

# Quality of work, quality of employment: benchmarks for cross- country comparisons

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## • MEMORANDUM

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# INTRODUCTION

Amid potential negotiations between social partners bearing particularly on the quality of working life – an opportunity to address the question of occupational health as well as the prevention and management of absence from work – and on the situation of the working poor and gender equality, in a brief dated February 24, 2025, the Minister of Labor and Employment requested that benchmarking data be collected and good practices identified in various comparator countries.

To that end, several sources have been drawn on within a very short space of time:

- Social affairs advisors based at French embassies in Germany, Spain, Italy, Sweden (also covering Denmark) and the United Kingdom were asked a series of questions (about situations of informal caregiving, situations of absenteeism, wage mobility over the course of a career, geographic mobility to promote a return to employment and limiting the use of insecure work contracts); their responses are printed in full in the annex hereto;
- France's permanent representation to the European Union consulted its counterparts about a number of subjects (such as limiting the use of insecure contracts and women's health in the workplace),
- Eurogip reviewed the literature on occupational health risks (chemical risks, musculoskeletal disorders, heat stress and psychosocial risks) and the risks of long-term sickness absence;
- Benchmarking data collated in recent IGAS reports was selected, not least on the impact management has on the quality of work, the use of involuntary part-time work, the comparison of some public employment services or the use of mid-career retraining initiatives.

The public policy objectives selected for the benchmarking have the merit of concerning a broad population target. They make it possible to address the quality of both work (prevention of the main occupational risks, impact of managerial models) and employment (job transitions, involuntary part-time work, consideration of employees' or jobseekers' personal constraints).

## Methodological precautions

The summary presented in this document is not immune to the limits inherent in the sources drawn on, which do not always enable a clear grasp of the situation or of the rules applicable abroad.

The comparative analysis is neither systematic nor identical for all the questions addressed. Only the IGAS reports that are mentioned – particularly on 'The social challenges of climate change: an international perspective for a national road map', on 'Part-time and involuntary part-time employment: possible shifts for a renewed framework', on 'Management practices in companies and social policies in France: lessons from an international comparison', or on 'Comparison of public employment services in different European countries' – bring more in-depth analyses to the fore.

The data collected is recent on the whole, but older references may be mentioned.

On a final note, the benchmarking insights reported are by no means exhaustive but rely on the information available and selections made by the observers present in the various countries.

The following table shows, according to theme, the countries where some regulations or practices have

been identified and reported.

THEME/COUNTRY	Ger.	Aust.	Bel.	Den.	Spa.	Fin.	Gre.	Ire.	Ita.	Lux.	Neth.	UK	Swe.	Non-EU
Prevention of chemical risks														
Prevention of heat stress														
Prevention of musculoskeletal disorders														
Prevention of psychosocial risks														
Women's needs in terms of occupational health														
Management policies for an environment conducive to quality of working life and conditions														
Prevention of absenteeism														
Prevention of long-term sickness absence														

THEME/COUNTRY	Ger.	Aust.	Bel.	Den.	Spa.	Fin.	Gre.	Ire.	Ita.	Lux.	Neth.	UK	Swe.	Non-EU
Consideration of caregiving-related constraints														
Addressing circumstantial barriers to employment														
Including barriers to geographic mobility for jobseekers														
Job transitions														
Use of insecure work contracts														
Limiting involuntary part-time employment														
Regulation of 'zero-hours' contracts														



# 1 Improving the prevention of priority occupational health risks

The main occupational health risks in France are addressed here: musculoskeletal disorders, psychosocial risks, chemical risks and heat stress – the latter risk is still emerging, but taken on board in several comparator countries.

## 1.1 Prevention of chemical risks

The benchmarking data collected, bearing on chemical risk prevention, must be considered within the context of the application of the European REACH<sup>1</sup> (Registration, evaluation, authorization and restriction of chemicals) regulation which provides for the registration of all manufactured or imported chemicals, evaluation of testing proposals, registration dossiers and substances, marketing authorization for use (for the substances of most concern) and restriction regarding manufacture, marketing or use, to regulate and manage the risks of certain chemicals with a view to protecting human health and the environment from risks resulting from their use.

In addition, regarding the different regulatory or empirical insights reported in terms of chemical risks, it should be noted that these come within potentially different national legal and operational frameworks, which evidently could not be analyzed.

Information materials	Substitution support tools	Organization of specific training and information seminars	Dissemination of good practices by setting an example	Financial incentive schemes	Workplace inspections
GERMANY Online platform for accident insurance institutions (DGUV, BG, IFA)	GERMANY The DGUV provides a <b>guide to help companies identify, assess and compare products</b> by referring to the safety datasheet that comes with each one. The aim is to help companies choose a <b>solution for substitution</b> .	GERMANY <b>The range of training courses available</b> through the Chemical Industry and Raw Materials BG is listed in a catalogue. Some of these courses address hazardous substances, three of them deal with PPE and there are also general programs on OSH in the chemical industry.	GERMANY The BG RCI (Berufsgenossenschaft Rohstoffe und chemische Industrie, sector-based institution for occupational risk insurance and prevention for companies in the chemical industry and raw materials sector) annually commends <b>businesses for good prevention practices through a 'Vision Zero' promotion award</b> .	GERMANY <b>The granting of financial assistance</b> for implementing prevention measures is the <b>responsibility of each sector-based institution for occupational risk prevention (BG)</b> (BG Chemical Industry and Raw Materials, BG Construction)	AUSTRIA Workplace inspections are particularly highlighted through the <b>AUVASicher program dedicated to companies with 50 employees or under</b> . As part of this free service, an AUVAs (accidents at work and occupational diseases insurance) supervisor visits the work premises to <b>help assess and technically advise</b> companies.
BELGIUM The <b>Sobane strategy</b> of the Employment, Labor and Social Dialogue Federal Public Service (SPF), is a <b>method for managing occupational risks</b> at four levels	SPAIN ISTAS provides a <b>database of alternatives to toxic and hazardous substances: RISCTOX</b> . This database contains information about alternative	ITALY Each region organizes <b>OSH training</b> , the themes of which depend on the economic activity of the area. INAIL (National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at	SPAIN Various prizes are awarded annually by different institutional occupational risk prevention stakeholders.	SPAIN All the governments of the autonomous communities seem to provide <b>businesses with grants</b> for better risk prevention. Some focus on the chemical risk.	

<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council, which came into force in 2007 to protect human health and the environment from the risks posed by chemical substances and to adopt common rules for encouraging the development of the European chemical industry.

(screening, observation, analysis and expertise) aimed at better preventing the risks associated with using hazardous chemicals. Publication of a <b>guide entitled 'Hazardous chemicals – Sobane Strategy Series'</b> . The recommendations refer to a series of help files.	chemical substances (which are of low to very low toxicity)	Work) puts on chemical risk-themed seminars, alone or in partnership with other prevention stakeholders.			
SPAIN The <b>INSST's platform BASEQUIM</b> provides specific information about situations of potential exposure / the most common hazardous chemicals encountered in a professional setting. The datasheets are primarily devoted to prevention methods to be implemented.	EU The <b>website of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA)</b> provides a wide range of information about substitution.		EU As part of the 2018-2019 campaign 'Manage Dangerous Substances', the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work ( <b>EU-OSHA</b> ) organized a <b>competition</b> aimed at shining the spotlight on organizations that make an innovative and remarkable contribution to OSH by managing dangerous substances in the workplace.	ITALY INAIL annually hands out <b>grants to businesses having invested in prevention the previous year</b> , according to predefined conditions (ISI scheme). Chemical risks form a significant part thereof.	
ITALY The <b>INAIL guides Title 'Hazardous chemical agents - Instructions for use by workers'</b> (visual guides)					
UK Irrespective of the type of risk, the approach of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is to provide employers with <b>easy-to-understand information</b> about their obligations. Guidance is available <b>by industry/topic</b> .					

Source: Eurogip literature review, analysis and summary by the mission

## 1.2 Prevention of heat stress

### 1.2.1 The social challenges of climate change: International comparison<sup>2</sup> (IGAS, 2024 - excerpts)

While the French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety (ANSES) was already drawing attention back in 2018<sup>3</sup> to the need to take on board the increased risk for workers amid rising temperatures, major research has recently focused on heat stress.<sup>4</sup> These studies state that high levels of exposure for workers are not limited solely to heatwaves, emphasizing the importance of preventive measures for workers during periods of high temperatures and not just during heatwaves.

The ILO cites the example of five countries (Chile, Japan, Belgium, France and Spain) for which heat stress is a key priority of national occupational safety and health (OSH) strategies and policies.

The ILO report on heat stress finds that some countries have long-standing legislation on the excessive heat risk for workers (Algeria 2016, South Africa 1993 and Costa Rica 2015). More recently, other countries have published specific legislation or updated existing laws (India 2019, Brazil 2019, Japan 2021, Singapore 2023, Spain 2023 and Chile 2024).

Based on an overview of the responses drawn up by 21 countries with the most comprehensive legislation as regards extreme heat events for workers, the ILO highlights three key takeaways:

- Countries often (in 71% of the 21 cases studied) use heat stress indicators – usually the WBGT (see box):

**The WBGT is the most effective, most commonly adopted and best-known indicator to assess the risk of heat stress for workers<sup>5</sup>**

The WBGT (Wet Bulb Globe Temperature) is the best-known and most commonly adopted indicator for heat stress used by scientists and OSH professionals.

The WBGT considers temperature, humidity, wind speed, and thermal radiation. Moreover, the guidance derived from the WBGT also takes into account work intensity and personal protective equipment (PPE). Various WBGT thresholds are established to keep heat stress within a manageable range that can be sustained over several hours, thus allowing healthy adults to maintain a level of core body temperature increase that is both tolerable and sustainable.

The countries that use the WBGT indicator are South Africa, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica (combined with another indicator), Qatar, Japan, Singapore, Thailand and, for the European Union, Belgium, Cyprus and Greece.

A series of large-scale multi-country evaluations of all the available indicators reported that the WBGT is the most effective heat stress indicator for evaluating the risk of heat-related illnesses for people who work in conditions of excessive heat.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> IGAS, October 2024, Allot, F. Erpelding-Parier, E.

<sup>3</sup> ANSES, 2018, Opinion: *Assessment of the risks to worker health posed by climate change*

<sup>4</sup> EUROGIP (June 2023), Report: *Working in extreme heat and heatwaves: what legislation and preventive measures at international level?* and Flouris, A. & al, eds 2024. *Heat at Work: Implications for Safety and Health. A Global Review of the Science, Policy and Practice*. ILO

<sup>5</sup> Flouris, A. & al, eds 2024. *Heat at Work: Implications for Safety and Health. A Global Review of the Science, Policy and Practice*. ILO

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Center for Occupational Health & Safety, 2005; NATO, 2013; NIOSH, 2016; ISO, 2017; ACGIH, 2020; Ioannou et coll. 2022; Ioannou et al. 2022; Ioannou et al. 2022



- Maximum temperature thresholds, combined with composite heat stress indicators (WGBT or others such as relative humidity, air temperature and air flow) have recently been adopted in 15 of the 21 countries studied and vary according to work intensity:

The thresholds adopted in the legislations analyzed are typically 29-30°C for high-intensity work, 30-31°C for moderate-intensity work, and 31.5-32.5°C for low-intensity work. For countries with relatively cool climates such as Belgium and Japan, these safety thresholds are more conservative,<sup>7</sup> since their populations are less acclimatized to higher temperatures.

Should maximum temperature thresholds be set beyond which workers must be allowed to stop? Lessons from the cross-country comparison

In view of the drafting of the second National Climate Change Adaptation Plan (PNACC 2), cross-ministerial discussions were held on the level of obligation sought in terms of allowing workers to stop to manage exposure to heat stress (the existing terms are described in Annex 4 - Review).

Two options were considered: one according to which work should not be allowed beyond a certain temperature threshold (with the risk of lowered productivity), while the other is an incentive-based approach, compatible with the aims of simplifying State procedures (with the risk of inadequate protection for workers).

In its research on 21 countries<sup>8</sup> with the most advanced systems for managing heat stress for workers, the ILO identifies 15 countries that have adopted maximum temperature thresholds: South Africa, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, China, India, Japan, Singapore, Thailand, Belgium, Cyprus, Greece and Spain.

Although the ILO does not specifically recommend adopting binding measures, it does stress the urgent need to strengthen systems for preventing and monitoring heat stress regarding workers. Similar to what is observed in terms of occupational health and safety at global level<sup>9</sup> and as called for by trade unions in France, a combination of binding measures ensuring a minimum protection floor and incentive-based measures could be considered.<sup>10</sup>

Note that, at European Union level, there is no acceptable maximum temperature for working. This subject is not addressed in detail by any European piece of legislation. Such a lack of precise regulation – which thus gives each European State considerable latitude in deciding whether or not to determine limits – recently drew sharp criticism from European trade unions, who are calling for urgent action (more specifically a European Directive) in this regard to make up for existing gaps.<sup>11</sup>

- Other common protection measures have been introduced:

33% of the countries studied by the ILO require employers to provide cool, shaded premises and ventilated rest areas for workers. 67% of countries have provisions in place for hydration and 57% for rest, breaks or modified work schedules to avoid excessive heat, while 48% provide for periodic health checks. There are provisions for education and training (57% of countries studied) and for personal protective equipment (PPE) (62% of countries studied). Finally, written risk assessment, acclimatization and identification of worker

<sup>7</sup> 22-25°C for high-intensity work, 26-28°C for moderate-intensity work and 29-30°C for low-intensity work

<sup>8</sup> Flouris, A. & al, eds 2024. *Heat at Work: Implications for Safety and Health. A Global Review of the Science, Policy and Practice*. ILO

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* ETUC 2020 and ETUI 2023

<sup>10</sup> Position expressed during the discussion session of the National Occupational Health and Prevention Committee (CNPST) of the National Advisory Board for Working Conditions (CNOCT) with the mission organized on September 3, 2024

<sup>11</sup> EUROGIP. *Working in extreme heat and heatwaves: what legislation and preventive measures at international level?* - Eurogip-185/F - 06/2023

groups in vulnerable situations are mandatory in many countries worldwide.

The provisions adopted by Spain and Greece are presented in detail in Annex 6 – Managing the risk of excessive heat.

Spain's provisions are not the most comprehensive but caught the mission's attention as regards three aspects: wage continuation in the event of work interruption when warnings of air temperature forecasts are issued by the national weather service;<sup>12</sup> risk assessments are mandatory for employers; and identification of worker groups in vulnerable situations.

According to ILO data, Greece is the European country with the most comprehensive response in terms of managing the risk of heat stress for workers. It has adopted the full range of measures identified by the ILO (exposure thresholds, rest areas, hydration, breaks, health checks, education & training and PPE).

The mission particularly highlighted three key points in the Greek system: the measures have been developed according to an evidence-based approach, with the involvement of all stakeholders; work interruption is mandatory when the exposure thresholds assessed using the WBGT indicator are reached; and a digital app (available on smartphones) has been designed to assess current and future WBGT indicators.

The ILO also cites Qatar as an example of good practice of evidence-based policy-making, like Greece. It has written a specific report on this subject.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of preventing and monitoring/surveillance, the ILO identifies various good practices: the 'Sun Safe Workplaces' program for preventing skin cancers of occupational origin in Colorado (United States); the European heat stress warning platform 'HEAT-SHIELD'; and the 'Adelante' initiative in Nicaragua, aimed at improving the working conditions of sugarcane workers exposed to extreme heat and its consequences.

In addition to and in line with the ILO List of Occupational Diseases Recommendation, 2002 (No. 194), several countries now recognize heat-related illnesses as occupational diseases.<sup>14</sup> This includes Mauritius, Malaysia, Tunisia, Namibia and Lebanon,<sup>15</sup> in particular.

As for France, it should be noted that one of the measures of the draft PNACC 2<sup>16</sup> provides for stronger monitoring and prevention when it comes to excessive heat exposure.

<sup>12</sup> Agencia Estatal de Meteorología, AEMET

<sup>13</sup> ILO, 2019, Report: *Assessment of occupational heat strain and mitigation strategies in Qatar*

<sup>14</sup> Flouris, A. & al, eds 2024. *Heat at Work: Implications for Safety and Health. A Global Review of the Science, Policy and Practice*. ILO.

<sup>15</sup> Particularly France, but for activities in potash mines only with inclusion in Table No. 58 of the general scheme: Occupational diseases caused by high-temperature labor.

<sup>16</sup> Measure 2 – Take the question of intense heat into better account in the labor regulations

### 1.2.2 Additional benchmarking data

Over and above awareness-raising campaigns and incentives for prevention measures, together with monitoring where applicable, particular note is made of the development of personalized warning systems in abnormally high temperature scenarios.

Communication and awareness-raising campaigns	Incentives for prevention measures	Personalized warning systems	Surveillance, monitoring and technical assistance
<p>GERMANY (2024)</p> <p><b>Annual day of action:</b> The DGUV association encourages businesses to perform risk assessments and to use these to develop heat protection concepts and protection measures.</p>	<p>GERMANY (2024)</p> <p>BG BAU helps businesses to implement UV protection measures. <b>Free UV protection packs</b> are provided; training aids and risk assessment aids.</p>	<p>ITALY (2024):</p> <p><b>WORKCLIMATE: guidance tool for assessing, monitoring and combatting occupational exposure to high temperatures:</b> training, monitoring of individual health vitals (heart rate, temperature, etc.) by connected bracelet, forecasting, warning, new work organization solutions</p>	<p>SPAIN (annual since 2021):</p> <p>Based on the provisions adopted in 2023 (royal legislative decree 4/2023 and order laying down companies' obligations), <b>a Special Plan 2024 of the Labor Inspectorate</b> and Social Security bears on the summer season; information letters are sent out on a wide scale beforehand.</p>
<p>SPAIN (2019)</p> <p>Campaign against heat stroke: <b>'Protecting against heat stroke means protecting your health'</b> led by the CCOO (Workers' Commissions trade union) Construction and Services</p>		<p>SWEDEN (2021):</p> <p><b>CLIMAPP app:</b> users enter their personal information (weight, age, clothes, level of activity). The app is connected to information about local weather conditions and provides personal information about how best to protect oneself from the surrounding temperatures.</p>	
<p>UK 2023</p> <p>HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE (HSE)</p> <p><b>Employers need to act</b> to make sure their workers are protected during periods of extreme hot weather this summer; dissemination of advice and good practices</p>			

Source: Eurogip literature review, analysis and summary by the mission



### 1.3 Prevention of musculoskeletal disorders

Musculoskeletal disorders are very common occupational illnesses and injuries. The actions taken, in different areas, are primarily aimed at improving collective or personal protection. Self-assessment tools have been identified, as has the development of robotic assistance.

Communication and awareness-raising campaigns	Research and tools for self-assessment of risks	Personal prevention programs	Awareness-raising in schools	Development of robotic assistance	Worker participation in prevention	Funding of in-company prevention initiatives	Internal management methods
<b>Germany:</b> (2013-2018), <b>'Think about me – your back' campaign</b> , as part of a joint long-term initiative led by the German Federal Government, the <i>Länder</i> and the industrial accident insurance funds, aimed at improving OSH in the workplace.	<b>Germany:</b> (2013-2018) 'MEGAPHYS' project, <b>research on the assessment of risks associated with physical stress</b> ; and the development of an online self-assessment tool for the healthcare sector.	<b>Germany:</b> (2022.) Back College of the BG BAU (statutory accident institution for the construction sector) organizes an all-expenses-paid 3-week <b>rehabilitation and training program for personal prevention purposes</b>	<b>Belgium:</b> (2015...), <b>Flexaminator: a game to raise awareness about the importance of good posture</b> and the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders	<b>Denmark:</b> (2024), at the Regionshospitalet Gødstrup, robotic assistance for moving beds around, laundry and logistics	EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR SAFETY & HEALTH AT WORK, Report, 2022, practical examples and case studies on workplaces where workers have taken part in MSD reduction measures	<b>Italy:</b> (2019), (ISI — <i>Incentivi di Sostegno alle Imprese</i> , industrial accidents insurance), focus on sectors most at risk of industrial accidents, prevention initiatives are financed by scheme contributions	EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR SAFETY & HEALTH AT WORK (2021), Practical guidelines to help small and micro-enterprises to systematically prevent or, at the very least, reduce work-related stress and psychosocial risks as well as MSDs



<b>Belgium:</b> (2016...), 'When one worker suffers, the whole company is affected! Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are everyone's business! Learn how to avoid them'					<b>Ireland:</b> participatory event on an ophthalmic lens manufacturing site: an in-house OSH co-ordinator organized the event in which both maintenance technicians and machinery operators took part		
<b>Denmark:</b> (2017-21), 'Job & Krop' ( <b>Work &amp; the body</b> ) campaign, dedicated to the public sector, associated with a scientific study on the campaign's impact, which demonstrated a positive outcome							

Source: Eurogip literature review, analysis and summary by the mission



## 1.4 Prevention of psychosocial risks

Psychosocial risks in the workplace are now taken on board in many countries and are particularly subject to regular communication and awareness-raising campaigns.

Initiatives for assessing and detecting PSRs have been adopted and made available to businesses and employees (JobPsy in Germany, PsychoScan in Belgium, questionnaire in Denmark, Burnout Assessment Tool in Finland). PSR management and prevention tools have been identified ('support journey' in Belgium, Working Minds in the UK, PSR management procedure in the care home sector in Spain, etc.). These tools include the possibility of appointing a 'trusted person' in the company (Belgium) to address certain difficulties upstream, in an informal manner. Rehabilitation and reintegration support schemes have been identified.

