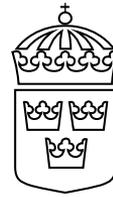


# Government Communication

## 2015/16:80



### A Work Environment Strategy for Modern Working Life 2016–2020

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Skr.  
2015/16:80

The Government hereby submits this Communication to the Riksdag.

Stockholm, 21 January 2016

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## The Communication's principal content

The Government's work environment policy is to contribute to a work environment that prevents ill health, accidents and people being excluded from working life. Work environment management must take into account people's differing circumstances and contribute to the development of both individuals and operations. The Government is raising the level of ambition in its work environment policy by basing this strategy on concrete measures within three prioritised areas:

- Zero tolerance of fatal accidents and the prevention of accidents at work
- A sustainable working life
- Psychosocial work environment

Improving the work environment requires action on the part of both central government and the social partners. Consequently, the process of drawing up the Government's work environment strategy for modern working life, which began in winter 2015, was commenced in consultation with the social partners. In order to maintain and deepen this tripartite process, the Government intends to create a forum for dialogue in which to continually discuss ongoing, planned and future actions in this area with the social partners.

The Government's strategy for its work environment policy indicates the direction this work will take over the course of the next five years. Within the scope of the strategy, the relevant work environment issues will undergo further work in dialogue with the social partners.

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# 1 Background

## 1.1 The Government's general priorities

The objective of working life policy is for both women and men to have good working conditions and the opportunity to develop at work. This implies a work environment that prevents ill health, accidents and people being excluded from working life, that takes into account people's differing circumstances and that contributes to the development of both individuals and operations.

Employment and working life policy in Sweden is based upon people's desire to work and develop. Participating in working life is a positive thing. Work means being part of the community, supporting yourself and having the power to shape your life and future. A safe and stimulating work environment is central to a well-functioning and vibrant labour market. The focus is on measures to prevent ill health and exclusion from working life before sick leave has become a reality.

Working life has to make it possible for people to be able and willing to work longer and to also live an active life in retirement. For decades, the basis of the Swedish work environment policy has been to regard the work environment as a whole, which applies not just to protection from ill health and accidents, but also the organisation and content of the work itself. This is also the substance of the provisions in the Swedish Work Environment Act. A good work environment is important to guaranteeing the individual reasonable working conditions, and it is also to be designed so that stimulation and opportunities for employees to develop their skills result in human resources being better utilised, ultimately contributing to increased productivity and competitiveness. A good work environment may also contribute to more people whose work capacity is impaired because of disability or ill health being able to remain in work or begin working again.

The process of drawing up the Government's work environment strategy for modern working life was commenced in consultation with the social partners in winter 2015. The strategy is to be valid for 2016–2020., serving as a compass for work environment management over the course of the next five years by emphasising three prioritised areas and initiatives. The problems and overall challenges set out in the strategy, as well as its concrete measures, are to demonstrate, primarily to the social partners and the Swedish Work Environment Authority, what the Government's ambitions are in this area.

In March 2014, the Riksdag notified the Government of its view (report 2003/14:AU5) that, for example:

- the Government should take the initiative to create zero tolerance of fatal accidents in dialogue with the social partners,
- the Government must invest more in research, education and inspections with the aim of minimising work-related deaths,

- the Government should take the initiative to ensure that all incidents and accidents that take place on the Swedish labour market are reported to the Swedish Work Environment Authority, and
- the Government should come back with proposals that aim to reduce bullying and harassment in working life.

The Government has allocated substantial resources to work environment area. A total of SEK 100 million per year is being invested over the course of this term of office. Through these investments and this strategy, as well as the measures that will be implemented, the Government believes it has attended to the matters of which it has been notified as per the above. The strategy and its follow-up via a dialogue forum are to be regarded as a whole. Some measures are described in more detail in section 4.2.1 (zero tolerance), section 4.2.2 and section 4.2.4 (improved research, education and inspections with the aim of minimising work-related deaths), section 4.2.1 (registration of accidents/incidents), section 4.2.3 (bullying and victimisation).

## 1.2 The Government's starting points for its work environment policy

The Government's starting point is that no one is to risk death, injury or illness as a result of their work and that working life is not to result in people being excluded prematurely as a result of physical, social or organisational aspects of the work environment. Modern working life involves new challenges, often of a psychosocial nature. At the same time, several more traditional problems of the work environment remain, often of a technical or physical nature. Many people experience a more stressful working life that wears them out prematurely. If people are to be capable of working throughout their entire career, the working conditions of mentally and physically demanding jobs need to improve.

The employer is responsible for the work environment. Improvements in the work environment are also a matter for central government and the social partners, which requires a clear division of roles and responsibilities. The fundamental requirements concerning the employer's responsibility for the work environment and for work environment management are set out in the legislation. In addition to the legislation and its enforcement, the social partners have an important role in promoting a good work environment. The Government believes that inspection activities must increase and has therefore allocated substantial resources, primarily to the Swedish Work Environment Authority.

The Government is also making its work environment policy more ambitious by basing this work environment strategy in concrete measures within three prioritised areas. A collective effort is required if the number of accidents that lead to fatalities or serious injuries is to continue falling. Even though the number of fatal accidents at work is low compared to other EU countries, zero tolerance is required in order to drive this work forward and involve further actors. In addition, efforts to achieve a sustainable working life must continue. The work being conducted by the six Riksdag parties that administer the parliamentary agreement

concerning the pension system (known as the Pension Group) and the agreements adopted by the Riksdag must of course be observed. However, there are still many measures the Government can initiate to contribute to the sustainability of working life at all ages. One underlying area that must be given specific space is the psychosocial work environment, especially in the female-dominated sectors. This is because organisational or social factors are the most common cause of occupational illness among women. The Swedish Work Environment Authority has adopted new provisions for organisational and social work environment and these enter into force on 31 March 2016. The Government has a positive view of the Swedish Work Environment Authority's efforts in this area.

An important part of the Government's formation of policy in the field of occupational health and safety is a continuous dialogue between central government and the social partners concerning how the policy can be improved and which initiatives should be implemented. The social partners possess significant knowledge and experience that can be better utilised in the policy work. They have a long tradition of finding joint measures in the work environment area. The tripartite process is an important starting point for future policy work in this area.

### 1.3 The need for a new work environment strategy

The work environment out in workplaces has an impact on individuals, enterprises and society as a whole. Over the course of the past two terms of office, there has been an increase in the number of reported occupational injuries. Occupational injuries have major financial consequences for individuals and society, as well as resulting in personal suffering for those affected. In parallel, sickness absence has risen continually since 2010, primarily among women. There is an increased need to take action to prevent sickness absence in the country's workplaces and to create a work environment that allows more people to participate and contribute, regardless of the cause of their ill health. If the increase in the rate of absence is to be halted by means of work environment initiatives, it is important that this is made into an issue that concerns everyone. Even though Sweden does well in international comparisons of work environment, the Government believes that the trend seen in recent years is worrying. In order to tackle this trend and contribute to improvement, there is a need for a new national strategy for work environment policy that contains concrete measures.

In addition, in the European Commission's communication on an EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020 Member States are invited to consider reviewing their national strategies in light of the new EU-OSH strategic framework, in close consultation with relevant stakeholders, including social partners.

The national work environment strategy aims to provide work environment management with a long-term focus, at the same time as it contains concrete measures within three prioritised areas. Current and planned measures within these areas are reported. All in all, the strategy

thus creates a platform for future work and policy development in this area.

The social partners have an important role in the implementation of work environment management out in workplaces and they possess great expertise and knowledge in this area. The Government's ambition during the process of drawing up this strategy has been to take advantage of this know-how via seminars and consultation with the social partners. The Government's understanding is that the prioritised areas and the concrete measures presented in this strategy are in line with the social partners' own assessments in this area. The intention is for future cooperation and follow-up relating to the strategy to take place via regular consultations between the Government and the social partners.

## 2 Developments in the work environment area

This section initially builds on the indicators that the Government reports each year in the budget bill. To gain a more detailed picture, the Government tasked the Swedish Work Environment Authority with producing a situation report on the work environment area for the period 2010–2015 (ref. no. A2015/01673/ARM). The rest of this section is based on that report.

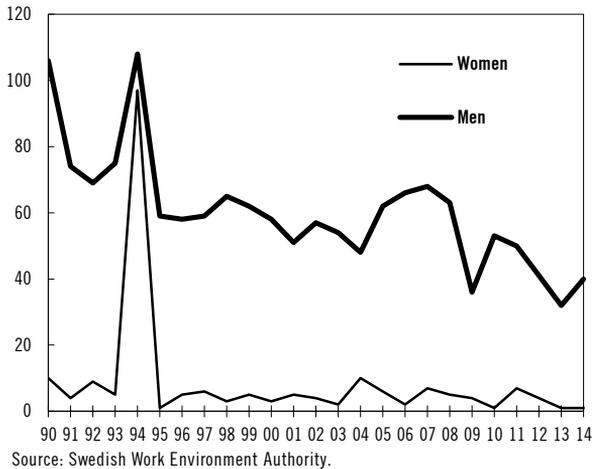
### 2.1 Work environment indicators

The indicators that exist for the work environment area are envisaged primarily to describe work environment risks.

