

CARER LEAVE POLICIES IN SWEDEN

Caring for family members alongside paid work is increasingly common and the global longevity revolution means this will continue. Combining care work and paid work has well-known consequences for carers, their employers, the labour force and economies. Some governments have introduced strategies that let carers take time away from their jobs to fulfill care responsibilities while still being able to return to their job afterwards. To inform development of carer leaves in the UK, an international policy scan was carried out in nine other countries (Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden) as part of the Sustainable Care program.

This Policy snapshot provides an overview of carer leave initiatives in Sweden. These policies and their implications for working carers are part of a forthcoming edited book J Fast, J Heyes, and K Hamblin, **Combining Work and Care**, that will be published by Policy Press.

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SWEDEN'S POLITICAL CONTEXT

Sweden is a parliamentary democracy with four levels of government: supranational (EU-level), national, regional (21 counties) and local (290 municipalities).

Each level of government is responsible for different policy domains, although responsibilities and issues overlap at times.

National laws and guidelines are enacted at the national level and interpreted and delivered at the regional (health care) and municipal (care for older people and social services) levels. This leads to varying results across the country¹.

Historically, Sweden is built on the welfare state Nordic model guided by collectivist values. Yet, deregulation and privatization of public services of the early 1990s has been rapid² and the "safety net" of equal care on equal terms, regardless of geographic location is not always a reality³.

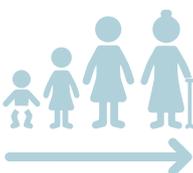
SWEDEN'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT



Labour force participation rate in Sweden was 74.5% in August 2021, up from a low of 71.3% in January 2021 during the global covid19 pandemic.



Sweden's unemployment rate was 7.1% in March 2020 (pre-pandemic), increasing to a high of 8.8% in August 2020, and is 8.5% as of August 2021.



The proportion of individuals in Sweden aged 65 years and older was 20.3% in 2020, an increase from 18.2% in 2010.



According to the National Board of Health and Welfare Sweden (2012) and the Swedish Family Care Competence Centre (2018) 18% of Sweden's 18+ population provide care on a regular basis to a family member or friend.

LEAVE FOR URGENT FAMILY REASONS

INTENT

An employee is entitled to leave from employment for urgent family reasons that are related to illness or accident that make the employee's immediate presence absolutely necessary⁴.

BENEFITS

Compensation for loss of earnings during leave is mostly decided in central agreements between national unions and employers and ranges from no payment to 100% of normal pay. Employers without a central agreement decide if and what the compensation during a leave is to be.

DURATION

Maximum length of leave differs between agreements made between employer and employee and is based on the issue itself.

Municipal and regional employees are entitled to a maximum of 10 days per year with full compensation.

The leave can be part of a working day up to several days.

FAMILY MEMBER & RELATIVES

According to the EU Council directive 2019/1158, family member and relatives includes a worker's son, daughter, mother, father, spouse, or, where such partnerships are recognized by national law, partner in civil partnership.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Leave provisions may vary across central agreements between national unions and employer organizations.

It is more common for large employers to have a central agreement.

Employers without a central agreement can make decisions in regards to payment but the right to leave of absence remains.

While the definition of close family members varies depending on authority, municipality etc., it most often includes partner/spouse, parent, child, grandparent, and/or grandchild of an employee.

The leave for urgent family reasons cannot be the sole ground for work termination, nor impaired working conditions or realignment.

If the employee is nevertheless dismissed, the dismissal shall be annulled, if the employee so requests.

Employers who break the law are required to pay compensation to the employee.

Employers may request a medical certificate from the employee.

FEATURES

NOTICE

4. Lag (1998:209) om rätt till ledighet av trängande familjeskäl
(Law (1998:209) the right to leave for urgent family reasons).

NÄRSTÅENDEPENNING (COMPASSIONATE CARE LEAVE)

INTENT

An employee has the right to a leave of absence with financial compensation while caring for a next of kin with a serious illness and at the same time abstaining from paid work⁵.

DURATION

Maximum length of leave is 100 days (or 240 days for a significant other with HIV).

If the care receiver is cared for by several family members, they share the days with compensation without exceeding the maximum length of leave.

BENEFITS

Compensation is related to the income and the length of work time abstained from. Normally the compensation is about 80% of salary, but there is a maximum amount.

