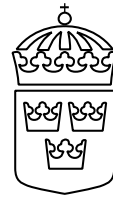


Government Communication

2020/21:92



A good work environment for the future – the Government's work environment strategy 2021–2025

Skr. 2020/21:92

The Government submits this Communication to the Riksdag.

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Main content of the Communication

In this Communication, the Government presents its work environment strategy for 2021–2025. The work environment strategy sets out the Government's long-term policy focus in this area over the next five years. The Communication outlines how the strategy will govern work to meet the objectives set, the implementation of the strategy and how it will be followed up. The government agencies in the work environment field will be tasked with drawing up action plans, giving them a more prominent and clearer role in supporting the implementation of the work environment strategy. The Government will continue to run a forum for dialogue with the labour market partners.

The overarching objective of the work environment strategy is the goal of working life policy decided by the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) for both women and men to have good working conditions and the opportunity to develop at work (Government Bill 2011/12:1 expenditure area 14, section 4.3, report 2011/12:AU2, Government Communication 2011/12:88) plus the Government's objective of a work environment that prevents illness and accidents, stops people being excluded from working life, takes people's differing circumstances into account and fosters the development of individuals and operations (Government Bill 2020/21:1 expenditure area 14, section 5.1). The four priority areas of the work environment strategy are as follows:

- Sustainable working life – everyone is to be able to, have the capacity to and want to work a full working life.

Skr. 2020/21:92

- Healthy working life – working life is to contribute towards development and well-being.
- Safe working life – no-one is to place their life or health at risk due to their job.
- A labour market free from crime and cheating – a poor work environment is never to be a competitive tool.

1	A good work environment for the future	5
1.1	A continuation of the Government’s work environment strategy for 2016–2020.....	7
1.2	An EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work (2021–2027)	8
1.3	The International Labour Organization (ILO).....	9
2	Vision and objectives	9
2.1	Working life must provide safety, the opportunity to develop and good health.....	9
2.2	Good working conditions and the opportunity to develop at work for both women and men	10
3	Sustainable working life.....	10
3.1	Everyone is to be able to and want to work a full working life	11
3.2	Developments in working life pose new challenges.....	12
3.3	A good work environment and skills development opportunities are vital to safeguard skills supply.....	13
3.4	Research and analysis on sustainable working life is also to be prioritised in the future.....	15
4	Healthy working life	16
4.1	Creating healthy workplaces can boost health as well as profitability.....	16
4.2	Systematic work environment management is the key to a good work environment	17
4.3	Functioning cooperation is vital to successful work environment management	18
4.4	Moving towards more flexibility in working life	19
4.5	It is becoming increasingly important to shed light on the impact of the cognitive work environment	20
4.6	Abusive behaviour, harassment and bullying are unacceptable in the workplace.....	21
5	Safe working life.....	22
5.1	The Government is expanding its zero tolerance of fatal accidents to a vision of no-one dying as a result of work.	23
5.2	A good work environment is a gender equality issue	24
5.3	The work environment rules need to be reviewed from a gender equality perspective.....	25
5.4	Questions on the organisational and social work environment must be prioritised in the years ahead	26
5.5	Threats and violence in the workplace need to be taken seriously.....	27
5.6	Healthy workplaces handle hazardous substances safely	28

- 5.7 People need to be better informed about the work environment before starting work and during their working lives29
- 6 A labour market free from crime and cheating30
 - 6.1 A poor work environment is never to be a competitive tool.....30
 - 6.2 Efforts to combat work-related crime must be expanded through more inspections and preventive work.....31
- 7 Implementation32
 - 7.1 Action plans and the role of agencies.....32
 - 7.2 The Government’s work environment forum.....33
- 8 Follow-up.....33
 - 8.1 Follow-up of action plans.....33
 - 8.2 Evaluation33

Labour market and working life policy in Sweden is founded on the human desire to work and develop. Working is a positive thing. For most people, women and men alike, work is the most important source of income and is extremely important to their opportunity to participate in and influence society. Work means community and the power to shape one's own life and future. A safe work environment that enables people to develop and grow is vital to a functioning and robust labour market. A good work environment is important both to growth and employment, and for good, equitable and gender-equal health.

Sweden has a strong and successful labour market model. A good dialogue between the State and the labour market partners on how policy can develop and the initiatives that ought to be carried out is an important part of successful working life policy. This tripartite cooperation is also an important starting point for continued work to ensure a good work environment in Swedish workplaces. Swedish work environment legislation is based on the employer being responsible for the work environment (health and safety) while working in collaboration with employees and safety representatives to improve it. There is a long tradition of the labour market partners working together on joint health and safety measures. The partners' own organisations, AFA Insurance, Prevent, the Social Partners' Council and Sunt arbetsliv (the healthy working life initiative), which are jointly owned by the labour market partners, are prime examples here.

In recent years, the Government has considerably raised its ambitions as regards working life. The Government's Work Environment Strategy for Modern Working Life 2016–2020 mapped out the long-term direction of policy and national work environment efforts. The Government has set up the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise and launched a decade-long national research programme managed by the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte). Significant increases in resources in recent years have led to the Swedish Work Environment Authority conducting almost 10 000 more inspections in 2019 compared with 2016. The Government has also made a concerted effort to tackle fatal accidents at work. Multi-agency efforts to combat cheating, breaches of regulations and work-related crime have been stepped up.

Government policy must continue to have high ambitions if we are to address different work-related challenges. Questions about a good work environment and sustainable working life therefore need to be a top priority.

The pandemic caused by the coronavirus has had a major impact on the world of work and the work environment has changed for everyone, in one way or another. The pandemic has posed different challenges for different occupational groups. For those who were able to work from home, the pandemic meant a widespread and rapid move from the physical workplace to remote working. Others have had to go to work as usual to keep the basic functions of society running, which has also made them more vulnerable to catching the virus. For healthcare and care workers, the

pandemic has meant long working days and a heavy workload with limited time for recovery. The pandemic will continue to affect Sweden and the rest of the world for a long time to come. Some of the changes that the pandemic has made to the way we live and work may also turn out to be permanent.

The world of work is constantly in a state of flux. Modern working life makes higher demands of employees' skills and capacity to handle information and solve problems. The Swedish labour market has become more polarised between, on the one hand, people with higher education and longer experience who find it easier to find work and, on the other, people with limited education and little or no experience of work who find it more difficult to gain a foothold in the job market. Lifelong learning, switching career and skills development are becoming increasingly important and a central part of creating a longer and sustainable working life.

More people are living for longer and the proportion of elderly people in the population is growing. The fact that we are living longer marks progress as a society, but it also makes high demands of our welfare system. It means that we will need to work longer, and that the retirement age will gradually need to be raised. However, there are challenges for groups that are already finding it hard to keep working up to the current retirement age due to work making excessive physical demands, illness or disability. To ensure that skills supply is sufficient in the welfare sector in particular, as many people as possible need to keep working until retirement age, which means that a good work environment and safety will be important to people being able to stay in work. A good work environment can also enable more people whose capacity to work is reduced due to disability or illness to keep working for longer or to return to work.

Compared with many other countries, workforce participation in Sweden is more gender equal across all groups of society. However, women and men largely work in different sectors in the labour market and encounter different circumstances and risks at work. One example that can be cited is that fatal accidents at work mainly occur in male-dominated sectors while stress and mental load are more common in female-dominated sectors. Questions about the work environment therefore also need to be addressed from the perspective of gender equality.

Mobility of labour and services between different countries is increasing. At the same time, global competition is constantly making new demands for greater productivity and efficiency and also leading to new ways of structuring the way we work. The shift towards increasing numbers of people working as contractors is not a new phenomenon and the move towards more temporary employment has also been going on for a long time. Production and efficiency gains must not be achieved at the expense of workers' health and safety and job security.