#### **Fatal accidents**

The number of fatal accidents at work has been steadily decreasing since the 1950s. The number of fatal accidents has more than halved in the past 25 years. In the first half of 2015, there were 16 fatal accidents at work involving persons in the working population. There were 24 such accidents in the same period of 2014 (see Figure 2.1). Fatal accidents mainly occur in the male-dominated sectors of construction, agriculture and forestry and transport.

**Figure 2.1** Number of deaths in accidents at work 1990–2014

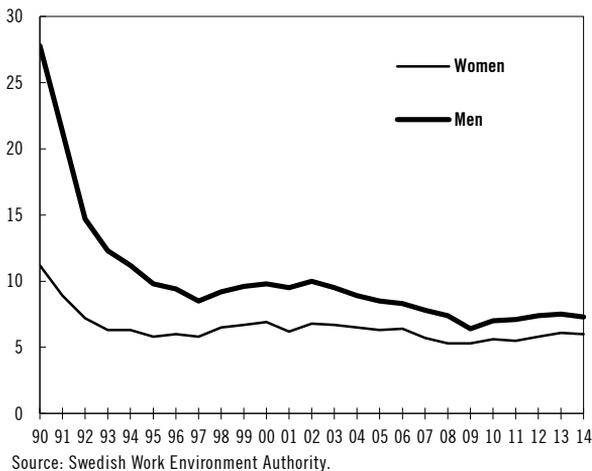


### Accidents at work

The number of reported accidents at work that resulted in sickness absence decreased sharply in the first half of the 1990s. Following a certain increase at the end of the 1990s, the number decreased again in the 2000s. The number of reported accidents is currently around one third of the level it was at 25 years ago (see Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2** Number of reported accidents at work with absence 1990–2014

Number per 1 000 workers



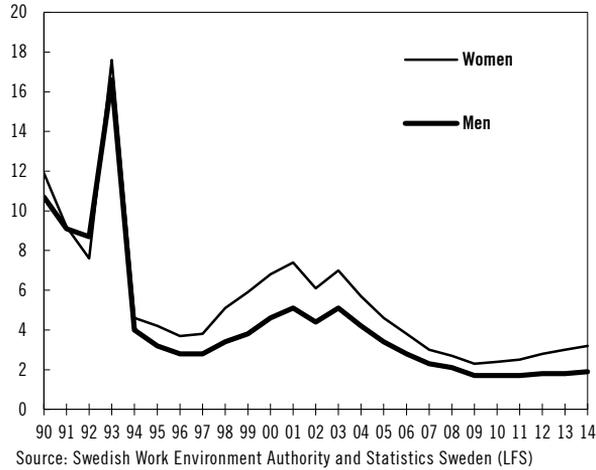
### Occupational disease

The number of reported cases of occupational disease also displays a downward trend over the past 25 years (Figure 2.3). What is notable with occupational diseases is that the problems first emerge following a long

period of harmful exposure and they can be of a physical or psychological nature. The rate of reporting has tracked the trend for rates of sickness absence, with an increase at the beginning of the 2000s. A rise, primarily among women, can be noted in recent years.

**Figure 2.3** Number of reported cases of occupational disease 1990–2014

Number per 1 000 workers

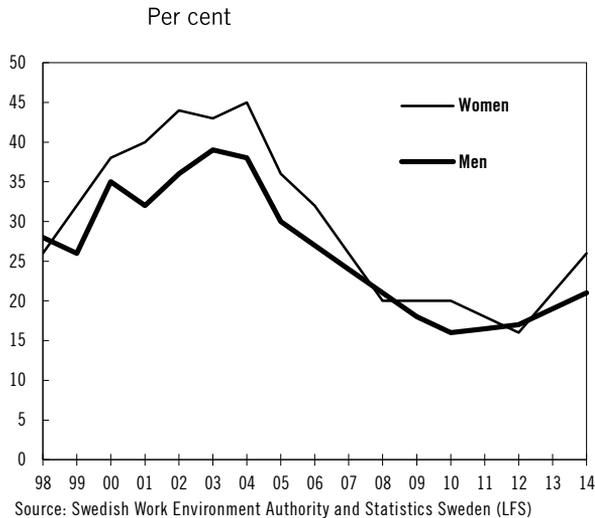


**Work-related sickness absence**

This indicator has been measured since 1998 and the trend is similar to that for the rate of sickness absence (Figure 2.4). Following a sharp decline from the middle of the 2000s, a renewed increase is then seen over the past few years, primarily among women, in the proportion of sickness absence specified as being due to work.

**Figure 2.4** Proportion of sickness absence specified as being due to problems caused by work 1998–2014

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## 2.2 Structural transformation of the labour market

Technological development and globalisation are leading to extensive structural changes in the economy and the labour market.

The demand for labour has changed. The number of job opportunities in low-wage and high-wage groups is increasing, while demand for labour in the intermediate-wage positions is decreasing. Trends point to the labour market becoming polarised.

The Swedish labour market is divided along gender lines. Nevertheless, this division has decreased somewhat over the course of the 2000s. Women are increasingly accessing traditionally male occupations to some extent, but an equivalent trend cannot be discerned in terms of men accessing traditionally female occupations. The local government sector is strongly female-dominated. Close to 80 per cent of all those who work in this sector are women. In central government, 52 per cent are women and 48 per cent men. In the private sector, about 40 per cent are women and just over 60 per cent men.

Reviews of the research have shown that more needs to be learned about what significance the gender division of the labour market has for occupational health, for example how the physical work environment interacts with organisational structures and processes. Research indicates that a gender unequal organisation goes hand in hand with psychosocial aspects such as conflict, harassment and high staff turnover. A workplace that is gender equal results in a more creative environment, better health and increased productivity.

The employment rate decreased sharply in conjunction with the financial crisis, but began to increase again at the end of 2009. The rate in 2013 was almost unchanged on that of 2006. However, it is mainly in

the older age groups that labour force participation has increased (Swedish Fiscal Policy, the Swedish Fiscal Policy Council's report 2014).

The composition of the population is changing and the population is becoming older. Besides the structural transformation, this is also significant to the development of labour force participation and employment. Controlling for changes in the age composition of the population, labour force participation has increased further and the employment rate has been growing since 2006.

The vast majority of those who are employed have a permanent job, but the proportion with temporary jobs is increasing. The increase in temporary jobs took place primarily in conjunction with the crisis in the first half of the 1990s, when it increased from 10 to 16 per cent, and it has subsequently remained relatively stable at this level, with the exception of the years around the beginning of the financial crisis when the proportion decreased. More women than men have a temporary job (19 per cent compared with 15 per cent). In the age group 20–24 years, the proportion with temporary jobs is 50 per cent (compared with the age group 35–64 years where the proportion is below 10 per cent). The proportion of people born abroad with temporary jobs is also higher, 24 per cent in 2014.

Traditionally, a large proportion of workers were employed by large companies. However, this is changing. The number of people who are self-employed has increased, as has the proportion of workers employed by small companies.

The number of people employed by employment agencies has increased, from approximately 5 000 in 1994 to 172 000 in 2014. Recalculated as full-time equivalent employees, they constitute 1.5 per cent of the labour force (SOU 2015:21 *Mer trygghet och bättre försäkring* [More security and better insurance])

The labour force has become more mobile. In recent years, there has been an increase in labour immigration to Sweden as a result of increased demand for labour in the sectors where the domestic labour force is insufficient or cannot be matched to the needs for a specific skill. Furthermore, people born abroad are overrepresented in occupations with lower wages and poorer working environments and conditions.

New ways of organising work have also appeared in recent years. The trend towards a larger proportion of subcontractors in the labour market has been going on for a long time. This can lead to uncertainty about responsibilities, which can have a detrimental impact on work involving health and safety. Employees of subcontractors are presumed to lack influence over the planning of their work to a greater extent. The purchaser largely determines the conditions. Those who perform the work can be affected by their situation, e.g. being self-employed with an F-tax card or having a temporary job in Sweden and poor language skills.

New ways of organising work are often closely linked to technological developments. New technology, e.g. online tools and mobile applications, makes it easier for individuals to offer resources, share ownership or use of various resources or provide services. Some names given to this phenomenon include the sharing economy, collaborative consumption and the collaborative economy. From the point of view of the labour market, one consequence of this development is that it is

easier for companies and individuals to have work carried out on a pay-as-you-go basis, which can be beneficial both for those performing the work and for those who want to have a certain task carried out.

