

SWEDEN: GENDER MAINSTREAMING TO PREVENT PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS

Introduction

This case study shows how Sweden has implemented a gender mainstreaming approach to reduce exposure to psychosocial risks (PSRs). Gender equality is treated as a transversal issue. In particular, Sweden has been at the forefront of integrating a gender perspective into the assessment and monitoring of PSRs, which specifically refers to the organisational and social work environment.

This case study concerns the role of gender mainstreaming and an initiative dating back to 2011, when the government assigned the Swedish Work Environment Authority (SWEA) the task of preventing gender-related occupational safety and health (OSH) risks over a period of three years. This led to further initiatives, such as training labour inspectors, conducting targeted inspections in female-dominated sectors through a national inspection programme, and developing research, tools and guidelines to help employers consider gender in OSH policies and risk assessments. Sweden recognises that in having a highly gender-segregated labour market, women and men are exposed to different work environments and experience PSRs at work in different ways, such as insecure or temporary work, mental strain and adverse social behaviour. The activities aim to recognise this in their OSH initiatives and apply this learning to specific sectors and other groups, such as promoting accessibility and inclusion for workers with disabilities.

Key takeaways and transferability

- An evidence-based approach, grounded in research and regular evaluation of initiatives is key for successful initiatives.
- A researcher-led learning network on gender mainstreaming, involving two municipalities, contributed expert knowledge alongside an independent formative evaluation. This close collaboration with researchers has continued since the project's end, bringing added learning, expertise and new knowledge to SWEA's work.
- The government's policy commitment to gender mainstreaming, successfully implemented in Sweden, provides a framework that can be extended to other groups.
- The experience of gender mainstreaming demonstrates the need for ongoing and sustained efforts, including resources to support the ongoing integration of a gender perspective in the labour inspection process and in the effective implementation of employers' responsibilities to address PSRs in risk assessment.
- Social partners initiated networking around OSH, gender and diversity, leading to the sharing of learnings and providing inspiration on OSH and other policy issues.
- The initiative has contributed valuable learning and a knowledge base of why women suffer higher risks of ill-health, burnout and MSDs, often working with different tasks and physical loads, carrying out monotonous and repetitive working tasks, and working with high levels of contact with the public.
- The project was innovative because it targeted labour inspections in sectors where women predominate, such as highly gender-segregated labour markets like social work, healthcare and home care services. This approach highlights the importance of identifying PSRs where there is an intersection between gender inequalities and the sectors in which women are employed.
- The initiative demonstrates that gender norms are deeply rooted in the workplace, leading to increased exposure to OSH risks for women. Gender-sensitive risk assessments are essential for identifying hidden stresses in the working environment and for ensuring proactive organisational changes that address job design, provide workers with greater control over their work, and offer better support for those experiencing stress.
- Gender mainstreaming is a well-developed methodology in Sweden. It can support initiatives for gender-sensitive OSH management, with the potential to address PSRs, and is highly transferable as a model.

- The approach taken in Sweden to compare OSH in female- and male-dominated labour markets is particularly relevant to any country with a gender-segregated labour market, thereby establishing an evidence base to identify and implement actions to mitigate gender-related work environment risks.

Legal and policy framework

The Work Environment Act (1977:1160) obligates employers to plan, lead and control the risks of harassment and abusive behaviour in the workplace, thereby creating a safe and healthy working environment. The general guidelines (AFS 2023:2) on 'Planning and organising work environment efforts – basic obligations for those with employer responsibility' include specific provisions on preventing harassment (sections 10-11 of Chapter 2 of the regulations). The SWEA's provisions and general advice on planning and organising OSH management include sections on preventing harassment at work across all sectors of the economy. The regulations address PSR factors relevant to the psychosocial and emotional dimensions of work, as well as victimisation at work, based on the OSH-management system (2001). This describes how employers must map and address these risks in the workplace in four steps: investigating the work environment, assessing the risks, remedying the risks and following up on the activities. A new regulatory structure for OSH came into effect on 1 January 2025. It aims to raise awareness and improve the implementation of regulations, along with obligating employers and other stakeholders to work more proactively to prevent risks and ensure a safe work environment.

