

## Promoting Full-time Employment

### Sweden - 2000-onwards

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### Summary

A key indicator of gender inequality in the Swedish labour market is the difference in working time. There are many more women than men working part-time (30 % of women and 11 % of men 20-64 years in 2014). This is not a matter of choice as not finding a full-time job is the main reason cited by women and men. In total, there are 207,900 women and 79,400 men working part-time involuntarily.

Promoting full-time employment has been high on the agenda since at least 2000. Unions, political parties and women's organisations have pushed for increasing full-time employment. Investigations have been carried out, commissions have been appointed, projects and campaigns, mostly in the public sector, have been started and evaluated. The employers' organisation for municipalities and county councils (SALAR) emerged as a champion. These different elements combined to create the conditions for change over the period 2008 to 2014 in municipalities and county councils.

A 2015 survey showed a significant increase in the number of the municipalities, up to 57%, and county councils, up to 66%, had made some form of political commitment to promote full-time employment or desired working-time for their employees. The gains of 5 percentage points in full-time employment were made solely by women employed by these bodies. The initiative has contributed to economic independence for women.

The Municipality of Avesta promoted a "full-time project" between 2011 and 2013, financed by European Social Fund, and obtained good results with more than 90% of their employees now working full time. There is valuable learning from this initiative in terms of negotiating change, timetabling work, and managing increased demands on services.

## Involuntary part-time employment limits economic independence

The understanding that employment creates the conditions for social inclusion by providing income and entry to the social security systems is the conceptual basis for social inclusion policy in Sweden. The difference in employment rates between women and men, therefore, needs to be reduced if social inclusion targets are to be reached. Longer working hours for women are needed to further economic independence.

The overall objective of Sweden's gender equality policy (Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality 2009) is to ensure that women and men have the same power to shape society and their own lives. One sub-goal is economic equality with the objective that women and men have the same opportunities to achieve lifelong economic independence.

Involuntary part-time work is related to this sub-goal. It affects the level of earnings, and thus the possibilities for an individual to support herself through her own work. Part-time work also has an impact on the income or future income deriving from the transfer systems, such as pension, health and unemployment benefits. Action to further full-time employment is a key focus in gender equality policy and gender mainstreaming strategy at all levels.

There is a significant gender gap in part-time employment. In 2014, around 719,000 or 30 percent of employed women (20-64 years), and 248,000 or 11 percent of employed men worked part-time. Among women working in part-time employment, 29 percent worked part-time because suitable full-time employment was lacking, and the figure for men was 32 percent. This meant that 207,900 women and 79,400 men worked part-time involuntarily.

A secondary reason for women working part-time was childcare (136,300) and for men education (35,200). The unequal sharing of caring responsibilities remains an important factor in women's likelihood to work part-time.

Conditions of employment are regulated by law in some areas including working hours. Such legislation is largely non-compulsory in that the social partners can agree to opt out of it and trade unions can bargain for improved conditions for the employees they represent. Proposals for new legislation concerning the right to full-time employment were put forward in the 2000s, but new legislation was not introduced.

There is pressure for change in this situation in the local authority sector. This is due to the fact that one third of the workers in the local authority sector will retire at the same time as the share of older people and children in the population requiring services is increasing. If no changes are made in ways of working, organisation and staffing, more than half a million new co-workers will be needed.

### **Early activities create the potential for change**

Towards the end of the 1990s a committee (SOU 1999:27) mapped part-time and temporary employment from the 1980s, finding a considerable increase in involuntary part-time work over this period. In 1998, the Government convened a commission that proposed that municipalities and county councils should cooperate with county labour boards in offering the possibility of full-time work to part-time employees (Ds 1999:44).

The HELA Project was initiated by the Government in 2002. The Swedish Work Environment Authority, the National Institute for Working Life, the Public Employment Service, the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman and the Swedish ESF Council co-operated over four years to develop ways of increasing full-time employment and reducing involuntary part-time unemployment by stimulating research and practical knowledge. Between 2002-2004, 63 local projects were carried out mainly in the public sector, retail sector, and hotels and restaurants with significant effects on gender equality (SOU 2005:105).

### **Key actors prepare the ground for change**

Change in this field has been driven by a range of stakeholders. Trade unions and political parties have been key actors in pushing for change. Employers, on the other hand, have been resistant.

Labour market organisations have a strong position in Sweden. National collective agreements covering pay and general conditions of employment are largely negotiated by the social partners, via a central bargaining process. Unions such as the Swedish Trade Union Confederation and the Municipal Workers Union have long promoted full-time employment.

There is resistance to promoting full-time employment among employers. A right to full-time employment can conflict with their capacity to organise operations in the way they regard as most expedient. In the public sector, staffing reductions and increased demands for efficiency are behind the development of part-time and temporary employment.

Political parties, such as the Social Democratic Party, the Green Party and the Left Party, are in favour of increasing full-time employment and decreasing involuntary part-time employment, at least in the public sector. The Centre Party believes that full-time employment should be the norm and part-time employment a possibility. The Liberal Party has called for reduced involuntary part-time employment.

The Moderate Party and Christian Democratic Party do not have a position on the right to full-time employment. However, their women's organisations together with the women from the Liberal and Centre Parties in Q4<sup>1</sup> want municipalities and county councils to enable more women to work full-time. The Social

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<sup>1</sup> The women's organisation of the Alliance (the Moderate, Christian Democratic, Liberal and Centre Parties)

Democratic Women want municipalities and county councils where they are in power to introduce the right to full-time employment.

One third of the workers in the local authority sector will retire at the same time as the share of older people and children in the population requiring services is increasing. This would require recruitment of more than half a million new co-workers. This has led to a more open attitude to full-time employment by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (*Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting*).

## **Municipalities and county councils achieve change**

These elements combined to secure change in women's access to full-time employment in municipalities and county councils. This contributed to economic independence for women, as the sole beneficiaries of the change.

A 2015 survey by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (2015) found that the number of municipalities and county councils where decisions have been taken to introduce "the right to full-time employment" or "desired working-time" significantly increased between 2008-2014. In 2015, 135 municipalities, or 57 percent of the municipalities that replied (238 replied), had made a political decision to support the right to full-time employment or desired working time. In more than half of these, the decision included all part-time employees. In the rest, it concerned employees within certain sectors, in particular care of older people followed by care for people with disabilities. 14 county councils, (66%) of the county councils, had made a similar decision, in three of which the decision was restricted to certain sectors. During this period, the share of full-time employees increased by five percentage points in the municipalities and county councils. This increase only involved among women. The difference between full-time employed women and men has decreased from 20 to 14 percentage points.

A number of success factors have been identified for this development:

- Start out from and reflect local conditions in the approach
- A clear political decision is a prerequisite
- A realistic time table for change.
- Make the change understandable and create participation in the effort for change
- Innovate in the way activities are organised
- Encourage more people to work longer hours

In 2008, for example, the municipality of Avesta, in the county of Dalarna, and the local division of the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union signed an agreement to guarantee all union members full-time positions by the end of 2010. A "full time project" ran from 2011 and 2013, financed by the European Social Fund (*Wolf, Sara 2013*). Today more than 90% of employees work full-time. This success had four key components:

- An annual check with employees regarding their desired percentage of part-time leave of absence
- A new timetabling method with employees responsible for timetabling at their workplace
- The adoption of software to support this whereby each employee indicates their desired, individual timetable using Time Care software, followed by a collective process of negotiation to adjust each individual's desired timetable into a functional whole
- The creation of a pool of permanent care employees to act as stand-in (*Avesta kommun 2011*).

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## Further information

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