New ways of organising work may mean that people spend a greater proportion of their working lives alone in front of a computer. If someone has chosen this type of working situation, the solitude need not be a problem, but for those who have, for whatever reason, not chosen to work in this way, solitude can become a work environment risk factor.

## 2.3 The development of work-related ill health

### **Accidents at work**

In the period 2005–2014, the number of fatal accidents at work decreased by 40 per cent, from 68 to 41. During the recession, the number of fatal accidents fell in 2009, only to rise the following year. In 2012 and 2013, the number of fatal accidents decreased compared with the year before, before increasing again somewhat in 2014. In the first half of 2015, there were 16 fatal accidents at work involving persons in the working population. There were 24 such accidents in the same period of 2014.

The sectors most exposed to risk are male-dominated: construction, agriculture and forestry, manufacturing and transport and warehousing. Foreign labour employed by foreign companies is recorded in the statistics as “Other” together with persons not in the working population but who are covered by occupational injury insurance. In 2014, there were 11 fatal accidents at work in the category “Other”. In the first half of 2015, there have been 3 fatal accidents in this category.

According to surveys, the national economy, i.e. the economic cycle that affects what work takes place in the economy, also has some significance to the number of reported occupational injuries in terms of both extent and which parts of the labour market and which groups are affected. Women and men are also involved in different types of accidents at work. Women are primarily involved in falls, while men are mainly involved in accidents caused by losing control of stationary machinery, hand tools and vehicles.

### **Occupational disease**

The number of reported cases of occupational disease per 1 000 workers is highest in the sector of public administration, among both women and men. According to the Swedish Work Environment Authority's report *Work-Related Disorders 2014*, almost one in four workers stated that they experience problems as a result of their work. Around 27 per cent of women and 20 per cent of men had physical and/or other types of work-related disorder. This is a significant increase since 2012, primarily among women. It is mainly the non-physical disorders that increased between 2013 and 2014, which is the case for both women and men.

Stress and other psychological strains increased by close to 40 per cent between these years. For women, this is the highest level since these measurements began in 1991. Between 2008 and 2012, this or an

equivalent variable maintained a relatively consistent level. Physical strain has also increased in the past two years among both groups; however, the increase for men is very small. A similar development is described in the Swedish Work Environment Authority's report *The Work Environment 2013* (Arbetsmiljöstatistik Rapport 2014:3). For example, the proportion of women who have difficulty sleeping because they are thinking about work increased sharply between 2011 and 2013 and was at the highest level ever measured in 2013. The proportion of people who have difficulty influencing their pace of work has increased by 5 percentage points since 2003 and is 61 per cent for women and 45 per cent for men. The pace of work is perceived as particularly difficult to control within the female-dominated occupations where the tasks are largely governed by contact with other people such as patients, customers and pupils. The prevalence of occupational diseases linked to physical ill health has increased and these are now the most common cause of reported occupational disease. Workload factors were previously the commonest. Workload factors are still the commonest cause of occupational disease among men.

The calculations presented by the Swedish Work Environment Authority in 2010 indicate that each year at least 800 deaths from cancer, lung disease or heart attack are work related. These deaths are not included in the statistics and may, in many cases, be presumed to reflect the impact of the work environment of many years in the past.

### **Occupational injuries**

The proportion of approved occupational injuries (decision to approve compensation from occupational injury insurance) is greater for men than for women. This may be, at least partly, due to the fact that men are significantly more often the victims of serious accidents at work than women. Men have their applications for compensation approved more frequently than women. For the most part, these differences are explained by the fact that women and men largely work in different occupations and sectors. Another possible explanation is societal notions and attitudes concerning masculinity and femininity. When occupation, year of birth, educational level, country of birth and diagnosis are taken into account, there is still a small difference in terms of the probability of being granted a lifetime annuity. Men are more exposed than women to factors that the current weight of academic evidence from the literature indicates have a harmful effect. There are more academic studies looking at male-dominated occupations than female-dominated occupations.

### **Harmful exposure**

In terms of the risks associated with exposure to various substances, we know about the risks of exposure to individual carcinogenic substances and about the causes of work-related cancer in humans. However, there is less scientific evidence regarding the interaction between different carcinogenic substances. In terms of those substances or exposures that are relatively new to the Swedish labour market, it is still difficult to say anything definitive about the risks of exposure. This applies to, for

example, carbon nanotubes, where the research supports a cautious approach to their manufacture, handling and use, but where there is insufficient scientific evidence to draw any conclusions about their harmfulness. This also applies to exposure in the electronic waste industry. Electronic waste is an environmental hazard if not handled correctly. There is not much research in this area, but cleaning and waste disposal workers belong to the occupational group that has the highest incidence of reported accidents and occupational diseases.

Occupational injury reporting and the pattern of injuries seen in industries with high noise levels are still predominantly found in the male-dominated industrial sector. However, it has been possible to reduce noise levels in this sector, at the same time as new noise problems have arisen in workplaces that were previously unaffected. This applies to, for example, offices, schools and the health and social care sector. Hearing damage can occur even if this does not necessarily manifest in traditional measurements of hearing damage, e.g. in the form of tinnitus, over-sensitivity to loud sounds or distorted sound experiences. Exposure to noise can also give rise to stress and tiredness, which may affect memory and learning, but other forms of ill health can also be caused directly or indirectly by these noise-related problems.

### **Work environment offences**

The pattern of work environment offences has changed. Causing bodily harm or illness currently dominates the statistics of reported work environment offences, whereas offences against the Swedish Work Environment Act were the most prevalent in the past. The number of reported offences has increased sharply in the 2000s and the levels in 2010–2011 were the highest they have been since 1988. According to research, this is due to a change in how the police authorities define and react to these offences and the Swedish Prosecution Authority having established a specific national unit for work environment offences, rather than an actual increase in the number of offences. The Swedish Work Environment Authority, the police and public prosecutors also now have common guidelines for work environment offences. A change to the law in 2014 means that violations are coupled with sanction charges instead of fines, which was the case previously.

## **2.4 Preventive work environment management**

Preventive work environment management has been developed on the basis of changed conditions and needs in the workplace and society.

For example, the size of an organisation has an impact on what knowledge there is and whether systematic work environment management is carried out. The fact is that the smaller the organisation, the less likely it is that systematic work environment management is carried out. What industry the organisation belongs to is also significant; for example, industries that produce goods and publicly regulated enterprises are above average in terms of the incidence of systematic work environment management.

The number of workers registered in the Swedish Work Environment Authority's register of posted workers in Sweden is increasing. This also affects the circumstances for working with inspection initiatives. Broader and more coordinated initiatives in partnership with other authorities in order to achieve a greater impact have become more common.

The regulatory framework is at the heart of prevention. Work to simplify and renew regulations has changed, from focusing on reducing the administrative burden on employers to also include making the regulations more accessible, clear and relevant to employers and others.

There are companies that more or less systematically violate the work environment regulations in order to obtain a competitive advantage. Efforts are being made to enhance inspection of unfair competition in working life.

The conditions for communications efforts concerning work environment management have changed. Advances in information technology are providing new opportunities, but the need to adapt communications to suit the target group also increases when different groups have widely differing conditions for taking in information. For many years, the Swedish Work Environment Authority has had an answering service that makes it easier for employers and others to obtain knowledge and information about work environment issues.

### 3 EU initiatives in the work environment area

#### 3.1 The European Commission's communication on an EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014–2020

In July 2014, the European Commission issued its communication on an EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014–2020 (COM (2014) 332 final), which is a follow-up and further development of the Community strategy on health and safety at work 2007–2012. In the wake of the EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014–2020, both the Latvian and Luxembourg presidencies have drawn up council conclusions concerning health and safety at work. The Government has a positive attitude to both the EU health and safety at work strategy and the two council conclusions that have been drawn up retrospectively and also believes that the national strategy's focus areas and concrete measures are a good fit in relation to the challenges and recommendations noted in the EU strategy and the conclusions.

In the communication on an EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014–2020, the Commission highlights three shared challenges for Member States:

1. Improving implementation of the regulations, particularly enhancing the capacity of small enterprises to put in place risk prevention measures

2. Preventing work-related diseases by tackling existing, new and emerging risks
3. Tackling demographic change

In order to take on these challenges, the Commission is focusing on the further coordination of national strategies, improved enforcement of health and safety at work legislation in Member States, simplifying compliance with health and safety at work legislation, especially for smaller enterprises, simplifying existing legislation, targeting initiatives at the ageing workforce and the emergence of new risks, preventing work-related problems and occupational diseases, improving statistical data collection and developing statistical information.