Communication and awareness-raising campaigns	Assessment and detection schemes	PSR management and prevention schemes	Contribution of the labor inspectorate	PSR reporting and emergency care systems	Reintegration schemes
<p>GERMANY (2016): Psyché program: Federal State inspectors were trained in psychological stress at work then visited companies to examine the question</p> <p>GERMANY (2019): As part of Germany's third common prevention strategy (federal government, <i>Länder</i> and accident insurance bodies): company inspections, advice, training or assessment and practical work tools, websites</p>	<p>GERMANY (2021): <b>JobPsy – online configurator for recording and assessing psychological stress</b>; creation of specific questionnaires.</p>	<p>AUSTRIA (2024): good corporate practice (retirement home in the district of Ferlach) to reorganize staff skills (nurses and healthcare assistants) and clarify the interfaces in detail, address the question of a sense of purpose in one's work.</p> <p>BELGIUM (law of November 5, 2023): Mandatory appointment of an in-house 'Trusted Person' in companies with 50 or more workers; major, first-line role in the <b>informal internal procedure for seeking solutions with due respect for confidentiality</b>.</p>	<p>AUSTRIA (2019) targeted labor inspections in the hospitality and catering sector to improve the implementation of risk assessment in the workplace.</p> <p>AUSTRIA (2023): supporting businesses in the implementation of preventive measures regarding employee protection and promoting professional, effective processing of incidents.</p>	<p>GERMANY: Reporting traumatic events at work; report (whether formal or informal) by the employer, mandatory if sickness absence for three or more days; employees may also report cases themselves</p> <p>GERMANY (2024): corporate practice: conflict reporting system; de-escalation training (DRK Kliniken Berlin Pflege und Wohnen Mariendorf, Berlin)</p>	<p>GERMANY (2019): <b>facilitating the process of getting back to work</b>: brochure designed to provide everyone involved in the process with an overview of the experience, examples in practice and specific instructions.</p>
BELGIUM (2021): awareness	BELGIUM (2019):	BELGIUM (2021): <b>'support</b>	DENMARK (2020): grouping		FINLAND (2024):

information to encourage more open discussion of the subject of mental well-being at work (part of the <b>Federal Action Plan for Mental Well-being at Work</b> ); BELGIUM (2023): Your mental well-being at work, let's talk about it! Mini-series of podcasts	<b>PsychoScan, a tool for assessing psychosocial risks in the workplace</b> ; also used as a basis for developing a practical action plan.	<b>journey' for detecting and responding early to professional burnout</b> (banking and hospital sectors); the request is submitted to the Fedris-Federal Agency for Occupational Risks and enables <b>contact with a network of professional consultants</b> (physicians, clinical psychologists, occupational psychologists, etc.). Expansion and broad-scale roll-out proposed.	within the same text of the provisions on the mental working environment, recalling the employer's responsibility		<b>rehabilitative psychotherapy</b> is governed by law and reimbursed for all patients meeting the eligibility criteria
	DENMARK: <b>questionnaire</b> of the National Research Center for the Working Environment (NFA) <b>can be used to assess the psychosocial working environment</b> . The national comparative data helps to initiate social dialogue.	FINLAND (2021): Nine <b>digital tools available free of charge at workplaces</b> – governmental program for mental health at work: <b>daily methods to prevent mental health problems</b> (interactions, joint resolution of problems and development of better working methods), reducing sickness absence and retirement on disability grounds (NB: under the law, businesses must conduct a PSR assessment and set up a suitable management system).			UK (2015): Sheffield Occupational Health Advisory Service (SOHAS) provides <b>confidential support in terms of job retention and rehabilitation</b> for people suffering from occupational health problems – associated with Sheffield Talking Therapies (formerly known as IAPT) for people suffering from anxiety and depression: specific action plans
	FINLAND (2024): The Finnish Institute of Occupational	UK (2024): <b>Working Minds is aimed specifically at</b>			



	Health is launching a new tool for <b>mapping the prevalence of professional burnout in the workplace</b> : survey is based on the <b>Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT)</b> .	<b>helping small businesses to recognize the signs of occupational stress and to embed the resolution of such problems into routine practices</b> , by providing employers and workers with advice, including the simple steps in its <b>5Rs</b> approach to Reach Out, Recognize, Respond, Reflect and Make it Routine.			
		GERMANY (2024): Listing of support tools for action to protect against harassment and violence in the workplace by the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (BAuA)			
		SPAIN (2020) Exposure to psychosocial factors in residential care centers and home-help services; <b>recommendations on the preventive measures</b> which contribute to control of the main psychosocial risks in the sector SPAIN (2024): <b>tool to initiate a psychosocial risk management process</b> in businesses with fewer than 50 employees in the elderly care sector.			





Source: Eurogip literature review, analysis and summary by the mission



## 1.5 Consideration of women's health in the workplace

No data has been identified on the subject of endometriosis; no EU Member States appear to have applicable legislation on this subject. There are a number of initiatives on the menopause, but many still seem to be at the drawing board stage or are reliant on recommendations for adapting working conditions, left to the initiative of each company.<sup>17</sup> Regarding menstruation, only Spain has passed legislation on this subject by creating the right to menstrual leave.

More generally, although this subject is not addressed here, note that there is little mention of gender inequality among current occupational health data, and that employers' safety obligations in terms of working conditions do not, in theory, distinguish needs based on gender.

Menstruation	Menopause
<p><b>UK</b></p> <p>Initiative by the broadcaster Channel 4 (2023): In agreement with their managers, women may, if necessary, benefit from additional rest time, change workspace within the office, begin their working day earlier or later and work fewer hours on an ad-hoc basis.... If they wish, women may also ask for their working environment to be adapted, since Channel 4 has committed to ensuring that this does not aggravate symptoms associated with menstruation.</p> <p>The other key measures of this policy include provision of a dedicated quiet room where women suffering from painful periods can take time out.</p> <p><b>Spain:</b> a right to 'menstrual leave' has been enshrined in law, aimed at women suffering from painful periods (2023): permission to take three days of paid leave in the event of 'painful menstruation' (dysmenorrhea), granted by physicians and financed by Social Security. Spain is the first country in Europe to recognize this right, which already exists in Japan, South Korea and Indonesia.</p>	<p><b>UK</b></p> <p>Businesses take support measures for women as required, managers receive training and <b>working conditions are adapted</b> (Severn Trent – water distribution, GlaxoSmithKline-pharmaceuticals, Aviva, insurance group, Diageo-alcoholic beverages, etc.); the Department for Work and Pensions has appointed a <b>Menopause Employment Ambassador</b> (2023), tasked with improving workplace support for the menopause; the <b>Menopause Workplace Pledge</b> has been adopted where companies who sign up commit to supporting the well-being of their employees going through the menopause (a toolkit is available to companies).</p> <p><b>Belgium</b></p> <p>In December 2024, the Interministerial Conference on Public Health decided to create a <b>working group on the menopause</b>. This group intends to map all the existing initiatives in Belgium, before issuing recommendations with a view to drawing up a structured action plan to sustainably improve the quality of life of menopausal women in Belgium.</p> <p><b>Ireland</b></p> <p>The <b>Menopause in the Workplace Policy Framework</b> (October 2023) has been developed to guide civil service organizations and their agencies in identifying how to support employees going through the menopause. The Framework provides a general structure for guiding civil service organizations when developing menopause policies and identifying how they can support employees, such as by offering workplace adjustments.</p> <p><b>Germany</b></p> <p>In October 2024, a transpartisan motion was adopted by the Bundestag in favor of a national menopause strategy. It urges the federal government (over and above the medical care aspects) to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve education and awareness-raising about the menopause;</li> <li>• Include the question in management practices, with adaptations of working conditions;</li> <li>• Develop a national strategy based on international precedent and best practices.</li> </ul> <p><b>Denmark</b></p> <p>In 2024, some businesses began to adopt provisions for women during the menopause,</p>

<sup>17</sup> Regarding this subject, see the report on Menopause in France (S. Rist, 2025): [https://sante.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/la\\_menopause\\_en\\_france-rapport\\_et\\_annexes-04-25.pdf](https://sante.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/la_menopause_en_france-rapport_et_annexes-04-25.pdf)

	<p>particularly through various Danish pension funds (<i>Pensionsselskaber</i>). In August 2024, Danica Pension thus became the first pension fund in Denmark to launch a <b>business advisory service</b> to support their employees during the menopause, in light of women's increasing requests for advice but also because companies are concerned that women suffering a difficult menopause feel obliged to miss work and take sick leave. As such, more and more large businesses in Denmark are taking this subject seriously and making it part of their strategy, among which Novo Nordisk and Lego.</p>
	<p><b>Sweden</b></p> <p>The trade organizations, not least the so-called 'white-collar' unions, are calling for a better adaptation of the working environment to the menopause; for example Unionen, the largest trade union in the private sector<sup>18</sup> and SSR, Sweden's premier union for social science professionals and social workers,<sup>19</sup> which is particularly active as regards this issue.<sup>20</sup></p> <p>In 2024, the Mensen (Periods) association distributed a <b>guide for human resource departments</b> in companies to take better consideration of menstruation and menopause in the workplace,<sup>21</sup> by making sure toilets are available with period products, running water, soap and bins, or by adapting working days and schedules for example. The association also actively supports World Menopause Day<sup>22</sup> and provides trade organizations with information posters in this regard. This initiative has particularly been praised by the metallurgy union IF Metall,<sup>23</sup> the municipal workers' union Kommunal and the electricians' union Elektrikerna.<sup>24</sup></p>

Source: Eurogip literature review, data collected by the PREU and the social affairs advisors, analysis and summary by the mission

<sup>18</sup> <https://kollega.se/arbetsmiljo/sa-paverkar-klimakteriet-dig-pa-jobbet>  
<sup>19</sup> <https://akademssr.se/rad-och-stod/lika-villkor-i-arbetslivet/klimakteriet-en-arbetsmiljofraga>  
<sup>20</sup> <https://akademssr.se/post/aldre-och-klimakteriet-onodiga-hinder-pa-arbetsmarknaden>  
<sup>21</sup> <https://mensen.se/var-verksamhet/ett-menskligare-arbetsliv/>  
<sup>22</sup> <https://hrmytt.se/aktuellt/ny-handbok-om-mens-och-klimakteriet-sa-kan-hr-gora-skillnad/>  
<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ifmetall.se/medlem/arkiv/mens---en-arbetsmiljofraga/>  
<sup>24</sup> <https://www.sef.se/om-oss/fokus-pa-jamstalldhet/en-menskligare-elbransch/>

## 2 Embedding working conditions and quality of working life into management practices and economic performance

### 2.1 Management policies for an environment conducive to quality of working life and conditions (IGAS report, 2024<sup>25</sup>-excerpts)

This report presents a comparative analysis of management policies in four countries (Germany, Ireland, Italy and Sweden), with references to the French situation, and draws lessons therefrom about the links between management policies, economic performance of businesses and quality of working life and conditions. The summary is given below.

**‘The mission made the counter-intuitive observation that the criteria for high-quality management, far from being dispersed and heterogeneous across the different countries, sectors or organization sizes, actually converged in a quite remarkable manner.** ‘Good’ management is everywhere and is firstly described as one that is characterized by a high degree of employee participation on the one hand, and that recognizes the work done on the other. Other fundamental traits of high-quality management are added to this central dimension of participation and recognition (autonomy, clarity of roles, decentralized decision-making, etc.), which ultimately form a limited number of principles. This strong convergence is probably linked to the new difficulties facing companies (manpower shortages, transformation of expectations accelerated by the Covid-19 epidemic, the search for meaning, individualization of relations at work, etc.) and this is reflected in the countries and sectors of activity studied.

**In addition, the quality of management practices produces significant but difficult-to-measure effects on company performance, while it is definitely a determinant of employee health, job quality and work quality.** The fact that management practices have an effect on company efficiency and performance is widely highlighted by numerous econometric studies, as recently confirmed by the Dublin-based European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), DARES and France Stratégie. Beyond the effects on the economic performance of companies, the quality of management practices certainly has effects on individuals' situations in such areas as occupational health and safety, job quality or work quality and employee commitment. In particular, it has very significant impacts on employee commitment and therefore on the company's economic and social performance. This is a major point in the current context of a tense labor market and labor shortages, where job attractiveness on the one hand and employee retention on the other are essential issues in terms of the employment rate and productivity.

**The comparative review of management practices places France in a less than flattering position compared to its neighbors,** as shown in surveys by Eurofound and the Bilbao-based European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), but also in the data produced by other bodies (Cnam, IFOP and APEC in particular) and in the convergent analyses performed by researchers. French management practices appear very vertical and hierarchical. Similarly, recognition of work, a decisive factor in

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<sup>25</sup> Bartoli, F., Dieuleveux, T., Hautchamp, M., Laloue, F., June 2024. *What connection between management practices and social policies in France? An international comparison with Germany, Ireland, Italy and Sweden.* IGAS: <https://igas.gouv.fr/pratiques-manageriales-dans-les-entreprises-et-politiques-sociales-en-france-les-enseignements-dune-comparaison-internationale-allemande-irlande-italie-suede-et-de-la-recherche-0>

management quality, is much lower than in the other countries in the comparison, and manager training is very academic with very little focus on cooperation, despite the progress that should be forthcoming with the new higher education methods being applied.

**Although France's management results appear poor, it is not through a lack of public efforts and schemes that attempt to influence these practices.** Regulation is more than ever the preferred lever by which the public authorities intervene. A comparison with Germany, Ireland, Italy and Sweden shows a better prioritization of topics and a better-established use of social dialogue instruments.

While all countries are facing imminent managerial challenges, be it the crisis of meaning at work, managing teams in hybrid mode or taking account of the major demographic, technological and ecological transitions, there is no public policy on management per se, but rather policies that indirectly influence management. In France, regulations are one of the principal instruments used to act on management in the guise of social policies. This reflects a form of French paradox, in which a vast public arsenal established to influence management practices (albeit indirectly through employees' right of direct expression and the obligations of companies in terms of quality of life and working conditions (QLWC)) coexists with the reality of very ineffective working relationships.

In the other countries studied, statutory and regulatory instruments take a back seat and just focus on priority issues that impact management: in Sweden, the 2015:4 provision provided a tool to manage psychosocial risks in the workplace at a time when sick leave was on the increase; in Italy and Ireland, the law promoted individual remote working formulas for a better work-life balance; and in Germany, the digital revolution is gradually being incorporated into companies' rules of social dialogue in order to give management clear markers.

In any case, it is the place of social dialogue that differentiates the countries studied with co-determination truly shaping management and management practices in Germany and Sweden, while in Italy, social dialogue is mainly present at the branch level. As for Ireland, the close proximity between managers and employees most likely offsets the low level of employee representation. In France, social dialogue has a more limited impact on management practices.

The mission also found that the measures targeting the management environment are sometimes more ambitious among our neighbors, with action by labor administrations that sometimes integrates a concerted approach around management practices, in particular in Sweden and Ireland. In several countries, the social partners also offer support and advice services to managers and employers, particularly in Sweden, where the SACO and Lenarda trade unions, dedicated to defending and representing white-collar staff, provide support to them both in their role as employees and as managers. The same is true in Germany where the joint initiative for a new quality of work (*Initiative für eine neue Qualität der Arbeit* - INQA) supports medium-sized companies in matters of management and work quality.

The mission has drawn up a series of recommendations based on the findings of its comparative analysis. Indeed, even if the limits to public action on management issues in companies are real, due to the necessarily indirect nature of the action of the public authorities in a debate that primarily concerns companies, the current context is rather favorable to such public intervention because:

- There is a consensus as to the reality of the crisis in the meaning of work. This has been the subject of numerous administrative reports, academic papers and position-taking by the most important players in the world of work, including business leaders (see Part 1)
- The recent and massive development of apprenticeship training, including in higher education

institutions, is a formidable means of profoundly changing the methods used to train managers and, ultimately, their approach to management practices.

- There is a social demand from the representative organizations interviewed by the mission to change management practices, not only on the employee side but also, in different ways, on the employer side, with the two major issues being professional dialogue and co-determination.
- This social demand for changes to management practices is present in the companies themselves, and interviewees who intervene in work issues, regardless of their particular specialization (ergonomist, economist, occupational psychologist or sociologist, etc.), tell of the numerous initiatives taken, particularly in the area of action learning. These professionals say numerous companies wish to transform their management practices but need a national technical support framework.
- European law, through the 'Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive' (CSRD) applicable since January 1, 2024, and its non-financial reporting obligation, also prompts questions about professional management practices.
- Finally, even though the April 2024 draft national interprofessional agreement (ANI) on a new 'pact for life at work' did not come to a successful conclusion, its content, highly focused on the need to change management practices to improve quality of life at work, is proof that the social partners, on both sides of the table, now see the subject as a major issue and share the desire to implement concrete solutions.

Thus, according to the mission, improving management practices in France requires a set of measures that are at once respectful of company practices, offer a better situation to employees and are consistent with the French social model while being inspired by lessons learned from experience abroad.

**While management practices are only one of the factors that influence the impact of economic and social policies, the mission considers it useful to propose measures that combine provisions intended to support a working environment conducive to positive management practices on the one hand and more targeted measures to overhaul the French legal framework for management practices on the other.**

As regards the working environment, the mission recommends:

- Promoting managerial policy in companies by taking the debates in the Assises du Travail forum on the issue of management a step further; this public debate could possibly lead to a new ANI report on the subject or the launch of a national program to support managerial innovation and quality of life at work in the form of calls for projects based on the German 'future of work' model;
- Reducing power distances through changes to both the initial and continuous training system by incorporating training elements for managers into the educational models applied by schools and higher education institutions. These elements would promote an innovative vision of management with the aim of mastering the way social dialogue and professional dialogue and their interactions are engineered. This could be achieved through partnerships between ANACT (the National Agency for the Improvement of Working Conditions) and the institutions that train managers, while at the same time reinforcing apprenticeship training as a training method for managers;
- Providing greater support for managers under considerable pressure to move towards a more participatory, innovative and decentralized management system, by extending APEC's missions to include the provision of advice not only to executives as employees, but also about the content of their professional management practices, placing executives and managers in particular at the center of the transformation processes within organizations;

- Breaking down the walls separating the various approaches in order to integrate management practices into public policies, in particular by setting improved management practices as one of the goals pursued in branch collective bargaining and in the national and regional occupational health plans, with support from the ANACT;
- Improving and transforming management practices in the public sector as well, through increased transparency and clarity in the management policies pursued in each administration, by encouraging initiatives to establish forms of professional dialogue in public services and by putting management training actions in place to boost organizational skills and provide individual and collective support in the form of coaching.

In addition to improving the working environment, it may also be necessary to take statutory measures to improve management practices. The mission points out that non-finalistic, procedure-based legal techniques exist in the comparison countries and could be sources of inspiration. It details a number of possibilities for statutory changes, which are not intended to be cumulative, but rather to constitute one or more levers available to the public authorities and social partners at the end of a necessary consultation process:

- the possibility of including management practices in the topics discussed in the framework of the mandatory social dialogue on QLWC;
- the possibility of including management practices among the strategic guidelines that are the subject of the information-consultation procedure with the Social and Economic Committee (SEC), unless a company agreement stipulates otherwise;
- the possibility of transforming the right to direct expression into a right to professional dialogue within companies;
- the possibility of extending the powers of the SEC in terms of work organization;
- the possibility of reassessing employee representation on boards of directors and supervisory boards;
- the possibility of experimenting with formal statutory mechanisms to take into account the needs of employees in terms of work/life balance.'

## 2.2 Prevention of absenteeism

The rising levels of absenteeism appear to be a fairly general concern across the comparator countries. The measures identified to reverse this trend aim particularly at improving the quality of working life (reorganization of workspaces and working conditions, etc.) and some are subject to tax-benefit exemptions (Germany, Sweden).

Presence bonus or anti-absenteeism bonus schemes have been introduced through collective agreements in Germany and Spain.

On a final note, some adjustments to labor law, whether restrictive (fines for unjustified absences) or incentive-based (reorganization of working time, permitted absences) are also designed to bring down absenteeism rates.

Adjustments to labor law	Management adaptations and presence bonus	Quality of working life
<b>Italy</b> In cases of unjustified absence, i.e. when an employee does not provide a valid reason or does not follow the procedure for communicating their absence, an employer is entitled to take disciplinary measures, ranging from a formal warning to dismissal on valid grounds. The <b>processing of unjustified absences</b> is governed by collective agreements and labor regulations, which specify when and how an employer may take action against an employee at fault.	<b>Italy</b> 42% of companies that took part in the annual Confindustria survey (2023) point out that adopting ' <b>smart working</b> ' (more agile working conditions and more flexible framework; principles of responsibility, independence, trust and well-being of workers) helps to bring down rates of absenteeism in their workplaces.	<b>Denmark</b> In Denmark, the conditions on the labor market and in businesses are mainly regulated by the social partners. Dialogue is key and <b>the prevention of work-related stress</b> is considered a priority.
<b>Spain</b> The <b>plans to reduce the weekly working period</b> from 40 to 37.5 hours are partly aimed at 'reducing absenteeism'. The idea is that fewer weekly working hours combined with the right to switch off will help to reduce stress and sickness absences. <sup>26</sup>	<b>Spain</b> In February 2025, the Supreme Court approved the principle of an <b>anti-absenteeism bonus</b> as long as this only includes unjustified absences and does not lead to gender-based discrimination. This decision allows employers to pay a <b>variable monthly bonus based on the number of hours of unjustified absence</b> , a scheme set forth in the collective agreement of a company, which had been challenged by a trade union.	<b>Sweden</b> <b>Some benefits granted to staff (personalvårdsförmån) are tax-free: exercise or relaxation at the workplace</b> organized and financed directly by the employer; allowance paid to finance a physical activity; fruit and drinks made freely available to employees, and often consumed during the <b>fika, the daily coffee break</b> taken in Swedish companies. Moreover, under working environment regulations, employers must provide a <b>relaxation room (vilrum)</b> where it is possible to take an occasional nap undisturbed. Finally, many collective agreements, especially in the public sector, make provision for a <b>flexible working time system</b> .
<b>Sweden</b> The <b>VAB (leave for a sick child) scheme</b> , applicable for children aged 8 months to 12 years (with the possibility of extending this for children with disabilities or chronic conditions) allows parents to receive	<b>Germany</b> <b>Presence bonus</b> All employees covered by this collective agreement are entitled to receive a special bonus of up to €1,600.20 per year. This is aimed at	<b>Germany</b> To reduce absenteeism in companies, some provisions have been negotiated in collective agreements:  Since January 1, 2022, <b>employees</b>

<sup>26</sup> La Moncloa, 'El Gobierno presenta la reducción de la jornada laboral ordinaria a 37,5 horas semanales'.  
URL: <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/conseiodeministros/resumenes/paginas/2025/040225-rueda-de-prensa-ministros.aspx>





compensation worth up to 80% of their salary for days where they stay at home to look after their child.	encouraging employees to work the required number of hours with minimal or no absence.	<b>who participate in programs</b> put on by external providers or in internal measures <b>aimed at improving general health have received a health bonus exempt from tax and contributions</b> of up to €255 a year, Payment is made upon presentation of supporting documents and refunded on the next payslip. Employees are encouraged to actively take part in fitness and staying healthy programs.
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*Source: Eurogip literature review, data collected by the PREU and social affairs advisors' responses, analysis and summary by the mission*

## 2.3 Prevention of long-term sickness absence

Preventing long-term sickness absence among employees is a widely shared concern.

Employers are often required to take steps to anticipate this risk and must implement work adjustment and/or rehabilitation measures together with the employees in question (Germany, Denmark and Sweden). Warning systems, connected to the duration of time off work, are in place. Employers and employees must communicate to keep a record of the situation and consider solutions for adaptation (schedule of planned contacts with an employee during their sick leave: Germany, Denmark and Sweden). Plans to help employees return to work are tailored to individual needs and benefit, in this regard, from various support and assessment mechanisms.

Sweden and Denmark provide examples of co-ordination between services (employment, health insurance, social services and municipalities) to co-ordinate and facilitate returns to work.