The work environment has a major impact on how long people are able to work, have the capacity to work and willing to work, and on people's living conditions. A good work environment promotes the development of organisations and individuals, and provides scope for people with different backgrounds and capacities in the workplace. Creating healthy workplaces is an important part of health promotion and is to be a central part of work

environment efforts on the ground. It is never acceptable for anyone to die at work or as a result of their work. However, work environment policy must set its ambitions higher than no-one being injured or made ill by their work. Working life must offer everyone who works an opportunity to develop and grow and to enjoy good health. Everyone who works in Sweden is to have a work environment that enables them to work throughout their working life and to want to do so. Everyone has the right to a secure and safe working environment. No-one should need to work in an environment in which abusive behaviour, discrimination or harassment occurs.

This work environment strategy is to be seen as the long-term direction of Government policy in this field. Working life must provide safety, development opportunities and good health for everyone who works. The elements that create good working conditions and the opportunity to develop at work for women and for men are a clear regulatory framework, well-functioning supervision, continuous skills development throughout one's working life and successful collaboration between the labour market partners. Work environment legislation determines the fundamental criteria that are to be set to create a good work environment and to prevent sickness and accidents at work. To retain the high level of protection enjoyed by workers in Sweden, the changes taking place in the world of work must be accompanied by knowledge and regulations. The Government therefore intends to review the regulatory framework in the field of working life. The work environment regulations must provide the same protection for women and men in all occupations, industries and sectors. The work environment regulations also need to be adapted to the world of work of today and tomorrow, and the organisational and social work environment must be prioritised. In this strategy, the Government is also expanding its zero vision of fatal accidents from a target of no-one dying at work to no-one dying as a result of work. Like the previous vision, the new zero vision targets accidents in the workplace leading to death, but it also focuses on work-related mortality due to long-term illness, cancer and suicide, so encompassing female-dominated sectors to a greater extent. The Government is also expanding efforts to combat work-related crime through more inspections and preventive work. A poor work environment is never to be a competitive tool. Human trafficking and human exploitation must not occur.

1.1 A continuation of the Government's work environment strategy for 2016–2020

The previous work environment strategy presented in Government Communication *A Work Environment Strategy for Modern Working Life 2016–2020* (Government Communication 2015/16:80) contained three prioritised areas:

- Zero tolerance of fatal accidents and the prevention of accidents at work
- Sustainable working life

The strategy period has expired and the Government will account for its results in the Budget Bill for 2022.

On 18 April 2019, the Government tasked the Swedish Agency for Public Management with evaluating the Work Environment Strategy (A2019/00794). The Swedish Agency for Public Management submitted the report *Evaluation of A Work Environment Strategy for Modern Working Life 2016–2020* (2020:4) to the Government in January 2020. The Swedish Agency for Public Management judged that the strategy and the mandates issued in conjunction with it provided good prerequisites for achieving the strategy's objectives and the overall goal of work environment policy. However, the Swedish Agency for Public Management judged that there was room for improvement and that strategic efforts could be run more effectively. Among other things, the Swedish Agency for Public Management considered that the Government should define and specify the priority areas in the strategy and set out more concrete goals for the strategy, with timeframes. The Swedish Agency for Public Management also judged that the strategy needed to be followed up more systematically and that ahead of the upcoming strategy period, the Government should consider exercising more trust in its governance of the public authorities. This would partly involve giving the agencies greater influence over the design of the measures in the strategy, so enabling better use to be made of the agencies' experiences and skills.

The Government has taken the conclusions of the Swedish Agency for Public Management's evaluation into account in producing this strategy and as a result, this strategy contains more clearly delimited areas and four concrete priority areas. Drawing up these prioritised areas for the strategy has included holding a number of dialogues with representatives of the labour market partners, the Swedish Work Environment Authority and the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise. Unlike in the previous strategy, the government agencies in the work environment field will be tasked with producing action plans and be given greater influence over the design of measures to implement the content of the strategy. The strategy and the agencies' action plans will be followed up through the Government's work environment forum, annual feedback reports from the agencies and when accounting for results in the Budget Bill. (See also section 7, Implementation and section 8, Follow-up.)

1.2 An EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work (2021–2027)

One of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights is that workers in the European Union have the right to a high level of protection of their health and safety at work and to a working environment adapted to their professional needs and which enables them to prolong their participation in the labour market. As part of its Work Programme 2021, *A Union of vitality in a world of fragility*, the European Commission has announced that it intends to draw up a new European Strategic Framework

on Health and Safety at Work in 2021. The Strategic Framework seeks to provide a political framework to improve health and safety at work at national and EU level. Like previous European strategies on health and safety, the forthcoming strategy also seeks to urge Member States to adopt and update their national work environment strategies. The new European strategy will include a focus on questions of the changing world of work and experiences as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Skr. 2020/21:92

1.3 The International Labour Organization (ILO)

Sweden has committed to undertakings in the field of working life by ratifying the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The ILO has adopted more than 40 conventions and recommendations in the field. Two key conventions are ILO Convention (No. 187) on Occupational Safety and Health, which sets out the basis for systematic work on health and safety and ILO Convention (No 155) on Occupational Safety and Health, which includes demands for a coherent national policy on occupational safety, occupational health and the working environment and measures to promote health and safety and improve working conditions.

The ILO's Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work was adopted at the International Labour Conference in Geneva in 2019. The Centenary Declaration helps to raise the status of health and safety, partly through an associated resolution. The resolution requests the Governing Body to consider, as soon as possible, proposals for including safe and healthy working conditions in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work. Recognising a good working environment as part of the fundamental principles and rights can strengthen the work environment perspective in working life, see also the Communication on the ILO's Centenary Convention for the Future of Work (Government Communication 2019/20:202).

2 Vision and objectives

2.1 Working life must provide safety, the opportunity to develop and good health

The Government's vision is for work to provide everyone who works with security, an opportunity for development and good health. A good work environment provides scope for people with different backgrounds and capabilities at work. Everyone in Sweden must have a safe job in which no-one is exploited or exhausted. A good work environment is essential to high productivity in the Swedish economy, which is characterised by its high workforce participation and high employment rate. A good work environment enables businesses and operations to develop and grow.

Work environment legislation is to foster a good and safe work environment and emphasise prevention. If work environment efforts are to function successfully, it is vital that there is good collaboration between the State, employers and employees.

2.2 Good working conditions and the opportunity to develop at work for both women and men

The Government's work environment strategy seeks to clarify and strengthen work to attain the goal of working life policy set by the Riksdag, which is that both women and men in Sweden are to have good working conditions and the opportunity to develop at work (Government Bill 2011/12:1 expenditure area 14, section 4.3, report 2011/12:AU2, Government Communication 2011/12:88). Based on this goal, the Government has set an objective of a work environment that prevents illness and accidents, stops people being excluded from working life, takes people's differing circumstances into account and fosters the development of individuals and operations (Govt Bill 2020/21:1 expenditure area 14, section 5.1). In this strategy, the objective for the working environment is broken down into four priority areas. The priority areas seek to clarify the direction of policy in the areas that the Government judges are of major importance in attaining the work environment goal and ultimately the overarching objective of working life policy. The four priority areas for the work environment strategy are as follows:

- Sustainable working life – everyone is to be able to, have the capacity to and want to work a full working life.
- Healthy working life – working life is to contribute towards development and well-being.
- Safe working life – no-one is to place their life or health at risk due to their job.
- A labour market free from crime and cheating – a poor work environment is never to be a competitive tool.

3 Sustainable working life

Everyone is to be able to, have the capacity to and want to work a full working life. The work environment has a major impact on how long people are able and willing to work for. A good work environment is essential to a sustainable working life that facilitates skills development, career change and safety. A good work environment and good working conditions go hand in hand. The world of work has changed rapidly and will continue to do so. If working life is to be sustainable, knowledge and regulations need to keep pace with these changes. Therefore, the Government will continue to invest in research and knowledge. A good work environment is also vital to safeguarding skills supply. The work

situation and the work environment for employees in the welfare sector continues to be an important question for the Government. Skr. 2020/21:92

3.1 Everyone is to be able to and want to work a full working life

We are living longer, we are healthier and we are better educated. Increasing numbers of people are studying for longer, which means that they are entering the labour market later but people are not exiting the labour market later as lifespans grow longer. The working part of the population need to extend their working lives to safeguard the skills supply, so that pensions do not become too low and to help to finance the welfare system. The Government considers that it is necessary to take additional long-term initiatives to attain sustainable working life for all. Work environment questions need to be prioritised so that everyone is able to, has the capacity to and wants to work a full working life.