*The Council Conclusions on an EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014–2020: Adapting to new challenges* was presented by the Latvian presidency on 19 December 2014 and adopted on 9 March 2015. According to the conclusions, the greatest health and safety at work challenges are the prevention of work-related ill health, demographic changes and the need to improve the implementation of the regulations, in particular in micro and small enterprises. Against this background, the conclusions contain recommendations for Member States, the Commission and the social partners. The focus here is on such matters as the importance of disseminating knowledge and producing tools to help small enterprises implement health and safety at work legislation, creating the conditions for satisfactory supervision and inspection and carrying out prevention in close collaboration with the social partners. The Commission is encouraged to identify possible simplifications of the regulations that do not reduce workers' protection and to update existing directives where necessary.

*The Council Conclusions concerning a new agenda for health and safety at work to foster better working conditions* was presented by the Luxembourg presidency in July 2015 and adopted on 5 October 2015. These conclusions take aim at such matters as the necessity of identifying and evaluating health and safety at work risks in relation to both existing and new industries, forms of employment and ways of organising work so as to guarantee workers a good work environment. The effort to tackle undeclared work is also addressed as an important factor in the maintenance of good working conditions.

## 3.2 Regulatory simplification

REFIT is the European Commission's regulatory fitness and performance programme. The goal is to simplify EU legislation and reduce the cost of compliance. The work to make matters simpler for businesses, and thus reduce administration and the regulatory burden, is important to competitiveness, growth and employment in Swedish businesses. The general principle when designing regulations should always be to use the small enterprise as a starting point, i.e. the principle of thinking small first.

The Government believes it is unacceptable to provide small and medium-sized enterprises with general exemptions from work environment legislation. A protected work environment is a right and has to be the same, regardless of workplace. Proposals that allow relaxations and exemptions for small businesses must be assessed and analysed on a case-by-case basis and all laws affected by the communication must be dealt with in the ordinary decision-making process and in the usual forums.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority is working on regulatory renewal as part of its work with regulations. In order to make the regulations more accessible, clear and relevant to stakeholders, they need to be renewed and revised in a more integrated manner. Regulatory renewal is therefore one of the Swedish Work Environment Authority's prioritised development areas for 2016–2018. Clear and transparent regulations make it easier to do the right thing and contribute to a good work environment. In autumn 2015, the Swedish Work Environment Authority began a preliminary study in advance of a forthcoming programme in which the authority intends to conduct a comprehensive review with the aim of renewing and simplifying the regulations. Work on this comprehensive review begins in the latter part of 2016.

The route this renewal process takes will be chosen in consultation with the social partners.

### 3.3 The European Commission's evaluation of the health and safety at work directives

In accordance with Article 18(3) of Council Directive of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work (the health and safety at work framework directive), Member States are to submit a report to the Commission every five years concerning the practical implementation of the framework directive. Pursuant to Article 16(1), the same requirement applies to individual directives. On the basis of these reports, the Commission is conducting an evaluation of the implementation of the directives that are affected in the light of their relevance and of research and new scientific discoveries in the various fields in question. The first report will concern the period 2007–2012. Within 36 months of the end of the five-year period, the Commission has to inform the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work about the results of the evaluation and, when necessary, about any initiatives that aim to improve the way the legislation in this area functions. The Commission has announced that it will be submitting the evaluation report in the second half of 2016.

# 4 The Government's work environment strategy 2016–2020

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## 4.1 Overall objective

**The Government's assessment:** A work environment strategy should be introduced. The work environment shall prevent ill health, accidents and premature exclusion from working life.

**Reasons for the Government's assessment:** The starting point for the Government's work environment policy is that no one need be injured or become ill as a result of their work. The ambition is for more people to work longer and not be excluded from working life prematurely as a result of physical, social or organisational aspects of the work environment. The aim of the strategy is both to achieve tangible results in the short and the long term and to lay the foundations of a strategic and uniform work environment policy in which other relevant political priorities such as gender equality, non-discrimination and sickness absence also have a natural place.

The Government has published a programme of measures to improve health and reduce sickness absence in which it sets out a clear target level for the sickness benefit rate with the aim of halting the current rise in sickness absence. Sickness absence, measured as the sickness benefit rate, is not to exceed 9.0 days at the end of 2020. This also encompasses injuries and diseases caused by work. For these, the ambition is of course for no one to be injured or become ill as a result of their work. The overarching objective of the Government's gender equality policy is for women and men to have the same power to shape society and their own lives. This objective is broken down into four different subsidiary objectives: equal distribution of power and influence in society, economic gender equality, equal distribution of unpaid household and care work, and an end to male violence against women. Several of these objectives are also relevant in a work environment context, and the measures implemented in conjunction with the work environment strategy are to have a gender perspective.

Discrimination in working life is common and leaves a deep impression on those affected. This is shown in the Equality Ombudsman's (DO) report *Delar av mönster* [Parts of a pattern], which is based on an analysis of the reports made to DO (DO, report 2014:1). For example, individual violations are felt to be linked to structures that contribute to discrimination arising, such as sexist jargon, prejudice against people on the basis of factors including sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Knowledge about the ban on discrimination needs to increase, and unions, employers and DO have an important role to play in this work.

The Discrimination Act (2008:567) also requires employers to conduct a goal-oriented effort to promote equal rights and opportunities in working life, and the existence of discrimination naturally influences the

work environment of those affected and the workplace they are in. Discrimination and work environment issues interact in various ways and there are synergies for employers who see the links and deliberately address both areas.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority is the authority that makes the greatest contribution to putting the Government's work environment policy into practice. The Swedish Work Environment Authority has operations within the following four main areas: inspections, analysis, regulation and communication/information. The Swedish Work Environment Authority is the Government's operational authority in the work environment area, and the Government has chosen to assign the authority with a range of tasks linked to the strategy in order for the strategy to really make a difference. These tasks are distributed amongst the authority's four main operational areas within the strategy's three prioritised areas. Some of the tasks are to be implemented in partnership with other relevant authorities. The Government has a clear focus on gender equality in all policy areas and the Swedish Work Environment Authority is working very actively with gender equality as a part of its operations. Accordingly, a gender perspective is to be taken into specific consideration in several of these tasks.

Employers and employees in workplaces throughout the country are the ones best qualified to provide expert opinions about their own work environment. The social partners also possess a great deal of expertise in the work environment area and, through their members, have a unique and continuous insight into developments in this area. If the Government is to achieve tangible results in the work environment area, it is therefore dependent on close contact and dialogue with the social partners. A dialogue forum will be formed during the strategy period in order to enhance the interface between the Government and the social partners. The aim of the dialogue forum is to monitor the work that takes place under the strategy in consultation with the social partners and other relevant actors in a tangible and operational way. The Ministry of Employment is to host and convene the forum and officials from the Swedish Work Environment Authority, the social partners and, when necessary, other relevant experts are to be attached to the forum.

The Commission's communication on an EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014–2020, the Council Conclusions on an EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014–2020, *Adapting to new challenges*, and the Council Conclusions concerning a new agenda for health and safety at work to foster better working conditions set out important guidelines for national work environment policy. The Government believes that the strategy's focus areas are in line with the main challenges described in these EU documents, and the objective for national work environment policy over the course of the strategy period is to keep in step with international challenges and undertakings in this area.

**The Government's assessment:** The strategy for this policy area should be structured around three prioritised areas: zero tolerance of fatal accidents and the prevention of accidents at work, a sustainable working life and psychosocial work environment. Working life research is also of central importance.

**Reasons for the Government's assessment:** The rate of sickness absence is increasing. The causal relationships are complex. In its programme of measures to reduce sickness absence and improve health, the Government has identified seven areas that need to be developed. One of these areas is the work environment. Physical ill health is rising at the fastest rate and has particularly serious consequences for individuals and society. Organisational or social factors such as workload and social relationships in the workplace are now the second most common cause of occupational disease and are behind one third of reported occupational injuries. This trend must be halted and concrete preventive measures must be put in place. The Government's ambition is for more people to establish themselves in the labour market and remain in work longer. The work environment is a key factor in achieving this. A sustainable working life demands continual focus on a good work environment throughout working life. The physical work environment risks may not be neglected. Although the figures are heading in the right direction, we currently have too many accidents at work. Some lead to fatalities, which is unacceptable. Against this background, the Government has chosen to target the strategy at the following three prioritised areas: zero tolerance of fatal accidents and the prevention of accidents at work, a sustainable working life and psychosocial work environment.

This was also the theme of the three seminars the Government organised in spring 2015 as a foundation for work on the strategy. The seminars were an occasion for the Government to get a hold on the various challenges and opportunities of work environment management. The participants were representatives from the social partners, researchers and others actively involved in work environment issues.

In conjunction with the work on this strategy, the need to appoint a special commission of inquiry was noted. The aim of the inquiry is to provide evidence on which to base decisions concerning measures and regulatory changes in the work environment area. The inquiry's aims include charting the challenges of modern working life, i.e. what trends and new forms of work currently exist in Sweden; analysing and assessing whether applicable provisions concerning work environment responsibility are fit for purpose given the challenges of modern working life; and reviewing the regional safety representatives' right of access and powers and proposing necessary statutes in this respect. The tasks of charting the challenges of modern working life and analysing applicable provisions concerning work environment responsibility are to be reported on by 14 December 2016 at the latest. The task of reviewing the regional safety representatives' right of access and powers is to be reported on by 31 March 2017 at the latest (ToR 2016:1).