Employer's obligations	Early warning system	Maintaining contact between employers and employees during sick leaves	Services and measures to support continuation of paid work in light of an employee's state of health	Methods and means for anticipating and organizing an employee's return	Co-ordination of social systems, together with the company and the medical profession
<b>Germany (2004):</b> The BEM (professional reintegration management): preventive measure aimed at avoiding dismissals due to ill health and at reducing absenteeism: right for employees; <b>duty for companies to manage a return to work when a period of sick leave risks turning into long-term sickness absence.</b> Dismissal on grounds of unfitness is more difficult in the event of a challenge, if this obligation is not met.	<b>Germany: criterion based on identification of periods of sick leave</b> that exceed 6 weeks in total within the past 12 months.	<b>Germany: co-operation process between employers and employees on sick leave</b> to clarify the latter's situation, attempt to overcome their inability to work and safeguard their employment.	<b>Germany:</b> proposal of a <b>plan tailored to individual needs</b> which can address 1. Design of the workplace: adaptation of the workplace, modification, extension or improvement of equipment, risk assessment. 2. Organization of work: changes in the organization of work, working time, reduction of physical and mental stress, implementation of a health management system in the company. 3. Qualifications/skills: CPD and qualification measures, refresher courses. 4. Health: individual proposals of healthcare services, individual measures of medical rehabilitation.	<b>Germany:</b> In large businesses, a <b>team is identified</b> on a routine basis (employer, trade unions, occupational physician, etc.); SMEs/micro-enterprises can call on an <b>occupational physician</b> , an <b>external consultant</b> or a <b>certified disability management professional</b> . The German accidents at work and occupational diseases insurance system has its own specific rehabilitation centers for victims of these diseases/accidents.	
<b>Sweden (2018)</b> <b>General obligation to ensure that work adjustment and/or rehabilitation measures are properly conducted</b> and that occupational medicine is provided under the best possible conditions.	<b>Sweden</b> Indicator: <b>long-term sickness absences of 60 days or more are considered a risk.</b>	<b>Sweden</b> Interviews must be held with the employee to take note of the situation. The latter must always take part in the rehabilitation efforts proposed by the employer and in clarifying their need for rehabilitation. The <b>schedule of planned contacts with the employee while they are off sick</b> is stipulated in the return-to-work support plan.	<b>Sweden</b> Companies are required to draw up a <b>return-to-work support plan</b> by the 30 <sup>th</sup> day of sick leave. In terms of the plan's contents, the employer must find out to what extent the employee is able to work despite their illness. The plan may contain workstation adjustments or flexible working hours, adapted individual tasks or aspects of the working environment, provision of support tools, the possibility of another temporary or permanent role,	<b>Sweden</b> The employer can call on <b>certified experts in assisting with rehabilitation at the workplace to develop the support plan</b> , with public funding. Some of the plan's measures may be financed by health insurance (treatments, training, etc.)	<b>Sweden</b> <b>Co-ordination of all the rehabilitation stakeholders within the county council</b> by financed 'rehabilitation co-ordinators', in charge of supporting each individual employee: Social insurance fund tasked with identifying needs, technical assistance and the co-ordination and supervision of rehabilitation; the healthcare sector is in charge of medical treatment; the employment agency, employer and trade unions are in charge of professional

			or training.		measures; municipality and county council are in charge of social support.
<b>Denmark (2014)</b> <b>Companies, together with the employee, must find solutions to help keep the length of time off sick to a minimum:</b> granting of short-time working, change in roles, workstation adjustment ... and joint planning of the return to work.		<b>Denmark (2014)</b> Companies are required to organize one or more <b>interviews with employees who are off sick, no later than 4 weeks after their first day of absence</b> , to determine how long the employee expects to be on sick leave.	<b>Denmark</b> Employers can ask employees at any time, especially in the event of doubt over their ability or inability to work, for a so-called 'ability declaration' certificate (documentation of the illness in relation to the job with the help of a physician: description of functional impairments, and solutions enabling a return to work). This right exists for short-term, long-term or repetitive sickness absence. For any absences expected to last more than 2 months, employees can ask their employer for a ' <b>job retention plan</b> ' to be drawn up.	<b>Denmark</b> Difficult situations are entrusted to a <b>multidisciplinary team for drawing up an overall rehabilitation plan</b> based on a medical assessment. Financial aid may be paid to the employer for adjustments made to the workplace or workstation.	<b>Denmark</b> Municipal employment services have specific monitoring and action obligations in the event of sickness absences, where applicable at an early stage. Throughout their sick leave, an employee's situation will be assessed at regular intervals as regards the impact that the progression of their illness is having on their ability to work. An ' <b>overall rehabilitation team</b> ' ( <i>rehabiliteringsteam</i> ) bringing together municipal representatives particularly tasked with the working environment, social affairs, health and, where applicable, training, organizes the individual monitoring and clarifies the employee's ability to return to work.

Source: Eurogip literature review, processing and summary by the mission



### 3 Taking due account of caregiving pressures

Under the terms of Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of June 20, 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers, the following definitions are given:

- 'carers' leave' means leave from work in order to provide personal care or support to a relative, or to a person who lives in the same household as the worker, and who is in need of care or support for a serious medical reason, as defined by each Member State,
- 'carer' means a worker providing personal care or support to a relative, or to a person who lives in the same household as the worker, and who is in need of care or support for a serious medical reason, as defined by each Member State.

Article 6 of said Directive provides that:

'1. Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that each worker has the right to carers' leave of five working days per year. Member States may determine additional details regarding the scope and conditions of carers' leave in accordance with national law or practice. The use of that right may be subject to appropriate substantiation, in accordance with national law or practice.

2. Member States may allocate carers' leave on the basis of a reference period other than a year, per person in need of care or support, or per case.'

The following has been observed:

- entitlement to paid leave (several days per year),
- entitlement to unpaid leave, or leave which is subject to an alternative form of compensation other than wages (municipal indemnity in Sweden, specific pre-pension in Italy, dedicated account in Denmark),
- entitlement to adjusted working patterns (Germany, Spain, Italy and UK).

Right to paid leave	Right to unpaid leave or alternative form of compensation other than wages	Right to adjusted working patterns
<p><b>Germany</b> Employees can take up to 10 days' leave when a dependent relative requires urgent care, particularly for the emergency adoption of support arrangements (continuation of treatment or compensatory allowance from the long-term care insurance fund of the dependent person)</p>	<p><b>Germany</b> The right to unpaid leave of up to six months for taking care of a dependent relative (long-term care requirement recognized by the medical service of the long-term care insurance provider), an adult at home or even in an institution or somewhere else when this is a child. Entitlement to up to 3 months' leave is also recognized to support relatives in their final weeks of life.</p>	<p><b>Germany</b> Employees are entitled to reduce their working time for up to 24 months to take care of a dependent relative (whilst maintaining minimum weekly working hours)</p>
<p><b>Spain</b> The royal legislative decree 5/2023 introduced new rights: <b>Paid leave for taking care of a relative:</b> 5 days per case (serious illness, accident, hospitalization or surgical procedure) <b>Leave for a family emergency:</b> up to 4 annual days of paid leave for unforeseen family emergencies</p>	<p><b>Denmark</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Right to five working days of unpaid leave per calendar year for carers</b>, in the event of a significant need owing to a serious health problem (the company may require the employee to medically justify the need for assistance or significant care owing to a serious health condition).</li> <li>• Contractual right to accompany relatives to medical appointments and interviews with the authorities: up to <b>two days/year and up to five days in the event of serious illness</b>; covered by a dedicated account that the employee can use (<i>fritvalgskonto</i>).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Spain</b> <b>Right to adjusted working patterns:</b> measure which guarantees employees with family responsibilities the right to ask for more flexible working patterns, including remote working.</p>
<p><b>Italy</b> The 104/1992 Act particularly provides for <b>three days of paid leave per month</b> for employees who have to take care of severely disabled relatives. Since August 13, 2022, without prejudice to the overall 3-day limit for caring for the same severely disabled relative, the right may be recognized, by request, for several people who may benefit therefrom in alternation. If the worker has to take care of several severely disabled people, they may obtain this right for each of the people they care for.</p>	<p><b>Italy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The social APE (<i>Anticipo Pensionistico</i>) is the early retirement scheme which supports workers until they reach retirement age (67 years old).</b> Early retirement may be taken by carers who, at the time of the request, have been taking care of a severely disabled relative for at least 6 months. Certain criteria must be met in terms of age and length of service (at least 63 years and 5 months of age; and at least 30 years of service). The amount of the <b>monthly pension payment</b> is calculated when the scheme is being accessed.</li> <li>• <b>Paid special leave</b> (legislative decree 151/2001, amended) further allows workers to take up to <b>two years off work</b> to care for a severely disabled family member whilst retaining their job and receiving an <b>indemnity</b>.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Italy</b> Under some regional bylaws (Emilia-Romagna and more recently Lazio), the Region encourages <b>agreements with employers' associations</b>, in a bid to guarantee more <b>flexible hours</b> to help balance working life with caregiving needs.</p>



	<p><b>Sweden</b></p> <p>In 2020, a national strategy for carers was launched<sup>27</sup> comprising a series of measures aimed at protecting the job situation of carers, especially through the introduction of a <b>municipal benefit, <i>narstaendepenning</i></b>, intended to compensate an employee caring for someone in a life-threatening condition. Employees can be paid <b>80% of their usual salary, for 100 days</b>, under this scheme. Informal carer's leave (<i>ledighet för närståendevård</i>) gives rise to availability throughout the payment of the informal carer's benefit.</p>	
	<p><b>UK</b></p> <p>Employees can take up to <b>a week of unpaid leave per year</b> to look after relatives in need of care because of a disability, old age or illness or injury requiring at least three months of care.</p>	<p><b>UK</b></p> <p>Carers are <b>entitled to ask for flexible working arrangements</b> to help them better balance their working and caring responsibilities. Employers can only refuse on very specific grounds.</p>

Source: Data collected by the PREU and social affairs advisors' responses, analysis and summary by the mission

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.socialstvrelsen.se/globalassets/sharepoint-dokument/artikelkatalog/ovrigt/2020-11-7045.pdf>



## 4 Combatting barriers to employment

### 4.1 Addressing circumstantial barriers to employment (Comparison of public employment services in different European countries, IGAS-IGF report, 2023-excerpts)<sup>28</sup>

- **None of the countries studied (the report analyzed German, Catalan, Danish, Flemish and Swedish public employment services/PESs) has found particularly effective solutions to address the major concern, not least in France, of the professional integration of those furthest from employment, especially people struggling with health, addiction or housing problems.**

The mission was able to observe that the integration tools used abroad are often similar to those used in France (structures for integration through economic activity, assisted contracts in the market or non-market sector). However, assisted contracts in the market sector are still more important in Germany and Denmark.

The real difference between France and countries such as Germany or Denmark lies in the way the needs of such populations are met. One-stop shops (Jobcenters in Germany) deal with the social and professional aspects of integration, whereas in France, Pôle emploi and the integration services of the *départements*, as well as the CAFs for housing and social action, and the municipalities for social assistance, have overlapping responsibilities. However, as in France, the responsibility for healthcare issues is most often assigned to other institutions.

Some circumstantial barriers seem to be less of a problem in several of the countries studied. Childcare is not considered a barrier to returning to work in Sweden or Denmark, where municipalities have to provide childcare for children over one year old, and even in Germany, where the supply of childcare has increased. Similarly, the issue of mobility is not considered structurally problematic in Denmark or Flanders because of a well-organized public transport system.

- **Examples of how circumstantial barriers to employment are addressed in the PESs studied**

<sup>28</sup> Bourguignon, B., Viossat, L-C., Mejane, J. (Igas), Cargill, T., Boillot, L., Etienne, T., Vincon, P. (IGF), <https://igas.gouv.fr/Comparaison-des-services-publics-de-l-emploi-de-differents-pays-europeens-quels>

## German PES

Regarding support for jobseekers struggling with 'circumstantial barriers', there is a range of aids available.

### -Family services

The German Social Code tasks the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit/BA) with the payment of benefits to families, i.e. 'child supplements' paid out monthly (€229 per child), school meal allowances and preschool fees.

In 2021, 4,656 FTE positions within the BA managed the family allowance funds, including 214 executive roles at the head office. This integration is an advantage in addressing barriers to employment associated with jobseekers' family circumstances, not least within co-managed Jobcenters.

Childcare services in Germany are provided by private and associational stakeholders, and in some cases at inter-municipal level. The presence of affordable childcare (below the marginal revenue) is a key incentive for parents to remain in the labor market and for jobseekers to join it. The German PES has therefore included financial support for childcare in its activation offering.

The expenses associated with participation in continuing professional development, for minding children in need of supervision, can be granted by the Employment Agency. The latter considers that 'Children not older than 15 years of age are in need of supervision for the purpose of Employment Promotion' (*Arbeitsförderung*).

- Expenses for childcare for the purpose of Employment Promotion are:

fees for kindergarten/preschool;

expenses for a nanny;

additional expenses for supervision by neighbors or relatives.

Subsistence costs are not expenses for childcare.

The Employment Agency absorbs expenses of €130 per month and child irrespective of the actual amount of expenses arising. However, for this aid to be effective, there must be childcare available, and such services are unequal across the *Länder*.

### -Over-indebtedness and addiction prevention services in the Jobcenters

Section 16 of the Social Code Book II (SGB II) states that 'in order to achieve comprehensive and holistic vocational guidance and support, the following services necessary to integrate the job-ready recipient(s) into working life may be provided:

(...)

2. Debt counselling,

3. Psychosocial assistance,

4. Dependency counselling.'

Nevertheless, as of December 2, 2022, the mission does not have a map of debt counselling centers or addiction counselling services in the different Jobcenters. In the co-managed Jobcenters, the degree of integration of these social services varies, and there may be basic collaborations with municipal or inter-municipal services. The existence of an integrated or municipal private debt counselling service with a high degree of involvement provides the jobseeker's counsellor (who, since the Hartz IV law has had the power to cancel certain rent arrears) with technical support.

This mission is not mandatory, which explains why a network of associational stakeholders in these fields is maintained.

### -Mobility aids

While precedence is given to job or training placement near the jobseeker's place of residence, mobility assistance is provided when necessary, especially for jobseekers eligible for basic security benefits (SGB II).



The Jobcenters consider the payment of a driver's license (B license) to be an integration benefit under Section 16 of the SGB II and it is financed by the BA on these grounds.

Financing of driver's licenses by the agencies (SGB III) is not as common, and may concern young people.

Furthermore, through 'placement budgets', the BA can financially support jobseekers:

with their relocation expenses, if required for starting a new job;

with their application costs (travel expenses for interviews and documentation costs).

Mobility aids are also available where jobseekers attend training. The mileage allowance is €0.20, up to a maximum of €476 per month. In 2021, move-in aid accounted for nearly €500 million.

#### **Danish PES**

The mission distinguished three particularly common circumstantial barriers:

- Mobility problems, which may prevent some people from travelling and therefore from taking a job or being employed;
- Childcare issues, which may prevent some people from holding a job, to care for their child;
- Addiction and mental health issues, which may make some people temporarily unemployable.

The mission was able to observe two different ways in which the Jobcenters address these circumstantial barriers:

- First, during its visit to Denmark, the mission found that mobility and childcare issues were not handled by the Jobcenters. Adopting the 'job first' mindset, Jobcenter advisors do not accept the geographic distance from a job or childcare problems as grounds for refusing a job.
- Second, for people with health issues but who are nevertheless able to hold down a job, support and professional integration programs are provided. Jobseekers with addiction or other health problems receive special support from the Jobcenter. The municipalities are competent in a certain number of areas in addition to employment policy, and these include health (which they share with the region). This dual competence enables Jobcenter advisors to easily put the jobseeker in touch with the municipal health services. There are also a number of social workers in each municipality who can be called on, to help jobseekers with specific problems or health issues, or other special cases.

## 4.2 Reducing barriers to geographic mobility for jobseekers

We have distinguished measures taken to help cover transport expenses and, in some cases, relocation expenses.

Reimbursement of transport expenses	Reimbursement of relocation expenses
<p><b>Germany</b></p> <p>Transport expenses can be <b>deducted from taxable income</b>, up to 30 cents per kilometer and 38 cents from the 21<sup>st</sup> kilometer, not exceeding €4,500/year.</p> <p>Employees who do not have to pay income tax can benefit from a <b>mobility bonus</b>.</p>	<p><b>Germany</b></p> <p><b>The Federal Employment Agency can fully or partially reimburse relocation expenses</b> provided that: the beneficiary receives unemployment benefit, the request is made before the actual move and the employer does not cover the expenses. This option is not regulated (chargeable event, rate, distance, etc.) by a domestic standard at federal level. Various sources confirm that relocation is generally covered from a distance of two-and-a-half hours from the current home address.</p>
<p><b>Spain</b></p> <p><b>Madrid: direct assistance intended to cover public transport travel expenses</b> for jobseekers undergoing professional integration.</p>	<p><b>Spain</b></p> <p>Policies supporting geographic mobility are above all managed by the autonomous communities, which have their own public employment services. In Galicia for example: <i>Retorna Qualifica Empleo 2025</i> program (<b>reimbursement of transfer expenses to Galicia</b>, €1,400 allowance for the first relocation expenses).</p>
<p><b>Denmark</b></p> <p>Some municipalities can grant jobseekers a <b>transport allowance</b> if they have to travel to a job interview over a certain distance away (a 90-minute car journey for example). Transport allowances may also be granted when a jobseeker is attending an internship or a specific program aimed at joining the labor market.</p>	<p><b>Sweden</b></p> <p>The Employment Agency's Council for Skills Transformation and Matching has set a target to attract workers to Northern Sweden.</p> <p>Based on an agreement with the municipalities of Skellefteå, Boden, Luleå and Kiruna, in the summer of 2023 it launched a program enabling candidates to try out a summer job in one of these towns, with <b>accommodation and travel expenses covered</b>.</p>

Source: Data collected by the PREU and social affairs advisors' responses, analysis and summary by the mission



## 5 Enabling professional mobility through skills development: Career transitions (IGAS report, 2024-excerpts)<sup>29</sup>

France is among the States that have ratified the International Labor Organization's Paid Educational Leave Convention (No.140) and, as such, implementation of the career transition project is part of its international commitments.

Various other European Member States run comparable schemes as part of these international commitments. The mission analyzed three countries (Germany, Austria and Spain) using the data available through CEDEFOP, the OECD and various governments' websites. All three of these countries grant employees training leave, during which a minimum level of pay is guaranteed, and at the end of which the employee can return to their original job.

These countries were selected because Germany and Austria are held up as models for access to career development schemes, providing support particularly to employees following vocational training, who represent a majority. Spain seemed to have developed a similar scheme to the organization adopted in France.

These benchmarks particularly bore on an analysis of the conditions for financially supporting employees (salary continuance, reimbursement of educational expenses) and on the scale of the schemes (duration of training programs, number of beneficiaries).

### 5.1 Individual training leave concerns a limited number of beneficiaries in Spain, for a short training duration

The *Permisa Individual de Formacion* (PIF) scheme enables employees with at least one year's seniority, with their employer's consent, to take leave for a training course unrelated to their job. This training must lead to a formal qualification or recognition of professional experience.

The scheme is managed by the *Fundacion Estatal para la Formacion en el Empleo* (Fundae), bringing together the social partners and the regions. Fundae reimburses the salary and associated social contributions, for PIF programs that can be financed under the budget available. Payment of the salary is integrated in the training credit system (associated with mandatory contributions) incumbent upon all companies, with limits depending on their size:

- 200h for companies with fewer than 10 employees;
- 400h for companies with 10 to 50 employees;
- 600h for companies with 50 to 249 employees;
- 800h for companies with 250 to 499 employees;

For workforces of over 500 employees: 800h + 200h for each additional 500 employees.

This scheme is part of an overall framework of incentives encouraging employees to engage in training, either through their company or independently:

<sup>29</sup> Bourguignon, B., Giorgi, D., Klein, T., Monasse, H., March 2024, <https://igas.gouv.fr/Transitions-professionnelles-dynamiser-et-mieux-cibler-l-action-publique>

- Right to 20 hours of training per year from one year of seniority, which can be combined up to 100 hours. Such training must be relevant to an employee's job;
- Training costs declared by employees can be exempt from tax, with the company's agreement, for training that is relevant to their job;
- Availability of free training programs financed by the authorities,<sup>30</sup> in response to calls for proposals. Employees can attend these outside of working hours, without having to inform their employer or obtain the latter's agreement.

The *Permisa Individual de Formacion* scheme is not widely used and training durations are short. In 2022, 5,036 people (which is 0.03% of the salaried population<sup>31</sup>) benefited from this scheme, for a financed training duration of 71.7 hours on average.<sup>32</sup>

## 5.2 Germany has adopted an elaborate long-term training system, from a career development perspective

The organization of the continuing professional development system is particularly complex. It entails a wide range of schemes at contractual sector level and regional level. Employees are entitled to take educational leave (*Bildungsurlaub*) in most *Länder*, of up to 5 days a year, or 10 days in total over two years. Employers must continue to pay the employee's salary during this period.

Additional incentive schemes are carried out at federal level, aimed at companies and employees alike, particularly the three below:

- Company grant for training programs lasting more than 120 hours, adjusted depending on the size of the company and workforce characteristics (age, qualification level) to cover 15% to 10% of the educational costs and a portion of the salary compensation, under the Future Work and Skills Development Opportunities Act;<sup>33</sup>
- Tax incentive,<sup>34</sup> which enables the direct costs (such as educational, travel or equipment expenses) associated with job-related training to be deducted from the tax base. 1.8 million taxpayers benefit from this scheme every year;
- Education grant (*Bildungsprämie*): this is a form of State aid that can finance 50% of a course's cost, up to €500. It is available to the working population on a means-tested basis, subject to the training being taken outside of working hours. In 2017, 12,600 people benefited from it.

Within this system, the Upgrading Training Assistance scheme (*Aufstiegs-Bafög*) can co-finance courses of more than 400 hours (two years' full-time or four years' part-time) which lead to a vocational qualification. Its aim is to support career development within the same sector, rather than retraining in a new sector.

In its initial design, the scheme is open to employees with an equivalent educational attainment of the high school diploma or less (*Bacheloabschluss*). Employees must target a higher educational course, from a list of 700 eligible courses. The courses can be attended part-time, over a long period (up to three years) to help raise employees' overall qualification level. If necessary, the *Aubstiegs-Bafög* can finance foundation courses, in preparation for sitting an exam to enrol in these higher education courses.

The scheme guarantees a minimum level of pay during the training period, adjusted depending on household

<sup>30</sup> Called *Formacion de Oferta*, or *Formation Subvencionada*

<sup>31</sup> 16.7 million active employees in 2019, source OECD

<sup>32</sup> Source: Fundea 2022 annual report

<sup>33</sup> *Qualifizierungschancengesetz und Arbeit-von-morgen-Gesetz*, 2019 and 2020

<sup>34</sup> *Werbungskosten, Aufwendungen für die Aus- und Fortbildung*

composition:

- €1,198 + €150 childcare for a single parent with one child
- €1,668 for a married person with two children.

The scheme enables co-funding of educational costs of up to €15,000, split between 50% unconditional aid and 50% State-guaranteed loan.

Employees are entitled to return to their previous job after the training.

In 2018, 167,000 people benefited from this scheme, which is about 0.43% of the salaried population.<sup>35</sup>

Since 2020, the scheme has been supplemented by *Meister-Bafög*, intended for graduates with no more than a Bachelor's degree.

### 5.3 Austria's system, initially aimed at older employees, is popular with young people

Continuing professional development policy, like in Germany, mainly comes under the remit of the occupational branches and the regions, in a country strongly shaped by a dual initial education system (20% of initial education leavers have the general baccalaureate).