Swedish OSH Strategy (2021-2025)¹

The Swedish OSH Strategy (2021-2025) (Government of Sweden, 2022) reflects a strong government commitment to OSH, PSRs, accessibility, gender mainstreaming and non-discrimination in national policy. This legal framework has influenced the approach to OSH. The strategy highlights the importance of the organisational dimension of PSRs and the creation of a good work environment for all workers. It also addresses discrimination and equal opportunities across the seven protected grounds, as well as abusive behaviour, harassment and sexual harassment. Specifically, the strategy highlights the impact of racism in the workplace and the need to implement related prevention strategies. The strategy emphasises the inclusion of older workers and workers with disabilities, as well as the role of occupational health, in designing rehabilitation and adaptations to enable people to return to work after taking sick leave. Emphasis is also given to the need to review work environment rules from a gender equality perspective, particularly in light of the health and safety risks prevalent in female-dominated sectors.

In addition, the strategy refers to the collaboration between the SWEA and the Equality Ombudsman in conducting awareness-raising initiatives on sexual harassment and discrimination. Building on this, the strategy emphasises the importance of preventive work environment measures and ensuring that employers are aware of their responsibilities, thereby playing an active role in ending sexual harassment. Managers and supervisors must be trained to prevent and take appropriate action against PSRs, and the involvement of social partners is considered essential for effective prevention and response.

In January 2025, the national strategy on mental health and suicide prevention (2025-2034) was launched. Among other issues, it marks an important milestone for OSH and mental health at work. Sub-goal 3 covers: 'An inclusive and sustainable working life that promotes mental health', which also addresses a gender and diversity perspective, as well as inclusive practices and accommodations for workers with illnesses or disabilities to support their employment.² The strategy was led by the National Board of Health and Welfare and the Public Health Agency, in close cooperation with other authorities.

Sweden has an advanced, long-standing policy framework on gender mainstreaming, which outlines the responsibility of all policy areas to integrate gender equality policies, both nationally and internationally. **Sweden's national gender equality policy**, dating back to 2006 (SOU 2005:66), is based on the principle that women have the same power as men in society and at work. In this regard, sub-goals cover the equal distribution of power and influence, economic gender equality, gender equality in education, an equal distribution of unpaid household work, gender equality in health, care and social services, and ending men's violence against women (SOU 2015:86). This approach has led to some real advancements in areas such as sex-disaggregated statistics, gender mainstreaming and gender-

¹ <https://www.government.se/contentassets/7a8a3957c3364717971a18ac3ed1d94d/a-good-work-environment-for-the-future--the-governments-work-environment-strategy-20212025.pdf>.

² Nationell strategi för psykisk hälsa och suicidprevention. <https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/livsvillkor-levnadsvanor/psykisk-halsa-och-suicidprevention/nationell-strategi-for-psykisk-halsa-och-suicidprevention/>.

responsive budgeting. Of relevance to OSH is that gender mainstreaming is regarded as a key tool for addressing gender-related OSH and PSRs. Since 2013, the government has assigned various assignments to develop knowledge and methods on gender equality work (under the gender mainstreaming supervision programme called Jämställdhetsintegrering i myndigheter (JiM)), which also included a gender perspective in OSH. Government agencies in the JiM programme have demonstrated results that improve conditions for their target groups, including knowledge-enhancing initiatives, new procedures and working methods, and support for gender mainstreaming at management levels.

Description of the intervention

Women's Work Environment initiative, 2011-2016

SWEA has undertaken a wide range of initiatives to address gender-specific issues in the work environment based on evidence showing that women are more likely to fall ill due to work, particularly from organisational or psychosocial stressors. In contrast, men are more often victims of fatal work accidents. In 2011, the Swedish government assigned the SWEA a task with a three-year deadline of undertaking a project on gender-specific work environment issues, and specifically addressing why women experienced higher rates of work-related illness than men. SWEA's project on the 'Sustainable work environment with a focus on women' constituted a three-year campaign carried out by the labour inspectorate to investigate and improve women's work environments, focusing on gender-related issues such as musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), and concentrating on sectors where women are predominantly employed. The aim was to assess how gender inequalities at work are linked to gender-related OSH issues, leading to greater risks of MSDs. This led to further initiatives on gender mainstreaming as described below.