Sustainable working life is a question of equality. On the one hand, working life has improved in many ways and more people are enjoying good health later in life. On the other hand, there are those in arduous and monotonous jobs who experience major health and safety shortcomings many years before they reach retirement age. A longer working life cannot be achieved solely through measures in the latter part of people's working lives. When people retire is affected by what their entire working life has been like. All exposure in the work environment, both positive and negative, from the very first day at work has a bearing on people's ability to work, capacity to work and willingness to work on into later life. Many people, especially those engaged in manual labour, work in an environment that has deteriorated in recent decades. People with higher levels of education continue working for longer than people with less education. Women have higher rates of sick leave, do more part-time work and leave the workforce earlier than men.

There needs to be more research on work environment conditions for different groups in the labour market. Research shows that in the Swedish labour market there are differences in terms of exposure to poor health and safety at work between those born abroad and those born in Sweden. Previous studies show that, compared with other employees, LGBTQI people are more frequently victims of abuse, harassment and bullying at work. The Government's action plan for equal rights and opportunities for LGBTQI people highlights working life as a new focus area. The Government considers that working life is an area of particular importance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for LGBTQI people (A2021/00140). The Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise has been commissioned by the Government to obtain and compile information about the work environment of LGBTQ people, with a particular focus on trans people (A2020/01002). The Government takes a positive view of this work continuing in the years ahead. It is important that the Agency adopts a gender equality and equal treatment perspective in its work and deepens expertise on differences in working conditions between workers born in Sweden and those born abroad.

Better utilising the skills and experience of older people is a central aspect in achieving working lives that are longer and more sustainable. The world of work needs to be more age-independent and better use needs to be made of the skills and experiences of older people. More and more people are able and willing to work longer but many encounter various obstacles at work in the form of different regulatory systems and contracts, for example; issues that must also be taken into account to create longer, sustainable working life. The Delegation for senior labour, appointed as part of the pension agreement 2017, has submitted its report *Äldre har aldrig varit yngre – allt fler kan och vill arbeta längre* (Older people have never been younger – more people can and want to work longer) (SOU 2020:69), which drew the conclusion that the requirements of working life have changed, that lifelong learning is becoming increasingly important and that seniors represent significant labour force potential. The attitudes of employers to and the use of senior labour need to be improved, with managers embracing age-conscious leadership, for example. Broad measures should be introduced to combat age discrimination, and a good work environment throughout a person's lifetime is fundamental.

The Work Environment Act (1977:1160) states that working conditions must be adapted to people's differing physical and mental capabilities. The key issue is that everyone should be able to participate in working life on equal terms. The work environment must be open, inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities to be able to participate on equal terms as others. This may mean a need for non-discriminatory measures, supportive technology or other aids, individual support initiatives and accessibility adaptations. People's functional capacity often varies over the course of their working life. An accessible work environment can help to extend working life for many people, and also enable people with disabilities to participate in the labour market. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure that the workplace is accessible. Occupational health also has an important role in designing rehabilitation and introducing adaptations when people return to work after sick leave.

3.2 Developments in working life pose new challenges

Globalisation and rapid technological development are bringing about far-reaching structural changes in the economy and on the labour market. Increased digitisation, robotisation and the use of artificial intelligence are driving rapid change. Some jobs are disappearing and being replaced by new ones that often mean improvements to the physical work environment. New technology and new ways of organising work are reducing many traditional physical risks in the work environment such as heavy lifting and exposure to chemicals. At the same time, these changes bring new risks at work.

The changes in the world of work affect how we work, where we work and when we work. Digital tools enable people to work in locations other than the physical workplace. Remote working has soared in the pandemic caused by the coronavirus. Technological developments are also making

it possible to assign jobs to workers in new ways using digital tools, such as platforms, which can affect the way work is organised (the gig economy).

Working conditions must continue to be predictable and safe, even in a world of work that is changing. Everyone who works in Sweden is to have a good and safe work environment. In situations where jobs are assigned using new, digital tools, it should be clear who takes responsibility for health and safety at work. In the same way, there should be no lack of clarity regarding the distribution of responsibility between different actors when the employer does not control the actual place in which the work is carried out. Work environment efforts need to keep pace with these new challenges and the Swedish Work Environment Authority needs the right conditions to be able to perform its supervisory mandate. The actor responsible for the work environment should be the actor that has the greatest opportunity to influence the health and safety conditions of the person doing the work in practice. That actor may, for example, have control over the place where the work is performed or otherwise exercise control over crucial elements that may affect the work environment. The responsibilities should be clarified and the criteria governing such responsibility over the workplace should be reviewed.

There is a need for greater understanding of how the changing world of work is affecting the work environment and the way work is organised. The Swedish Work Environment Authority and the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise are central actors in this context, as are the labour market partners.

3.3 A good work environment and skills development opportunities are vital to safeguard skills supply

Conditions on the labour market are also affected by the structural changes that are moving the goalposts in terms of the circumstances and needs of employers and employees. Employers need predictability to be able to adapt their operations and survive in this more competitive climate. This is particularly true for small businesses. Employees, on the other hand, need protection that is adapted to the new labour market, where ongoing skills development at work, which boosts employability, is an important security aspect.

New occupations are constantly emerging but the pace of technological development means that changes are happening fast. Some Swedish jobs and certain tasks may be replaced by digital solutions in the years to come. Estimates vary widely, but those jobs that the majority of experts judge may be replaced are primarily routine jobs in retail and administration. However, there are also examples of jobs in journalism, transport, services, accounting and finance that have already been replaced or are expected to be replaced. Although some tasks or jobs will be automated, it can also be assumed that the knowledge-intensive part of working life will grow to the same or a greater extent as the tasks that will disappear, making lifelong

learning, skills development and the opportunity to change career or switch tasks increasingly important questions.

According to the Swedish Work Environment Authority's work environment survey 2019, about 60 percent of employed people have received training during paid working hours in the last 12 months. The proportion that has received paid training increases as income rises. The employers' capacity to identify, make the most of, and develop individuals' skills is extremely important to skills supply in the labour market. Skills development is a shared interest for both employers and employees, and important to a functioning labour market. The labour market partners play a key role in this work because they modify the conditions and circumstances for skills development and transition in different sectors through collective agreements. The opportunities available in the education system also have an important part to play.

The Council for Negotiation and Cooperation PTK, IF Metall, Kommunal and the Confederation of Swedish Industry have negotiated an agreement in principle on security, transition and employment protection. On 4 December 2020, the parties jointly requested that the Government modernise labour law in line with this agreement in principle (A2020/02524). The Government has started work on implementing the parties' agreement in principle, which includes improved opportunities for skills development and transition throughout working life for all, irrespective of form of employment (A2021/00045). This will involve introducing a new and parallel public study allowance, for example (U2021/00138). The Government has additionally taken several initiatives to facilitate career transition and further education. These include the Government intending to draw up a proposal to increase the age limit on the right to student funding and the education entry grant for the unemployed, and changing the repayment rules.