Against this backdrop, the State has targeted long-term continuing professional development programs for adults with a low initial educational attainment level. Since 2012, an 'Adult Education Initiative' (*Initiative Erwachsenenbildung*) has financed courses for people who have not completed general secondary education. There are two programs: 'basic skills' (100-400h) and 'second chance' to achieve the lower secondary school completion certificate (*Hauptschulabschluss*, 1,160h). 50,000 people benefited from the program between 2012 and 2017, and the funding allocated for 2018-2021 represents €112 million.

Furthermore, since 1998, employees with at least one year of seniority can benefit from a leave scheme, either full-time (*Bildungskarenz*) or part-time (*Bildungsteilzeit*).

Employees can take between 2 and 12 months of leave over a four-year period, and are paid the equivalent of a minimum wage (55% of the net salary) on a full-time basis,<sup>36</sup> provided they participate in at least 20 hours of training per week.

Employees tend to contribute to the educational costs with the company and the *Länder*.

If they wish, they may return to their job after their training.

14,000 people benefited from the scheme in 2021 (which is 0.37% of the salaried population),<sup>37</sup> for an average duration of 230 days. In 2016, the cost represented about €12,000 per full-time participant, and €5,000 per part-time participant.

Initially aimed at older employees, the scheme seems to be of most benefit to younger employees, those with higher educational attainments and women. Part-time courses account for about a third of beneficiaries.

<sup>35</sup> 38.2 million active employees in 2019, source OECD

<sup>36</sup> Full-time: 55% of the net salary, minimum wage of €14.53 per day

Part-time: compensation of €0.82 per hour, maximum amount of €492 per month.

<sup>37</sup> 3.8 million active employees in 2019, source OECD

## 6 Limiting involuntary part-time employment and fixed-term contracts

### 6.1 Regulating the use of insecure work contracts

Some States (Spain, Finland and Sweden for instance) significantly limit the use of fixed-term contracts.

Regulation of fixed-term contracts
<p><b>Spain</b></p> <p>In 2022, the labor market reform fully adopted a social partners' agreement from the end of 2021, leading to restrictions on the use of temporary contracts (presumption of employment on an open-ended contract, easier conversion of fixed-term contracts into open-ended ones, end of project- or task-based temporary contracts).</p> <p>On the whole, this reform has been deemed a success, since it has reduced the rate of temporary work in Spain – the highest in the EU prior to the reform (21.0% in 2021, 14.4% in 2023, close to the French level of 12.2%) and one of the structural weaknesses of the labor market.</p>
<p><b>Finland</b></p> <p>A work contract is considered to be open-ended unless it is specifically drawn up on a fixed-term basis on justified grounds (temporary employment, internship, type of work, seasonal work).</p> <p>The law governing the use of fixed-term contracts is expected to be amended, however, to enable the signature of a work contract on a one-year fixed-term basis without needing to provide a reason. The legislation must take care to ensure that this amendment does not lead to the unjustified use of consecutive fixed-term contracts.</p>
<p><b>Sweden</b></p> <p>Under employment protection law, a job is open-ended out of principle. Fixed-term contracts are therefore exceptions to the general rule and the conditions for their use are usually set forth in collective agreements. By law, it is possible to use a fixed-term contract in the following cases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A trial period (typically 6 months before changing to an open-ended contract);</li> <li>- To cover parental leave or sick leave;</li> <li>- A job corresponding to a temporary requirement;</li> <li>- A seasonal job.</li> </ul>

Source: Data collected by the PREU, formatting by the mission

### 6.2 Limiting involuntary part-time employment (IGAS report, 2024<sup>38</sup>- excerpts)

#### 6.2.1 International recommendations that often align with the French legislation

The ILO and, to a lesser extent, the OECD and IMF, have issued a series of recommendations regarding part-time work.

These are firstly legislative recommendations. The ILO outlines the following guidance:

- Better guarantee equality of treatment by establishing a general non-discrimination clause in the legislation, addressing the situation of marginal workers on task-based fixed-term contracts or other very-short-term contracts and removing barriers to collective organization and collective bargaining for part-time workers;
- Set minimum numbers of hours for part-time workers in general (15 hours) as well as minimum shifts

<sup>38</sup> Magnier, A., Viossat, L-C. *Temps partiel et temps partiel contraint : des inflexions possibles pour un cadre rénové*. -Annex 6, <https://www.igas.gouv.fr/temps-partiel-et-temps-partiel-contraint-des-inflexions-possibles-pour-un-cadre-renové>

(3 hours for example) for marginal part-time workers whose working hours are not stable or whose hourly shift is not clearly determined;

- Restrict or even prohibit the use of certain types of contract, especially zero-hours and variable-hours contracts;
- Limit the use of subcontracting for companies' non-essential activities and hold subcontractors to greater account;
- Guarantee clear communication beforehand about the duration of work and rest periods as well as record-keeping;
- Ensure compliance with the working time provisions through adequate inspection measures.

They also include collective recommendations (collective bargaining and workers' representation). From this point of view, the ILO particularly outlines the following guidance:

- Ensure that the legislation effectively protects and promotes freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining for part-time workers;
- Support the ability of trade unions to organize part-time workers and ensure their representation within collective bargaining procedures;<sup>39</sup>
- Leverage collective bargaining to regulate part-time work. The ILO mentions two countries where agreements have been concluded.

The ILO also recommends adapting social protection systems to improve protection for part-time workers.

Indeed, social security cover for part-time workers is mainly determined by work-hour or remuneration thresholds set in the national social security legislation. In many cases, regular part-time workers with moderate, regular hours (typically more than 20, or sometimes 15 hours a week) benefit from social security cover. That said, in some countries, regular part-time workers are excluded from some or all social security benefits and marginal part-time workers are excluded from unemployment insurance and other social security benefits almost everywhere.

In order to extend the social security cover of part-time workers, the minimum work-hour or remuneration thresholds should, according to the ILO, be lowered pursuant to Convention No. 175 so as 'not to exclude an unduly large percentage of part-time workers'.

It is also necessary to facilitate social security cover for workers with several employers and for those who combine part-time dependent work and independent work.

Given the high proportion of women in part-time employment, specific measures are called for to supplement the social security rights of people who have been carers for a certain duration, in a bid to enable those who have reduced their working time owing to caregiving responsibilities to improve their social security cover.

The ILO also recommends that unemployment insurance provide partial unemployment benefits, such as in France and other countries. It further recommends that the public sector be a model employer for flexible and protected working time arrangements over the life course.<sup>40</sup>

With respect to involuntary part-time work, the ILO recommends that unemployment insurance provide partial

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<sup>39</sup> According to the ILO, Japan seems to have partly achieved this in recent years.

<sup>40</sup> ILO. Schmid, G. and Wagner, J. *Managing social risks of non-standard employment in Europe*, Conditions of Work and Employment Series. No. 91. 2017.

unemployment benefits, as already practiced in some countries. Broader 'employment insurance' can also cover voluntary part-time work, often 'required' by non-remunerated social obligations, under certain circumstances, such as in the form of parental leave or carer's leave benefits for sick children or dependent elderly people.

A missed opportunity involves easing the switchover from full-time to voluntary part-time and providing part-time unemployment benefits on the condition that the other part of 'working' time be used for education or training in the job market. Finally, the ILO recommends that the importance of the State not be overlooked, not only as an employer of last resort but also as a model employer for flexible and protected working time arrangements over the life course.

The OECD's recommendations are similar to the ones outlined by the ILO. The OECD particularly considers flexible hours or remote working to be a much better solution than part-time work to increase the non-material comfort of employees – and one of the least studied solutions to date.

IMF experts have recently turned their attention to the decline in working hours across Europe over the past few years, which they mainly attribute to workers' preferences.<sup>41</sup> They reckon that enabling all involuntary part-time workers to switch to full-time jobs would bring about an average increase of 0.42 hours or 1.1 percent in working hours. They recommend various policy actions in this regard:

- Creating tax and benefit systems that are neutral with respect to workers' hours choices;
- Introducing more targeted measures to help part-time working mothers who would like to switch to full-time jobs to do so;
- Enacting active labor market policies to enhance matching involuntary part-time workers and available full-time jobs;
- Abolishing contributory pension and other social protection schemes, such as unemployment insurance, that unduly incentivize part-time work through benefit formulas excessively crediting part-time work periods;
- Designing non-contributory benefits, such as housing allowances, in ways that minimize threshold effects which disincentivize recipients from taking up full-time jobs even when they would like to.
- Raising the number of hours of part-time working mothers through more neutral tax treatment of second earners, higher childcare subsidies or services, enhanced paid (pa)maternity leave, and more flexible work arrangements including teleworking.
- Ensuring that active labor market policies not only help the unemployed find jobs, but are also available for part-time workers in need of adequate support to find full-time jobs. Re-training programs could play some role in boosting hours worked by helping involuntary part-time workers find full-time jobs.

## 6.2.2 The German example

Legislation on part-time working is long-standing in Germany (1994) and falls under the SGBIV code.<sup>42</sup>

The 'Act on Further Development of Part-Time Work – Introduction of Bridging Part-Time Work' (TzBfG) entered into force at the beginning of 2019. This law particularly contains the following provisions:

Introduction of a right to part-time work for a limited period of time (bridging part-time work);

A significant transfer of the burden of proof to the employer in the event of a request to

<sup>41</sup> See Astinova, D. et alii. *Dissecting the decline in average hours worked in Europe*. International Monetary Fund. WP/24/2. January 2024.

<sup>42</sup> See the text of the applicable act: [ArbZG - Arbeitszeitgesetz \(gesetze-im-internet.de\)](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/arbztg/)



increase working time;

A right to discussion if a worker wishes to change their working hours;

Improved income security and planning in the event of on-call work.

An assessment of this new legislation is expected this year (2024) but was not available at the time this report was being written.

- The right to bridging part-time work<sup>43</sup>

Bridging part-time work was introduced in 2019 in addition to the existing right to part-time work for an unlimited period. After the limited part-time working period, a worker resumes their initial working hours. Bridging part-time work may be implemented for a period of one to five years. This entitlement is open to companies with over 45 workers. Moreover, provision is made for a 'reasonable threshold' in the case of companies with 46 to 200 workers: this entitlement may only be granted to one in every 15 workers.

Throughout the limited part-time working period, there are no rights to be able to extend or reduce the working hours, or to an early return to previous working hours.

- Extending the working hours of part-time workers is now easier

It is now easier to extend the working hours of part-time workers. Employers must, like before, give priority to part-time workers when seeking to fill a suitable vacancy. Such a vacant position exists when an employer has made the organizational decision to create it or to fill a vacant position. Part-time workers who wish to increase their working hours must indicate this in writing. The employer bears the burden of presentation and, where applicable, proof, should the job not be a suitable vacancy and the worker not have the same skills for occupying the vacant position. Like before, the employer also bears the burden of proof, where applicable, should the wishes of other part-time workers in terms of working hours or urgent operational reasons be incompatible with such an application.

Employees must justify their part-time employment and inform their employer of their wish to extend their working hours.

Under the law, employers must discuss a change in working hours and/or time with workers wishing to amend their employment contract. This discussion obligation applies irrespective of the number of workers and of the working time. A worker may call on a workers' staff representative to help or act as a facilitator. The employer must inform workers' representatives of any working time requests it receives.

- Agreed minimum weekly working hours for on-call contracts

In Germany, the arrangements for minimum weekly working time are quite different to the system in France. Accordingly, for 'on-call' work, where no weekly working time has been agreed between the parties, a working time of 20 hours (instead of 10 hours previously) shall apply out of principle. The amount of additional work that an employer may unilaterally require of on-call workers is limited to 25% of the agreed minimum weekly working hours. In the event of an agreement on a reduction in weekly working hours, the volume is 20% of the agreed maximum working time. The calculation basis for salary continuance in the event of sickness absence and the payment of public holidays is, in principle, established based on the average working time over the three months prior to the inability to work or the public holiday. The applicable calculation rules are more favorable to workers.

- Different schemes specific to part-time working

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<sup>43</sup> For details about this new law, see the website of the Federal Ministry of Labor (in German): [Questions & answers about bridging part-time work - BMAS](#).

Part-time working may also result from specific legal provisions. The specific part-time working schemes are typically more favorable to employees since they tend to come with financial assistance and other protection rights (such as specific prohibitions on dismissal). They particularly include the Federal Parental Allowance and Parental Leave Act (BEEG), Caregiver Leave Act (PflegeZG), Family Caregiver Leave Act (FPfZG), Book Nine of the Social Code (SGB IX) and Act on Part-Time Work for Workers Nearing Retirement (AltTZG).

The problem of a gender imbalance in part-time working and the means to remedy this are now on the agenda of trade union organizations, the DGB in particular. The Vice-President at federal level is a labor market expert at the DGB. She has stressed the need for a radical cultural shift within companies that would pave the way to measures promoting the development of part-time working among male workers. In her opinion, women would therefore have the opportunity to extend their working hours, which would also help to ease employers' recruitment problems.

### **Some recent court decisions on part-time working in Germany**

In Germany, the Federal Labor Court submitted a request for a preliminary ruling to the CJEU in October 2021 asking whether the provisions of a collective agreement providing for overtime pay for part-time workers only in respect of hours worked in excess of the working time of a full-time employee amounted to discriminatory treatment of part-time workers. Conversely, in another October 2021 ruling, the Federal Labor Court held that a collective agreement containing independent provisions on overtime for part-time workers does not discriminate against them.

Then, in November 2022, Germany's Federal Labor Court issued a decision on the scope of prohibiting discrimination against part-time workers.

### **German mini-jobs, an example of marginal part-time employment<sup>44</sup>**

Mini-jobs are so-called marginal part-time jobs that were created as part of the Harz reforms in the mid-2000s, which have been updated several times since. In 2021, mini-jobbers accounted for 11% of the labor force, i.e. 4.3 million employees, including 60% women. The number of mini-jobbers has been in decline over the past ten years or so.

Four groups of exclusive mini-jobbers can be distinguished with, in descending order, housewives (about a third of the total), pensioners, students and jobseekers.

There are two types of mini-job. In the first instance, the monthly salary cannot exceed €538. The number of hours per month that mini-jobbers are permitted to work is determined by the hourly wage. The statutory minimum wage also applies to mini-jobs. For short-term mini-jobs, the assignment cannot exceed 3 months or a total of 70 days during a calendar year.

Because mini-jobbers do not pay into unemployment insurance, these workers are not entitled to unemployment benefits – a significant downside. Pension contributions are very low and only entitle employees to very small pensions. Employers do pay flat-rate contributions, but mini-jobbers are not automatically entitled to health insurance or long-term care insurance.

Mini-jobbers are deemed to be part-time employees under part-time and fixed-term employment law. In theory, they therefore have the same labor law rights as full-time employees. However, in practice, many employees working mini-jobs find that they are unable to claim these rights. They are seldom compared to employees subject to social contributions.

## **6.2.3 The Dutch example**

According to the ILO, the part-time working system established in the Netherlands provides some of the highest protection worldwide.

Part-time work has been encouraged through the 'one-and-a-half earner' model for dual-earnings households, to enable men and women to adjust their working hours. The quality of part-time work has also been ensured by implementing the equality of treatment principle, distributing part-time working among the senior occupational levels and organizational hierarchies, and through regulations that entitle individuals to switch their working hours between full-time and part-time arrangements.

The 1996 legislation on equal treatment (WOA), adopted prior to the European Directive concerning the Framework Agreement on part-time work, prohibits an employer from discriminating between full-time and part-time employees where they do not have objective grounds for doing so. The law's underlying principle

<sup>44</sup> See the website of the Bundesagentur für Arbeit and German Ministry of Labor.

is that permanent and non-permanent employees should not suffer discrimination based on the number of hours they work, and that discrimination between part-time workers working more or fewer hours is prohibited. Part-time workers are proportionally entitled to the same salary, the same bonuses and the same number of days' leave.

The 2000 Working Hours Adjustment Act awarded employees the right to increase (unless stipulated otherwise in the collective agreements) or reduce their working hours. Employers may only refuse requests that employees make in this respect by citing incompatibility with the company's interests. This law is part of the 'Work and Care' policy, which brought together various existing provisions and added others (such as leave for caring for family members), the aim being to help balance out working and family responsibilities. This legislation reflects a certain trend that could already be observed in various collective conventions.

Since the adoption of the Flexible Working Act in 2015, employees can request changes to their working hours, working time and work location. In theory, employers are not entitled to reduce working time of their own accord: part-time work or the decision to change from full-time to part-time working must be agreed between the parties to the employment contract. In some limited cases, however, unilateral reduction of working time is allowed.

Some types of contract, such as on-call work, afford Dutch workers significantly less protection. These particularly include zero-hours and variable-hours contracts. The regulations governing on-call work, adopted in the late 1990s, were drawn up to offset the relaxation in the use of fixed-term contracts provided by the 1999 act (Flex Law). Variable-hours contracts must contain a guaranteed minimum of working hours and workers are entitled to remuneration even if their employer does not call on them. Where agreed hours are less than 15 hours a week and the working period is not defined, workers must be paid for at least three hours per working period, irrespective of the number of hours actually worked.

In September 2022, grappling with the same problem as Denmark in terms of staff shortages, the Dutch government announced a pilot bonus scheme to reward teachers for working full-time in schools. Other, similar initiatives have been rolled out in the care and education sectors. These have drawn criticism from trade unions, which argue that healthcare staff already work more hours than they get paid for and that the workload in the sector was already considerable.

#### 6.2.4 Additional data about the regulation of 'zero-hours' contracts

So-called 'zero-hours' contracts<sup>45</sup> seem to be called into question since 2018 in Ireland and could be strongly regulated by a bill currently under consideration in the UK.

Prohibition or regulation of 'zero-hours' contracts
<p><b>Ireland</b></p> <p><b>The 2018 Employment Act</b> amended the 1997 Organization of Working Time Act to <b>ban zero-hours contracts</b>, except for work of a casual nature, work done in emergency situations or short-term relief to cover routine absences. This prohibition came into force on March 4, 2019.</p> <p>Under the 2018 Act, employees whose current contract does not accurately reflect the average hours per week actually worked are entitled to an appropriate band of specified weekly working hours. Employers must determine the appropriate band based on the average number of weekly hours worked over a typical 12-month period. This primarily guarantees employees a minimum number of weekly hours.</p>
<p><b>UK</b></p> <p><b>The Employment Rights Bill was introduced on October 10, 2024.</b> It largely implements the pledges described in Labour's pre-election document dated June 2024, 'Labour's Plan to Make Work Pay: Delivering a New Deal for Working People'.</p> <p>Various reforms should be forthcoming in 2026:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Right to guaranteed hours: workers who regularly put in a number of hours over a reference period (supposedly 12 weeks) will be entitled to a guaranteed hours contract reflecting these hours.</li> <li>• Right to reasonable notice of changes affecting shifts: employers will be required to provide reasonable notice of planned changes to workers' shifts.</li> <li>• Right to payment for cancelled and curtailed shifts: workers may claim compensation where shifts are cancelled or curtailed at short notice.</li> </ul> <p>Source: UK Social Affairs Advisor</p>

<sup>45</sup> A zero-hours contract (or casual contract) is a type of employment contract in the UK for which employers do not guarantee a set number of working hours, and employees do not have to agree to the working hours proposed.

In March 2024, there were approximately 1.03 million people in the UK on zero-hours contracts, which represents about 3.1% of total employment in that country.



## ANNEXES



# ANNEX 1: Caregiving situations, wage mobility over the course of a career, geographic mobility to promote a return to employment, limiting the use of insecure work contracts: social affairs advisors' responses

Preparations for the 'Work' conference - March 2025

[Germany](#), [Spain](#), [Italy](#), [Denmark](#), [Sweden](#), [UK](#)

**Caregiving situations:** what measures under labor law or what good sectoral or enterprise practices, identified for their interest, have been adopted to consider the pressures on employees with family caregiving commitments?

**Wage mobility over the course of a career:** what measures under labor law or what good sectoral or enterprise practices (stemming from agreements between sectoral or enterprise social partners), identified for their interest, have been adopted to promote upward wage mobility over the course of a career?

**Geographic mobility to promote a return to employment:** what measures have been adopted by the employment services or by local authorities supporting jobseekers in their job-hunting, to facilitate their geographic mobility in cases where the jobseeker's home is remote from the hiring company?

**Limiting the use of insecure work contracts:** what measures have been adopted to limit the use of insecure work contracts or allow easier transition between insecure and stable work contracts?

<p>- <b>Germany:</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What measures under labor law or what good sectoral or enterprise practices, identified for their interest, have been adopted to consider the pressures on employees with family caregiving commitments?</b></li> </ul> <p>German law recognizes a <b>right to unpaid carer's leave (<i>Pflegezeit</i>) of up to six months</b> to look after a dependent close relative (whose long-term care requirement has been recognized by the regional medical service of the long-term care insurance provider), at home when the close relative is an adult or even in an institution or somewhere else when this is a child. Entitlement to up to 3 months' leave is also recognized to support relatives in their final weeks of life.</p> <p>This obligation applies to employers with more than 15 employees. Other employers may agree to such leave on a voluntary basis.</p> <p>Close relatives include grandparents, parents, parents-in-law, step-parents, spouses, life partners, partners in a civil partnership or cohabiting partners, siblings, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, children, adopted or foster children, adopted or foster children of the spouse or life partner, stepchildren and grandchildren.</p> <p>Furthermore, in companies with more than 25 employees, the latter are <b>entitled to reduce their working time for up to 24 months</b> to take care of a dependent close relative (under Family Carer's Leave: <b><i>Familienpflegezeit</i></b>). A voluntary arrangement is possible with other types of employer, and the required response time for employers is four weeks. The minimum working time is nevertheless set at 15 weekly hours as an annual average.</p> <p><b>The two types of carer's leave, <i>Pflegezeit</i> and <i>Familienpflegezeit</i>, can be combined</b>, for up to 24 months.</p> <p>Employees in companies of all sizes can also <b>take 10 days' leave when a dependent relative requires urgent care</b>, particularly for the emergency adoption of support arrangements. Employees must inform their employer of their family care commitments and how long they are expected to last. On the employer's demand, a medical certificate attesting to the long-term care requirement, for which the employee has to take leave to organize care of the relative in question, must be furnished. Social security entitlements are fully maintained. Caregiving employees may apply for a care support allowance (<b><i>Pflegeunterstützungsgeld</i></b>) from the long-term care insurance fund of the dependent relative in question, equivalent to 90% of the gross treatment, within the limit of 70% of the social security ceiling, for 10 days per year, per person under care, when they do not ask their employer to continue paying for their treatment or for health insurance benefits in cases of a child's accident or illness. This right may be shared between several family carers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Wage mobility over the course of a career: what measures under labor law or what good sectoral or enterprise practices (stemming from agreements between sectoral or enterprise social partners), identified for their interest, have been adopted to promote upward wage mobility over the course of a career?</b></li> </ul> <p>To the knowledge of this advisor, German labor law does not govern wage developments at enterprise level. This comes under <b>collective bargaining between the employer and the trade union(s)</b> represented in the sector concerned. This advisor has not identified any remarkable good practices in terms of wage progression, with the exception of some bonuses which are now contested (see the workers' strike at Volkswagen), linked to seniority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Geographic mobility to promote a return to employment: what measures have been adopted by the employment services or by local authorities supporting jobseekers in their job-hunting, to facilitate their geographic mobility in cases where the jobseeker's home is remote from the hiring company?</b></li> </ul> <p>Transport expenses can be <b>deducted from taxable income</b>, up to 30 cents per kilometer and 38 cents from the 21<sup>st</sup> kilometer, not exceeding €4,500/year.</p> <p>Employees who do not have to pay income tax can benefit from a <b>mobility bonus</b>.</p> <p><b>The Federal Employment Agency can fully or partially reimburse relocation expenses</b> provided that the beneficiary receives unemployment benefit, the request is made before the actual move and the employer does not cover the expenses. But this option is not regulated (chargeable event, rate, distance, etc.) by a domestic standard at federal level. Various sources confirm that relocation is generally covered from a distance of two-and-a-half hours from the current home address.</p>

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<p>- <b>Spain:</b></p>
<p><b>1. Figures at a glance</b></p>



(Data for Quarter 4/2024, latest Economically Active Population Survey of the National Statistics Institute/INE)

- **Unemployment rate: 10.6% (under 11% for the first time in 16 years).** Under 8% (campaign pledge of Pedro Sanchez) in 15 Spanish provinces.
- **Employment rate among 16-year-olds and over:** 52.28% (+468,100 new jobs).
- **Proportion of 18-24-year-olds not in employment, education or training (NEET):** 18%.
- **Part-time employment:** +265,000 part-time jobs between October and December 2024, especially among women.
- **Multi-employment:** 555,800 people in the 3rd quarter of 2024 (+365,000 contracts lasting less than one year signed in 2024).
- **Employment rate among foreigners:** 13.7% of all employees, a significant increase (40% of new jobs created in 2024, up from 35.6% of foreign workers since 2019).
- **M/F wage inequality:** average annual wage for women €24,359.82 and average annual wage for men €29,381.84 (20.62% gap).
- **Minimum wage: €50 increase in 2025, bringing it to €1,184 gross per month (+4.41%). Between 2018 and 2025, the minimum wage in Spain has increased by 61%.**
- **Work accidents (2023):** 558,936, including 3,921 serious accidents and 619 fatal accidents.