Research and policy developments

These developments were further reinforced by research on gender differences in experiences of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), showing that women and men carried out different tasks, with different workloads, in the same occupations (Lewis & Mathiassen, 2013). SWEA's (2013) research highlighted how the role of gender norms impacts gender differences and inhibits innovation in the working environment. A range of PSR factors were identified, leading to women having a worse psychosocial working environment compared to that of men. This included PSR factors such as lower levels of control, lower stimulation at work, more frequent combinations of high demands and low job control, poorer social networks at work, and a higher occurrence of stress and anxiety related to work (SWEA, 2013). In addition, women were more likely than men to report high demands in the work task, emotional work, unclear roles and targets, stressful work, low influence, and having less working time to complete the job (SWEA, 2016).

Subsequent research conducted by the SWEA (2017) identified PSR factors that include both job demands (e.g. job strain, job insecurity) and job resources (e.g. job control, social support). Women and men experience somewhat different work environments due to their employment in distinct sectors and types of jobs. This research found that in female-dominated work, the risks of ill health are greater, and the risk of employees leaving their jobs due to ill health or dissatisfaction is higher than in occupations dominated by men. Higher levels of physical and emotional stress are likely the cause of this. The report argues that the highest sickness rates can be attributed to organisational and social factors in the work environment. Therefore, prevention measures must be addressed at the organisational level, rather than the individual level. Furthermore, it is recommended that the values and norms underpinning gender inequalities be discussed in the management of the working environment.

A key finding in the report is that a larger percentage of women worked in part-time and shift positions, reporting higher job demands and poorer job resources compared to their male counterparts, who typically worked longer hours. Specific psychosocial work environment factors included higher levels of job strain and psychological and emotional demands experienced by women, which were linked to the work roles held by women in education, healthcare and social services. In terms of job resources, a greater proportion of women reported low levels of control, which is often characteristic of jobs primarily occupied by women in fields such as education, healthcare, and social services. The research concluded that excessive demands coupled with limited resources at work were generally associated with lower job satisfaction, an increased desire to quit, and poorer mental and physical health.

In the same year, the SWEA's (2017) White Paper on women's work environment identified a range of risk factors arising from a gender-segregated labour market, different physical and mental stressors, and

unequal working conditions. It concluded that there is a need to incorporate a gender perspective into OSH, highlighting exposure to risks, including both physical and psychosocial factors. In particular, addressing these issues requires greater involvement and cooperation among the various actors responsible for the work environment, including employers, employees, social partners and occupational health services.

Actions undertaken as part of the labour inspection in a gender-segregated labour market

Two specific initiatives were used to implement gender mainstreaming into labour inspections.

Firstly, in the HAK project (2013), inspections were conducted in 65 municipal authorities across Sweden to compare work environment conditions and organisational prerequisites in female- and male-dominated jobs (SWEA, 2014). Inspections were performed to compare the work environments and working conditions in home care services (female-dominated) and technical administrations (male-dominated) of the municipal authorities being inspected. This revealed gender differences in workload and stress levels. In-home care services, staffing and other resources were not adequately adapted to meet needs, resulting in women performing manual patient handling and repetitive, monotonous work tasks. Overall, women had limited control over their work, and a lack of time and work pressures led to increased stress at work. Managers were more stressed and had high levels of responsibility, but they had access to fewer resources, including equipment and vehicles. This is in contrast to male-dominated technical jobs, where sufficient resources were provided to perform and manage the job effectively.

The inspections found that women experienced much greater exposure to risks in the work environment compared to men. At the same time, preventive measures were often more limited in female-dominated sectors than in male-dominated sectors, due to differences in knowledge and training requirements for various jobs. For example, a forklift truck driver requires training and a permit to operate a forklift. In contrast, workers in home care services are expected to lift and support users without certification or training in ergonomics (SWEA, 2017).