A good work environment is vital to safeguarding the skills supply in different sectors, whether in the public sector and the private sector. The work environment therefore needs to be better. The Government has appointed a Welfare Commission whose remit includes working for a sustainable skills supply and a good work environment in the welfare sector (Fi2019/04300). Long-term forecasts have shown that the skills shortage in the welfare sector is set to continue in the years ahead. Attracting and retaining skills in care and healthcare, for example, demands secure terms of employment, a good work environment and the opportunity to develop at work. In 2020, the Government presented a boost for care of the elderly which seeks to strengthen skills in care of the elderly by giving both new and existing staff the opportunity to undergo training in paid working hours. It is proposed that this initiative continue until 2023. The work situation and the work environment for employees in the welfare sector is an important question for the Government. In 2019, the Government appointed a national coordinator to promote sustainable skills supply in municipally financed care and healthcare for the elderly (ToR 2019:77). Ways in which the coordinator is to support the municipalities include stimulating change efforts to make the work environment more attractive, strengthening leadership and proposing technological solutions that relieve the burden on staff.

The proportion of temporary employees has remained at too high a level for a long period of time. While temporary employment and part-time work may be a way of facilitating entry onto the labour market, especially for young people and those born abroad, such forms of employment also mean a lack of security for the individual. Many shortcomings in the work environment basically come down to poorer working conditions. People with insecure employment often lack the job security required to risk calling attention to health and safety deficiencies and are less keen to take on positions of trust, such as safety representatives. In the Swedish Work Environment Authority's work environment survey for 2019, employees on temporary contracts cited to a considerably higher extent than those in permanent posts that they had worked despite illness because they could not afford to be ill or did not want to be seen as lazy. This issue, and its potential consequences, became highly relevant during the pandemic. Work to improve the work environment goes hand in hand with employees' working conditions and safety in general. The Government has commenced work to implement the labour market partners' agreement in principle, which includes amendments to rules on changing a post to a lower employment rate, provisions on fixed-term employment, and full-time as the norm (A2021/00044).

3.4 Research and analysis on sustainable working life is also to be prioritised in the future.

Gaining knowledge on how a good work environment is created and what promotes more sustainable working life demands both high-quality research and the results of that research being passed on to and applied in the workplace. There is a need for more initiatives on evaluation, research and labour market statistics. Greater knowledge and understanding of the often complex links between the work environment and health are necessary to attain sustainable working life. Knowledge summaries and analyses contribute towards a greater understanding of the problems and thus to relevant measures being able to be implemented.

Working life research spans many different fields and disciplines. In 2017, the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte) was tasked by the Government with setting up and running a national research programme on working life research (S2017/03055). The research programme lasts ten years and has three prioritised areas: creating sustainable and inclusive working life, promoting good working conditions and achieving sustainable working life. In the Government's research and innovation policy proposal *Forskning, frihet, framtid – kunskap och innovation för Sverige* (Research, Freedom, Future – knowledge and innovation for Sweden) (Government Bill 2020/21:60) the programme was allocated further funding so as to continue to prioritise both the research initiatives indicated by the Government when the programme was set up and new challenges in this field. In addition to the programme for working life research, the bill contains several other initiatives judged to contribute to the work for a good work environment, for example, the establishment of a national research programme on

mental health, an initiative on research on prevention and public health and an initiative for research into the elderly where knowledge on care of the elderly is a priority question.

4 Healthy working life

Working life is to contribute towards development and well-being. Everyone who works must have the opportunity to enjoy for good health. Creating healthy workplaces is an important aspect in promoting health. The work environment is to contribute towards a positive exchange in the form of jobs with rich content, job satisfaction, a sense of community and personal development. Examples of health factors at work include the balance between requirements and resources, employees' power and influence over their work, a good community and support from management. If the work environment is not merely good but also promotes health and contributes towards productivity, it benefits individuals, enterprises and operations and society as a whole. A work environment that is good in the long term is created through successful collaboration between employers and employees. Occupational health and its role in health and safety at work should be expanded and strengthened and it is essential that greater use is made of occupational health in preventive work environment work. Questions of working remotely or from home remain relevant. Bullying at work needs to be combatted. No-one should need to work in an environment in which abusive behaviour, discrimination or harassment, including sexual harassment, occurs.

4.1 Creating healthy workplaces can boost health as well as profitability

Employment and financial security play a major role in good, equal and gender-equal health. For most people, work is the most important source of income and is also extremely important to the individual's opportunity to participate in and influence society. There is a close link between work and a person's health and well-being.

Traditional health and safety work has generally focused on risks and problems. However, its aim should not only be to protect employees from injury and illness but to promote health. The work environment is to help to foster good health and improve the health of society. A greater focus on health promotion could increase individuals' motivation and enjoyment at work, which in turn could increase competitiveness and profitability for companies and operations. Working life policy should therefore promote healthy working life which encourages and makes it possible for as many people as possible to enter the workforce, develop and remain in work.

The Government has tasked the Swedish Work Environment Authority and the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise with compiling and reporting on health factors at work (A2018/01350). Examples of such

factors are that employees feel safe and supported and that they have opportunities to develop at work, but also have the opportunity to take responsibility, agency and co-determination. Good leadership, good communication and a workplace in which values are shared are other examples of health factors. The way tools and workplaces are designed can also promote health.

There are knowledge gaps on the positive effects of the work environment and what creates healthy workplaces as research in the field largely focuses on factors that increase the risk of illness. Furthermore, there is a lack of knowledge on the importance of the work environment for production, growth and innovation. Work environment efforts need to be able to be about limiting the risks and about developing the positive factors of the job. The Government considers that there needs to be a greater focus on work environment aspects that are beneficial from a health point of view. Work on healthy workplaces needs to be prioritised. Occupational health can contribute to work to create healthy workplaces but doing so requires a high-quality occupational health service with good skills supply and appropriate regulation. The employer also needs to ensure access to occupational health or other expert help.

The presence of drugs in the workplace also affects working life and brings health and safety risks, causes work-related accidents, affects the mental and physical health of employees and can cause situations involving threats and violence. The Government intends to adopt a new strategy on alcohol, drugs, doping, tobacco and gambling. Therefore, there are grounds to draw attention to the employer's preventive health and safety work and adapting work in cases of substance abuse and addiction.

4.2 Systematic work environment management is the key to a good work environment

Systematic work environment management is about working on the work environment as a natural part of day-to-day operations. Good work environment management involves both limiting the risks and developing the positive factors. It involves investigating, tackling and following up operations to prevent accidents and illness, but also to create a good work environment. These efforts span every aspect of the work environment. All employers are to conduct systematic work environment management. Every worker has the right to a good work environment irrespective of the size of the workplace and the form their work takes. The Work Environment Act and the regulations on systematic work environment management (AFS 2001:1) also apply to students. School students from year seven have the right to appoint student safety representatives who are allowed to participate in work environment management at school and students in higher education can appoint student safety representatives. School and higher education students need to be given what they need to study well and safely. It is therefore important that attention is paid to their work environments and that systematic work is carried out on their physical and psychosocial learning environments. Student healthcare also

has an important role to play in fostering the physical and mental health of students in higher education.

Companies play an important role in the Swedish labour market. A clear majority of Sweden's employees work in the private sector. The number of self-employed people has increased, as has the number of people employed in small businesses. All employers should take their responsibility for the work environment. Protection of the work environment is a right and must be identical no matter where people work. Employers in small workplaces do not usually have the same resources to put into health and safety as employers in large workplaces, which can make it more difficult for smaller employers to gain an overview of the regulations and requirements of work environment legislation. The Government considers that it must be made possible for all employers to do the right thing, no matter how big or how small their workplace may be. Less administration and reducing the regulatory burden are important for competitiveness, growth and employment in Swedish companies, making it appropriate to reduce the amount of red tape for companies. Rules should therefore be clear and simple. The Swedish Work Environment Authority is tasked with producing and providing needs-based, easily accessible, high-quality information in its area of responsibility, particularly addressing the needs of SMEs. The Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise also plays an important role in disseminating expertise on the work environment to workplaces, as do the joint expert organisations established by the labour market partners.