NB: Spain is a highly decentralized country.

## 2. What measures have been adopted to limit the use of insecure work contracts or allow easier transition between insecure and stable work contracts?

In 2022, the labor market reform fully adopted a social partners' agreement from the end of 2021, with three main thrusts:

- Simplification of contract templates to limit misuse of temporary contracts (presumption of employment on an open-ended contract, easier conversion of fixed-term contracts into open-ended ones, end of project- or task-based temporary contracts widely used in construction and agriculture, strengthening of 'discontinuous-fixed' contracts, which are seasonal open-ended contracts for intermittent or cyclical work, restrictions on the use of fixed-term contracts (only to replace an employee or during a busy period) and fines in the event of very-short-term contracts);
- A new hierarchy of norms (return to the pre-eminence of collective agreements – these remain in force after expiry until a new agreement is signed, prevalence of the sector-level agreement over the enterprise-level one on wage matters, application of the contractor's collective agreement to employees of subcontractors);
- Maintaining the temporary lay-off (short-time working) systems introduced during the pandemic with the new RED mechanism (similar scheme to temporary lay-off in France), activated by the Government, which provides cover in the event of an economic crisis or sector-wide upheaval.

**On the whole, this reform has been deemed a success, since it has achieved its main goal: to reduce the rate of temporary work in Spain – the highest in the EU prior to the reform (21.0% in 2021),** and one of the structural weaknesses of the labor market. As such, Spain is now more aligned with the norm, with rates close to the European average in this regard (14.4% in 2023, not far off the French level – 12.2% – and the EU average – 10.6%/13.2% in Q3/2024 for quarterly data).

**According to the most recent figures published by the Government,** since 2022, the number of workers on open-ended contracts has risen by 3.7 million (+33.3%), while the proportion of temporary jobs has fallen to a historically low level of 12.8%. This fall is particularly marked in the seasonal sectors, such as agriculture, where the rate has dropped from 34.8% to 11.6%. Young workers now only account for 20.9% of temporary contracts, versus more than half before the reform.<sup>46</sup>

## 3. What measures have been adopted by the employment services or by local authorities supporting jobseekers in their job-hunting, to facilitate their geographic mobility in cases where the jobseeker's home is remote from the hiring company?

The Plan for the Promotion of Decent Employment,<sup>47</sup> drawn up pursuant to Act 3/2023 of February 28 by the Government (Ministry of Labor, State public employment service) in connection with the autonomous communities and social partners, does not contain specific measures on geographic mobility, but focuses on tailored support for jobseekers, as well as the promotion of employment in regions experiencing depopulation.

One of the policy lines in the Spanish Active Employment Support Strategy bears on equal opportunities in access to

<sup>46</sup> La Moncloa. La Seguridad Social suma en enero 35.000 afiliados en términos desestacionalizados y 501.000 en el último año

<sup>47</sup> [Plan Anual para el Fomento del Empleo Digno 2024](#)



employment, which includes the measure 'support geographic and sectoral mobility'.

Policies supporting geographic mobility are above all managed by the autonomous communities, which have their own public employment services. Here are some examples:

- Galicia: *Retorna Qualifica Empleo 2025* program aimed at supporting the return to employment and professional integration of Galicians and their families who have left the region. This support includes financial assistance (reimbursement of transfer expenses to Galicia, €1,400 for the first relocation expenses).<sup>48</sup>
- Madrid: direct aid intended to cover public transport travel expenses for jobseekers undergoing professional integration.<sup>49</sup>
- Temporary accommodation assistance for seasonal workers (e.g.: Andalusia).<sup>50</sup>

Companies are also implementing measures in the hospitality sector for example: the Melia hotel chain offers free accommodation for employees over the tourist season (such as in the Balearic Islands where the housing market is under particular pressure).

#### 4. What measures under labor law or what good sectoral or enterprise practices, identified for their interest, have been adopted to consider the pressures on employees with family caregiving commitments?

The royal legislative decree 5/2023 introduced new rights as regards leave or working time reduction:

- **Paid leave for taking care of a relative:** 5 days per case (serious illness, accident, hospitalization or surgical procedure) for a first- or second-degree family member or a person living with the employee.
- **Leave for a family emergency:** up to 4 annual days of leave for unforeseen family emergencies; this leave can also be taken on an hourly basis.
- **Parental leave:** 8 weeks for parents of children up to 8 years of age.
- **Right to adjusted working patterns:** measure which guarantees employees with family responsibilities the right to ask for more flexible working patterns, including remote working. Extended to employees looking after children with special needs up to 12 years of age, a dependent relative or spouse, or an elderly person or disabled person living with them.
- **Protection against the dismissal of workers benefiting from such leave or reduction in working time.**

In terms of childcare/caregiving: The 'co-responsibility plan', whose primary aim is gender equality when it comes to sharing out household and family chores, plans to unlock €190 million/year for autonomous communities to continue narrowing the care/caregiving gap, given that 88% of childcare leave is requested by women, 73.5% of part-time workers are women and the main cause for this reduction in working time is care for relatives. In all, since 2021, €760 million has been allocated to more than 2,000 projects supporting a better gender balance.

#### 5. What measures under labor law or what good sectoral or enterprise practices (stemming from agreements between sectoral or enterprise social partners), identified for their interest, have been adopted to promote upward wage mobility over the course of a career?

- **Increase in the inter-occupational minimum wage (Government pledge for it to reach 60% of the average wage);**
- **Collective bargaining reform (2022):** prevalence of the sector-level agreement over the enterprise-level agreement on wage matters;
- **Collective bargaining reform (2022):**
  - Prevalence of the sector-level agreement over the enterprise-level agreement on wage matters. Clauses in the latter agreement which provide for lower pay than the clauses set out in the sector-level collective agreement shall not apply;
  - During renegotiations of a collective agreement, any pay set by an agreement that has expired shall remain valid ('ultra-activity of collective agreements'); this is designed to shore up the position of trade unions.
    - In addition, the law and regulations (workers' statute) prevail over collective agreements. Accordingly,

<sup>48</sup> Xunta de Galicia, *Retorna Qualifica Empleo 2025*. URL:

[https://emplego.xunta.gal/portal/index.php/es/?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=596#ayudas-parafacilitar-la-participacion-en-el-programa](https://emplego.xunta.gal/portal/index.php/es/?option=com_content&view=article&id=596#ayudas-parafacilitar-la-participacion-en-el-programa)

<sup>49</sup> Comunidad de Madrid, *Ayudas al transporte público para desempleados que participen en acciones de formación profesional para el empleo*. URL: <https://sede.comunidad.madrid/ayudas-becassubvenciones/ayudas-transporte-publico-0>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.juntadeandalucia.es/presidencia/portavoz/social/192141/residencia/trabajadores/temporeros/Lepe/Huelva/erradicacion/chabolismo/PlanEASEN/asentamientosinformales/infraviviendas/zonasagricolas/Andalucia/ConsejeriadeInclusionSocial/Juventud/FamiliasIgualdad>

any agreement-based clauses providing for lower salaries than the minimum wage shall not apply.

- **National cooperation agreement (2022-2025) between the social partners:** commitment to the uprating of wages to protect workers' purchasing power in an inflationary context. According to the UGT trade union, between May and December 2023, 1,179 collective agreements were signed, bringing about an average rise in collectively agreed wages of 4%;
- **Calls from the trade unions for salary adjustment clauses where such revision happens automatically in line with inflation.** According to the UGT trade union, their cover is relatively low (23.4% in 2023 versus about 70% in 2008).

#### **Annex 1: A few updates on wages since January:**

##### ▪ **The ILO ranks Spain among the countries with the lowest level of wage inequality.**

In its Global Wage Report 2024-25, the ILO ranks Spain among the countries with the least inequality: the 10% best-paid workers in Spain obtain 23% of the total wage bill and the 10% least-paid workers receive 0.5% of the total wage bill. This difference is 15 points higher than the global average (where 10% of the best-paid workers obtain 38% of the total wage bill). In Spain, just 1.3% of employees earn less than half of the median wage. Of the thirty high-income countries analyzed by the ILO, Spain is among the eleven with the least wage inequality (behind Luxembourg, Italy, Iceland, Slovakia, Finland, Lithuania, Sweden, Poland, Belgium and Portugal).

Since 2000, the groups having lost the most purchasing power are the highest-earners as well as women and migrants: women account for 47.7% of employees overall but 60% of low-paid wage workers (i.e. those who are paid less than 50% of the median wage). Immigrants represent 17.6% of employees overall but 26% of the poorest employees. In Spain, the drop in wages in 2022 (-3.5%) was followed by a partial uptick in 2023 (+1.4%) and 2024 (+0.6%).

##### ▪ **Employees maintain their purchasing power in 2024.**

A study by EADA Business School and the ICSA Group, 'wage trends 2007-2024', shows that, in 2024, employees maintained their purchasing power because wages went up by 2.8%, in step with inflation. However, senior executives' wages increased by 0.57% and middle managers' wages dipped by 0.77%. The increase in the lowest wages can be explained by the increases in the minimum wage, the salary adjustment clauses in the collective agreements and the problems filling certain job vacancies. The study shows that no category has maintained its 2007 purchasing power. Between 2007 and 2024, prices rose by 39.7% and wages by 38.3%. The wages of middle managers only increased by 22.7% during this period.

##### ▪ **Purchasing power and wage trends.**

In 2024, prices only increased by 2.8% in Spain, whereas in 2023 they had risen by 3.6% and in 2022 by 8.4%. By comparing the development of inflation with that of wages, it can be estimated that 6.3 million people lost purchasing power in 2024: the 3 million public-sector employees and 3 million private-sector employees. The purchasing power of 3.39 million private employees remained intact. Meanwhile, the 9 million pensioners and 3.9 million private-sector employees gained purchasing power. Accordingly, 27% of the groups analyzed (private sector, public sector and pensioners) lost purchasing power and 58% gained in this regard.

##### ▪ **A new increase in the minimum wage to €1,184 per month in 14 payments, approved by the Government.**

This will benefit 2.4 million workers, including 65.8% women and 26.8% 16-24-year-olds. An internal dispute broke out this week, however, within the governmental coalition following Sumar's presentation of a bill aimed at scrapping the decision to make workers on the minimum wage liable for income tax. The Ministry of Economy considers this necessary in light of the strong increase in the minimum wage since 2018 (+61%), while the Ministry of Labor, headed up by Yolanda Diaz, is advocating for an exemption. This week, Sumar asked for a meeting between the governmental partners, while the PSOE and Ministry of Economy have sought to ease tensions without backing down. According to Eurostat, in Spain, the lowest-earning taxpayers paid 6.7% of tax in 2023, far below the European average of 19%.

##### ▪ **The salary of new young entrants to the job market has moved away from the average salary.**

According to the National Statistics Institute (INE), young workers' average monthly starting salary is €2,011, whereas the average monthly salary is €2,504. The gap between the former and latter salaries has grown wider: €250 in 2006, it is now €492. It is even greater for 25-34-year-old women: €751 (€200 less than men). Generational differences in income are significant: 16-24-year-olds earn a gross monthly salary of €1,770; 45-54-year-olds (the best-paid group), €2,727.87.

#### **Annex 2: The Spanish job market – December 2024**

A rare sovereign prerogative among largely decentralized social policies, Spain's labor policy has undergone major

reform in recent years, under the leadership of Yolanda Diaz, Minister of Labor (since 2020) and Vice-President of the Government (since 2023), longtime member of the Community party and former co-ordinator of the left-wing alliance, Sumar.

Active on a number of fronts at the end of this year – including the introduction of a 'labor shield' and creation of 'climate leave' in response to the consequences of the flooding in the region of Valencia, multilateral initiative with the International Labor Conference (see NDI-2024-0488949) and introduction of measures against offshoring under the Industry Act – in 2025 she has new structural reforms in her sights, on the minimum wage, working time and dismissals.

The successful roll-out of the latter two plans – especially the flagship reform on working time – is by no means guaranteed at a time when parliamentary balance and the stability of the governmental coalition are coming under pressure.

The difficulty for the government is how to win support from a disparate group of parliamentary partners, particularly the regional parties on the right, Junts per Catalunya and the Basque Nationalist Party, which do not naturally share the progressive beliefs of the left-wing governmental coalition.

### **1. Inter-occupational minimum wage: encouraged by the success of the record rise, the Government is now hoping to make good on its pledge for an amount that is 60% of the average wage.**

The inter-occupational minimum wage has risen by 54% since 2018, with an unprecedented increase of 22.3% in 2019. Thus, it has gone from a gross monthly amount of €859 in 2018 up to €1,323 in 2024, or in annual terms from €10,304 to €15,876.<sup>51</sup> According to the assessments conducted to date, not least the OECD's working paper on the 2019 minimum wage hike, this reform has driven up low wages without leading to substantial job losses. Indeed, the OECD report<sup>52</sup> suggests that the increase in 2019 'significantly boosted the wages of low-wage workers without causing substantial job losses'. In practice, the report reckons that the 2019 hike 'increased monthly earnings by on average 5.8% and reduced employment by 0.6% or about 7,000 jobs'. Other preliminary studies have reached similar conclusions.<sup>53</sup>

Under scrutiny now are the plans for 2025: in addition to the new increase expected at the start of the year, at the end of November the Government tasked the advisory commission on the minimum wage with drafting proposals for a mechanism or method guaranteeing a 60% amount of the average wage, as set out in the coalition agreement between the PSOE and SUMAR.

The challenge is to manage to sustain this level largely automatically,<sup>54</sup> particularly by enshrining it in the Workers' Statute, Spain's equivalent of France's Labor Code. At present, the uprating of the minimum wage is a governmental prerogative and normally happens at the start of each year based on the inflation forecasts and after consulting with the social partners.

### **2. Reduction in the statutory working time: a divisive reform fraught with parliamentary uncertainty.** **2.1 The extensive consultations with the social partners failed to produce a tripartite agreement.**

The reduction in the statutory working week, currently set at 40 hours, is a headline labor pledge set out in the coalition agreement signed in 2023 between the PSOE and SUMAR, when there has been no major reform of statutory working time in Spain for forty years.

Since the start of 2024, the Government has thus met with the trade unions and employers' organizations on several occasions to discuss the terms of the reform. Initially, in the absence of agreement between these two types of representative bodies, the Government worked on a draft tripartite agreement providing for a reduction in the statutory working time to 38.5 hours in 2024 and 37.5 hours (on average over the year) in 2025 with compensations for employers: reduced contributions for new hires stemming from this reduction and direct assistance for companies in certain sectors

<sup>51</sup> In Spain, the minimum wage, like most wages, is traditionally paid out in 14 monthly paychecks, i.e. every month of the year (12) plus two special paychecks in summer (June) and winter (December). The minimum wage was thus set at a gross monthly amount of €736 in 2018 and €1,134 in 2024, in 14 payments.

<sup>52</sup> [Reviving Broadly Shared Productivity Growth in Spain | OECD](#).

<sup>53</sup> [The impact of the increase in the Minimum Interprofessional Wage on inequality and employment - Iseak or SMI](#).

<sup>54</sup> Sustaining this level will particularly involve determining a formula for estimating this level of 60% of the average wage, an estimation which is by no means evident (for the wage structure survey is always conducted with a one-year delay, as is the labor cost survey). The experts need to give their opinion about this matter.

(hospitality, hairdressing, retail, cleaning and agriculture).

In early November, the employers' organizations roundly rejected this proposal, however, claiming that it would undermine collective bargaining, weaken the internal organization of businesses, threaten productivity given the structure of the Spanish economy, and was not compatible with Spain's specific territorial characteristics. The Minister of Labor and the Social Economy and her State Secretary strongly criticized a position considered out of touch with employees' aspirations and the times, along with the two largest trade union confederations, CCOO and UGT, which accused employers' organizations of deliberately delaying negotiations.

At the end of November, the Ministry of Labor announced that the negotiations were coming to an end and a forthcoming agreement with only the trade union organizations (UGT and Comisiones Obreras) to reduce working time to 37.5 hours in 2025, abandoning the 38.5-hour stage in 2024.

The main measures outlined in the agreement eventually concluded on December 20 between the Ministry of Labor and the trade unions are as follows:

- Reduction in working time to 37.5 hours (weekly average over the course of a year). The collective agreements will have to be brought into compliance with this new rule by December 31, 2025, whilst safeguarding any bonuses or other entitlements for employees;
- Shakeup of time-keeping, introduced five years ago and poorly implemented by employers, by making it completely digital and directly accessible to the labor inspectorate, to employees and to the social partners of the company and by applying tougher fines in cases where the employer fails to honor its obligations;
- Recognition of the right to disconnect, the terms of which will be defined through collective bargaining.

The compensations, intended to win round the employers' organizations, are no longer part of the final deal.

According to the Ministry of Labor, the measure would benefit 12 million employees. Although the debate about this measure was primarily political, some impact assessments were published in July 2024. For BBVA Research,<sup>55</sup> enactment of the reform without compensatory measures would imply a 1.5% increase in unit labor costs, which would have a negative impact of 0.7 points on GDP average annual growth over the two years following the reform and of 0.8 points on employment. For the think tank FEDEA,<sup>56</sup> a legislative reform is bound to imply an increase in wage costs per employee, ultimately affecting business competitiveness, GDP and employment. Even though no figure has been forthcoming, the impact would be particularly high in flagship sectors of the Spanish economy like tourism, hospitality, catering and retail and – in a cross-cutting manner – for SMEs who make up 99% of Spain's economic fabric. FEDEA thus recommended a sweeping agreement between social partners to reduce working time through collective bargaining. This should particularly align with sector-based productivity trends, and provide greater flexibility in terms of hourly distribution and improved working time-keeping systems, which are not well applied in Spain, to avoid unpaid overtime.

The impact of such a reform remains nevertheless uncertain, given its lack of clear definition at this stage and the uncertainty over measures potentially introduced during the parliamentary debates. Moreover, the Government has announced the establishment of a monitoring body with the social partners to assess the effects of the law and eventually progress toward an even greater reduction in working time.

## **2.2 The highly uncertain adoption of the text will depend on the positions of the regional parties.**

The provisions are expected to be transposed into a bill, to be examined by urgent procedure. Although no official timetable has been communicated – and the Ministry of Labor is not able to indicate any parliamentary calendar either – the Minister Yolanda Diaz has publicly mentioned summer 2025 as an adoption target.

That said, the subject of the measure's enactment, which is of particular concern to businesses, has been discussed recently in the press between the Ministries of Labor and the Economy. As such, Ms Díaz is advocating for an immediate roll-out, guaranteeing that, by December 31, 2025, all Spaniards will have seen their working time reduced, whereas her colleague Carlos Cuerpos (PSOE) is calling for a postponement until 2026 and transitional measures.

These cross-government debates clearly show that, despite the determination of the Minister, who systematically defends the measure in her speeches, pledging its application in 2025, the adoption of this highly symbolic reform is far from guaranteed.

The text may not be adopted solely with the votes of the national left-wing parties, for want of a majority, and the rejection

<sup>55</sup> España | Cómo reducir la jornada laboral | BBVA Research

<sup>56</sup> ¿Cómo reducir la Jornada Laboral?



of the employers' organizations makes the support of the People's Party (right-wing) unlikely. Its future thus depends on the positions of the nationalist and pro-Independence regional parties, not least the two right-wing parties Junts per Catalunya and Basque Nationalist Party (PNV). At this stage, the latter seems to be in favor, while the official position of the former is not known, but they are likely to have reservations. The leader of the UGT, Pepe Alvarez, has expressly asked the party to defend this measure and held direct talks with its leader, Carles Puigdemont, in Waterloo (Belgium) during the week of December 16. Yolanda Díaz, meanwhile, has met with social partners in the Basque Country and Catalonia to defend her agenda.

The question of support for businesses, particularly the smallest, and that of the timetable for the measure's implementation, should be decisive during the parliamentary debates.

### **3. Dismissal law: reform proposals which set forth political and agreement-based issues on a particularly sensitive subject.**

The coalition agreement between the PSOE and Sumar also made reference to dismissal law, regarding which the Minister made clear her intentions throughout 2024:

- On the one hand, legally clarify the definition of possible grounds for personal dismissal;
- On the other, update the compensation arrangements in cases of unlawful dismissal. This project has directly to do with the debates on the conformity of Spanish law to the provisions of the European Social Charter on the right to protection in cases of termination of employment. Indeed, the trade union UGT had referred a complaint to the Committee of Social Rights in which it alleged that the compensation mechanism in cases of dismissal without a valid reason (33 days' pay per year of seniority) does not allow victims to obtain adequate compensation to cover the damage suffered and have a dissuasive effect for employers, since the worker is only entitled to compensation automatically by law that sets a maximum ceiling.

The Minister has since committed to the provision of compensation arrangements that better factor in the damage suffered by employees, particularly based on their individual characteristics.

Furthermore, the debate on the subject of dismissal has recently reopened amid the Supreme Court's departure from precedent about personal dismissal, considering that a preliminary interview should have been held (in addition to the individual written notification, stipulated under Spanish law), pursuant to the direct application of the ILO's Termination of Employment Convention (C158).

Both these decisions could therefore bring Yolanda Díaz' proposals in this regard back to the table. However, although Sumar's socialist allies support the reduction in working time, they are less enthusiastic about the terms for dismissal, given the repercussions for the predictability of working relations and, as such, for Spain's attractiveness.