A second project, titled 'Gender, Work Environment and Learning' (GAL), carried out between 2018 and 2020, took learning from the project to develop new tools (the 'doing gender' model, highlighting gender equality in the systematic work environment) and inspections in other sectors, such as elderly care and cleaning. A specific focus was given to equipping inspectors with the tools to identify and address gender-specific health risks in the workplace and to increase awareness of risk factors related to work organisation and gender norms that lead to MSDs. The aim was to raise awareness of how gender inequality influences the work environment and to encourage employers to incorporate gender into systematic work environment management (SAM) (described below). During this time, inspections revealed the influence of gender norms, traditions and attitudes on the working environment and how work is organised, which is based on the model of the average male worker. This initiative led to the development of new assessment tools, recognising that how work is organised affects women's higher incidence of MSDs. Suggestions were developed to improve the PSR work environment for both women and men. For example, tasks can be divided to reduce repetition and monotony, mixed work teams can be formed, and equal attention should be given to addressing concerns about work environment issues.

Overall, the independent evaluation of the inspections carried out in the municipal sector helped raise awareness among employers and labour inspectors about gender-related risks and how to prevent them (Vänje, 2021). However, a lack of structure and resources for workplace learning, limited knowledge about long-term change management, and the perceived complexity of addressing issues such as emotional labour in risk assessments hinder progress. Similarly, gender-segregated work environments, and traditional values held with regard to women's and men's roles in society, result in a lack of organisational values on equality and gender and resistance in developing gender-equal and safe working environments. Inspectors placed a major focus on the learning and development activities of the project by means of seminars and workshops. The learning captured from the GAL project (2018-2020) found that labour inspectors had developed their knowledge about gender in the working environment (SWEA, 2021). A crucial aspect of this is the need for time to facilitate inspectors' engagement in regular and ongoing reflective discussions, seminars, and competency development as part of their supervisory activities.

Between 2019 and 2020, a national labour inspection effort focused on harassment at work and the organisational and social work environment. The latter was directed at the culture, film and theatre sectors. This initiative was a response to the #MeToo movement and growing concerns about sexual

harassment in these sectors. The overall aim was to investigate how employers work preventively through the investigation of OSH risks and risk assessment, and how they deal with harassment linked to OSH legislation. The experience gained from the inspection projects led to regular 8 March inspection days, inspections in female-dominated sectors, and the development of tools to integrate gender into training for all inspectors. This ensures gender mainstreaming will feature in all future inspections.

Tools for gender sensitive risk assessment

SWEA has produced various tools and resources for labour inspectors and employers, including an online self-assessment tool that addresses differences in working conditions between female-dominated and male-dominated activities. The tool asks specific gender-related questions about the organisation's mission, communication, management, governance, the working conditions of its employees, and demands and resources related to it. The tools have been developed to assist inspectors during their inspection and supervision activities, highlighting issues related to unequal work environments. Research from experts included a knowledge compilation report, 'Under luppen,' published by SWEA (2013).

The SWEA webpage on gender equality

The SWEA's dedicated webpage³ on gender equality provides tools and resources to show how a systematic, gender-sensitive approach to improving the work environment can create better conditions for both women and men. The website features videos (comprising an animated YouTube video and three short explanatory videos), as well as self-assessment tools, research and information for employers to utilise.

The animated YouTube video⁴ was created to raise awareness about gender in the workplace, using an example from the fish processing industry to illustrate gender differences in tasks performed. For example, women are affected by monotonous repetitive tasks and MSDs, while men are affected by heavy work in the loading dock. It highlights the importance of a gender perspective in identifying workplace risks and developing effective prevention strategies. It is one of three videos released to raise awareness about gender differences in the workplace.

▪ The 'doing gender' model

The 'doing gender' model has been introduced to the labour inspectorate as a supervisory aid to identify gender-related conditions that affect the working environment, aiming to support reflection and analysis. This model evolved from the evaluation of the project, supported by researchers, as a theoretical framework for understanding the interaction of different social processes in workplaces. It is based on research by US expert Joan Acker (1990) and adapted to the Swedish context by Kvande (2003) and Vänje (2013). It comprises four dimensions of an organisation's business (structures, interactions, symbols, and professional identity) that enable the addressing of gender issues in the working environment. The benefits of the model are that it shifts focus from women as a group to the contexts and processes that lead to gender inequalities and unequal power. However, it has been challenging for inspectors to understand and utilise the system, even though some have attempted to implement it.

▪ Highlighting gender equality in the systematic work environment system

A further tool to assist labour inspectors and employers is the integration of gender equality into systematic efforts within the work environment in the supervision system. An interactive diagram helps to visualise how a gender perspective can be integrated into the OSH management system, to improve health and safety for women and men.

