

Challenges in working life 2021

Information about the call

Forte has been commissioned by the Government to conduct a national research programme for research on working life. The research shall contribute to addressing the challenges of working life by generating and disseminating new knowledge.

For this call for proposals, a minimum of SEK 200 million has been allocated for for the period 2021–2027. The specified budget level applies provided that the Swedish Riksdag decides to allocate funds to Forte for the programme on working life research, in accordance with the parliament's Research and Innovation Bill *Research, freedom, future – knowledge and innovation for Sweden* (Govt. Bill 2021/21:60).

The deadline for applications is 20 May, 2021 at 14:00.

Focus areas

Forte has prioritised a number of challenges with a great need for new knowledge. The challenges were identified during the preparation of the working life programme's strategic agenda. The research agenda was produced in collaboration with a reference group consisting of researchers, labour market parties, government authorities and organisations. Applications within the call must focus on one of the following four sub-challenges:

- Ensuring a well-functioning labour market when structural changes occur
- Increasing the inclusion of under-represented groups in the labour market
- Reducing the occurrence of intimidation, violence and harassment in the workplace
- Creating opportunities for people to be able to work for their entire professional career

Ensuring a well-functioning labour market when structural changes occur

Promoting an inclusive and sustainable working life involves general questions about the functioning of the labour market. These concern, for example, the relationship between the labour market parties, labour supply and demand, wage formation and the consequences of urbanisation and globalisation. Other areas of knowledge include labour law and regulation, matching problems and the educational system, as well as increased requirements in relation to education and skills.

The creation of job opportunities is a prerequisite for a well-functioning labour market. This means that knowledge on the factors that affect job growth is needed. Important issues to consider include innovation and entrepreneurship, as well as the transition to a green economy.

It is important to take into account the effects of structural change on the labour market and the impact on different groups and parts of the country, as well as the effects on unemployment, the polarisation of conditions, inequalities and income distribution between different social groups. In the future, new sectors may be affected, including professions such as economists and lawyers, as technological developments replace routine tasks.

Economic crises and recessions have historically contributed to restructuring and conversion of the labour market. Changes that have already begun or have been pending tend to happen faster when jobs are lost, and companies or entire industries are in crisis and collapse. As a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, the digitisation and robotisation of working life and the use of AI are expected to increase in scope.

Systems and organisation of skills supply, training and matching have gained renewed topicality as a result of the ongoing structural changes and the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. Continuous development of skills is needed to ensure that the working population has suitable knowledge and experience in a changing labour market. In addition to industry-specific skills, the demand for skills is increasing in newer areas such as AI and digitisation, and there are indications that social skills, creativity and adaptability will be highly valued in the future. At the same time, skills shortages persist in, for example, the welfare sector. The importance of access to relevant and topical education stands out more clearly when the labour market is under pressure. How are the opportunities of digitisation and automation harnessed? What skills supply challenges exist in different sectors and what is the link between working environment, working conditions, productivity and competitiveness?

Sweden and the EU have decided on a series of support packages and labour market policies to mitigate the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on the economy and employment. It is important to track the short- and long-term consequences of these measures to identify how different social groups and industries, for example, will be affected in the future. It is also important to study how successful welfare systems have been in catering to new needs arising from the pandemic.

The ability to deal with structural change is affected by the employer-employee relationship. In Sweden, like many other Western countries, trade union membership has declined significantly in recent decades, especially among workers and in groups with generally lower influence over their work situation. It is therefore of interest to study the consequences of reduced trade union organisation in different sectors and different forms of employment in relation to working conditions, working environment, equality and the functioning of the labour market.

The direction of the economic recovery and growth determines the way in which and in what areas skills supply will be organised. Some incentives, for example, are intended to develop a climate change transition in the economy and society.

The climate change transition is expected to have a significant impact on the labour market and working life. Some jobs will disappear while others will be created, and the transition will often be intertwined with digitisation. In order to cope with the climate change transition, society needs to provide suitable education and skills supply, especially

in key sectors of the transition and other parts of the labour market where green growth is expected. Scenarios are needed, among other things, on which jobs will increase and decrease in importance, efforts to support individuals and communities undergoing transition processes, and research on how a good working environment can be secured in a fossil-free society. It is also important to take into account how climate change will affect people with a low level of education, poor labour market establishment or a socio-economically vulnerable situation, and are therefore likely to find it more difficult to meet, or transition to, new skills requirements.