The Government has also tasked a special commission of inquiry with analysing and providing proposals for how a national centre for knowledge and evaluation of work environment and work environment policy should be established and structured. This task is to be reported on by 3 October 2016 at the latest (ToR 2016:2).

#### **4.2.1 Zero tolerance of fatal accidents and the prevention of accidents at work**

**The Government's assessment:** There is to be zero tolerance of fatal accidents. No one need die as a result of their work. Concrete initiatives are necessary to prevent accidents at work that lead to injury or death.

##### **Reasons for the Government's assessment**

The trend over the past 50 years has shown a sharp decline in the number of fatal accidents at work. At the same time, this level has, with some exceptions, remained relatively constant since the beginning of the 2000s. In a European perspective, Sweden has a small number of fatal accidents at work each year. According to Eurostat, only the Netherlands had fewer reported fatal accidents per 100 000 workers in the EU in 2012. Having zero deaths resulting from accidents at work may be a target that is difficult to achieve, but it is an important objective nonetheless. The decline in the number of fatal accidents appears to have halted. Every fatal accident is a tragedy for those involved and unacceptable for a modern working life.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority's statistics show that those industries most affected by fatal accidents in the period 2007–2014 are construction, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, manufacturing and transport and warehousing. Consequently, initiatives must target these vulnerable industries if concrete results are to be achieved.

It is often only circumstances which determine whether an event leads to physical injury, death or an incident that goes no further than the incident statistics. For this reason, the fatal accident statistics cannot be used as the only basis. Accordingly, the measures in the strategy are focused on preventing accidents at work in a broad sense.

##### *High-risk industries*

The Swedish Work Environment Authority's intelligence report from 2014 indicates that the transport and warehousing industry is placed highly in terms of fatal accidents among workers. Many fatal accidents happen during work that takes place on and by roads. In addition to the fatal accidents, there are accidents and serious incidents every year that could have led to fatalities. Work that takes place on and by roads is regulated in several pieces of legislation.

As the transport industry is one that suffers from many accidents, zero tolerance of fatal accidents at work can and should be linked to the vision of zero tolerance of people being harmed or killed on the roads, known as Vision Zero. Zero tolerance is also the basic premise of road safety

efforts in Sweden, which is laid down in a decision by the Riksdag. This decision has led to changes in the way we work with road safety. Zero tolerance has become a vision of a future in which people are not killed or suffer lifelong injury in road traffic. In order to create more effective measures, the authorities concerned should collaborate to achieve positive change.

Agriculture, forestry and fisheries are hazardous industries. The Swedish Work Environment Authority's fatal accident statistics show that a total of 25 employees and 47 self-employed people died in accidents at work in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector in the period 2007–2014. According to the Swedish Work Environment Authority's systematic review *Migrantarbete inom den gröna näringen* [Migrant labour in agriculture, forestry and fisheries] (Rapport 2012:14), foreign workers have poorer working and socioeconomic conditions than domestic workers. The report also states that there are work environment risks in this sector in the form of ergonomic load, exposure to chemical and biological pesticides, etc.

Dangerous machinery is also used extensively in agriculture and forestry. These industries are also characterised by the fact that many people work alone and many accidents take place in conjunction with the use of machinery.

Construction is another hazardous industry. The construction industry is marked by high risk, long chains of subcontractors and many different actors on the same work site, which can lead to a lack of clarity about the division of responsibilities.

#### *Market surveillance – inspections to ensure products comply with requirements*

Serious accidents can happen if products do not comply with the applicable health and safety regulations. The Swedish Work Environment Authority conducts market surveillance in order to protect employees and other users' health and safety, but the authority's inspection is also important to the equivalence of competitive conditions among product manufacturers. If work-related accidents and ill health are to be prevented, it is extremely important that the products available in the common market are safe. Those who do not manufacture or supply safe products are to be stopped. The deliberate or unintentional sale or use of substandard products by economic actors results in unfair competition and exposes both workers and consumers to risks. The free movement of goods within the EU demands active market surveillance authorities in order to combat irresponsible actors.

#### *Foreign employers and their employees*

Many foreign employers and their employees are active in the construction industry and other hazardous industries. Foreign workers, both EEA citizens and citizens of third countries, are of great value to Swedish working life, but language difficulties, differences in safety cultures and lack of knowledge of Swedish work environment provisions can lead to work environment risks. Greater knowledge is often vital for employers and employees who want to do the right thing. It needs to be

easy for foreign employees, employers and self-employed people to find comprehensive information about the various regulations that apply when working in or posting employees to Sweden. Comprehensive information can also be helpful for Swedish employers who employ or intend to employ foreign workers. Comprehensive information from various authorities also makes it easier for foreign employees to learn about and exercise their rights. This makes it easier for foreign employers and self-employed people to plan and undertake activities in Sweden.

Since 1 July 2013, the Swedish Work Environment Authority has had the task of receiving notifications from foreign companies concerning workers posted to Sweden. All notifications received are compiled into what is known as the register of posted workers. The Swedish Work Environment Authority administers the register, provides information about what rules apply and cooperates with authorities in other countries. The Swedish Work Environment Authority has also been tasked by the Government with being a point of contact and Sweden's representative in the forthcoming forum at the EU level with the aim of improving cooperation on preventing and combating undeclared work. This remit also includes national coordination with the authorities working to combat undeclared work, among them *Arbetsförmedlingen* (the Swedish national employment agency), the Swedish Tax Agency, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and the Swedish Migration Agency.

#### *Unfair competition in working life*

Companies that deliberately violate the work environment regulations in order to gain a competitive advantage create unfair competition in working life. Such companies can be found in all industries. The Swedish Work Environment Authority works very actively against unfair competition in working life, both on its own initiative and at the Government's behest. One of the Swedish Work Environment Authority's strategic objectives reads as follows: Fewer companies deliberately violate our regulations in order to gain a competitive advantage. In order to achieve this objective, the Swedish Work Environment Authority adopted a strategy on 11 June 2014 to combat unfair competition in working life for 2015–2017 and an accompanying action plan.

#### *Reporting and registration of incidents and accidents*

A well-functioning system for the reporting and registration of incidents and accidents is of great importance to the effectiveness of preventive work environment management.

With the free movement of labour in Europe, it has become more difficult to build up a complete picture of all the accidents that take place in Sweden.

An occupational injury affecting a worker in Sweden at a workplace that has a Swedish organisation registration number is reported to the Swedish Social Insurance Agency in accordance with the occupational injury insurance in the Social Insurance Code. Persons working in another country temporarily are to report injuries in their country of origin and be included in that country's occupational injury statistics.

Accordingly, if a Swedish person who is working abroad but employed by a Swedish company and is covered by Swedish social insurance is injured, the injury is reported in Sweden. The regulations are the same throughout the EU and are found in Regulation 1338/2008 on Community statistics on public health and health and safety at work.

However, reports of serious accidents and incidents are to be made in Sweden, regardless of whether those affected are Swedish or foreign nationals. The aim of these reports is primarily to obtain an indication that something serious has happened that may require some form of action on the part of the Swedish Work Environment Authority.

If all accidents and incidents were to be reported to the Swedish Work Environment Authority, this would lead to a greater workload for employers and a problem of delineation. Registration and quality assurance of the reports would also be a demanding task for the Swedish Work Environment Authority in terms of resources, and the reports would lose their function of indicating that something serious has happened which may require action on the part of the authority.

Therefore, in order to create a more complete picture of how many employees and self-employed people are injured at work on Swedish soil, the Government intends to focus mainly on improved information exchange with those countries that have the most employees in Sweden and to step up its effort to reduce the rate of under-reporting to the existing registers. Several of the speakers at the initial zero-tolerance seminar talked about how the statistics for this area are collected. This became an important basis for the picture of the problem referred to above. It will become important to find good methods for the future monitoring of work environment developments, for example by having access to relevant and reliable statistics.

#### *Concrete measures that are underway or planned*

- In the period 2015–2018, the Swedish Work Environment Authority is working on a government commission to strengthen its inspection of companies that violate the work environment regulations in order to gain a competitive advantage. As part of this commission, the authority is to work together with relevant authorities, including the Swedish Tax Agency, the Swedish Competition Authority, the National Agency for Public Procurement, the Swedish Economic Crime Authority and the Swedish Police Authority. In consultation with the social partners, the Swedish Work Environment Authority is also to develop and implement information initiatives specifically targeted at the industries and companies concerned.
- The Swedish Work Environment Authority is working on a government commission that involves the authority submitting an overall analysis of events in which people from another country working temporarily in Sweden have been fatally or seriously injured.
- Over the course of 2015 and 2016, the Swedish Work Environment Authority is working on a government commission to analyse fatal accidents in the sectors and occupations that are dominated by men. These analyses are to be conducted using a gender perspective and are to shed light on how notions concerning gender are given

significance in working life. The Swedish Work Environment Authority is also to draw up methods for preventing accidents and fatal accidents using a gender perspective in work environment management. This commission also includes drawing up a literature review, disseminating information and carrying out internal and external training activities.