If working or caring part time, compensation could be done for the mutual amount of time a day if the carer otherwise would have been carrying out paid work. The allowance can be paid out for 25%, 50%, 75% or 100% of a full day. If timing is uncertain, the carer may take out some allowance days and then pause it for awhile if the care receiver's condition stabilizes.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The law does not exempt any type of employer but clarifies that the employer cannot negotiate away this right.

Eligible only to working carers who through their caring activities miss income from their paid work. Carers must be caring for a family member or other person with a close relationship, such as relatives, friends or neighbors.

Both the carer and the person who has a serious illness must be insured in Sweden. The care should be given in Sweden or in an EU/EES-country.

Care receiver must have a serious illness, defined as a condition that threatens the person's life. The care receiver should be cared for at home or at a hospital and consent from the next of kin is necessary.

FEATURES

Leave cannot be the sole grounds for work termination, impaired working conditions or alignment. If the employee is dismissed, the dismissal shall be annulled, if the employee so requests. Employers who break the law are required to compensate the employee.

NOTICE

A medical certificate and a treatment plan are necessary.

The Swedish Social Insurance Office performs an individual assessment of the need for preventive sick leave payment to the carer.

5. <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/privatpers/sjuk/anstalld/narstaendepenning>

Act (No. 2010:1241) to amend Act (1988:1465) respecting compensation and leave of absence for care to close family member (In Swedish).

Act (No. 2017: 1125) to amend Act (1988:1465) respecting compensation and leave of absence for care to close family member

Chapter 47 of the Social Insurance Code

REDUCED PAID WORKING HOURS FOR A PARENT WITH ELIGIBLE DISABLED CHILDREN

INTENT

An employee with a disabled child covered by the law⁶ has the right to shorten their working hours up to a maximum of 25%.

DURATION

The right for decreased working hours is present as long as the nursing allowance is approved by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, at most until June the year the child turns 19.^{6,7}

BENEFITS

The employer does not compensate for the loss of income.

Nursing allowance is approved at four levels from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, although the allowance is not compensating the loss of income.⁶

DEFINITION OF PARENTS

According to the Parental Leave Act, a person who is not the biological parent can be considered as similar to a parent. This definition covers partners living together with the child, future adoptive parents, appointed child guardians or adults in family homes.⁷

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The national Parental Leave Act covers all workplaces in Sweden. The right of having reduced working hours is extended to parents who have a child/children with disabilities and where nursing allowance is approved.

Central collective agreements between employers and trade unions may allow minor changes to the law.

Must be a parent of the child or have a similar role.

Both carer and child is ensured in Sweden.

The child must be in need of more support and care than ordinary children of the same age without disabilities, and require such support and care for at least six months.

The child must be no older than 19 years.

FEATURES

The parental leave law states that the employee has a duty to inform their employer about the leave and that employees should not be discriminated in terms of salary, work tasks etc.⁷

NOTICE

Employers may request a certificate from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency.

6. Act (1993:387) concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (In Swedish).

7. The Parental Leave Act (1995:584) (In Swedish).

CONTACT DAYS FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

INTENT

The aim is to increase employed parents' knowledge about how to best support their child with a disability⁸.

DURATION

The right for contact days is limited to a maximum of 10 days per year and child.

BENEFITS

Compensation for loss of earnings during the contact days is applied for and approved by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (national authority). The compensation is 80% of lost pay per day.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

National law covering all workplaces.

The parent must have a Sickness Benefit Based Income (SGI), earn a minimum of 11424 SEK yearly and have regular periods of paid work each year.

The parent must abstain from paid work or unemployment benefit during the contact day.

The parent must be insured in Sweden.

The child must be covered by the Law LSS (The Act concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments)⁸.

The child must be less than 16 years old.

FEATURES

Contact days⁹ are approved for reasons such as:

- Parent education, for instance arranged by a nongovernment organization
- Visits to the child's day care or school
- Participating in activities arranged by the school

The child does not need to participate in trainings or activities.

NOTICE

Employers do not pay for the contact days. The right for leave of absence is regulated by a national law.

8. The Act (1993:387) concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (In Swedish)

9. www.forsakringskassan.se/privatpers/foralder/om_ditt_barn_har_en_funktionsnedsattning/kontakt dagar