



14 November 2019

Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

Division for Disabilities and Social Services

Desk officer

Jan Rehnberg

08-405 10 00

jan.rehnberg@regeringskansliet.se

Right to Work and Access to the Labour Market

Older workers in Sweden are at great risk of long-term unemployment or leaving the labour market. This means that they face greater difficulties in getting back on the labour market if they become unemployed. People with low education level are particularly vulnerable. Keeping older workers in employment is therefore vital. Access to lifelong learning with the possibility to develop skills is the key to achieve success in this matter.

A report from the Swedish Public Employment Service (PES) in 2018 shows that older people have benefited from the strong labour market. Over the past ten years, the employment rate has increased from 70 to 77 percent among the 55-64-year-olds. There are still more older men than women who work, but since 2007 the difference has decreased from six to four percentage points in the age group 55-64 years. In 2017, the employment rate at the mentioned ages was 74.6 percent among women and 78.5 percent among men.

Many elderly people are performing tasks as informal workers, not least when it comes to providing care to a partner. There are no official statistics in Sweden available regarding older persons engagement as informal care-givers. Surveys have however been conducted over the years by the National Board of Health and Welfare. In terms of the entire group of caregivers, there are generally more women (53 percent) than men (47 percent) who provide care.

A sustainable working life means that people have the opportunity to work throughout their entire career. Sustainable working life is one of the priorities in the Swedish Government's Work Environment Strategy for

Modern Working Life 2016–2020. A sustainable working life demands continual focus on a good work environment throughout working life. Some concrete measures for a sustainable working life are for example the establishment of a new agency for work environment expertise (2018), the introduction by the Labour Inspectorates of new provisions about organizational and social work environment (2016) and the Government's investments in research regarding working life through a ten-year national research program.

When it comes to workplace accommodations, it is worth noting that a person who has a disability is entitled by law to reasonable accessibility measures in certain situations. This means that employers are obliged to make their activities or business accessible to an employee who has a disability.

A growing number of persons who are registered with the Swedish PES belong to groups who have more difficulties finding work than others and who therefore are at risk of long-term unemployment. These groups include people with only compulsory education, people born outside Europe, people aged 55 years and older, as well as people with disabilities with reduced working capacity. There are of course individual differences in each group which means that not everyone has difficulties in finding work.

Sweden has a broad labour market policy that entails a number of measures, mostly aimed at the unemployed. When registered at the Swedish PES, an individual labour market policy assessment is established. Based on this, the PES assesses whether the risk of long-term unemployment is high. If there is a risk of long-term unemployment (which applies to most 55+), the PES has the opportunity to offer measures at an early stage of the unemployment period, for example through guidance, validation, education, subsidized employment or internships. These measures' intentions is to within short help the unemployed back to a new job as well as preventing long-term unemployment.

However, the fact that the Government has not chosen to target specific labour market policy measures towards elderly does not mean that the PES does not actively work with the group. It is very important to take advantage of the skills and experience of elderly women and men in the Swedish labour market.

Education and training opportunities are crucial for individual development, participation, empowerment and employment prospects, as well as for a well-functioning labour market. Many adults do not have the necessary education or training that correspond to the needs of the labour market. Such individuals must be provided with opportunities for reskilling and upskilling. In the budget bill for 2020, the Swedish Government proposes almost SEK 1.3 billion to equip more people for work, better integration, a continuation of the expansion of the Adult Education Initiative and an active business policy.

Also, when it comes to labour law the Swedish rules of priority (first in – last out) have had an important role in keeping elderly persons within the labour market.

Discrimination in working-life on the ground of age is prohibited according to the Swedish Discrimination Act (2008:567). The Act also states that employers shall work on active measures, for example prevention and promotion measures aimed at preventing discrimination and promote equal rights regardless of age. The Equality Ombudsman is to supervise the compliance with the Swedish Discrimination Act. Individuals can place complaints of alleged discrimination to the ombudsman. The Ombudsman can bring such claims to court seeking a financial penalty on account of the alleged discrimination.