Increasing the inclusion of under-represented groups in the labour market

One consequence of the Coronavirus pandemic is that unemployment has increased in Sweden in 2020 and 2021. Different industries and social groups have been affected in different ways. Industries that traditionally offer jobs to young people and other groups who have difficulty in establishing themselves in the labour market have been particularly badly affected. Groups that have been particularly badly affected in Sweden include persons with an immigrant background, young people, persons with disabilities, people who were unemployed before the pandemic and people with temporary employment.

These are groups whose situation in the labour market was already less stable before, and the question is how they can be included in the labour market after the pandemic. There is also reason to consider how equality in society will be affected in relation to work life development and life opportunities in general.

There is therefore an increased need for knowledge about the inclusion of under-represented groups in working life. Questions about how integration processes can be promoted and about the impact of migration legislation on development need to be further studied.

The role of workplaces and employers in including under-represented groups in the workplace also needs to be examined. How can tasks and workplaces that open up for diversity be created, in relation to both the labour market and work design and organisation? Fair adaptation of workplaces, employers' receiving capacity for under-represented groups, skills development and discrimination are therefore important areas of knowledge.

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

Another area where more knowledge is needed to achieve a health-promoting working life is the occurrence of threats, violence, harassment, abuse, bullying, and abuse in the workplace. In health care, for example, and for blue light personnel, threats and violence have increased recently and women are exposed to a greater extent than men. The Internet and social media have become arenas for intimidation and harassment and have opened up for new types of vulnerability. The extent of sexual harassment and abuse has attracted attention in recent years and a gender perspective is therefore particularly important.

Creating opportunities for people to be able to work for their entire professional career

The prerequisites for a sustainable and health-promoting working life are constantly changing. Young people's entry into the labour market is now taking longer in line with increased requirements in relation to education and the impact of structural change on the labour market. At the same time, new opportunities are created for work at a higher age. Rationalisation, efficiency improvements and increased productivity have led to an intensification of work and digitisation has for many created an unclear demarcation between work and leisure. The opportunities for a sustainable and health-promoting working life differ between groups with different work and employment circumstances.

Adaptation of work and work intensity can be important for individuals to be able to work throughout their working life. Adaptation also increases the opportunities for work in the event of illness and disability. Knowledge on how working conditions and the work environment interact with other living conditions in general, and how living conditions affect job opportunities are also important areas.

There are major differences in opportunities between different sectors and industries. In terms of health and safety at work and sick leave, there is a significant difference between female-dominated and male-dominated workplaces and sectors.

The high sickness rates are a social problem and entail a loss of production and increased costs, but also great personal suffering for those affected. There is also a risk of exclusion of individuals on long-term sick leave and early retirement. Diseases of the musculoskeletal system and psychiatric illnesses dominate, and interventions must be strengthened both to prevent problems and contribute to a return to work.

A proportion of those who have had the Coronavirus experience long-term symptoms and sick leave. What are the conditions for a return to work for this group?

Methods that facilitate a return to work after periods of mental and physical illness and sick leave, as well as prevention and health promoting measures for a good working environment are crucial. This also applies to knowledge about factors in the working environment and conditions that promote motivation, satisfaction and health at work and that reduce the risk of sick leave and the link to the organisation of working life. What promotes a good working environment and what characterises a health-promoting workplace? Knowledge in relation to the consequences of work-related injuries and research on the benefits of a good working environment for both individuals and society is also needed.

The Coronavirus pandemic has brought about a changed and increased workload in health- and social care. Care for the elderly has been particularly vulnerable. Not only the working environment, but also issues regarding governance and organisation of health- and social care have come into focus. Access to and use of protective equipment, language skills and the ability of employees to absorb information are challenges in the care activities. Temporary and/or short-term forms of employment, a high turnover of employees per user and patient and difficulties in carrying out systematic work environment management are other areas discussed as structural problems in health- and

social care. It has also been discussed whether there are systematic differences between different principals in relation to the quality of care.

There is a risk of long-term increased burdens in health-care and social work in the wake of the pandemic. In healthcare there is an accumulated care debt, and the social vulnerability resulting from unemployment may increase the need for intervention by social services. Research may be needed to follow developments.