- In conjunction with the strategy and in order to prevent the risks of employees who work on and by roads falling victim to accidents that lead to fatalities or serious injuries, the Government is issuing a commission to the Swedish Work Environment Authority. The authority is to cooperate with the Swedish Transport Administration and the Swedish Transport Agency, within the scope of their respective mandates, on clearly setting out what risk relationships there are and which occupational groups are at risk of falling victim to accidents that may lead to fatalities or serious injuries when working on or by roads. The authorities are also to draw up a joint proposal for accident-prevention measures.
- The Government makes the assessment that there needs to be a comprehensive approach to the situation for foreign employees within agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Only work environment issues can be handled within the Swedish Work Environment Authority's remit. Other issues are outside of the authority's powers. Consequently, in conjunction with this strategy, the Government is issuing the Swedish Work Environment Authority with a commission to be undertaken in consultation with the Swedish Chemicals Agency, the county administrative boards, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the National Board of Health and Welfare. The authority is to analyse how joint information about applicable regulations, rights and obligations can have a positive impact on the work environment of foreign employees and, in the light of the results of this analysis, create joint information and distribute this to foreign employees and their employers within agriculture, forestry and fisheries.
- In conjunction with the strategy, the Government is tasking the Swedish Work Environment Authority with analysing which industries and types of product indicate a lack of knowledge or desire to buy, sell or manufacture products that comply with the applicable requirements, known as unfair competition. The Swedish Work Environment Authority is to identify which actors are to be addressed by its market surveillance initiatives in order to achieve the greatest impact.
- In conjunction with the strategy, the Government is issuing a joint commission to the Swedish Work Environment Authority, Arbetsförmedlingen, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the National Board of Trade, the Swedish Competition Authority, the National Mediation Office, the Swedish Migration Agency, the Swedish Tax Agency, the Swedish Institute, Business Sweden, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and the National Agency for Public Procurement. Based on their respective mandates, they are to analyse and submit a joint proposal for how online information for foreign employees, employers and self-

employed people who work or intend to work in Sweden can be coordinated and structured in an easily accessible way. Skr. 2015/16:80

#### 4.2.2 A sustainable working life

**The Government's assessment:** Long-term initiatives are required in order to make it possible for everyone to keep working throughout their entire career. Initiatives to prevent work-related ill health and reduce the risk of employees being injured or worn out are necessary if a sustainable working life is to be achieved. The conditions must also exist that also allow those with failing health or disabilities to be involved and contribute.

##### **Reasons for the Government's assessment**

People are to have the opportunity to work throughout their entire career. In order to achieve a sustainable working life, continued efforts must be made to improve the work environment conditions of mentally and physically taxing jobs. Everyone must reap the benefits of a longer working life.

Modern working life comes with new challenges, at the same time as more traditional problems of the work environment remain. Global competition is constantly demanding increases in productivity and efficiency and is also leading to new ways of organising work. These may not come at the cost of employees' health and well-being.

Work needs to be adapted to the circumstances of different ages throughout working life. The demographic transition from a relatively even demographic distribution to an over-representation of older people is increasingly making its presence felt. There are several causes of this development, for example the lower birth rate in the EU and more people living longer. Combined with later entry into working life, this has distorted the age distribution between the younger and older sections of the population. The retirement age is increasing slowly, but fewer people of working age will in future have to support an increasing number of elderly people.

If the composition of the population changes so that the proportion of elderly people becomes larger, this means both that fewer younger people have to support a higher number of elderly people and that the age structure of workers changes.

The demands of working life have changed markedly in recent decades. Thirty to forty years ago, the labour market was dominated by low-skilled jobs and poorly educated workers. The proportion of jobs that do not require more than lower-secondary school education decreased from about 50 per cent at the end of the 1960s, to about 10 per cent in 2000. For individuals, their first job is an important step into society. The entry phase has been worsened for some groups of young people; those without a completed upper-secondary school education have a particularly hard time coping with the entry requirements of working life and gaining a permanent foothold in the labour market.

The proportion of employees with stressful jobs in the sense of high mental demands, but little scope for independent decision-making, has

increased markedly since the 1980s. This increase may be partly associated with the structural transformation that the tax-funded welfare sector underwent in the crisis of the 1990s, when, among other changes, the number of workers decreased significantly. This has resulted in the average age of workers in this sector rising at the same time as the workload has increased.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority's official statistical report for 2013 (Arbetsmiljöstatistisk rapport 2014:3) states that about 14 per cent of respondents aged 50–64 indicate they do not think that or are uncertain whether they will be able to work up to the “normal” retirement age within their current occupation.

Factors that have an impact on early exit are often established early in working life. Preventive efforts need to be strengthened so that workers are able to get support at the time health problems related to work first emerge. Employers' preventive efforts have to be good enough to enable them to detect those risks that may result in an early exit from working life. Knowledge and attitudes are decisive to the prevention of ill health and early exit from working life. Not having a job is a risk factor for ill health and increased mortality. This is one further reason for preventing premature exit from or late entry into working life.

#### *Young people*

Close to 4 000 young people are injured at work each year. Inspections indicate that employers often fail to provide young people with induction and supervision. Lack of an induction, combined with young people often having a low awareness of risk and great eagerness to get into the labour market and do their bit in competition with others, can appreciably increase the risk of them suffering from ill health and falling victim to accidents.

Young people run a greater risk of being injured in an accident as they have not yet been able to gain work experience. Young people often work in industries such as retail, hospitality, health and social care, construction, heavy industry and manufacturing. These industries often involve heavy lifting and moving in confined spaces, stressful situations that may also feature threats, work with machinery and work with substances that may be hazardous.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority has implemented initiatives in order to reach young people aged 15 to 18 with targeted information.

#### *Older people*

A significant proportion of all employees still indicate they have strenuous and monotonous jobs and experience shortcomings in their work environment. Some are more vulnerable than others to the risk of being worn out prematurely, and work environment policy must take into account that work environment problems are different for different people and in different sectors. For example, employees in female-dominated sectors are over-represented in terms of the number of reported occupational injuries.

There is limited research about the direct link between work environment and the time at which people exit the labour market.

However, the research results that are available indicate that the physical health and safety at work is significant. Skr. 2015/16:80

Various factors influence the decision to leave working life. A person's life partner and closest social surroundings are important to the point at which they choose to retire. Opportunities for development and influence at work, responsibility for others, satisfaction with working hours and meaningful duties are significant to whether people want to retire or continue working.

Working life research can provide new knowledge in this area, for example with respect to the work environment of female-dominated sectors.

### *Domestic services*

The number of people employed to provide services for which the RUT deduction is available has increased sharply in a short period of time. However, there is a lack of reliable information about the number of people employed, as Statistics Sweden's statistics do not differentiate between services provided to business and those provided to households. Many of those whose work involves the provision of domestic services are young and many have an immigrant background. About 60 per cent of the businesses are registered as employers with the Swedish Tax Agency. The others are self-employed people without employees. The degree of unionisation among these employees is low and there is often no collective agreement. There is no overall picture of the work environment conditions in these enterprises. Services provided by personal assistants employed by the service user have a similar set of work environment problems linked to the fact that the employee works in the employer's home. The service user has certain rights of their own, while the employee has the right to a good work environment.

### *New ways of organising work*

The work environment regulations are based on the primary rule that employers have a responsibility for the work environment of their employees. New ways of offering services and goods mean that it is not as easy to define the relationship between employer and employee. This could also result in the relationship gaining a somewhat different significance. A relatively new element in the Swedish labour market is self-employment companies, where these companies say they take on the full responsibility of employers, while the self-employed person runs an independent enterprise. Another element is companies that facilitate transactions in goods and services between other actors, in some cases without considering themselves to have taken on the role of employer. This can take place with the help of new technology, e.g. online tools in the shape of platforms, websites and mobile applications, and is one example of the development that is sometimes called the sharing economy. In response to the need for flexible solutions in the labour market, new forms of employment and other new ways of organising work have also emerged. Some examples are staff sharing and work sharing, temporary work, IT-based mobile working and what is known as portfolio working and crowd-working.

New forms of employment may involve both opportunities and challenges from a work environment perspective. There needs to be more knowledge about how work environment conditions are affected by new ways of organising work. These can vary compared with employees and self-employed people and there can also be an unclear division of responsibilities with respect to work environment management.