4.3 Functioning cooperation is vital to successful work environment management

Functioning cooperation is highly important to the success of work environment management in a workplace. Under the Work Environment Act, the employee must participate in work relating to the work environment and take part in the implementation of the measures needed to create a good work environment. Safety representatives play a central role in health and safety at work, and it is essential that safety representatives are given the training necessary to perform their role. Increasing numbers of employees are working in workplaces without a local safety representative, two reasons for this being labour market mobility and a major increase in the number of companies with few employees. When there is no local safety organisation, regional safety representatives are important. It is essential to point out that the work of the regional safety representatives provides support to employees and employers alike in working to improve the work environment, particularly for small companies that tend to be less well placed to develop local work environment management. The regional safety representatives, like occupational health, are an important resource when expertise is lacking in one's own organisation. The Riksdag has announced that the Government is to appoint an inquiry to evaluate the effect of the work of the regional safety representatives (report 2019/20:AU13, item 2,

Government Communication 2019/20:305). The Government will return to this issue at a later date. Skr. 2020/21:92

A good dialogue at all levels is vital to successful work environment management. The Government and the government agencies work jointly with the labour market partners to create the framework for a good work environment and it is the employers, the employees and their representatives who jointly shape and run work environment efforts on the ground in individual workplaces. Knowledge about local work environment management is crucial to how the work environment requirements can be implemented in practice. Between them, the labour market partners have accrued expertise, industry knowledge and represent the people who are to apply and use the legislation. The Government considers that cooperation between the work environment agencies and the labour market partners needs to be prioritised and expanded to ensure that good work environment management is able to be conducted, and that the regulations are designed such that they are clear, simple and comprehensible. In its instructions to the Swedish Work Environment Authority and the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, the Government has made it clear how these agencies are to work hand in hand with the labour market partners.

4.4 Moving towards more flexibility in working life

In some parts of working life, the boundaries as to when and where work can be performed are being erased. Conditions must be in place for achieving a good work environment even when working flexibly. During the pandemic, questions of remote working and working from home became relevant for some groups of employees. It is likely that questions about when and where we work will continue to affect working life in the years ahead.

Working from home and working remotely open up opportunities but create challenges too. Digitisation and remote working are not new phenomena. For a long time now, new ways of organising work have meant that more jobs can be performed with no organisational boundaries and no limits in terms of when or where work is done. The changes taking place in parts of the world of work affect both the structure of working life and its content, as well as the conditions and terms of workers. Flexibility as to when and where work is performed opens up better opportunities to combine work and private life for many people. At the same time, when spaces and locations that were previously reserved for leisure are now also used for work, there is a risk of private life and working life merging into one. When and where work is performed also has an impact on other areas. For example, questions about the design of homes take on additional importance when even more people now have their home as their workplace.

The opportunities of employees to work independently and take professional responsibility can be highly important to job satisfaction. The ability to work flexibly can therefore be relevant to how satisfied

employees are with their work. Independence and responsibility also give employees an opportunity to actively participate in health and safety at work. Some, however, find that as work becomes increasingly digital, the pace of work increases, leading to additional stress. Furthermore, working from home can lead to fewer social contacts and greater isolation. The risk of various kinds of strain injury also increases when more people are working from home and from temporary office solutions. It is therefore important to address the issue of strain injuries in work environment work as a result of the pandemic. Another important question is how safety representatives are to do their jobs remotely.

More flexible working life also brings challenges for managers in terms of managing and allocating work that is carried out in lots of different locations. The employer's opportunities and capacity to spot, tackle and resolve work environment problems can also be limited. The employer is responsible for the employee's work environment and this remains the case when the employee is working from home or remotely. At the same time, the employer does not control the workplace when this is located in someone's private home. With more people working from home, there is therefore a need to analyse how this is affecting the work environment of employees. It is important that conditions are in place for a good work environment even when employees are working remotely or from home and although the employer does not control the workplace, the division of responsibilities between different actors must be clear.

The Government considers that questions about digital and flexible working continue to be relevant in future work environment efforts. With more people working from home, light must be shed on the work environment from the perspective that the workplace is flexible, and on the consequences poorly designed workplaces have for individuals in terms of both physical and psychosocial aspects. The Government has decided to task the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise with surveying and analysing conditions for working from home during the pandemic, and how working from home affects the work environment of employees (A2020/02549). Further guidance is needed on how employers can live up to their responsibility for the work environment even in a home-based work environment and how digital tools affect the work environment.

4.5 It is becoming increasingly important to shed light on the impact of the cognitive work environment

Working life and the way we work have changed in recent decades. Modern working life is making greater demands in terms of cognitive capacity. We are increasingly working with information, not only in white-collar jobs but also in industry, trades and healthcare, for example. Many elements of our jobs have become more complex, and more time is needed to perform demanding tasks. Some jobs that used to be physically demanding have become more cognitively demanding and the digital work environment has expanded. Work environment management needs to

highlight issues relating to the cognitive work environment and the digital environment. The Government is keen for the work environment agencies to tackle these issues in the years ahead.

Cognitive strain can be experienced physically in the workplace and in the tasks themselves. For example, there may be external disruptive factors such as noise and chat, or there may be a need to switch quickly between different types of task. Being flung from one demanding task to the next or rapidly needing to familiarise oneself with a problem and prioritise between different tasks demands concentration and problem-solving skills.

Humans are good at solving complex problems but the capacity of our working memory is limited and interruptions and noise disrupt concentration. The cognitive work environment, in other words how the brain is affected during the working day, plays an increasing role in working life. This makes new demands in terms of health and safety. This issue becomes particularly important when employees have or suffer from cognitive problems, such as memory problems or attention difficulties. The fact that many people suffer cognitive problems at some point in life, whether transitory or permanent, makes this issue particularly relevant. When people in work have or suffer from cognitive disabilities, requirements are often made to adapt the design of the workplace, the content of the work and working hours. Measures that benefit people with cognitive disabilities can as a rule also make work easier for other employees.

As technology develops, new demands are also made of employees' capacity to understand and use that new technology. The sense that technology is being introduced and changing at a faster pace than employees can cope with can lead to technology stress and constitutes a health and safety risk. The question of technology stress has come to the fore due to higher numbers of people working from home and remotely. Productivity gains from new technology can also ramp up the pace of work, leading to an increased workload for employees. At the same time, new technology means that occupations and tasks are evolving and that more and more routine tasks are able to be performed with advanced technical support. This frees up working hours that can be spent on more advanced and stimulating tasks. Technological developments need to benefit companies and employees and the work environment work of the future needs to be adapted to new circumstances and challenges.

4.6 Abusive behaviour, harassment and bullying are unacceptable in the workplace

All employers must have prevention and promotion efforts in place to combat discrimination in their workplace and otherwise work for equal rights and opportunities irrespective of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnic origin, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.

Harassment and sexual harassment at work are serious problems. The accounts from the #metoo movement shed a spotlight on the prevalence of

discrimination and sexual harassment in many sectors and in all parts of society. In the Swedish Work Environment Authority's work environment survey 2019, one in four young women stated that they had experienced sexual harassment at work. The #metoo movement also made it clear that there is a lack of knowledge of the regulations and the requirements incumbent on employers to prevent and combat sexual harassment. The Swedish Work Environment Authority and the Equality Ombudsman have run special awareness-raising initiatives on sexual harassment. It is vital that preventive work environment work is in place and that employers are aware of their responsibilities and work actively to combat such behaviour.

Abusive behaviour and harassment must not be acceptable in the workplace. The Government has therefore appointed an inquiry to review the need for measures to ensure compliance with the provisions on active measures in the Discrimination Act (ToR 2018:99). The Inquiry Chair is also to assess whether there is a need for protection for employees in the event of discrimination, harassment and threats made by people who are not employed at the workplace, such as customers, patients, passengers or users (ToR 2020:102). The Government has also appointed an inquiry to propose how ILO Convention (No 190) Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work is to be implemented in Swedish law (ToR 2020:98). Sweden was a driver behind voting the Convention through at the ILO's work conference in 2019. The purpose of the Convention is to combat violence and harassment and gender-related violence and gender-related harassment at work. The Convention also includes violence in the home and its impact at work.