▪ 'How can the work environment be made better for both women and men?' (SWEA, n.d.)

This is the title of a brochure that offers practical guidance on how employers can implement gender-inclusive practices in managing the work environment. It focuses on recognising and addressing the different challenges women and men face at work, such as higher sickness absences among women and greater accident risks for men. SWEA's view is that a gender-inclusive work environment will lower sickness absences and injuries, reduce the risks of harassment and violence, foster better performance and creativity from diverse teams, and ensure a fairer distribution of demanding or risky tasks. Suggestions include:

³ <https://www.av.se/arbetsmiljoarbete-och-inspektioner/jamstalldhet-i-arbetsmiljon/>.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xurUaIBMa8Y&list=PLEIRHW0U5qeqN4qt2rgZ74OKVssxWBcj&index=3>.

- Improving task variety and ergonomics: women often perform more repetitive tasks or ones requiring uncomfortable postures; such work should be diversified or adapted to suit all genders;
- Encourage more mixed-gender workplaces: balanced gender representation can reduce absenteeism, limit harassment, spark creativity, and enhance organisational performance;
- Use structured reflection tools: the brochure offers targeted questions for employers across three domains – human, technological, and organisational – to help identify and address gender-specific risks and inequities (see box below).

How can I, as an employer, apply a gender perspective?

Human	▪ Does our work environment management apply a gender equality perspective?; ▪ Is there a notion that certain tasks or areas are more suited to women and men, respectively?; ▪ Do women and men have the same opportunities to influence and participate in questions concerning the work environment?; ▪ Are there pictures, texts, or objects at the workplace that could be considered degrading? Is there use of language or jargon that could be experienced as degrading?; ▪ Is the workplace inclusive or exclusive? Do staff members feel included, irrespective of gender?; ▪ Is the workplace characterised by mutual respect and tolerance?; ▪ Is the attitude to parental leave the same for women as for men?; ▪ Do women and men have the same opportunity for competence development?
Technology	▪ Are tools at the workplace adapted for both small and large hands and bodies?; ▪ Are there protective clothes and work clothes that fit, irrespective of gender?; ▪ Are there changing rooms for women and men, respectively?; ▪ Are workplaces individually and ergonomically adapted?; ▪ Are there differences between female- and male-dominated occupations when it comes to protective clothing, conditions, tools, etc.?; ▪ Have any machines or tasks been 'gender stamped', that is, used or performed by only women or men?; ▪ Official statistics indicate that women are sick-listed more than men are, and that more women than men are forced to end their working lives early because of ill health. Can this be linked to tools not being adapted for both women and men?
Organisation	▪ How many employees are there?; ▪ How many are women? How many are men?; ▪ What do the women and men do? Do women and men have the same positions?; ▪ If women and men have the same positions, do they have the same work tasks?; ▪ If women and men do different things, what are the work-related risks faced by the women and men like?; ▪ Is a more equal distribution between the number of employed women and men being striven for?; ▪ Official statistics indicate that women are sick-listed more often than men are and that more women than men are forced to end their working lives early due to ill health. How is my workplace in this regard? What could the possible differences be due to? Could they be because women and men do different things?;

How can I, as an employer, apply a gender perspective?

- What prerequisites do men and women have at the workplace to enable them to work on the same things?;
- Do all employees have the opportunity to influence their own work conditions? Which employees experience high pace of work, machine- or client-governed work speed, lack of development, or are physically bound to the workplace?;
- How do different operational decisions affect women's and men's exposures to various risks and ill health?;
- Do women's and men's opinions and viewpoints regarding problems and improvements in the work environment receive the same attention?;
- If musculoskeletal disorders arise, could work rotation be a way to reduce and prevent injuries?;
- Have any employees chosen to reduce their working hours to part-time due to shortcomings in the physical or psychosocial work environment? Are there any differences between men and women in this regard?;
- How is the distribution of men and women in work groups, project groups, and development groups?