*People employed through employment agencies*

The employment agency industry is increasing in size and scope. Employees in this industry have double organisational affiliations. The employment agency has the responsibility of an employer, while the client company has the responsibility of a supervisor. The responsibility for the work environment is also shared between the employment agency and the client company. Any lack of job security constitutes a risk of stress for the people employed through employment agencies. Agency staff are also over-represented in occupations and industries with high-risk working conditions. Agency staff are also more vulnerable to occupational injuries. There is uncertainty about the causes of this, but studies indicate risks in always being new to the job and in shortcomings in terms of training and safety instructions. The Swedish Work Environment Authority conducted a specific inspection initiative in 2010–2011, but the industry is constantly developing and changing.

*Concrete measures that are underway or planned*

- In conjunction with this strategy, the Government is tasking the Swedish Work Environment Authority with carrying out a preliminary study to analyse the possibility of drawing up selection criteria for inspections with a focus on revealing any industries and workplaces where there is an early exit that can reasonably be linked to work environment factors.
- In conjunction with this strategy, the Government is tasking the Swedish Work Environment Authority, in cooperation with the social partners and within the scope of the national network linked to EU-OSHA, with planning and implementing a series of seminars to coincide with the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work's campaign for a healthy working life 2016/2017.
- In conjunction with this strategy, the Government is tasking the Swedish Work Environment Authority with drawing up a literature review concerning potential work environment risks related to new ways of organising work such as the use of subcontractors, digital working, the sharing economy and crowd-working (i.e. work distributed over the internet from a shared platform).
- In conjunction with this strategy, the Government is tasking the Swedish Work Environment Authority with implementing information and inspection initiatives targeting those employed through employment agencies, employment agencies and companies that hire in labour.
- A range of measures are being implemented within the scope of the Government's programme of measures to improve health and reduce sickness absence that are of great significance to the work

environment. In order to ensure that employers take their responsibility for rehabilitation and that people receive adequate support and assistance, the Swedish Work Environment Authority will be tasked with analysing the results of inspections of employers' work with adaptation and rehabilitation. The aim of this task is to gain an overall picture of the results of inspections in this area. The Swedish Social Insurance Agency has been tasked with developing its communication with the Swedish Work Environment Authority with the aim of making the authority aware of employers who are not complying with their responsibilities pursuant to the Work Environment Act and/or the Social Insurance Code (S2015/07796/SF). The National Board of Health and Welfare has been tasked with conducting a preliminary study concerning how the supply of skills to occupational health services can be supported and, within the scope of the funds allocated to this purpose, with submitting proposals to get more doctors to choose to train in occupational medicine. This preliminary study also includes charting how specialist training in occupational medicine is currently organised and how it should best be structured in future on the basis of the objective.

### 4.2.3 Psychosocial work environment

**The Government's assessment:** Initiatives are required in order to improve the organisational and social work environment and improve the opportunities of those with mental ill health or disabilities to participate in working life.

#### Reasons for the Government's assessment

The incidence of mental ill health is increasing. The causes are especially present in working life. Organisational and social factors are now the next most common cause of occupational disease and are behind one third of reported occupational injuries. They are the most common cause of reported occupational disease among women. The number has increased by just over 70 per cent since 2010. This trend must be halted and preventive measures must be put in place. The organisational and social work environment must not cause disease.

A poor organisational and social work environment does not only result in mental ill health. New knowledge about the links between common diseases, e.g. heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure, and organisational and social aspects of the work environment provides further arguments in favour of the need for action.

On 22 September 2015, the Swedish Work Environment Authority adopted provisions for organisational and social work environment (AFS 2015:4), which enter into force on 31 March 2016. The Government has great faith in these new provisions. These have a clear ambition to be a tool for preventing social and organisational work environment risks and to clearly set out responsibility for these issues. The provisions are given weight by being the product of a long process and there being an ambitious strategy for making their content known before they enter into

force. This will result in a new level on which to work for employers, employees, partners and the enforcement authority with regard to organisationally and socially induced loads in working life.

The fact that more people are living with mental ill health, regardless of how that ill health has arisen, is also becoming a problem that must be dealt with in the workplace. Good preventive efforts focusing on organisational and social work environment risks improve the chances of a workplace also being able to take advantage of the expertise of employees who are suffering from mental ill health, but it will also remain important to pursue opportunities for workplace rehabilitation.

Employers' preventive efforts are to be structured in a way that allows risks of injury and sick leave to be detected in time. Systematic work environment management is an important tool in this.

One success factor is that the social partners and central government are contributing, on the basis of their respective roles, knowledge and practical examples of how to create workplaces with a good psychosocial work environment. This was one of the important conclusions from the seminar on psychosocial work environment issues that the Ministry of Employment organised on 18 May 2015.

### *Stress*

In the Swedish Work Environment Authority's official statistical report for 2013 (Arbetsmiljöstatistisk rapport 2014:3), Swedish people indicate that stress and mental strain are the most common form of problem caused by their work. Workplace stress is also an extensive problem at the EU level. It is estimated that 50–60 per cent of the total absence from work in the EU is linked to work-related stress. We now have extensive knowledge about what causes stress in working life and stress-related sick leave and that this can involve major, complicated organisational issues just the same as somewhat technical issues. Common examples are tight time frames, lack of planning, weak support from management and colleagues, unfair treatment, little opportunity to exert influence linked to high expectations or IT systems that are frequently changed or go wrong. An investigation from 2015 shows that almost seven out of ten employees have doubts about their employer's ability to deal with stress-related problems in the workplace. Research can contribute towards identifying potentially appropriate measures to prevent and tackle mental ill health. Research can also show the long-term effects of work environment initiatives.

More knowledge is required about the reasons why women are more likely to be affected by stress than men. The knowledge that does exist must lead to action. One reason may be the gender division of the labour market. For example, literature reviews indicate that if women and men are subject to the same strains in working life, the reactions in the form of mental ill health are the same. Important aspects to address are that women take greater responsibility for unpaid house work and caring, and giving more attention and work environment resources to industries dominated by female workers and where the pressures have increased (more information below). However, in industries with fewer women,

e.g. heavy industry, it is naturally also important to take into account organisational and social work environment risks. Skr. 2015/16:80

### *The caring professions and illegitimate work tasks*

Some groups are particularly exposed to factors that cause unhealthy stress. Both women and men in occupations where they work close to users of various types of welfare services or other personal services, known as the caring professions, have a significantly higher risk of sick leave with a psychiatric diagnosis. The stresses in the caring professions can often be due to what are sometimes called illegitimate work tasks. What this means is that the employee feels that the workload becomes so great that they come into conflict with the obligations and regulations that apply to the profession in question. This becomes a form of moral stress.

The caring professions are largely confined to the public sector and these employees constitute a large group that is important to the sustainable functioning of our welfare system. Aside from the fact that sick leave involves suffering for the individual, it also involves a loss to the community. There are several good reasons for public-sector employers, e.g. municipalities and county councils, to serve as a role model of good leadership and improve the activities offered to citizens by taking action to improve working conditions for those employees who work with welfare services.

### *Limitless working life and working hours*

In some sections of working life, particularly in the service sector, the trend is towards more flexibility, especially with regard to when and where people are able to carry out their work. According to one investigation, Sweden is the EU country with the highest proportion of employees who have the opportunity to use flexible working hours. This makes it easier for people to combine their work with their private lives, but it can also result in work environment as the boundaries between work and private life are erased. Both employers and employees see the benefits of this flexibility, but the social partners have also, in various ways, already identified challenges that come with a limitless job and are working on these. Limitless working life entails a particular need for competent leadership. A consensus concerning appropriate measures for safeguarding flexibility while providing an opportunity for real recovery from working life could, in a concrete way, be developed by the Swedish Work Environment Authority and the social partners in tandem.

The extent and structure of working hours in a more general sense have also increasingly been highlighted as a cause of other forms of ill health than just mental ill health. For example, overtime and shift work can result in diagnoses such as stroke and cardiovascular disease. The extent of working hours is largely regulated by the collective agreements between the social partners. The extent to which these negotiations result in improvements in productivity benefit the employees in the form of increased real wages or shorter working hours can also be of significance to the social work environment, as of course can the structure of any reductions in working hours and other changes in working conditions.

The fact that the extent of working hours is largely determined by the social partners does not reduce central government's responsibility for monitoring the legal work environment aspects of when and how much we work.

### *Bullying*

Bad relationships in the workplace such as bullying and victimisation are often both a cause and a consequence of stress. A vicious circle is created when such a tone and culture has established itself in a workplace. Nevertheless, it is possible to detect early signs of a potential bullying problem emerging in a workplace, and it is vital to create a climate and a system in which these early signs are detected and dealt with. Some signs that deserve to be highlighted are an environment with a bad organisational climate in which employees feel the support of managers is unfair and poor and workplaces where employees feel there is a high degree of control (low self-management) or inconsistent role requirements.