In any case, the shape that this potential reform might take is still hazy and does not seem to call into question the principles of the 2012 reform, which had significantly simplified and lowered the costs of dismissal in Spain.

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## **- Italy:**

### **1. Caregiving situations: what measures under labor law or what good sectoral or enterprise practices, identified for their interest, have been adopted to consider the pressures on employees with family caregiving commitments?**

In Italy, there are more than 7 million family carers in total, primarily women (65%) who often have a separate job or who have had no choice but to give it up (in 60% of cases) to be able to look after their close relatives full time.

The legislation on family carers is fragmentary and there is no framework law that specifically regulates this role. Virtuous examples do exist (such as the case of Emilia-Romagna and more recently Lazio) where regional bylaws have been adopted in this respect, but there is still no legislative standard applicable nationwide.

Under the regional bylaws, the Region encourages agreements with employers' associations, in a bid to guarantee more flexible hours to help balance working life with caregiving needs. This also includes promoting the development of well-being services within companies or at inter-company level as well as encouraging remote working.

Although there are currently no specific laws in Italy – despite plenty of motions submitted to Parliament – some tools do exist to support carers.

- a) **Act 104/1992:** this is fundamental for the support of people with disabilities and also includes provisions for family members who care for the latter. It particularly makes provision for 3 days of paid leave for employees caring for severely disabled relatives. Anyone taking care of an ill person may also choose to work at the nearest workplace to their home.

In detail, under Act 104, a worker who cares for a first- or second-degree family member (or third-degree in specific situations) is entitled to 3 days of leave per month, which can also be used on a continuous basis.

The daily permitted leave provided for by Act 104 is always paid and covered by a notional contribution useful for retirement.

Since August 13, 2022, without prejudice to the overall 3-day limit for caring for the same severely disabled relative, the right may be recognized, by request, for several people who may benefit therefrom in alternation.

If the worker has to take care of several severely disabled people, they may obtain this right for each of the people they care for, as long as the person they are caring for is either their spouse or a first-degree or second-degree relative (in specific situations).

As regards caring for severely disabled children, an employed mother or employed father, even an adoptive or foster parent, is entitled to 3 days' leave per month if the disabled person is not hospitalized full-time in specialist institutions. Workers with severely disabled children are also given priority in terms of employers accepting smart working requests.

The monthly leave may be divided into hourly leave.

Monthly leave, whether taken by the hour or day, is always paid and covered by a notional contribution useful for retirement.

Leave is granted to the employed parent even when the other parent does not work or works from home.

In some exceptional cases, workers who ask to work part-time to take care of disabled family members are given priority in terms of changing their full-time employment contract into a part-time one. More specifically, the cases potentially conferring entitlement to such a change following a request to work part-time are as follows: the spouse, children or parents of the worker suffering from cancer or a serious degenerative chronic condition; the severely disabled spouse who is totally and permanently unfit for work and requires round-the-clock assistance as they are unable to perform essential everyday activities; the disabled son or under 13 years of age, living under the same roof.

In addition, under Act 104, family members of the disabled person, as well as the disabled person themselves, are given priority in terms of choosing their workplace; they may also refuse, irrespective of the existence of valid reasons on the part of the company, to leave their workplace, to work nights, on Sundays or on public holidays. Termination of their employment is dependent on serious misconduct.

- b) **Paid special leave:** introduced by legislative decree 151/2001 and subsequently amended, this leave entitles workers to take up to two years off work to care for a severely disabled family member, whilst retaining their job and receiving an indemnity.

The following workers are eligible:

- the spouse or civil partner living with the severely disabled person;
- the father or mother, including adoptive, in cases where the spouse of the severely disabled person is absent or has died or suffers from debilitating conditions;
- one of the children living with the severely disabled person, in cases where the father or mother, including adoptive, is absent or has died or suffers from debilitating conditions;
- one of the brothers or sisters living with the severely disabled person, in cases where the children living with the disabled person are absent, have died or suffer from debilitating conditions;
- one of the parents or relatives up to the third degree living with the severely disabled person, in cases where other family members of the disabled person – able to take care of the latter – are absent, have died or suffer from debilitating conditions.

In cases where the disabled person is hospitalized full-time in specialist institutions, special leave shall only be

granted if the presence of a family member is required by the host health facility.

Workers are entitled to take the leave within 30 days of requesting it.

Special leave to take care of severely disabled people may be used on a continuous basis or in separate periods.

While on leave, workers may not perform any kind of job.

Workers are entitled to an indemnity corresponding to their last wage.

The period of special leave is covered up to a certain amount by notional contributions, useful for retirement.

**Employed parents, including adoptive or foster parents, with severely disabled children may take time off work thanks to special authorizations:**

- **Severely disabled children up to 3 years old: daily or hourly authorizations for parents**

Parents of severely disabled children under 3 years of age may take 2 hours of leave per day if they work for at least 6 hours, or 1 hour if they do less than 6 hours' work.

Hourly leave per day may only be requested if the child is not hospitalized full-time in specialist institutions.

If both parents are employees, daily leave may be taken in alternation by the mother or father.

Employees are entitled to an indemnity equivalent to 100% of their wage.

Rest periods are covered by notional contributions up to a certain amount and may be supplemented via the buyback of contributions or via voluntary payments.

- **Severely disabled children up to 12 years old: extending parental leave**

An employed mother or employed father of a severely disabled child is entitled to extend their parental leave, until the child reaches 12 years of age, if the latter is not hospitalized full-time in specialist institutions, unless the parent's presence is required by the host health facility.

Extended parental leave may begin once the ordinary parental leave has come to an end and be taken by parents, on a continuous basis or in separate periods, over a maximum period of 3 years (including the periods of ordinary parental leave).

Extended parental leave may be taken instead of hourly leave for severely disabled children under 3 years old.

Throughout this leave, workers are entitled to a daily indemnity equal to 30% of their wage, unless the collective agreement provides for a higher indemnity.

Periods of extended parental leave are also covered by a notional contribution useful for pension entitlements and amounts.

c) **The social APE (*Anticipo Pensionistico*) is the early retirement scheme which supports workers until they reach retirement age (67 years old).** Early retirement may be taken by carers who, at the time of the request, have been taking care of a severely disabled relative for at least six months.

Eligible beneficiaries of the social APE indemnity are employees or self-employed workers who, at the time of the request, have, for at least six months, been caring for their spouse or first-degree relative with a severe disability (in the meaning of Article 3, Paragraph 3, of Act No. 104 of February 5, 1992), or a second-degree relative living with the disabled person if the parents or spouse of the severely disabled person are at least 70 years old or personally suffer from debilitating conditions or have died or are absent, and if they have paid social security contributions for at least 30 years.

The social APE is paid monthly for the 12 months of the year, until the age required for obtaining the old-age pension, or until the achievement of an early direct pension or obtained in advance of the old-age pension age.



If registered with a single management body, the indemnity is equal to the amount of the monthly pension payment calculated when accessing the benefit (if it is less than €1,500) or equal to €1,500 (if the pension is equal to or more than this amount). The amount of the allowance is neither revalued nor included in the minimum calculation.

In the case of a beneficiary with contributions paid or credited for whatever reason in more than one organization, including those concerned by the social APE, the monthly pension payment is calculated pro rata for each organization relative to the respective affiliation periods, according to each scheme's calculation rules and based on the respective reference wages.

To obtain the allowance, eligible beneficiaries meeting the statutory conditions must, when making the request, fulfil the following criteria:

- be aged at least 63 years and 5 months;
- have at least 30 years of seniority.

**2. Wage mobility over the course of a career: what measures under labor law or what good sectoral or enterprise practices (stemming from agreements between sectoral or enterprise social partners), identified for their interest, have been adopted to promote upward wage mobility over the course of a career?**

In this framework, only two measures merit a mention, and even then they are not entirely relevant to the question asked:

- As highlighted among the measures provided for under Act 104, all periods of leave taken on the grounds of caring for a vulnerable and/or dependent relative are paid or subject to a paid indemnity, and benefit from 'notional' social contributions so as to retain retirement benefits;
- Regional bylaws entitle carers who so wish to attend training in the management and recognition of skills acquired during care activities, to promote subsequent career opportunities (course to become a qualified elderly care assistant).

**3. Geographic mobility to promote a return to employment: what measures have been adopted by the employment services or by local authorities supporting jobseekers in their job-hunting, to facilitate their geographic mobility in cases where the jobseeker's home is remote from the hiring company?**

Pursuant to Act 104, for the parent of a severely disabled person and for anyone caring for a disabled relative up to the second degree (or third degree in specific situations), the nearest workplace to the person requiring care may be chosen. The company accepts this entitlement to the extent possible.

Moreover, as already mentioned, the family members of a disabled person may also refuse a geographic transfer, irrespective of the existence of valid reasons on the part of the company.

**4. Limiting the use of insecure work contracts: what measures have been adopted to limit the use of insecure work contracts or allow easier transition between insecure and stable work contracts?**

This advisor did not identify any relevant schemes in this regard, specifically for workers who are also carers.

However, as previously mentioned, in exceptional cases, workers who request part-time arrangements to take care of disabled family members are given priority in terms of changing their full-time employment contract to a part-time one.

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**- Denmark:**

The Danish labor market is strongly regulated by the **social partners rather than by the law**: employers and workers adopt voluntary agreements regarding wages and working conditions. **This means that there are very few statutory instruments governing labor law** in Danish legislation: there is no statutory minimum wage in Denmark for example, or statutory working time. Most of the good practices cited below have therefore been adopted **at sectoral or enterprise level**.

- **Caregiving situations: what measures under labor law or what good sectoral or enterprise practices, identified for their interest, have been adopted to consider the pressures on employees with family caregiving commitments?**

On this subject, there does not seem to be any noteworthy scheme in Denmark, where **the family plays a fairly limited role in terms of social protection (caring for the elderly, children or the sick) – unlike the municipal public**

services, which play a much bigger role than in France when it comes to care and upbringing responsibilities.

**New rules bearing on carer's leave were adopted in June 2022** (as a result of a European Directive), under which employees are entitled to **five working days of carer's leave per calendar year**. Said leave may be taken to care for or assist one's own children, parents, partner or another person living at the same address as the employee, where there is **a significant need owing to a serious health problem**. This might entail, for example, assisting a parent suffering from dementia or other serious illness like cancer. It might also involve accompanying a parent suffering from Alzheimer's disease or other serious physical or mental illness to a blood test or physician's or dentist's appointment. Carer's leave may be taken continuously over a single period or as separate days. Note that any unused days by the end of the calendar year are lost. Companies may require employees to **medically justify the need for significant care or assistance** owing to a serious health condition (treatment appointment for example). In addition, **employees are not paid wages** by their company while on leave.

The most recent industrial collective agreements concluded in early February make provision for new rights for employees, not least to help them better reconcile their working and family commitments. These provisions particularly include the **right to accompany relatives – such as parents – to medical appointments and to interviews with the Danish authorities (up to two days/year and up to five days in cases of serious illness)**. Note that these days of leave are not paid but covered by **a dedicated account that the employee can use ('fritvalgskonto', which has been increased, incidentally)**. The new agreements also stipulate an additional day's leave to care for sick children (up to 3 days) and, for grandparents, leave to look after grandchildren (2 days/year).

- **Wage mobility over the course of a career: what measures under labor law or what good sectoral or enterprise practices (stemming from agreements between sectoral or enterprise social partners), identified for their interest, have been adopted to promote upward wage mobility over the course of a career?**

It is important to start by pointing out that Danish employees are among those in Europe with **the highest wages**, but that comes with a very high level of compulsory levies, like in France (although these are well accepted by the Danish population); the main difference between the two countries lies in the very low proportion of social contributions in the total amount of compulsory levies in Denmark.

Upward wage mobility is encouraged in Denmark through **dynamic and effective social dialogue** at sectoral and enterprise level alike. There is no legislation governing wage developments since there is no statutory minimum wage; traditionally, collective agreements have been concluded **at national level for a given sector** and each collective agreement **specifies the duration** (typically 2 to 4 years) and **scope of the agreements**. That said, in recent years, there has been a tendency to **negotiate agreements at local level** (it is common for wages to be **negotiated within companies even**) that supplement the general agreements. For the record, 80% of workers are covered by collective bargaining in Denmark, and the trade union density rate is high, since more than 65% of Danish workers are members of a trade union.

Dialogue between employees and employers is generally good, based on trust, and disputes are rare. What's more, **limited echelons in the organizational hierarchy in Denmark** mean that direct communication and negotiations are easier. In many businesses, **the trade union delegates** represent their trade union at the workplace and workers' interests with respect to the management. In addition, most trade unions offer their members **advice for negotiating an increase in wages** with their employer. The trade union *Djøl*, which represents students and workers in the law and social science sectors, has even developed a wage calculator so that an employee can check what their wage level should be, based on their profile and business sector.

On a final note, careers are often very long in Denmark, since the population typically begins working young (around 13-14 years of age) and retires later than elsewhere. As such, **a Dane's working life lasts 40 years on average**, and there are **lots of seniors still active on the labor market**. As an incentive for them to keep working, **employers are very adaptable**, above all via adjustments in terms of working hours, equipment and tasks, but this can also involve wage increases. Working while drawing a pension is also encouraged.

- **Geographic mobility to promote a return to employment: what measures have been adopted by the employment services or by local authorities supporting jobseekers in their job-hunting, to facilitate their geographic mobility in cases where the jobseeker's home is remote from the hiring company?**

In Denmark, **the municipalities** are responsible for supporting jobseekers in their job-hunting, particularly via their Jobcenters. However, this system is shortly due a major overhaul since, at the start of February, the Government unveiled a **reform aimed at abolishing these agencies and giving more freedom to municipalities** in their support duties, the aim being to save DKK 3 billion by 2030 (approximately €400 million).

The Danish public employment service has a **broad vision of jobseekers' potential geographic mobility**. The total daily commuting time can be **up to three hours on public transport**. Jobseekers must be available and accept vacancies offered within a **90-minute radius by public transport**. There are no restrictions regarding a medium or high skills level for jobseekers. If a jobseeker turns down a vacancy requiring significant geographic mobility but within the defined perimeter, **a Jobcenter may fine them**. This fine is adjusted, however, according to the jobseeker's family and personal circumstances (e.g. an unemployed person with dependent children will not be fined as much as a single jobseeker – or at all).

Note that **some municipalities** may grant jobseekers a **transport allowance** if they are expected to travel to a job interview that is located further away than a specified journey time from their home (90-minute car journey for example). Transport allowances may also be granted when a jobseeker is attending an internship or a specific program aimed at joining the job market.

Also note that since Denmark is one of the European countries that most uses **digital tools and new technologies at the workplace and at home**, as well as **remote working**, employees and jobseekers do not always have to travel to work or to interviews.

- **Limiting the use of insecure work contracts: what measures have been adopted to limit the use of insecure work contracts or allow easier transition between insecure and stable work contracts?**

To our knowledge, there are no specific measures, on a subject which does not typically come under the State's or Government's remit, but rather, is a matter for the **social partners and businesses**.

**Working conditions in Denmark are very favorable overall** (high wages, flexible hours, a healthy work-life balance, long, well-paid parental leave, skills development and so on) and **uptake of short, insecure work contracts remains low**. Indeed, the **European Job Quality Index (JQI)** ranks Denmark in first place for this dimension.

**Denmark's flexicurity model** seems to be decisive in explaining this success, as it combines flexible job mobility (1 in 4 Danes change jobs every year) with generous unemployment benefits. The principle is therefore that there is **low employment protection but high protection for people**. And once again, **the representation and expression of collective interests, which are robust in Denmark**, enable workers to have predictable and suitable employment contracts.

Note that a **new law on work contracts entered into force on July 1, 2023**. Contracts must now be drawn up for **all employees working more than 3 hours a week on average** (versus more than 8 hours before) over a reference period of 4 consecutive weeks. The new law also applies to all employees for whom a **guaranteed quality of paid work is not determined in advance**. Previously, employers were required to disclose 'all key terms' of a working relationship, including ten specific points. **This list of ten points has been lengthened to 15 points**, which include a description of remote working, overtime and team changes, training, how much paid leave an employee may take, pension contributions, social security and the trial period among other details. With this new law, the employee can also receive **compensation if the rules are not followed**, of up to 13 weeks' wages.

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#### - **Sweden:**

1. **Caregiving situations: what measures under labor law or what good sectoral or enterprise practices, identified for their interest, have been adopted to consider the pressures on employees with family caregiving commitments?**

As can be seen below, Swedish labor law makes no specific provision for adapting the employment of family carers to their specific circumstances, except when the death of the person under care is imminent. Municipal schemes do exist, in the form of social assistance or respite measures for carers.

On the whole, the question of informal carers retaining their job does not seem to have been specifically taken up by the social partners.

The question of family carers was identified by the authorities back in 2016, following a report by the National Competence Center for Relatives (*Nationellt kompetenscentrum för anhöriga/NKA*), a so-called 'FoU-enhet'.



association,<sup>57</sup> on the question of carers retaining a job.<sup>58</sup>

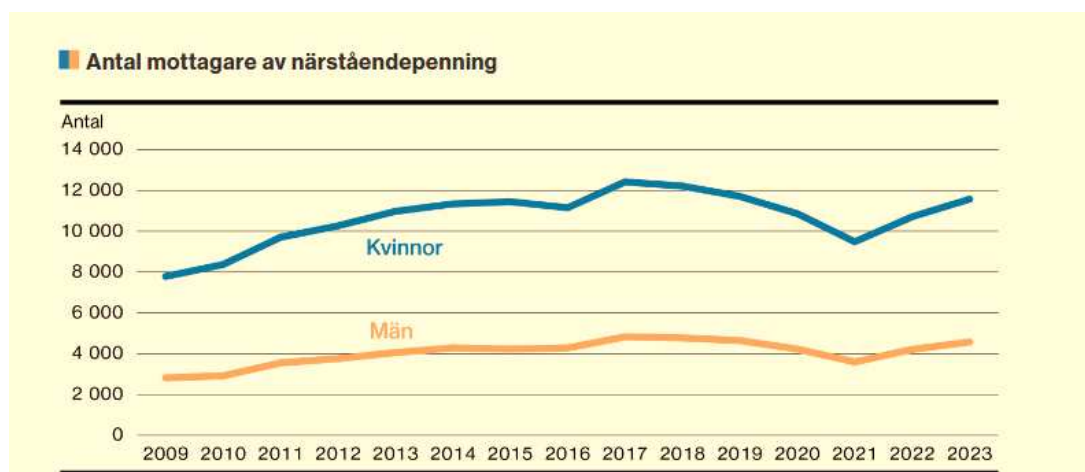
According to this report, 1.3 million Swedes, i.e. about 1 in 5 adults in Sweden, were in a caregiving situation. The solutions put forward at the time were **wider roll-out of flexible working hours (*flextid*) and dialogue with the employer and colleagues about the informal carer's situation.**

The association puts on its own training programs for employers on the subject of informal carers.<sup>59</sup>

In 2020, a national carers' strategy was launched,<sup>60</sup> including various measures aimed at protecting the job situation of carers:

- Introduction of a benefit, ***närståendepenning***, intended to compensate a relative caring for a severely ill person with a life-threatening condition; note that this benefit cannot apply in the event of a chronic condition that is ultimately life-limiting. The informal carer can receive 80% of their usual wage, for up to 100 days, under this scheme;<sup>61</sup>
- Informal carer's leave (*ledighet för närståendevård*) gives rise to availability throughout the payment of the informal carer's benefit;<sup>62</sup>

**Figure 1. Number of beneficiaries of the informal carer's benefit, in Sweden, 2009-2023**



Source: Försäkringskassan

In blue: women, in orange: men

Analysis: Between 2008 and 2017, the number of beneficiaries rose by 84%, but subsequently fell by 24% between 2017 and 2021. In 2023, the number of beneficiaries was 16,100, i.e. 3,100 more people than in 2021.

**Table 1. Amount of informal carer's benefits, in 2023, by age, number of beneficiaries and duration**

<sup>57</sup>Forskning och utveckling, research and development. This term refers to non-governmental organizations which develop expertise on a particular subject with a view to helping municipalities and regions to lead public policies.

<sup>58</sup>[https://anoriga.se/globalassets/media/dokument/publicerat/kunskapsoversikter/anhorigomsorg\\_sand\\_uppdatt.pdf](https://anoriga.se/globalassets/media/dokument/publicerat/kunskapsoversikter/anhorigomsorg_sand_uppdatt.pdf)

<sup>59</sup>[https://anoriga.se/globalassets/media/dokument/publicerat/kunskapsoversikter/anhorigomsorg\\_sand\\_uppdatt.pdf](https://anoriga.se/globalassets/media/dokument/publicerat/kunskapsoversikter/anhorigomsorg_sand_uppdatt.pdf)

<sup>60</sup><https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/globalassets/sharepoint-dokument/artikelkatalog/ovrigt/2020-11-7045.pdf>

<sup>61</sup><https://www.forsakringskassan.se/privatperson/sjuk/anstalld/narstaendepenning-for-anstallda>

<sup>62</sup> 47 kap. SFB

## ■ Närstående penning 2023

Ålder	Antal mottagare		Antal dagar i medeltal		Medelbelopp, kronor under året	
	Kvinnor	Män	Kvinnor	Män	Kvinnor	Män
-24	130	75	8	7	8 228	7 334
25-29	366	164	8	9	9 624	10 896
30-34	661	359	8	9	9 142	11 533
35-39	867	425	8	8	9 898	10 957
40-44	1 209	520	9	9	10 416	12 076
45-49	1 609	672	9	8	10 795	11 154
50-54	2 206	835	8	9	10 642	11 795
55-59	2 480	863	9	9	11 474	12 354
60-	2 041	658	10	12	12 838	15 148
<b>Samtliga</b>	<b>11 569</b>	<b>4 571</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11 005</b>	<b>12 117</b>

Source: Försäkringskassan

Columns from left: age, number of female beneficiaries, male beneficiaries, number of average days of benefit payment, average amount in Swedish krona

Analysis: Out of a total SEK 182 million in 2023 (€16.63m), 70% of the benefit was paid out to women and 30% to men.

- Some municipalities had introduced the possibility of being paid for the time spent supporting an elderly and/or sick relative (*anhöriganställning*); however, many of them, including Stockholm,<sup>63</sup> halted the scheme after widespread cases of home help fraud;<sup>64</sup> Stockholm cited the lack of oversight regarding working conditions, which can lead to genuine situations of misuse.
- Many municipalities do have social assistance in place for informal carers, the amount of which varies according to the number of hours spent caring for the person in need. Since 2009, the municipalities have been responsible for assisting informal carers (*anhörigstöd*),<sup>65</sup> but the aforementioned NKA report demonstrates that this support is developed around the situation of elderly, retired spouses and does not take proper account of employed family carers, whose upward wage mobility and economic stability are often impeded by their caregiving circumstances.<sup>66</sup>

**Table 2. Amount of monthly aid for informal carers, municipality of Stockholm**

Bidrag per månad			
Grupp	1/12 av andel av prisbasbelopp	Bidrag per månad	Insatser
1	30 %	1 470 kronor	Hjälp dagligen, 1-2 tillfällen, med omvårdnad och tillsyn.
2	60 %	2 940 kronor	Hjälp flera gånger om dagen, minst tre tillfällen, med omvårdnad och tillsyn.
3	90 %	4 410 kronor	Hjälp flera gånger om dagen med omvårdnad och tillsyn även under nattetid.
4	120 %	5 880 kronor	Hjälp med omvårdnad och tillsyn kontinuerligt alla tider på dygnet.
Uppdaterad 2023-07-20			

Source: Stockholm stad

Right-hand column, from top: daily help, once or twice a day, with care and supervision; daily help, at least three times

<sup>63</sup> <https://ka.se/2015/06/03/anhoriganstallda-stoppas-i-stockholm/>

<sup>64</sup> <https://ka.se/2021/09/08/66-hemtjanstforetag-fast-for-fusk/>

<sup>65</sup> 5 kap. 10 § socialtjänstlagen (2001:453), SoL

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.



