

Challenges in Working Life 2019

Descriptions of the prioritised challenges

1. Adapting working life to demographic changes and creating conditions for sustainable labour force participation

Demographic changes resulting in an increase in the proportion of elderly people in the population has led to a discussion about the need to increase the length of working life and to raise the age of retirement. One contributing factor to the negative development of the dependency ratio (the proportion of the population that supports those who are non-economically active) is that young people in Sweden enter the labour market relatively late.

Demographic changes also affect the distribution of labour between sectors (mainly an increased need for labour in the public sector), growth, and the opportunities for employers to hire skilled workers, as well as the ability of workers to impose demands regarding their employment and working conditions. The question of how to foster a sustainable supply of skills and an increased labour force participation is therefore important. Related issues have to do with creating conditions for increasing the participation of older people in working life, and how transition processes and the educational system can be organised for life-long learning and continued education.

2. Increasing the inclusion of under-represented groups in the labour market, with a focus on the workplace and the role of employers

Some groups such as newly arrived immigrants, persons with disabilities and young people who are neither employed nor studying, find it difficult to establish themselves in the labour market. Hence, there is an increased need for knowledge about the inclusion of under-represented groups. Questions about how integration processes can be efficiently promoted and the effects of legislation on migration needs to be studied more closely.

The workplace and the employer's role in including under-represented groups in the labour market needs closer investigation. How can we create work tasks and workplaces that encourage diversity, in terms of the labour market, as well as work design and organisation? The design of workplace adaptations, employers' receptiveness when it comes to hiring under-represented groups, and discrimination are therefore important areas of knowledge.

3. Improving the prerequisites and conditions for organising and undertaking work within various forms of employment

There is a need of more knowledge about inequality relating to working conditions and terms. Indications point to an increased polarisation of the labour market and of the terms and conditions for employees. This polarisation is linked to growing inequalities and differences in health.

There is a clear tendency towards new ways of undertaking and organising work. Temporary employment, as well as agency-hired labour, is increasing. There are also indications that newer forms of employment and work, for example through digital platforms, are becoming more prevalent. The new forms of employment can result in worse working conditions and work environments and may limit the ability of certain groups to exercise influence as well as affect their access to social security systems. The ability of workers to participate, exercise

empowerment, and influence work processes in the various sectors, employment forms and leadership and management systems are therefore important issues. The link between employments and conditions is affected by socio-economic status, ethnicity, age and gender.

The trend towards increasing heterogeneity in employment and working conditions puts the focus on issues of occupational stability and status in the workplace. The impact on individual's work environment, both in each individual job and over the course of a lifetime, but also on the consequences of this shift for organisations and the labour market is also highly relevant.

In Sweden, as in many other Western countries, membership numbers in trade unions have declined significantly in recent decades, particularly among workers and groups who generally have less influence over their work situation. It is of interest to study the consequences of this declining unionisation in different sectors and for different forms of employment, in terms of their effect on working conditions, health and safety, equality, and the functioning of the labour market.

4. Reducing the occurrence of intimidation, violence, and harassment in the workplace

More knowledge is needed about threats, violence, harassment, violations, bullying, and abuse in the workplace. For example, in recent years threats and violence against healthcare and emergency personnel have increased, and women are more likely than men to be subjected to such occurrences. The internet and social media have become venues for threats and intimidation and have resulted in new types of vulnerability. In the last year, the extent of sexual harassment and assault has been highlighted and clarified, and a gender equality perspective is therefore particularly important.