It is thus vital that the employer is able to offer competent leadership and that there is preventive work environment management in place so that no one need be victimised or bullied in their workplace. The Swedish Work Environment Authority's new provisions for organisational and social work environment (AFS 2015:4) place demands on the employer to ensure that managers and supervisors have knowledge about how to prevent and deal with victimisation. The Swedish Work Environment Authority's enforcement of the new provisions, combined with the authority's guidance and the training initiatives linked to their introduction, provides better conditions than in the past for reducing victimisation and bullying.

### *Threats and violence*

Threats and violence, or the risk of being subjected to threats and violence, are a serious work environment problem and, in many cases, constitute a very serious threat to fundamental societal values and functions. This applies, for example, to Sweden's approximately 36 000 social workers, 30 000 of whom are women. About 40 per cent of them state that they are subjected to threats of violence at work. Reports may involve everything from death threats from clients to repeated calls from clients to their private telephone number causing discomfort and disruption. Other professional groups are also subject to threats and violence, for example work environment inspectors, animal welfare inspectors and environmental, health and food inspectors. The authority exercised by these kinds of official is important to maintaining the rule of law in Sweden. Consequently, threats and violence are not simply a work environment problem, but are also ultimately a threat to the democratic state governed by the rule of law.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority has shown that it is beneficial to work preventively against threats and violence using physical measures such as improving the security of premises, as well as having good systematic work environment management to identify risks of threats and violence, and organising work so as to minimise risks.

- In conjunction with this strategy, the Government is establishing a dialogue forum for work environment that will initially focus on working together with the social partners, the Swedish Work Environment Authority and invited experts to identify concrete measures to improve the psychosocial work environment and on how mental ill health can be successfully managed in the workplace (further information in section 5.1). One example of an issue that may be appropriate for this forum is how employers can offer competent leadership and preventive work environment management so that no one need be subjected to victimisation or bullying in their workplace.
- In conjunction with this strategy, the Government is tasking the Swedish Work Environment Authority with drawing up guidance concerning work environment challenges linked to a limitless working life in consultation with the social partners. A gender perspective is to be given specific consideration during the production of this guidance.
- In conjunction with this strategy, the Government is tasking the Swedish Work Environment Authority with implementing expanded inspection of working hours and associated work environment problems and with carrying out special information initiatives focused on working hours and psychosocial work environment in conjunction with the new provisions for organisational and social work environment entering into force.
- In conjunction with this strategy, the Government is tasking the Swedish Work Environment Authority with implementing a special inspection initiative for the work environment of elderly care, focusing specifically on the psychosocial work environment, stress and employees' opportunities to exert influence and participate in systematic work environment management. This inspection initiative is to specifically take into account a gender perspective.
- In conjunction with this strategy, the Government is tasking the Swedish Work Environment Authority with surveying the work environment conditions within the domestic services industry, with the aim of creating a better overview of the industry's challenges from a work environment perspective. This survey is to specifically take into account an ethnicity and gender perspective.
- In 2015, the Swedish Work Environment Authority conducted around 300 inspections in southern and eastern Sweden looking at the working conditions of social workers, including problems involving threats and violence. These inspections will continue over the course of 2016–2017 and will encompass the entire country.
- In the budget bill for 2016, the Government decided to invest in increased staffing levels in social care for children and young people. The Government also decided to provide additional resources to increase staffing levels in elderly care. In addition, the Government decided to make major investments in schools. These measures are judged to improve the work environment and reduce pressure on staff in schools, social care for children and young people and elderly care.

- A range of measures are being implemented within the scope of the Government's programme of measures to improve health and reduce sickness absence that are of great significance to the work environment. In terms of mental ill health, the Government will, within the scope of the programme, be initiating the development of an evidence base for primary care concerning the care and treatment of diseases that often lead to sick leave. A return to work will be taken into account in this process.

#### 4.2.4 Enhanced research into working life

**The Government's assessment:** Initiatives within the work environment area should be based on the results of research into different forms of work environment problems and into which work environment measures might have a positive impact. This is dependent both on the research being of a high quality and on its results being disseminated to the rest of society. It has to be possible to evaluate the work environment policy that is pursued.

##### **Reasons for the Government's assessment**

The knowledge gained through research is of great significance to the early identification of developments regarding both opportunities and risks within the work environment area. Research in this area therefore needs to be based on a multidisciplinary perspective. Analyses and literature reviews based on several different research areas can contribute to a greater understanding of the problems, thus enabling relevant action to be taken. The Government believes that greater knowledge and understanding of the often complex connections between work environment and health is important to achieving a positive development within this area and to halting the rise in sickness absence.

As it is women's sickness absence that is increasing most, a gender equality and gender perspective is central. The Government has already taken action to enhance working life research, with a specific focus on the work environment of female-dominated sectors. The Government will return to the overall policy for working life research in the forthcoming research and innovation bill that is expected to be submitted to the Riksdag in autumn 2016.

It is also extremely important that the knowledge produced by research is supplied in an easily accessible way in order for it to be practically useable in the workplace. Since the Swedish National Institute for Working Life was closed, there has been no unifying actor for the field of working life and work environment. Nor has there been any authority that evaluates the effects of the policy pursued in this field.

Several different universities, university colleges and research centres are currently involved in research within working life and work environment, both within their respective subjects and disciplines and taking a multidisciplinary approach. Conferences and seminars are arranged each year in this area, which means that knowledge is disseminated and debated. Significant research, as well as the dissemination of knowledge and development projects, in the work

environment area is also undertaken by companies and organisations owned by the social partners and by other private actors. Initiatives in terms of teaching and support to development efforts are also implemented by the social partners. The Government naturally welcomes all such activities and that the social partners take collective responsibility for these issues. Tripartite cooperation is also important in this area. Information exchange between central government and actors involved in working life and knowledge transfer between the research community and working life is essential to the development of working life and to ensuring the relevance of the research that is conducted.

*Concrete measures that are underway or planned*

- In autumn 2015, the Swedish Work Environment Authority advertised project planning grants so that the authority will be able to commission research of relevance to inspection activities over the course of 2016–2018 with an emphasis on work environment and related ill health in a gender perspective.
- Over the course of autumn 2015, the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte) has conducted a preliminary study of how to design a call for proposals for research funding concerning the work environment of female-dominated sectors and of how to utilise the results of research in the workplace. Forte is to consult with the Swedish Work Environment Authority, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the social partners and with other relevant authorities and actors. In spring 2016, a call for proposals will be issued for the funding of three-year research projects.
- The Government has tasked a special commission of inquiry with analysing and proposing how a national centre for knowledge and evaluation regarding work environment and work environment policy should be established and structured (ToR 2016:2).

## 5 Implementation and follow-up of the strategy

### 5.1 Implementation

**The Government's assessment:** The work environment strategy presented should be valid for the period 2016–2020.

**Reasons for the Government's assessment:** The primary aim of the Government's strategy for work environment policy is to indicate a direction for work environment management over the next five years. The strategy contains a number of concrete measures that give expression to and realise the Government's work environment policy. In this respect, work under this strategy will continue so that relevant issues

and solutions can be identified. These will be dealt with through the usual decision-making process within the Government Offices.

In order to maintain and deepen the tripartite effort, the Government intends to create a dialogue forum to which the Government Offices invites the Swedish Work Environment Authority and representatives from the social partners. The aim of the forum is to continually discuss ongoing, planned and future measures in this area with the social partners.

The work environment strategy highlights three prioritised areas with a number of measures for each area. The planned measures will take place over the course of one or more years. The Government will monitor developments within the entire work environment area and how it is affected by societal developments. These may be major societal challenges such as the refugee crisis that forced the Government to undertake emergency measures in autumn 2015. It becomes important here to safeguard the equal rights of all people to a good work environment, even in difficult times. However, this also applies to more specific challenges that may be the result of new technology or new ways of organising work. The strategy will be continually evaluated and developed. For example, consultation with the social partners becomes important in order to attend to prioritised areas. In this context, the dialogue forum to be established by the Government will be of central significance.

## 5.2 Follow-up

The situation within the work environment area, as well as the Government's political direction, is presented annually in conjunction with the budget bill. Naturally, this will have an impact on the work environment strategy stated in the present document, and follow-up will take place in relation to the strategy. A half-time reconciliation of the work environment strategy will take place in 2018 and an evaluation will begin in 2019.

## The Ministry of Employment

Excerpt from the minutes of the cabinet meeting on 21 January 2016.

Present: Minister Wallström, chair, and Ministers Romson, Y Johansson, Baylan, Bucht, Hultqvist, Hellmark Knutsson, Lövin, Regnér, Andersson, Ygeman, Kaplan, Damberg, Strandhäll, Shekarabi, Fridolin, Wikström, Hadzialic

Rapporteur: Minister Ylva Johansson

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The Government adopts Communication 2015/16:80 A Work Environment Strategy for Modern Working Life 2016–2020.