Source: SWEA, n.d

▪ **'Gender check. A better working environment for women' (Genuskollen: En bättre arbetsmiljö för kvinnor) (SWEA, 2016)**

To guide organisations in identifying and addressing gender-based differences in working conditions, a gender checklist has been developed. Divided into key themes, it supports awareness about gender issues in the quality of the working environment. These questions take account of SWEA's research evidence that more women than men take sick leave for organisational and social reasons; women are more likely to work involuntarily part-time and in temporary positions; women and men in female-dominated jobs/organisations have a poorer balance between resources and work demands; and in female-dominated activities, physical and emotional strain is higher, leading to a risk of ill health for both women and men in these activities.

The checklist can be used to help employers, safety representatives and managers analyse how the work environment may affect women and men differently, covering the following areas:

1. Staff composition: How many women and men work in the organisation? What do women and men do? Are specific tasks carried out predominantly by one gender?;
2. Gender-segregated statistics: Do gender statistics break down metrics for part-time/fixed-term roles, sick leave, turnover and role distribution?;
3. Emotional and physical workload: Are there differences in emotional strain or physical demands across gendered roles?;
4. Physical environment and resources: Is the workplace adapted for different body sizes and needs? Are tools, equipment, protective gear, transportation and apparel gender-inclusive?;
5. Organisational conditions: How is work scheduled or organised? Are breaks, recovery, leadership support, or opportunities for training and career development equally accessible to women and men?

The role of the social partners in preventing PSRs, including violence and harassment

The social partners play a crucial role in regulating and implementing working conditions and OSH policies, including PSR factors, gender equality and the prevention of violence, harassment and sexual harassment. The social partners actively participated in a social partner reference group established between 2011 and 2016 by the SWEA as part of the gender mainstreaming project. Owing to the success of the group and the networks created, at the request of the social partners, the Swedish WEA continues to facilitate the group, ensuring that issues related to gender (and related to this under the gender umbrella) continue to be discussed in the implementation of the OSH programmes.

There have been numerous collective bargaining agreements and union initiatives aimed at preventing PSRs, particularly violence and harassment. A good example is from the Swedish hotel and restaurant union, Hotell-och Restaurangfacket. All union health and safety representatives have received training on the regulations related to violence and harassment under the Discrimination Act, as well as the employers' obligations under the Work Environment Act regarding the management of the psychosocial work environment. The union has developed internal guidelines that promote a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment and an effective complaints procedure for victims of such harassment. In negotiations for the new collective agreement in 2020, the union demanded increased protection for restaurant workers, including better measures to prevent violence and harassment from third parties. This resulted in the establishment of three joint working groups on the issue with the employers' organisation Visita, which committed to introducing prevention tools and guidance for both employers and unions in the workplace.

A further example is the collaboration between the three national trade union confederations (LO, TCO and SACO) to develop a joint education programme for safety representatives on how to prevent sexual harassment. In addition, TCO has produced a *Handbook against Sexual Harassment* (Handbok mot sexuella trakasserier) to help employers, workers and trade union representatives work more effectively in preventing sexual harassment and to instruct on how to proceed if it occurs. Trade unions have also participated in activities organised as part of #MeToo Sweden to avoid sexual harassment.

Other ongoing and planned issues relevant to PSRs and diversity

The Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise (SAWEE) has developed various initiatives to promote new knowledge about PSRs and diversity. They include:

- Research on OSH and functional disabilities covering psychological, intellectual and physical disabilities (SAWEE, forthcoming, 2025);
- Research on preventing sexual harassment (SAWEE, forthcoming 2025);
- An ongoing research project on OSH risks for young workers (forthcoming);
- Information tools for young workers, including training materials on 'working environment knowledge' for secondary schools (13-16 year olds) about OSH⁵;
- An update on guidelines for external occupational health services on mental health in the workplace;
- A report and guidelines, to be finalised (forthcoming, 2026), addressing work adaptations for professionals with autism and ADHD.

SWEA and SAWEE have been commissioned by the Swedish government to act as strategic authorities for LGBTIQ and diversity, giving a specific focus to LGBTIQ and diversity in OSH. An example of this is the research based guide: 'A good working environment for LGBTIQ people' (SAWEE, 2025), which aims to raise awareness amongst all work actors (employees, managers, HR representatives, safety representatives and union representatives) about creating an inclusive work environment that is respectful of everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. It contains colour-coded reflection exercises that address roles within the organisation and practical ways to raise awareness amongst work groups on issues such as 'Where should you draw the line?' between expressing a personal opinion and offending someone, tools to encourage work colleagues, managers, senior managers, HR and trade union and safety representatives to create a supportive work environment. It also contains actions that management can take to address work organisation initiatives that support LGBTIQ workers' inclusion and visibility (such as policies on non-discrimination, inclusive leadership, gender neutral rest rooms, holding PRIDE events and supporting LGBTIQ networks). The report draws on a systematic review of research on the organisational and social work environment of LGBTIQ people submitted to the Swedish government in 2022 (SAWEE, 2022).