Another question is how discrimination affects the conditions of different groups in the workplace. Within the remit of the national plan against racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crimes, the Government finds that more knowledge is needed on how racism and discrimination affect the conditions of different groups in a broad spectrum of areas (Ku2016/02629). Partly for this reason, the Government has tasked the county administrative boards with increasing knowledge and awareness of racism among labour market actors (A2020/01514).

The Government considers that it is also important to highlight the questions of workplace bullying and combatting this. In workplaces where bullying occurs, it not only affects the victim. Other employees at the workplace often also suffer and have higher rates of sickness absence. Increased use of digital media at work has made digital abuse and online bullying more common. No-one should need to work in an environment where abusive behaviour and harassment occurs, neither online nor in the physical workplace. The Government sees a need for attention to be paid to the question of workplace bullying and for steps to be taken to combat bullying in the workplace.

5 Safe working life

No-one is to place their life or health at risk due to their job. Everyone has the right to a secure and safe working environment. Systematic work

environment management is vital to preventing illness and accidents, which in the worst case can be fatal. Knowledge of the work environment is important to reduce work-related accidents and illness. A good safety culture means that everyone in the workplace is aware of the risks that exist and has the knowledge and the desire to reduce them. Nothing other than zero tolerance is acceptable regarding deaths as a result of work. The Government is expanding its zero vision for fatal accidents from a target of no-one dying at work to no-one dying as a result of work. This new zero vision also incorporates other work-related mortality due to, for example, longer illness, cancer or suicide. Hazardous substances in workplaces need to be restricted and handled correctly and threats and violence at work need to be taken seriously. Similarly, the trend of increasing stress at work needs to be broken. The Government will therefore prioritise issues relating to the organisational and social work environment in the years ahead. The work environment rules also need to be reviewed from a gender equality perspective. One question that needs to be taken into account is whether there is a need for sanction charges in more areas than today.

5.1 The Government is expanding its zero tolerance of fatal accidents to a vision of no-one dying as a result of work.

Combating fatal accidents at work is an important priority for the Government. Approximately one person dies every week as a result of an accident at work in Sweden. Work to combat fatal accidents at work is to continue with the agencies concerned, representatives of the labour market partners and other organisations in the sectors that are worst affected by fatal accidents. The joint work of the ministers to prevent fatal work-related accidents launched in the previous strategy period is to continue and expand. At the same time, it is important not to limit efforts only to specific industries but also to focus on initiatives to prevent the types of accidents that usually lead to death. One recurring pattern seen in events that lead to fatal accidents is that they are preceded by one or more deviations from normal behaviour with a simultaneous lack or deficiency in safety measures. The vast majority of fatal accidents can be prevented with expertise and systematic work environment management. Cooperation with safety representatives is important for reducing the risk of serious accidents. Working with attitudes and values is at least as important to reducing fatal accidents at work.

No-one should need to die at work but nor should anyone need to die from their work. The Government is therefore expanding its zero tolerance of fatal accidents to a vision of no-one needing to die as a result of their work. This involves a zero vision for workplace accidents that lead to death but also for work-related mortality due to long-term illness, cancer and suicide, for example. Expanding the zero vision is important from a gender equality perspective.

Every year, thousands of people in Sweden die prematurely due to work-related illness. Work-related mortality is due both to modern work environments and the work environments of the past. Many work-related

deaths are the result of people being exposed to low or moderate risk for a very long time, while the number of people exposed to the very highest risks is quite small. Often the deaths occur a long time after the employee has left the hazardous workplace. Many of today's work-related deaths are primarily the effect of past use of asbestos.

Researchers judge that deaths caused by work-related stress are expected to harvest far more lives in the future. Work-related stress is a major health and safety problem and something that the Government takes extremely seriously. The trend of increasing stress at work must be halted. Research shows that it is possible to reduce work-related mortality through preventive measures in the workplace and by applying new knowledge. The Government therefore considers that we need to increase our knowledge of stress-related illness, not least in terms of information about the costs of stress-related sick leave and expertise on other absence due to work-related mental illness and effective measures for returning to work.

Work-related suicide is part of the Government's broadened zero vision that no-one is to die as a result of their work. There is a need for more knowledge about work-related suicide in Sweden. Mental illness is a major public health challenge and a priority issue for the Government. The Government intends to produce a strategy for mental health and suicide prevention and has therefore asked about twenty agencies concerned to produce data ahead of an upcoming strategy in this area (S2020/06171). The Swedish Work Environment Authority and the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise are engaged in this mandate.

5.2 A good work environment is a gender equality issue

Today the majority of working women in Sweden work in the public sector where caring for people is the focus. These welfare and caring professions are over-represented in terms of sick leave due to stress-related illness. The healthcare and care sector stands out in terms of illness as a result of organisational and social factors in the work environment, such as an imbalance between demands and resources at work, a high workload and minimal opportunities to affect the way work is done. Other factors include poor conditions and resources for managers in care of the elderly with many employees per manager and high staff turnover. The Swedish Work Environment Authority's inspection initiative in care of the elderly in 2017-2019 shows that almost nine out of ten of the inspected workplaces have work environment shortcomings, mainly in terms of fundamental systematic work environment work.

To put in place long-term change and to turn around illness and work environment problems that exist in the health care and care sector, the Swedish Work Environment Authority has changed the way in which it inspects this provision. Councils and committees are the ultimate employer representative of municipalities and regions and boards of private welfare companies. The Swedish Work Environment Authority now conducts its inspections of these workplaces by first meeting the management and then inspecting the workplace. The Government

considers it is important that the Swedish Work Environment Authority continues to exercise and expand its supervision of the work environment in the welfare sector.

The costs of illness and lost production are high, both for individuals and for society. Illness is increasing in both women and men, even if women are on sick leave to a considerably higher extent than men. The rise is mainly related to stress and shortcomings in the organisational and social work environment in female-dominated sectors. Other explanations of women's illness are that women take greater responsibility for unpaid domestic and caring work. Knowledge of stress-related illness in relation to unpaid domestic and caring work thus also needs to increase. The Gender Equality Agency has therefore been tasked with surveying research on the connection between unpaid work, family life and sick leave. The Agency is also to conduct a pilot study on inequality at work and women's mental health (A2020/02204).

The Government considers that the values and norms that underlie gender inequality when it comes to working conditions and the work environment need to be questioned and changed. The Swedish Work Environment Authority has, for example, shown that gender norms and a macho culture in workplaces affect attitudes to safety and risks in the work environment. A good work environment is important for women and men to enjoy good working conditions and the opportunity to develop at work. The Swedish Work Environment Authority has had a special mandate to gender mainstream its operations for many years now. Drawing up rules and conducting inspections that identify the different conditions that women and men encounter at work is essential to attaining the objectives of gender equality policy in Sweden (Government Bill 2008/09:1, report 2008/09:AU1, Government Communication 2008/09:115) and the objective of working life policy of good working conditions and the opportunity to develop at work for both women and men (Government Bill 2011/12:1 expenditure area 14, section 4.3, report 2011/12:AU2, Government Communication 2011/12:88). The Government is keen that this work continues and is a priority.

5.3 The work environment rules need to be reviewed from a gender equality perspective

In 2011–2016 the Swedish Work Environment Authority had a Government remit on the work environment of women. One conclusion of this remit is that the work environment is worse for women than it is for men (Swedish Work Environment Authority report 2017:6). The lack of gender equality in the work environment is partly because the resources in female-dominated occupations are low in relation to the workload and that preventive health and safety often tends to be weak. There are also differences in the way knowledge and training requirements are viewed. A forklift truck driver needs training before being issued with a permit to drive a forklift while staff working in home care are expected to be able to lift and support users without certification or training in ergonomics.