*a day; daily help several times a day, including at night; round-the-clock help.*

- The municipalities also organize support and respite measures for carers, usually in the form of discussion groups or appointments with a care co-ordinator or psychologist.<sup>67</sup>

In its highly commended 2023 report, '*Livspusslet som inte går ihop*' (The life puzzle that does not fit together), the Swedish Gender Equality Agency (*Jämställdhetsmyndigheten*) talked about caregiving situations (*obetalda omsorgen till äldre och andra närstående*) from a gender perspective.<sup>68</sup> The report notes that although caregiving situations tend to be shared between men and women, the involvement of women increases when the caregiving needs increase. Assistance given to elderly or sick relatives varies depending on the carer's gender: women provide more day-to-day support and ensure the material conditions of the care work, while men help out in more practical ways, looking after the home. Compared to men of the same age, as women get older, the support they provide takes up an increasing share of their free time. As a result, these burdensome, unpaid caregiving situations take more of a toll on women than men, and women can find it harder to hold down a steady job, forcing them to opt for part-time employment and to sacrifice a healthy life balance.

The report's authors recommended creating a new social benefit to address caregiving situations, not least those involving an adult with a chronic condition or disability, but this has not led to a change in the applicable regulatory and legislative provisions.

In 2024, a report submitted to the Minister for the Elderly and Social Security, Anna Tenje,<sup>69</sup> recommended various measures, such as setting up an information platform for informal carers, a telephone helpline and a role of a 'contact person' (*kontaktperson*) responsible for co-ordinating the various people helping the person under care (so a similar role to that of a MAIA co-ordinator in France). It was also recommended that municipalities be earmarked an additional SEK 300 million (€27.3m) to implement support measures for carers. The regulatory updates associated with these proposals are expected to come into force on January 1, 2026.<sup>70</sup>

## **2. Wage mobility over the course of a career: what measures under labor law or what good sectoral or enterprise practices (stemming from agreements between sectoral or enterprise social partners), identified for their interest, have been adopted to promote upward wage mobility over the course of a career?**

In Sweden, 88% of all employees are covered by a collective agreement (*kollektivavtal*), which determines working conditions and particularly the terms for the uprating of wages.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, in 2023, 58% of private-sector employees and 75% of public-sector employees had joined a trade union. Indeed, depending on the collective agreement, workers' unions can be tasked with renegotiating employees' wages at enterprise or sectoral level,<sup>72</sup> thanks to the cost of living indicator (*märket*), which is subject to a sector-level agreement and used as a reference point during wage negotiations.<sup>73</sup> In addition, the trade unions ask their members to update their wage developments at regular intervals, to gain as accurate a picture as possible of the wages in a given sector.

At the individual level, collective agreements often include a clause about '*lönesamtal*', annual reviews, bearing solely on wage uprating (an employee's performance review regarding the past year is called *utvecklingssamtal*). During the *lönesamtal*, the employee is entitled to ask for an annual wage review (*årlig lönerevision*) and to negotiate with their employer along those lines.

At the same time, the question of skills supply and transferability from one occupational sector to another (*kompetensförsörjning*) is covered by a national strategy on the part of *Tillväxtverket*, the Agency for Economic and Regional Growth,<sup>74</sup> in cooperation with the Ministry of Education (*Utbildningsdepartementet*), the Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*) and the association of municipalities and regions (SKR).<sup>75</sup> Employers' organizations like *Svenskt Näringsliv* are also actively involved in this matter.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>67</sup> <https://funktionsnedsattning.stockholm/olika-former-av-insatser/stod-och-hjalpmedel/stod-till-anhoriga/>

<sup>68</sup> <https://jamstalldetsmyndigheten.se/media/3s4naedu/raQport.2023-17.pdf>

<sup>69</sup> [https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/4e4ec43884144936bd53a3707266aa80/sou\\_2024\\_60\\_pdf-a\\_webb.pdf](https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/4e4ec43884144936bd53a3707266aa80/sou_2024_60_pdf-a_webb.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2024/08/utredningen-ett-starkt-stod-till-anhoriga-har-lamnat-sitt-betankande/>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.mi.se/nyheter/2024/nastan-alla-stora-foretag-har-kollektivavtal/>

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.kommunal.se/sa-satts-lonerna-medlemmarna-i-kommunal#>

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.unionen.se/fragor-och-svar-om-forhandlingarna>

<sup>74</sup> <https://tillvaxtverket.se/tillvaxtverket/guiderochverktyg/guiderochverktyg/kompetensforsorjningfornyborjare.3955.html>

<sup>75</sup> <https://skr.se/skr/arbetsgivarekollektivavtal/personalochkompetensforsorjning.170.html>

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.svensktnaringsliv.se/sakomraden/utbildning/>

### 3. Geographic mobility to promote a return to employment: what measures have been adopted by the employment services or by local authorities supporting jobseekers in their job-hunting, to facilitate their geographic mobility in cases where the jobseeker's home is remote from the hiring company?

The Swedish Government has been discussing the opportunity for introducing stronger incentives to encourage jobseekers to engage in geographic mobility since 2022-2023.<sup>77</sup>

In 2022, *Arbetsförmedlingen*, the Public Employment Agency, launched a plan to attract workers to municipalities in northern Sweden,<sup>78</sup> in light of the development of the Northvolt site in Skellefteå and H2 Green Steel plant in Boden. The regions of Norrbotten and Västerbotten have been grappling with labor shortages for years. The economic, demographic and social decline plaguing northern Sweden has particularly been illustrated by the acclaimed graphic novel *Nya Norrland*, by Mats Jonsson, in which the author returns to the town where he grew up and compares its living conditions to those of his gentrified suburb south of Stockholm.<sup>79</sup>

According to the Agency for Economic and Regional Growth *Tillväxtverket*, around 40,000 jobs were due to be created through the green transition in northern Sweden: 17,000 in industry and 23,000 indirect jobs.<sup>80</sup> The municipality of Skellefteå had even launched a major local marketing campaign, in a high-profile clip (described as '*kaxig*', cocky) where the town asked the other towns to apologize for stealing their workers and cultural and sports facilities owing to its economic growth and appeal.<sup>81</sup>

However, Northvolt filed for bankruptcy in November 2024 in the United States, unleashing a spate of redundancies in northern Sweden; in all, 800 employees had to leave the company,<sup>82</sup> including a number of non-European workers whose residency permit thus came under threat.<sup>83</sup> Only a hundred or so seem to have been able to find new jobs in other companies in the region and are learning Swedish.<sup>84</sup>

The Council for Skills Transformation and Matching (*Kansli för Omvändning och Matchning*) of *Arbetsförmedlingen* has not abandoned its ambitions to attract workers to northern Sweden for all that. It organizes employment forums at regular intervals on the theme '*Jobb i norr*' in Sweden's southernmost county, Skåne.<sup>85</sup> What's more, European workers with no family ties in another Sweden region are a target of interest for *Arbetsförmedlingen*.<sup>86</sup>

In the summer of 2023, the Council launched a program based on an agreement with the municipalities of Skellefteå, Boden, Luleå and Kiruna, called '*Provjobba och provbo i norr*'. This enabled applicants to try out a summer job in one of these towns, with accommodation and travel expenses covered. But the program was not a success, since only forty or so jobseekers applied, a mere three of whom stayed on at the end of the summer period.<sup>87</sup>

For the program leaders and municipalities, various factors can be cited to explain this: the recruitment procedures of the employers in the towns in question, unaccustomed to hiring at national level, took a long time; family and friends are now more important to jobseekers who do not interact daily with their work colleagues;<sup>88</sup> and Swedes have a dim view of the north, believing it to be an area 'invaded by mosquitoes, snow and darkness'.<sup>89</sup>

### 4. Annex: Focus on the stereotypical images of northern Sweden

Countless Swedish films, TV series and novels are based in northern Sweden, and paint a particular picture of local life which often comes across in a negative light. Examples include the film *Jägarna* (The Hunters), by the well-known director Kjell Sundvall, a thriller in which a police officer working in Stockholm returns to his home town of Älvsbyn and

<sup>77</sup> <https://arbetet.se/2023/04/17/politisk-majoritet-for-hardare-krav-flytta-dit-jobben-finns/>

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.aftonbladet.se/minekonomi/a/onpQjV/arbetsformedlingen-ska-locka-personal-norrut>

<sup>79</sup> <https://ordfrontforlag.se/bocker/nya-norrland/>

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.aftonbladet.se/minekonomi/a/onpQjV/arbetsformedlingen-ska-locka-personal-norrut>

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.resume.se/marknadsforing/kampanj/skelleftea-kommun-sager-forlat-till-andra-stader-i-ny-kaxig-kampanj/>

<sup>82</sup> <https://arbetet.se/2024/10/22/over-800-far-qa-fran-northvolt-i-skelleftea/>

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.di.se/nyheter/uppsagda-northvoltarbetare-hotas-av-utvisning/>

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.dn.se/ekonomi/northvoltuppsagda-fick-jobb-och-studier-i-svenska/>

<sup>85</sup> <https://akademikern.se/uppdrag-folkforflyttning-norrut/>

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> <https://arbetet.se/2023/11/10/bara-tre-stannade-kvar-i-varden-i-norrland-trots-kommunernas-bonusar/>

<sup>88</sup> <https://arbetet.se/2023/11/10/bara-tre-stannade-kvar-i-varden-i-norrland-trots-kommunernas-bonusar/>

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.dagenssamhalle.se/chef-och-arbetsgivare/kompetensforsorjning/unika-af-kansliet-ska-locka-arbetslosa-norrut-trots-myg-g-och-morker/>



encounters a criminal, inward-looking society;<sup>90</sup> *Händelser vid vattnen* (Blackwater), a novel by former member of the Swedish Academy Kerstin Ekman, about the double murder of Dutch tourists near a remote commune in Norrland,<sup>91</sup> which was later adapted into a TV series; *Stöld* (Stolen), by Ann-Helén Laestadius, which was named Book of the Year in 2021 and deals with the discrimination and violence endured by Sami reindeer farmers;<sup>92</sup> and *Stallo*, by Stefan Spjut, a fantasy novel translated into a dozen languages, which delves into the mysterious nature of Norrland and the terrifying creatures that lurk there.<sup>93</sup>

*Arbetsförmedlingen* is supported in its efforts by the initiative *Omställningsfonden*, a 'transition fund' financed and coordinated by the association of municipalities and regions, *Sveriges kommuner och regioner* (SKR), Sobona, an employers' organization for municipally owned enterprises, and the municipal employee trade unions.<sup>94</sup> In March 2025, SKR unveiled a plan worth SEK 46 million (€4.1 million) to address the labor shortages in the healthcare, social care and care home sector in Norrbotten and Västerbotten, particularly the towns of Skellefteå, Boden, Luleå and Piteå.<sup>95</sup>

What's more, several municipalities, including Pajala and Arjeplog, as well as Region Norrbotten, offer financial assistance to help teachers, healthcare professionals and social workers to move and settle.<sup>96</sup>

On March 6, 2025, the Government announced it was tasking *Arbetsförmedlingen* with finding additional levers to encourage jobseekers to engage in geographic mobility. Its remit will shortly be adjusted accordingly by the Ministry of Labor, *Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet*.<sup>97</sup>

**Limiting the use of insecure work contracts:** what measures have been adopted to limit the use of insecure work contracts or allow easier transition between insecure and stable work contracts?

Under the Employment Protection Act (*lag (1982 :80) om anställningsskydd*), a job is, out of principle, *tills vidare*, i.e. open-ended.<sup>98</sup> Fixed-term positions (*tidsbegränsad anställning*) are therefore exceptions to the general rule and the terms governing their use are usually set forth in collective agreements.

When a company is not covered by a collective agreement, the legislative provisions bearing on fixed-term contracts shall apply. These stipulate that fixed-term positions are possible in the following cases:

- A trial period, *provanställning* (usually six months before switching to an open-ended contract);
- To cover parental or sick leave, *särskild visstidsanställning*;
- A job corresponding to a temporary requirement (*vikariat*);<sup>99</sup>
- A seasonal job (*säsongsarbete*).

Hourly employment (*timanställning*) or employment solely for a specific project (*projektanställning*) are not allowed under the applicable regulations and the workers in question must be employed as part of a *visstidsanställning*. However, there are no rules in labor law determining the minimum duration of a job.

In most companies covered by a collective agreement, a fixed-term position automatically switches to open-ended employment after 24 months of continuous employment over a five-year period or after 36 months of employment. In the absence of any collective agreement, the provisions of the Employment Protection Act shall apply, enabling the fixed-term contract to become an open-ended contract at the end of a trial period of more than 12 continuous months over a five-year period, or of 12 months in total over a period where short jobs have been performed in succession less than six months apart.<sup>100</sup> If three or more short jobs have been held in succession over the same month, the time between the periods of employment is also counted.

With regard to *vikariat*, these switch to open-ended employment after two continuous years completed over a five-year

<sup>90</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Hunters\\_\(1996\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hunters_(1996_film))

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.albertbonniersforlag.se/bocker/160052/handelser-vid-vatten/>

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/ann-helen-laestadius-vinterprat-2024>

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/bokrecensioner/stefan-spjut-stallo/>

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.omstallningsfonden.se/privatperson/jobba-i-norr/>

<sup>95</sup> <https://skr.se/skr/tjanster/pressrum/nyheter/nyhetsarkiv/pilotprojektskastarkavalfardenskompetensforsorjning.87470.html>

<sup>96</sup> <https://arbetet.se/2023/04/18/100-000-i-bonus-sa-ska-norrandskommuner-locka-arbetskraft/>

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/e88249e6e79b48c1b1a8010268bec4d4/250306-presentationsbilder-for-presstraff-om-arbetsmarknadslaget-den-6-mars.pdf>

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-198280-om-anstallningsskydd-sfs-1982-80/>

<sup>99</sup> A 'vikariat' is legally considered to be a type of 'visstidsanställning'.

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.unionen.se/rad-och-stod/anstallningsformer>



period.

#### 5. Annex: Focus on the atypical employment of platform workers

At the end of a fixed-term contract, employees can benefit from transition support (*omställningsstöd*) in the same way as an employee who is laid off.<sup>101</sup>

Swedish trade unions and employer's organizations have followed the debates about the directive on platform workers (*gigarbetare*) closely<sup>102</sup> and mostly supported the view that such workers should be covered by collective agreements.<sup>103</sup> In the spring of 2024, Sweden's Government praised the compromise reached at European level.<sup>104</sup> This is a crucial issue for the syndicalist newspaper *Arbetaren*, which has repeatedly reported about transport companies<sup>105</sup> and their multiple subcontractors<sup>106</sup> working 'in slave-like conditions'. At the same time, a series of feature-length documentaries, such as the high-profile '*En av dem*' (One of them) by Qaisar Mahmood, where the author, a figure on the cultural scene, is hired by Foodora, sparked a debate in Swedish society about the working conditions of delivery drivers.

The European directive on platform work is expected to come into force in Sweden in 2026.

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### - United Kingdom:

#### Carers in England

##### Definition:

The Department of Health and Social Care describes an **unpaid carer** as follows: '... someone who provides unpaid help to a friend or family member needing support, perhaps due to illness, older age, disability, a mental health condition or an addiction,' as long as they are not employed to do so.

##### Figures

- **Population of carers:** according to the 2021 census, there are approximately 4.7 million carers in England, including about 3 million women and 2 million men. They are estimated to spend about 19 hours on caregiving duties on average, and this time is higher among women than among men.
- **Economic impact:** the charity Carers UK estimates this to be £162bn for England.

##### Existing schemes

- **Leave:** employees can take up to a week of unpaid leave per year to look after relatives in need of care because of a disability, old age or illness or injury requiring at least three months of care. This entitlement applies from the first day of employment without a qualification period. It is unpaid, however (even though each company has a choice), and simply protects employees from dismissal.
- **Flexible Working Act:** this is a flagship piece of legislation in the UK. Carers are entitled to request a flexible working arrangement to better reconcile their working and caregiving responsibilities. Employers may only refuse on very specific grounds. Culturally, flexible working is well developed in the UK: 30% of employees are recognized as hybrid workers and nearly 14% are full-time remote workers. 55% of the British population occasionally work remotely. Over 3 million carers are in employment, including 38% on a part-time basis.
- **Protection against 'discrimination by association':** carers are protected against direct discrimination because of their caregiving activities.
- **Carer's Allowance:** for people providing care for more than 35 hours a week. This allowance is set at £81.90/week exclusively for carers over 16 years of age earning less than £151/week. Pensioners are not eligible for this allowance.

##### Key legislation

- **Work and Families Act 2006:** This introduced the Flexible Working Act for some employees including carers of adults.
- **Equality Act 2010:** this protects carers of disabled or elderly people against direct discrimination or harassment.
- **Children and Families Act 2014:** This extends the Flexible Working Act, applicable to all employees. Employers

<sup>101</sup> <https://www.unionen.se/rad-och-stod/trygghetsrad-stod-om-du-blir-uppsagd>

<sup>102</sup> <https://www.transportarbetaren.se/egenanstalld-och-blast-pa-tryggheten/>

<sup>103</sup> <https://www.prevent.se/arbetsliv/lagar-och-regler/2024/starkta-rattigheter-for-gig-arbetare/>

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2024/03/starkta-rattigheter-for-gigarbetare-nar-eu-antar-plattformsdirektivet/>

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.arbetaren.se/2023/08/10/svarta-loner-konkurser-och-falska-fakturor-bland-airmees-budfirmor/>

<sup>106</sup> <https://www.arbetaren.se/2024/02/16/sista-milen-utan-lon-nya-skandaler-hos-airmees-underleverantorer/>



may only refuse a request for flexible working on limited grounds.

- **Carer's Leave Act 2023**: this came into force on April 6, 2024. It entitles employees to one week of unpaid carer's leave per year. This entitlement is available from the first day of employment (which is not the case for paid sick leave for example).

# ANNEX 2: Absenteeism, social affairs advisors' responses

## Absenteeism

*Germany, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Sweden and United Kingdom*

*Absenteeism rates are a major concern for French companies. The figures of the Department of Research, Studies, Evaluation and Statistics (DREES) and National Health Insurance Fund (CNAM) show a rise in uptake of daily benefits across all age groups, with major sectoral differences. This increase in France can be attributed to various factors, including population aging, development of mental health issues and work-life balance problems.*

### - Germany:

#### 1. Continuing rise in sick leave rates in Germany, especially for mental health reasons

According to one of Germany's largest health insurance funds, the number of days not worked because of sickness rose in the first half of 2024 by 5.7% compared with the same period the previous year. Over this period, half of the working policyholder population took at least one day off.

Traditionally, 19% of absences are due to respiratory illnesses and 17.7% to musculoskeletal disorders.

However, the increase in days not worked because of depression or adjustment disorders is particularly high, at 14.3% compared with the first half of 2023, amounting to 182 days not worked per 100 policyholders. 21% of women are concerned versus 14.5% men.

#### 2. Telephone requests for sick notes are becoming embedded in routine practice in Germany

One fifth of the working population has already made such a request, according to a YouGov poll, and 11% more than once. 46% of young people under 30 years old claim to have used this option, even though they were not really sick – including a third of men and less than 10% of women.

This is a recurring debate in Germany. The number of sickness absences has soared, exceeding the rates in France and the current Minister of Health has renewed the authorization of telephone requests for sick notes, initially an exception introduced during the Covid pandemic. This point has come under fire on the political scene and from employers' organizations, who regularly put a figure on the estimated cost of sickness absences for the economy and are critical of the German system's leniency (no medical certificate necessary for less than 4 days' leave; wages are paid in full by the employer for 6 weeks).

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### - Spain:

#### • Does your country note similar findings regarding the rise in absenteeism from work?

*NB: in Spain, the notion of absenteeism encompasses any type of absence, including for paid leave and maternity leave... the approach is much larger than sickness absences alone.*

Spain is also seeing a rise in absenteeism from work.

Both the frequency and duration of cases of temporary incapacity for non-work-related health conditions increased over the 2018-2024 period.

According to the data, this increase is widespread, spanning all genders, ages and professions. Some key facts at a glance:

- Absences of less than 15 days have risen sharply;
- Rates are particularly up among young people (for long and short absences);

- The most common reasons for short absences are illnesses like gastroenteritis, colds, viral infections and back problems. The most common reasons for absences of more than 15 days are MSDs and mental health problems (which have risen sharply).

In July 2024, the Government and the social partners signed an agreement bearing particularly on:

- Strengthening the role of private health insurers in absence from work processes: collaboration with the public health service not least to diagnose orthopaedic trauma injuries;
- Improving the monitoring of absence from work indicators, by establishing a supervisory committee for monitoring and analyzing absence from work trends.

**According to research by Adecco, in Q3 2024, rates of absenteeism reached 7.5%**, bringing the annual average to 7.2% (above the 7.1% rate in 2020, when the pandemic hit). As such, nearly 1.2 million people didn't go to work every day, particularly because of health problems (5.8% of absenteeism rates is due to temporary incapacity for work<sup>107</sup>). Current rates of absenteeism, which had already been rising in recent years (6.6% in 2021 and 6.8% in 2022), contrast sharply with the level over the past two decades, when they remained below 6% (2.9% at the start of 2014).

According to Randstad,<sup>108</sup> the level of absenteeism was 6.3% in Q3 2024. Since the end of 2022, the level has remained above 6% and for the fourth quarter in a row, absences for temporary incapacity exceed 5%. More than a million people have been off sick over this quarter. The sectors where absenteeism rates are highest are industry and services.

**A study conducted by the Spanish association of human resource directors at the end of 2024<sup>109</sup>** reports the following points:

- Absenteeism rates of 8.02% vs 5.91% before Covid;
- Repercussions on productivity, performance and atmosphere at work;
- Significance of mental health determinants.

**The association of private insurers for accidents at work has estimated the direct cost of absenteeism for 2023 to be €12.2bn**, plus indirect costs of 50 million incurred by the replacement of workers off sick and 110 million in losses of production of goods and services.

**Specifically concerning sickness absences:** absences lasting more than a year have doubled since 2018, accounting for 34.1% of total work days lost in 2023.

The aforementioned private insurers' report mentions 13 billion in social security expenditure to finance benefits, particularly compensation for temporary incapacity for non-work-related health conditions.