A new issue that has emerged from the work on gender is that attention is being given to including a gender perspective in work-related deaths as part of the Zero Vision programme, 2023-2025, which, amongst other factors, provides for the role of stress and gender in work-related deaths. These issues were discussed at a conference in October 2025.⁶

⁵ <https://sawee.se/publications/working-environment-knowledge-for-young-people/>.

⁶ <https://niva.org/course/work-related-deaths-in-the-nordics-need-for-a-new-focus-in-osh/>.

Success factors

- By embedding gender and accessibility into laws, regulations, policies and practices, including OSH and PSR assessments, Sweden has addressed a wide range of workforce diversity issues.
- The extensive learning in Sweden on gender mainstreaming and related tools has been incorporated into the SWEA's activities, research, training and information materials developed for labour inspectors. This has helped to improve knowledge, particularly about structural gender inequalities, gender norms in a gender-segregated labour market and gender-related PSRs.
- Translating Sweden's extensive knowledge of gender mainstreaming into specific projects with actions that are evidence-based and informed by extensive research and evaluation.
- The training and knowledge development of inspectors have led to a better understanding of gender-related work environment issues, including emotional labour, invisible work tasks carried out by women, the undervaluing of women's work in social and care sectors, and exposure to stress in these sectors. By comparing typically female jobs with typically male jobs, risks in workplaces, such as manual handling of patients, and repetitive and monotonous work tasks carried out by women, were revealed.
- A stepwise approach has enabled the targeting of one sector or issue, learning lessons from practice, and then applying those lessons to other sectors and groups.
- Social partner involvement, coupled with a strong tradition of collective bargaining, has ensured a systematic approach, rather than one-off initiatives. A key success factor has been the engagement and networking among social partners, who have continued to meet since the project's completion.
- A key message from the initiative is that improving working conditions for women workers benefits not only women but also men, highlighting the importance of respecting and accommodating workforce diversity in the workplace.

Challenges

- At the outset of the initiative, there was a lack of knowledge about gender-related risks, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises. Employers generally had limited knowledge about how to prevent OSH risks in the context of gender.
- Despite progress made in raising awareness amongst employers and inspectors, including integrating gender issues into the inspection process, this has not fully translated into action to end gender inequalities in the working environment. As a result, the SWEA has argued that more and sustained change, along with additional resources, are needed to address these issues at all levels, including within the organisation, governance and management.
- According to the SWEA (2024),⁷ work-related illnesses increased by 13 % in 2024 compared with the previous year, affecting higher numbers of women than men. The increase mainly comes from work-related illnesses linked to organisational and social causes, such as excessive workloads, especially among women in the healthcare and social services and education sectors.
- Sustaining learning and knowledge among labour inspectors and employers has been challenging, especially during staff turnover and when new inspectors and employers are appointed.

⁷ <https://www.av.se/globalassets/filer/statistik/arbetsskador-2024/arbetsmiljostatistik-arbetsskador-2024.pdf>.

