

# **Work-Life in Sweden**

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# Why focus on work-life in Sweden?

- Sweden stands out in its enforcement of statutory requirements in this field
  - A few examples include high-quality public day care, paid parental leave for 480 days and the right to reduce work hours until children are 8 years of age
- Statutory support may not always be sufficient to address the number of challenges on the work-life agenda with cultural values being important forces to contend with

# Economic Background

- Sweden is the largest economy in the Baltic area – its size roughly that of California
- Sweden built one of the most generous welfare states following the Second World War and up to the first oil crisis of 1973
- Most elements of the welfare system are intact including tax-financed schools, child care, elder care, health care, pensions, and social services to all its citizens

# Political and Social Context

- In the 1920s, the Social Democratic Party laid the foundation for an egalitarian society that builds on cooperation and understanding leading to the first in universal health care and free education for all
- It began the labor movement with labor unions playing a critical role in the development of government policy, especially those around work-life issues
- Today, Sweden is governed by a conservative/liberal coalition led by the Moderate Party
  - Advocate for a welfare society but want to reduce peoples' dependency and increase individuals' incentive to work
- Tax burden is high at 47% of GNP in 2008
- If the conservative/liberal coalition retains power in 2010, they will likely continue to lower taxes
- If the liberal Social Democrat Party-led coalition wins, they will likely work towards more work-family benefits

# Demographics

- Population is over 9 million
- Swedish couples often cohabit rather than marry; cohabitation has the same legal standing as marriage
- The average man becomes a father at 31, the average woman becomes a mother at 29
- 44% of Swedish children are born to married parents
- About 18% of the population is over age 65
- Only 59% of Sweden's population was of working age in 2001 – the figure is expected to drop to 54% in 2030
- 32% of the Swedish population has completed higher education

# Swedish Culture

- Sweden is a highly individualistic society
- Class distinctions are few – some argue the drive towards equality has gone too far, hampering personal liberty and limiting economic incentives for individuals
- Although 1 in 10 Swedes thinks religion is important in daily life, the country is characterized by a strong Lutheran tradition and high work ethic

# Swedish Culture

- Since the 1960s, policymakers have advocated for the development of a gender equal society, encouraging women to see themselves as breadwinners and independent
- Sweden has one of the highest proportions of working women in the world
  - In 2007, 81% of women ages 20-64 were in the labor market
- Many labor laws pertain to non-discrimination and equal opportunities



# Division of domestic labor and childcare

- 1974 Sweden was the first country in the world to offer fathers paid parental leave and today is one of only four nations to grant fathers individualized rights to highly paid parental leave
- Women still spend more time doing unpaid domestic work and men's hours spent in unpaid domestic work has not increased since 1990
- 22% of fathers taking parental leave in 2009 compared to 7% in 1987
- Still close to 80% of women are taking parental leave days resulting in political problems since prolonged leave reduce women's productivity when they return
- Women are more likely as well to stay at home with a sick child and work part-time

# Women's advancement

- While the Swedish government and parliament are virtually unique in their equal gender distribution, the labor market is one of the most sex-segregated in the world and women are typically underrepresented in power positions
- 50% of women work in government jobs associated with women's traditional roles while 82% of men work in the private sector of corporations
- Women still make only 91% of what men earn

# Work-family balance

- A government study in 2003 found that 36% of mothers and 31% of fathers of children aged 3-6 found they never or seldom experienced work and family balance
- Mothers who worked full-time were more likely to report a lack of balance than mothers who worked part-time; Fathers who worked over-time were more likely to report a lack of balance than fathers who worked full-time
- 16% and 12% of men wished to work fewer hours
- It is possible men and women have a strong desire to work but need more support in the domestic area

# Family dynamics

- Equal sharing is still rare though the majority of Swedes believe men should take on a bigger role in helping to care for children and do housework
- Some researchers argue that while women have been encouraged to see paid work as an obligation, men's participation in active parenting is still seen as more of a choice

## Company Initiatives

- **CSC** – won the Guldnappen prize in 2009 for its policy for people who want to telecommute, flexihours, and provision of household services
- **Axis** – supplements the contribution from the social insurance during parental leave. For up to a year the company pays the difference between the ceiling amount and 90 % of the worker's salary
- **Skandia** – set a number of concrete goals to increase the number of women in management

# Company Initiatives

- **Ericsson Microwave** – The company has worked to change attitudes towards fathers taking parental leave by making the issue more visible; Employees are offered 80% of their real salary for six months during parental leave
- **FM Global** – 30 days of paid vacation and flexible hours are available to allow employees time for personal appointments

# What can organizations do further?

- Actively encourage men to take parental leave via incentive structure (e.g. financial support)
- Make fathers' use of parental leave visible and work on changing attitudes
- Work on reflecting equal opportunities for women in management's corporate priorities
- Ensure that corporate values are aligned with goals towards equality and work-life balance

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