Working life is not the same as it was when the Swedish Work Environment Act entered into force in 1978 when a larger proportion of employment in Sweden was industrial. More people had permanent, manual jobs and a larger proportion of the workforce were men. Consequently, the Work Environment Act provides greater protection against accidents than it does against illness and is more focused on health and safety in industry than in the service and care sector. Women and men largely work in different sectors and in different occupations, which means different terms and conditions and different health and safety risks. The different risk scenarios for women and men are largely explained by the fact that women and men work in different occupations but there are also other factors that mean the Work Environment Act does not offer women and men the same protection at work. Research shows that attitudes to health and safety where sex is not taken into account often only look at the average male worker while the working conditions of women and men who fall outside the norm are rendered invisible. For example, the burden that women and men are exposed to differs because tools, safety equipment and workstations are designed and adapted for men.

The work environment rules need to be reviewed from a gender equality perspective. Although the Work Environment Act and the Swedish Work Environment Authority's regulations have been updated over the years, the Government considers that there are grounds to review how the organisational and social work environment can be improved, partly to tackle the health and safety risks that prevail in female-dominated sectors. One question that needs to be taken into account is whether there is a need for sanction charges in more areas than today.

Research on the work environment is also less complex in the sectors in which most women work. When the right to compensation from occupational injury insurance is examined, there is a need for expertise on the importance of the work environment in the onset of illness. There is still an urgent need for research into risk factors that are particularly common in female-dominated work environments and into which factors in the work environment cause the illnesses for which women typically seek compensation for loss of income due to occupational injury. The Government also considers that there is a need to review work-related injury insurance, not least from a gender equality perspective.

5.4 Questions on the organisational and social work environment must be prioritised in the years ahead

Part of sickness absence is related to organisational and social factors in the work environment. These need to be tackled at organisational level, not at individual level. The whole organisation, at all levels, must ensure that the requirements of the work are balanced with the right sort of resources. The Swedish Work Environment Authority's provisions on organisational and social work environment and general recommendations on application thereof (AFS 2015:4) are one step towards highlighting and tackling problems in these parts of the work environment. The Swedish

Work Environment Authority's collaboration with Försäkringskassan (the Swedish Social Insurance Agency) is also important in preventing illness and effective work on adaptations and rehabilitation.

The agencies in the work environment field need to prioritise questions regarding the organisational and social work environment in the years ahead. These questions also need to be highlighted from the perspective of gender equality. Work environment problems relating to organisational and social factors in the workplace need to be taken as seriously as physical risks in the workplace. More than five years have passed since the Swedish Work Environment Authority's provisions and general recommendations on organisational and social work environment entered into force. The provisions and recommendations include requirements on the prevention and handling of unhealthy workloads and victimisation. Too much work or too fast a pace of work and abusive behaviour (victimisation) are examples of problems in the organisational and social work environment. The provisions are important for halting the trend of escalating work-related illness due to these factors. They need to be followed up and the result of the provisions must be evaluated in the years ahead so that efforts can be expanded and to establish whether the provisions have had the intended effect.

5.5 Threats and violence in the workplace need to be taken seriously

No-one should need to be subjected to threats or violence at home or at work. The #metoo movement made it clear that work remains to be done to put a stop to threats, violence and even sexual harassment at work, whether the perpetrator is a colleague or a boss, or someone who is not employed at the workplace. According to the Swedish Work Environment Authority's work environment survey 2019, approximately one in ten men and almost two in ten women had been the victim of threats or violence at work at least once in the past year. The proportion of men and women who were victims of violence has remained at the same level throughout the period 2011–2019. The Government has appointed an inquiry whose remit includes assessing whether there is a need for protection for employees who are discriminated against, harassed or threatened by people who are not employed in the workplace such as customers, patients, passengers or users (ToR. 2020:102).

Worry about being the victim of threats and violence at work imposes a mental burden that also has a negative impact on the work environment. The increase in working from home during the pandemic has also brought an increased risk of violence, and of honour-related violence and oppression. The employee who is the victim may also find it more difficult to seek support.

It has been found that the prevalence of threats and violence at work is greater in some sectors of the labour market. Threats and violence are common, for example, in education, health care and the care sector. Other occupations and sectors where threats and violence have been found to be particularly common are occupations that monitor the law and security in

society, and employees working in retail. In recent years, reports have been received of increasing numbers of public sector workers in government agencies experiencing threats and violence at work.

The Government considers that it is utterly unacceptable for people whose job is to help and protect other members of society to suffer threats and violence. This is not only a work environment issue but ultimately an attack on democratic society. The Government has introduced several measures that will bring in generally tougher protection from violence, threats and harassment under criminal law. The Government has also specifically increased protection for public sector employees. The ILO has adopted a Convention and accompanying Recommendation Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work and an Inquiry Chair has been tasked with proposing how this is to be incorporated in Swedish law (ToR. 2020:98).

5.6 Healthy workplaces handle hazardous substances safely

Every year, exhaust, dust and chemicals at work cause accidents, illnesses and, in the worst case, deaths. Although the development of new technology and working methods has reduced many chemical risks in the workplace, chemicals remain a serious health and safety problem. Hazardous chemicals and chemical work environment risks occur in almost all workplaces. Often, we do not know which substances we are being exposed to. Awareness of which nanomaterials are used in the workplace and how risks associated with these are to be managed remains low. There ought to be information available on nanomaterials in Swedish. Chemical substances on the skin are another example of a problem to which workers are exposed.

Hazardous substances can cause anything from minor irritations to life-threatening diseases such as cancer. The EU directives that restrict the use of hazardous substances in the workplace have been revised several times to reduce the risk of employees suffering cancer. Sweden has high levels of protection and it is important that the minimum level is raised in the EU as this would lead to higher protection for employees and fairer competition between companies operating in the EU. The right of Member States to impose higher levels of protection than the threshold values decided at EU level must be safeguarded and respected. Work to improve protection for workers will continue into the future. The Government takes a positive view of threshold values for hazardous substances being updated in pace with scientific research in the field. Sweden must continue to maintain high levels of protection from hazardous substances in the workplace. National work to limit chemical risks at work must continue alongside work at EU level.

5.7 People need to be better informed about the work environment before starting work and during their working lives

Skr. 2020/21:92

Knowledge and attitudes are vital to preventing illness. When the aim is to integrate health and safety in the day-to-day operations of organisations, it is not enough for good expertise in the work environment to be limited to merely a few experts. Many more people need to be better informed. All managers, team leaders, safety representatives and employees need to have good skills in how work environment management is to be carried out as all of them have a part to play in ensuring that workplaces are safe. It is crucial that safety representatives are trained so that they are able to do their job as well as possible. Many workplaces need informed health and safety support provided by an external resource. Occupational health has an important role to play in this respect, as do the labour market partners' knowledge organisations.

New employees at a workplace often run a considerably greater risk of suffering an accident at work and this applies to younger and older workers. The number of work-related accidents suffered by young people has increased in recent years. The highest number of reports are made by young men aged 16–24. Poor induction procedures and a lack of knowledge of the importance of health and safety can be some explanations behind the growing number of accidents among the young. It is predicted that more people will change jobs in the future, which can also bring about a higher risk of work-related accidents.

In high-risk jobs it is especially important to be familiar with the risks and how to prevent them. For example, the Swedish Work Environment Authority has produced teaching material for upper secondary programmes in the construction industry, the green industries and the transport sector which teachers can use to increase student awareness of health and safety issues. Health and safety is not only important in practical vocational programmes, where they form part of the training; it affects everyone. Expertise on the work environment is also conveyed through teaching in social studies both in comprehensive and upper secondary education and in equivalent schooling. Teaching on the work environment is important in schools to help to reduce the number of work-related accidents and other illness at work. The skills, awareness and attitudes of management and others in positions of authority in an organisation are important in focusing more attention on the work environment.

Good, safe working methods that already exist should be passed on in in-service training in different workplaces. Knowledge about the work environment and the rights and obligations of employers and employees is needed to create a good basis for a good and safe work environment. The Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise has launched a pilot project aimed at researching work environment awareness and the need for and potential routes to develop work environment awareness in comprehensive and upper secondary education. The Government is keen to see work on work environment expertise expanded.