References

- European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) (2020), *Sweden: Women's work environment and MSDs prevention. Policy case study*, https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Sweden_womens_work_environment_MSDs_prevention.pdf.
- European Commission (2019), *Peer review on legislation and practical management of psychosocial risks at work*. Stockholm (Sweden), 3-4 October 2019.
- European Commission (2024), *The EU mutual learning programme in gender equality: Progress on gender and equality budgeting within the European Union*. Sweden, 28-29 November 2024, Stockholm, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/eu-mutual-learning-programme-gender-equality-progress-gender-and-equality-budgeting-within-european_en?prefLang=el.
- Gender Equality Agency [Jämställdhetsmyndigheten] (2024), *Delredovisning (4:5) av Jämställdhetsmyndighetens uppdrag att stödja arbetet med jämställdhetsintegrering i statliga myndigheter 2020-2025*, <https://jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/aktuellt/publikationer/jamstalldhetsintegrering-i-myndigheter-jim-2024-2024-8/>.
- Government of Sweden (2022), *A good work environment for the future – The Government's work environment strategy 2021–2025* (Government Communication, 2020/21:92), <https://www.government.se/contentassets/7a8a3957c3364717971a18ac3ed1d94d/a-good-work-environment-for-the-future--the-governments-work-environment-strategy-20212025.pdf>.
- Lewis, C., & Mathiassen, S.E. (2013), *Physical Work, Gender, and Health in Working Life*, <https://www.av.se/globalassets/filer/publikationer/kunskapssammanstallningar/physical-work-gender-and-health-in-working-life-kunskapssammanstallning-2013-9-eng.pdf>.
- Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise (SAWEE) (2022), *The organisational and social work environment of LGBTQ people – A systematic literature review*, <https://sawee.se/publications/the-organisational-and-social-work-environment-of-lgbtq-people/>.
- Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise (SAWEE) (2025), *A good working environment for LGBTIQ people*, <https://sawee.se/publications/a-good-work-environment-for-lgbtqi-people-research-based-guide/>.
- Swedish Work Environment Authority (SWEA) (2013), *Physical work, gender, and health in working life. State of Knowledge Report*, <https://www.av.se/globalassets/filer/publikationer/kunskapssammanstallningar/physical-work-gender-and-health-in-working-life-kunskapssammanstallning-2013-9-eng.pdf>.
- Swedish Work Environment Authority (SWEA) (2014), *Inspections of female and male-dominated municipal activities, home care services and technical administration*, <https://www.av.se/globalassets/filer/publikationer/rapporter/inspections-of-female-and-male-dominated-municipal-activities-home-care-services-and-technicaladministration-report-2014-3-eng.pdf>.
- Swedish Work Environment Authority (SWEA) (2015). *Swedish work environment research 2017–2027: Input to the Government's research policy*. Stockholm: SWEA, <https://www.av.se/globalassets/filer/publikationer/rapporter/swedish-work-environment-research-2017-2027-input-to-the-governments-research-policy-report-2015-18-eng.pdf>.
- Swedish Work Environment Authority (SWEA) (2016), *Genuskollen: En bättre arbetsmiljö för kvinno. (Gender check. A better working environment for women)*, <https://www.av.se/globalassets/filer/arbetsmiljoarbete-och-inspektioner/jamstalldhet-i-arbetsmiljon/genuskollen.pdf>.
- Swedish Work Environment Authority (SWEA) (2017), *Women's and men's working conditions: The significance of organisational factors and psychosocial work environment for occupational and health-related outcomes*, https://www.av.se/globalassets/filer/publikationer/kunskapssammanstallningar/women_and_men_and_their_working_conditions.pdf.

Swedish Work Environment Authority (SWEA) (2024), *How to improve the work environment for both women and men*. Stockholm:

SWEA, <https://www.av.se/globalassets/filer/publikationer/broschyrer/other-languages/how-can-the-work-environment-be-better-for-both-women-and-men-broschyr-adi-690eng.pdf>.

Swedish Work Environment Authority (SWEA) (n.d), *Gender equality in the work environment*.

Webpage in English. <https://www.av.se/en/work-environment-work-and-inspections/gender-equality-in-the-work-environment2/>.

Swedish Work Environment Authority (SWEA) (2013), *Under the magnifying glass - gender perspective on work environment and work organisation*. Report by Annika Vänje, Department of Work Science, Royal Technical Institute KTH.

https://www.av.se/globalassets/filer/publikationer/kunskapssammanställningar/under_the_magnifying_glass.pdf.

Vänje, A (2021), Slutrapport forskningsrapport GAL. SWEA/AFA.

Interview with a representative of the Swedish Work Environment Authority and supplemented by material provided by the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise.

Author: Jane Pillinger.

Project management: Maurizio Curtarelli and Sarah Copsey, European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA).

This case study was commissioned by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA). Its contents, including any opinions and/or conclusions expressed, are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of EU-OSHA.

Neither the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) nor any person acting on behalf of the Agency is responsible for the use that might be made of the above information.

© European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2026

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not under the copyright of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.