Grant type

There is one type of grant available within this call – programme grants. Programme grants are aimed at creating research environments or strengthening and developing existing research environments. Forte would like the programmes to have an international connection and the research group to consist of both senior and junior researchers. They can refer to both basic research and applied research.

Limitations

The same person can submit one application as main applicant and one application as co-applicant, or two applications as co-applicant.

Grant length

Programme grants are for six years, but half of the first year's funds will be paid in November 2021 and the other half in 2027. A report is submitted half-way through the programme, describing the organisation, start and progression of the research.

Budget limit

Maximum SEK 18 million for the whole programme period. Annual budget may not exceed SEK 3 million (including indirect costs).

Eligibility requirements

To apply for a programme grant you must have completed a doctoral degree no later than the date of the call closing.

The application process

All applications are to be submitted via the [Prisma application and review system](#). Before writing your application, make sure the following conditions are met:

- You have created a personal account in Prisma
- All participating researchers have created personal accounts in Prisma
- Each participating researcher has stored personal data, CV and publications on their accounts
- Your administrating organisation has an organisational account in Prisma and has been approved as an administrating organisation at Forte. [Read more about Forte's criteria for administrating organisations »](#)

In order for your application to be considered, the final reporting for any previously approved projects must have been submitted. This only applies to grants where the deadline for final reporting has passed. Any previously granted extensions of project duration, and consequently of reporting deadlines, will be taken into account.

For more information on how to fill out the application, [see instructions on the call's website](#).

The review process

The applications are assessed by a review panel composed of international researchers and Swedish society representatives. Funding decisions are made by Forte's board.

Since applications are reviewed by international experts, your application should be written in English (except for fields where Swedish is specifically requested). If the application is written in Swedish, the quality of the assessment may be compromised. Forte is not responsible for the quality of any translations.

Forte's assessment criteria

Scientific quality:

- Purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, background and originality
- Study design, methods for data collection and analysis
- Interdisciplinary and/or multidisciplinary approach
- Gender and diversity perspectives in the content of the research

Relevance:

- Relevance in relation to societal needs, Forte's areas of responsibility and the focus area of the call
- Engagement with end users
- Utilisation and communication of research results

Feasibility:

- Work plan quality
- Research competence of project leader and research group
- Account of any previous own research in the area
- Staffing and budget, assessed on reasonableness

Call-specific assessment criteria

The following criteria are important for fulfilling the purpose of the call and for developing the research field. The criteria were identified in [the strategic agenda for working life research](#). To the extent applicable to the research, they are therefore to be taken into account in the application. Some of the criteria are also included in Forte's set assessment criteria, but since they are particularly important in this call, they are emphasised here.

- International cooperation. Cooperation that extends beyond the Nordic countries is especially encouraged. International cooperation should be described in the work plan.
- Competence transfer between less established and more established researchers. A mix of researchers in project groups will be encouraged in order to facilitate competence transfer.
- Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches.
- Engagement with end users
- Dissemination and practical application of the research

Guidelines on how Forte handles applications where part of the research is to be carried out abroad

- Forte is positive towards international research collaborations. Forte's area of responsibility covers complex societal challenges in which international research collaborations can provide important contributions.
- Forte's grants can be used to finance research where certain parts are carried out in other countries. However, the research shall be initiated and led from Sweden or be a clear part of the collaborative research.
- Applications involving international collaborations are assessed against the same criteria as other research applications and by the same review panels.
- In assessing research applications, the reviewers in Forte's review panels shall assess if any foreign section of a project brings added value to a project or is a prerequisite for a project with, for example, a global or comparative approach.
- It is the main applicant's responsibility to: find out how his or her administrating organisation stands on financing research where certain parts are carried out in other countries; and, find suitable collaboration procedures in each specific case.
- It is the grant's administrating organisation, i.e. the main applicant's home institution in Sweden, that determines and is responsible for, if necessary, appointing foreign personnel or paying for activities or services carried out in other countries.

Plan S and open access

Results from research funded by Forte shall be published with open access.

[Forte's guidelines for publication with open access »](#).

SweCRIS

Forte transfers information of issued grants to SweCRIS, a national database on grant-funded research set up at the request of the government. [Read more about SweCRIS](#).

Time plan

The call opens: March 4, 2021 at 10:00

The call closes: May 20, 2021 at 14:00

Forte's board decides on funding: September 30, 2021

Decisions are published: October 8, 2021 (preliminary)

Project start: November 1, 2021