6 A labour market free from crime and cheating

A poor work environment is never to be a competitive tool. The labour market must be well run and well organized. Committing a crime or obtaining an advantage by ignoring the rights of employees to a safe work environment must never be worthwhile. There is no place for work-related crime in the Swedish labour market. The Government therefore proposes prioritising work on work-related crime, including through lasting collaboration within the remit of multi-agency work to combat cheating, breaches of the rules and crime at work and expanding checks and preventive work. Collaboration between agencies and the labour market partners needs to be improved and expanded.

6.1 A poor work environment is never to be a competitive tool

The labour market partners have an important role in work to foster healthy labour market competition. The Government cherishes the Swedish model which builds on the labour market partners agreeing employment terms in the labour market. The vast majority of employers take their responsibility for the work environment seriously and work in collaboration with employees and safety representatives to create a good work environment. However, there are occasions when companies contravene the law and regulations to obtain advantages over their competitors. This may, for example, involve employees not having access to safety equipment or products and machinery being used in unsafe ways that are harmful to the health of those operating them.

A poor work environment is never to be a competitive tool. It must never be worthwhile to ignore the right of employees to a good work environment. Human trafficking and human exploitation must not occur. Companies that deliberately contravene health and safety regulations to gain competitive advantage create unhealthy competition in the labour market. Serious companies that follow the rules must not be forced out through competition with companies that break the law and contravene regulations. There are several sectors where unhealthy competition is more prevalent, including the construction industry, the transport industry, the cleaning sector and the restaurant sector. The Swedish Work Environment Authority is to plan its supervision partly on the basis of analyses of work environment risks and the risk of actors deliberately breaking the rules. Work environment supervision is vital in maintaining protection for employees and to ensure that fair competitive conditions prevail in the labour market.

The Government has launched several initiatives to combat unhealthy competition. These include introducing contractor responsibility for

unpaid wages in the construction industry and tighter rules on client responsibility when purchasing transport. Sanction charges have also been increased for transport companies when a driver is at the wheel for considerably longer than permitted or has taken a considerably shorter break than that laid down. Furthermore, the Government has also been active in negotiations on the EU's Mobility Package on commercial road transport, where new rules have been drawn up to create a transport sector with healthy working conditions. The Government has also expanded the requirement on electronic personnel registers to more industries so that it now also covers the restaurant, vehicle services, grocery and tobacco wholesaler, beauty care, laundry and construction sectors.

6.2 Efforts to combat work-related crime must be expanded through more inspections and preventive work

The Swedish Work Environment Authority judges that growing numbers of companies are systematically contravening work environment regulations to gain a competitive advantage. Links to other criminal activity are also increasing. The Government takes a very serious view of this. This work therefore needs to be part of the Government's concerted work to combat crime. If society can make it more difficult for criminals to infiltrate companies or run companies for criminal purposes, this helps to combat organised crime.

The field of work-related crime includes, for example, breaches of work environment regulations but also breaches of tax legislation and certain types of crime against the welfare system. Work-related crime can also involve money laundering and fraud, working without a work permit, human exploitation and human trafficking. Employees often risk unsafe working conditions, low pay, serious abuses of their rights and reduced protection under labour law and social security legislation.

The Government judges that successful cooperation between relevant agencies is of great importance for ensuring that work to combat work-related crime is effective and appropriate. Similarly, collaboration between agencies and the labour market partners needs to be improved and expanded. Cheating and crime at work have consequences that demand measures in several policy areas. The problems that the agencies encounter are becoming increasingly complex and new working methods are needed to tackle them. The Government has therefore previously tasked the Swedish Work Environment Authority with working with Arbetsförmedlingen (the Swedish Public Employment Service), the Swedish Economic Crime Authority, Försäkringskassan, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency, the Swedish Migration Agency, the Swedish Police Authority and the Swedish Tax Agency with developing appropriate and effective methods for multi-agency checks to combat cheating, breaches of the rules and work-related crime. The Government's initiatives to strengthen the work of the agencies to develop methods for joint checks has led to increasing collaboration and the agencies working together more in this area. The multi-agency work to combat organised

crime that has existed since 2009 is also important to combat the opportunities of organised crime to carry out work-related crime. A total of 21 agencies are involved in this collaboration.

Multi-agency endeavours have increased opportunities to stop actors that contravene work environment regulations and other rules. The Government is keen to see this important work continue and intensify. The Government has therefore tasked the above agencies with continuing to work to develop methods and implement multi-agency checks, within their respective remits, with a particular focus on fostering lasting collaboration (A2021/00085). The agencies' checks are effective in helping to increase compliance and healthy competition. The number of checks should therefore increase. Improvements are needed in opportunities to monitor checks and their results over time. In addition to checks, preventive work is essential in combating work-related crime. The knowledge and attitudes of the general public are important to the prevalence of work-related crime and preventive information campaigns should be carried out for this reason.

The Government considers it important that agencies are able to exchange the information necessary to exercise effective and appropriate checks. Greater sharing of information must always be weighed up against personal privacy. The Government will review the need for changes to the regulations on confidentiality that may be required to enable improved collaboration between agencies.

Good cooperation between the Swedish Work Environment Authority, the Swedish Police Authority and the Swedish Prosecution Authority is important to effectively investigate serious work-related crime. The Government has also appointed an inquiry to review the regulations on the statute of limitations on crime and punishment, which also covers work-related crime (ToR. 2020.91). The Inquiry Chair's mandate includes reviewing the prescriptive period and the different penalties that determine the length of this period and reaching a view on which crimes should not be subject to a statute of limitations.

7 Implementation

7.1 Action plans and the role of agencies

The Swedish Work Environment Authority and the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise have a particular role as agencies in the work environment field. For this reason, the Government has decided to task these agencies with drawing up action plans to implement the strategy in their respective areas. The work environment strategy sets out the Government's long-term political focus in this area in 2021–2025. The action plans are to draw on the four priority areas of the strategy and make clear which measures are to be implemented to attain the objectives it sets out. The measures must have a time limit and incorporate a follow-up plan.

7.2 The Government's work environment forum

Skr. 2020/21:92

To maintain and deepen tripartite cooperation, the Government intends to continue to operate an ongoing forum for dialogue with representatives of the labour market partners and agencies concerned. The forum is to be named the Government's work environment forum. Its purpose is for the labour market partners and agencies to join the Government in discussing ongoing and planned measures in the area of the strategy, and the action plans to be drawn up by the Swedish Work Environment Authority and the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise.

8 Follow-up

Developments in the field of working life, including the work environment, are presented in the Government's reporting of results to the Riksdag in the annual Budget Bill. The strategy will be followed up in the Budget Bill, which also presents the Government's policy focus for the year ahead. The work environment strategy is to be seen as the Government's long-term policy focus in this field.

8.1 Follow-up of action plans

The Swedish Work Environment Authority and the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise will review the results of their work on the work environment strategy and the actions plans they are to draw up on an annual basis. A first written report on this remit is to be submitted by 31 August 2021. Subsequently, the Swedish Work Environment Authority and the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise are to produce a written status report on work in progress, present the results of measures taken and, where necessary, update the action plans by 1 March each year. The final report is to be submitted on 1 February 2026. In the final report, the agencies are to submit an overall assessment of how their work has contributed to attaining the objectives set in the strategy and proposals for continued work.

The action plans will be discussed in the work environment forum to be established by the Government.

8.2 Evaluation

An evaluation of the work environment strategy is to be commenced in 2024.

Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet

Extract from the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 11 February 2021

Present: statsminister Löfven, ordförande, och statsråden Bolund, Johansson, Baylan, Hallengren, Hultqvist, Andersson, Damberg, Ygeman, Linde, Ekström, Eneroth, Dahlgren, Nilsson, Ernkrans, Lindhagen, Lind, Hallberg, Nordmark, Micko, Stenevi, Olsson Fridh

Rapporteur: Minister Lövin

The Government decides on the Communication En god arbetsmiljö för framtiden - regeringens arbetsmiljöstrategi 2021-2025