- **What do the national authorities make of this situation? Have the reasons behind such an increase been identified?**

Various factors contribute to this trend (over and above the dynamic development of the Spanish labor market and economy in recent years):

- Aging of the working population, which is particularly pronounced in Spain;
- Increase in mental health problems;
- Difficulties accessing primary care (the public health service is overstretched and patients have to wait a long time to be seen, etc.).

The workers' trade unions attribute the rise in sickness absences to workers' deteriorating health and also draw attention to a shift in mentalities: greater store is set by a healthy work-life balance, especially since the pandemic

<sup>107</sup> Informe trimestral absentismo y siniestralidad laboral, Adecco Institute. URL: <https://www.adeccoinstitute.es/salud-y-prevencion/x-informe-absentismo-siniestralidad/> Adecco calculates the rate of absenteeism on the basis of the 'Encuesta sobre Costes Laborales' survey of the National Statistics Institute, as a ratio of the total number of hours not worked (vacation, temporary incapacity, maternity/paternity leave, personal reasons, disputes at work, etc.) to the total number of actual hours agreed.

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.randstadresearch.es/absentismo-laboral-tercer-trimestre-2024/>

<sup>109</sup> <https://aedrh.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Presentacion-Estudio-del-Absentismo-laboral-y-medidaspara-reducirlo.pdf>

and the arrival of younger generations on the job market.

- **What solutions are the national authorities/social partners considering or implementing to address this issue?**

**The agreement on employment and collective bargaining signed in 2023 between trade unions and employers** includes a section about temporary incapacity. It acknowledges that this is on the rise and that priority must be given to improving workers' health. The agreement indicates that collective bargaining must:

- Analyze in detail the extent and causes of temporary incapacity;
- Define measures to bring its rates down.

The agreement underscores the role of the collaborating private health insurers (employers' associations which handle accidents at work and occupational diseases as well as individual health monitoring and are tasked with checking absences from work), so that they can also support the national health service and specifically assist workers suffering from temporary incapacity.

As it happens, these private health insurers are advocating for a bigger role in delivering care and issuing notifications to return to work, at least for absences on the grounds of MSDs, to help address the delays in the health service.

**The proposal to reduce weekly working time from 40 to 37.5 hours is partly aimed at 'reducing absenteeism'.** The idea is that easing the burden in terms of number of working hours, together with the right to switch off, will help to bring down stress levels and sickness absences.<sup>110</sup>

In February 2025, the Supreme Court approved the principle of **an anti-absenteeism bonus** as long as this only includes unjustified absences and does not lead to gender-based discrimination. This decision allows employers to pay a variable monthly bonus based on the number of hours of unjustified absence, a scheme set forth in the collective agreement of a company, which had been challenged by a trade union.<sup>111</sup>

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## - **Italy:**

### **1. Does your country note similar findings to France regarding the rise in absenteeism from work?**

In Italy, a somewhat paradoxical approach is taken to the question of absenteeism from work: the press frequently identifies this phenomenon as a major problem in the workplace, and yet it is hardly documented at all by official sources, not least at national level. As part of efforts toward 'transparent administration', some ministries and other public institutions do publish figures pertaining to their own institution, but this in no way enables an overall picture to be drawn up. As such, there are no common assessment tools and each company calculates absenteeism rates according to its own criteria.

The only somewhat general tool is the annual survey conducted by the Confederation of Italian Industry, Confindustria, on work, but this presents a possible methodological bias: it defines absenteeism rates as the ratio between hours of absence and hours worked, which does not allow for a distinction between lawful absence (leave, sickness, etc.) and voluntary or unlawful absence (repetitive and unjustified). Be that as it may, this source does show an increase in absenteeism rates over recent years, from 6.6% in 2020 to 7.4% in 2023. The Confindustria survey points out that these rates are higher in the services (8%) than in industry strictly speaking (7.1%) and that the larger the company, the higher the rates: 5.1% in companies with up to 15 employees, 8.1% in companies with 100 employees and over.

### **2. What do the national authorities make of this situation? Have the reasons behind such an increase been identified?**

<sup>110</sup> La Moncloa, 'El Gobierno presenta la reducción de la jornada laboral ordinaria a 37,5 horas semanales'. URL: <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/consejodeministros/resumenes/paginas/2025/040225-rueda-de-prensaministros.aspx>

<sup>111</sup> El País, 'El Supremo avala el plus para combatir el absentismo siempre que no tenga sesgo de género'. URL: <https://elpais.com/economia/2025-02-19/el-supremo-avala-el-plus-para-combatir-el-absentismo-siempre-que-no-tengasesgo-de-genero.html>

Just as there is no official monitoring of absenteeism, so is any analysis lacking by the public authorities of this subject. The reasons for its increase are, instead, identified by specialist publications, mainly in the legal sphere: these cite work-related stress and professional burnout, physical or mental health problems, lack of motivation or job dissatisfaction, disputes in the workplace and finally external factors such as family and logistical difficulties.

### **3. What solutions are the national authorities/social partners considering or implementing to address this issue?**

The second paradox of the subject of absenteeism from work in Italy is that although there is very little in the way of documentation about it, that does not mean it is not highly regulated by law.

Indeed, Italian legislation carefully regulates absenteeism among employees, drawing a distinction between justified and unjustified absences, and laying down specific rules about how they should be managed.

Justified absences include such situations as illness, maternity leave, accidents, parental leave, vacations, trade union leave and other forms of lawful leave. Such absences are governed by collective agreements and the applicable legislation, and must be notified to employers on a timely basis by furnishing the necessary documents, such as medical certificates in the event of illness.

In cases of unjustified absence, i.e. when an employee does not supply a valid reason or does not comply with the terms for notifying their absence, employers are entitled to take disciplinary measures, ranging from a formal warning to dismissal on valid grounds. Handling of unjustified absences is governed by collective agreements and the labor regulations, which specify when and how employers can take measures against an employee at fault.

If an employer detects a case of unjustified absence, they must go through several stages to formally report it and protect themselves legally. The procedure for reporting absenteeism from work typically begins with a warning letter. This document is sent to the employee as soon as the unauthorized absence occurs and must contain: a detailed description of the absence, the dates on which it occurred and a request for explanations from the employee within a specific timeframe, usually five days.

The worker is entitled to reply to the warning letter and to supply any explanations. If the latter are not considered sufficient, the employer may take other sanctions, including suspending or dismissing the employee on valid grounds. Employers must follow the statutory procedure to the letter, since any formal error could nullify the disciplinary sanction or expose the employee to legal disputes.

Under Italian law, termination of employment for absenteeism is only considered lawful in certain specific cases. It must be demonstrated that the unjustified absence undermines trust between the employee and employer. The main cases in which a dismissal may be considered lawful are as follows:

- prolonged, unjustified absence: when the employee is absent for a long period of time without sufficient justification and does not respond to the employer's requests for explanations;
- repeated absence: when the employee is often absent without justification, making it impossible to organize work properly;
- fraudulent conduct: when the worker supplies false documents to justify their absence, such as false medical certificates or misleading claims.

Specific rights protect employees against unfair or unlawful dismissal on the part of their employers. If an employee believes that they were unlawfully laid off because of lawful absence, they may refer the case to the employment tribunal to request their job back or financial compensation.

However, note should be made of the re-establishment under the new labor law, adopted by Parliament at the end of 2024, of the notion of resignation by tacit consent, introduced by the Fornero Act in 2012 then scrapped by the 2015 Jobs Act. Article 19 of the new law contains a provision aimed at simplifying termination of employment in cases of prolonged unjustified absence (longer than 15 days), by avoiding, in this case, the application of the regulations bearing on resignations by email, stipulated in Article 26 of legislative decree No.151/2015.

The legislature thus intends to attach renewed importance to workers' willingness to resign by tacit consent, by presuming their willingness. In this way, employers do not have to wait for the worker to resign or assume the various burdens associated with a redundancy on economic grounds – even when this is justified (these include organizational burdens – activating the disciplinary procedure; notifying workers who may no longer be on national soil of their dismissal, etc. – and financial burdens, not least payment of the unemployment benefit, NASpl, owed



to workers who have involuntarily been let go).

Finally, it is worth noting that, at micro-economic level, companies have various tools at their disposal, especially in terms of human resources, to combat absenteeism. For instance, 42% of companies who participated in the above-mentioned Confindustria survey state that adopting smart working helps to bring absenteeism rates down in their workplaces.

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#### - Denmark:

- Does Denmark note similar findings regarding the rise in absenteeism from work?

Yes.

The central authority on Danish statistics, **Statistics Denmark**, devotes a section on its website to absence from work:

<https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/arbejde-og-indkomst/fravaer-og-arbejdskonflikter/fravaer-fra-arbejde>

According to Statistics Denmark, on average, in 2023, one full-time employee **was absent from their job owing to illness for 10.20 days**. This is down by 0.7 days compared with 2022, the year when **absenteeism owing to illness reached a historically high level**.

In 2023, 42% of absence periods lasted 1 day, 25% lasted 3 to 7 days and 9% lasted more than 8 days. The 'corporations and organizations' sector (*Virksomheder og organisationer*) is the one with the lowest absenteeism rates for personal illness, while the highest rates are observed in **municipal government jobs (areas of education, social services and healthcare)**.

- What do the national authorities make of this situation? Have the reasons behind such an increase been identified?

This does not really seem to be an issue in Denmark, which is known for offering employees **good working conditions, flexibility and a healthy work-life balance**, and where there generally tends to be a **trusting relationship between employees and their employers**. **Parental leave** is, moreover, long and generous.

Nevertheless, debates have emerged in recent years, especially in connection with **the increase in stress, burnout and mental health problems**. Indeed, according to various studies on the subject, including by the Danish Health Authority, stress seems to be a particular problem among Danes. And this has a cost for the economy and for society in general.

According to a 2023 study by the National Research Center for the Working Environment (NFA), **absences due to stress are costing Danish businesses DKK 16.4 billion a year (about €2.2 billion)**. This figure mainly includes the wages of employees on sick leave as well as production losses for businesses.

Another 2023 study by the Danish Chamber of Commerce (*Dansk Erhverv*) reports that **absenteeism owing to illness is costing society a total of DKK 46 billion a year (about €6.2 billion)**. The study also claims that approximately **340,000 Danes (11% of employees) take at least one day off sick every year when they are not actually ill**; this primarily concerns young people (18-39-year-olds).

- What solutions are the national authorities/social partners considering or implementing to address this issue?

Regarding the **tools being considered to try and address this situation**, specialists reckon that **dialogue** is key and that efforts should be made to **prevent occupational stress as far as possible**. In Denmark, **conditions on the job market and in companies are mainly governed by the social partners rather than the State**, which does not play much of a role where these subjects are concerned. **Companies** are responsible for monitoring the well-being of their employees and for implementing specific measures, where applicable, to combat absenteeism (e.g.: flexible working patterns or adjusting duties and assignments entrusted to employees, etc.).

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#### - Sweden:



### 1. Does your country note similar findings regarding the rise in absenteeism from work?

According to Statistics Sweden (SCB) data, the number of working people who took time off owing to occupational illness has fallen over the past twenty years.<sup>112</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, absenteeism rates owing to illness soared, but dropped again in 2022 and 2023 back toward pre-pandemic levels.

In 2008, the sick leave system was reformed with the introduction of criteria assessing an employee's capacity to resume work, and a gradual reduction in the compensation level of sick leave.

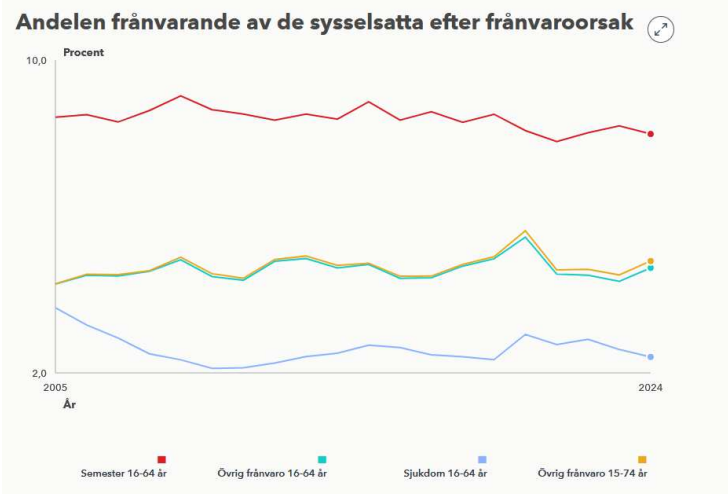
In 2024, among 15-74-year-olds, absenteeism rates were 2.4% owing to illness and 4.9% for other reasons (not including illness or vacation).<sup>113</sup>

**NB.** Sick leave (*sjukskrivning*) does not distinguish between all the cases of absenteeism owing to illness, unlike the notion of absence due to illness (*sjukfrånvaro*), which also encompasses cases of temporary illness lasting one or two days. Since Sweden applies a grace period, workers can wait until the 15<sup>th</sup> day off sick to obtain an official sick note and receive sickness benefits (*sjukpenning*) from the Swedish social insurance agency, *Försäkringskassan*.<sup>114</sup>

Graph 1. Rates of absenteeism from work, by reason, 2005-2024

Source: *Ekonomifakta*, based on data from Statistics Sweden, SCB

From left: Vacation for 16-64-year-olds, Absenteeism among 16-64-year-olds, Illness among 16-64-year-olds, Absenteeism among 15-74-year-olds



### 2. What do the national authorities make of this situation? Have the reasons behind such an increase been identified?

Absenteeism rates have been relatively stable over time and are not identified as a major concern by the public authorities, with the exception of days off to care for a sick child (*vård av barn/VAB*), see below, in question 3.

A report has been published by the social insurance agency (*Försäkringskassan*), comparing trends in sickness absence in Sweden to those in other Nordic countries, France, Germany and the Netherlands over the period 1995-2022.<sup>115</sup> It particularly notes that sickness absence has increased in France and Germany, but that sickness absence among women is more common in Sweden than in France (162% as a proportion of men's sickness absence in Sweden, versus 143% for France, over the period 2013-2022).<sup>116</sup> According to the report's authors, this rise in sickness absence in Germany and France could be attributed to a rise in employment rates among women and older workers, which could have influenced the composition of the workforce – this development already emerged in Sweden several decades ago.<sup>117</sup>

The question of unauthorized absence (*olovlig frånvaro*) above all comes under the remit of the service providing guidance to businesses, *Verksamt*,<sup>118</sup> and law firms that advise employers about sanctions and termination of

<sup>112</sup> [https://www.ekonomifakta.se/sakomraden/arbetsmarknad/sysselsattning/sjukfranvaro\\_1209179.html](https://www.ekonomifakta.se/sakomraden/arbetsmarknad/sysselsattning/sjukfranvaro_1209179.html)

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> [https://www.ekonomifakta.se/sakomraden/arbetsmarknad/sysselsattning/sjukfranvaro\\_1209179.html](https://www.ekonomifakta.se/sakomraden/arbetsmarknad/sysselsattning/sjukfranvaro_1209179.html)

<sup>115</sup> <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/download/18.2af5a1181888f751e1b2/1706795275862/den-svenska-sjukfranvaron-i-ett-europeiskt-perspektiv-1995-2022-arbetsrapport-2023-2.pdf>

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> <https://verksamt.se/personal-rekrytering/uppsagning-uppsagningstid/misskotsel-hos-anstalld#olovlig-franvaro>



employment.<sup>119</sup> In this regard, it can be noted that while absence for family reasons (*trängande familjeskäl*) is not considered unjustified, it is up to employees to prove that their absence is justified.<sup>120</sup>

For the record, *Arbetsgivarverket*, the Swedish Agency for Government Employers, keeps a list of justified absences from the workplace and the associated regulations.<sup>121</sup>

### 3. What solutions are the national authorities/social partners considering or implementing to address this issue?

The *vård av barn* (VAB) scheme, applicable for children aged 8 months to 12 years (with the possibility of extending this for children with disabilities or chronic conditions), allows parents to receive compensation worth up to 80% of their salary for days where they stay at home to look after their child.<sup>122</sup>

Since 2022 and with the broad-scale roll-out of remote working, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government has blamed this system for generating social benefit fraud, claiming that some parents manage to obtain the sick child benefit (known as VAB – *tillfällig föräldrapenning*: temporary parental leave) on top of their wage by applying for this benefit while still working.<sup>123</sup> The social insurance agency, *Försäkringskassan*, estimates this fraud to be SEK 85 million (€7.7 million), and has filed 1,700 police reports.<sup>124</sup>

The Government's main proposal for cracking down on *vabfusk* (VAB fraud) is to require employers to report the number of days' leave that their employees take to care for a sick child.<sup>125</sup> This measure is part of a broader strategy on the part of the Government to combat social fraud (*felaktiga utbetalningar och bidragsfusk*).<sup>126</sup> It came into force in January 2025, despite opposition from employers' organizations,<sup>127</sup> who argued that the administrative burden of reporting VAB leave to *Försäkringskassan* should not fall on employers.<sup>128</sup>

At the same time, a high-profile report published by the Swedish Gender Equality Agency (*Jamställdhetsmyndighet*) in 2023, called *Livspusslet som inte går ihop* (The life puzzle – i.e. the work-life balance – that does not fit together), drew attention to persisting gender inequality regarding involuntary absence from work,<sup>129</sup> particularly in caregiving or childcare situations. In 2024 and for the third year in a row, men took less VAB leave than women,<sup>130</sup> even though an equal distribution of childcare between the sexes is one of the Government's objectives.<sup>131</sup>

By way of measure to combat absenteeism, the personal care benefits system for employees (*personalvårdsförmån*), which is exempt from tax, is worth mentioning.<sup>132</sup> The employees' benefits listed by the Swedish Tax Agency (*Skatteverket*) include:

- Physical exercise or relaxation activities at the workplace, organized and financed directly by the employer.
- An allowance, *friskvårdsbidrag*, paid out annually by the employer, often of about SEK 3,000 to 5,000 (between €270 and €450), which employees must put towards a health and wellness activity. In the past, *Skatteverket* used to publish a list of activities that could be financed using the *friskvårdsbidrag*, but stopped on the grounds that it was impossible to provide an exhaustive list.
- The wellness hour, *friskvårdstimme*: one hour per week dedicated to physical exercise or a relaxation activity at the workplace.
- Fruit, tea and coffee are made freely available to employees, and often consumed during the *fika*,

<sup>119</sup> <https://www.mbl11.se/quider/nar-arbetsdagaren-forsvinner/>

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> <https://www.arbetsgivarverket.se/arbetsgivarguiden/ledighet-och-franvaro>

<sup>122</sup> <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/privatperson/foralder/vard-av-barn-vab>

<sup>123</sup> [https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/fac495ec120e42acb4a3529cf06ba5fb/sou2022\\_31.pdf?bcsi\\_scan\\_08ef23fd69ee142d=FJ1n526WsmGKm4sKUMepih/6ZYEAAAAPXikHA==&bcsi\\_scan\\_filename=sou2022\\_31.pdf](https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/fac495ec120e42acb4a3529cf06ba5fb/sou2022_31.pdf?bcsi_scan_08ef23fd69ee142d=FJ1n526WsmGKm4sKUMepih/6ZYEAAAAPXikHA==&bcsi_scan_filename=sou2022_31.pdf)

<sup>124</sup> <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/skane/vabfusk-for-85-miljoner-ska-vara-smidigt-system>

<sup>125</sup> <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/b3ff1f5a3a324ae89eaa297195f7d675/uppgifter-som-ska-lamnas-i-samband-med-arbetsgivardeklarationen-prop.-20242536.pdf>

<sup>126</sup> <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2024/10/regeringen-gar-vidare-med-forslag-som-ska-stoppa-bidragsfusk/>

<sup>127</sup> [https://www.svensktnaringsliv.se/sakomraden/pension-och-forsakring/regeringens-nya-vab-regel-ett-trubbigt-verktyg\\_1218137.html](https://www.svensktnaringsliv.se/sakomraden/pension-och-forsakring/regeringens-nya-vab-regel-ett-trubbigt-verktyg_1218137.html)

<sup>128</sup> [https://www.svensktnaringsliv.se/sakomraden/pension-och-forsakring/foretagare-kritiska-mot-nya-regelkravet\\_1224451.html](https://www.svensktnaringsliv.se/sakomraden/pension-och-forsakring/foretagare-kritiska-mot-nya-regelkravet_1224451.html)

<sup>129</sup> <https://jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/media/3s4naedu/rapport-2023-17.pdf>

<sup>130</sup> <https://jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/aktuellt/nyheter/mans-vabbande-minskar-for-tredje-aret-i-rad/>

<sup>131</sup> <https://jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/jamstalldhet-i-sverige/delmal-4-jamn-fordelning-av-det-obetalda-hem-och-omsorgsarbetet/>

<sup>132</sup> <https://www.skatteverket.se/privat/skatter/arbeteochinkomst/formaner/personalvardmotionochfriskvard.4.7459477810df5bccdd4800014540.html>



the daily coffee break taken in Swedish companies.

Furthermore, pursuant to regulations on the working environment, employers must provide a relaxation room (*vilrum*) where it is possible to take an occasional nap undisturbed.<sup>133</sup> Naps at the workplace are broadly permitted by employers<sup>134</sup> and staff representative bodies<sup>135</sup> alike.

Lastly, a large number of collective agreements, in the public sector particularly, provide for a flexi-time system called *flexibel arbetstid* or *flexid* for short. This system enables employees to choose at what time they begin and end their working day, within agreed limits (usually 7am-9am and 4pm-6pm).<sup>136</sup>

A clocking-in system can also be introduced, so that employees who accrue overtime can 'flexa', i.e. leave work early on another day.

A typical white-collar working day generally runs from 8-8.30am to 4-4.30pm, with a short lunch break (30 to 45 minutes usually). It is also common practice for employees to leave work earlier on Fridays, from 3pm onward.

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#### - **United Kingdom:**

The UK's job market does well in international comparisons, with a low unemployment rate and strong wage growth. However, since the Covid-19 pandemic it has stood out for an upswing in economic inactivity, mainly due to the rise in long-term illness cases. Beyond questions of public health, this situation has major economic and budgetary repercussions which are calling into question the design of the social protection system. Accordingly, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves has described the country as 'a welfare state that does not always incentivize work'.<sup>i</sup>

#### **The pandemic has reversed the downward trend of economic inactivity**

- **The economic inactivity trend has been rising since 2020, firstly for apparent health reasons.**

The economic inactivity rate among 16-64-year-olds fell between 2010 and 2020, from 23.6% to 20.5%<sup>ii</sup> (Graph 1.a). The pandemic reversed this trend: the working age population has continued to grow, but this increase has only led to an increase in the number of people who are economically inactive (Graph 1.b). Among 16-64-year-olds, this number rose by 8% between January 2020 and July 2023, to 9.3 million, hence the rise in economic inactivity to 22.1% in the second quarter of 2024. 70% of this increase is attributable to the rise in long-term illnesses (Graph 1.c). Indeed, the number of people reporting long-term sickness in the UK has risen by 32% since January 2020, to 2.8 million (+750,000 since 2020).<sup>iii</sup> Over and above genuine inactivity for health reasons, there are 4.0 million workers with a work-limiting health condition (+64% since 2014).

- **The UK's case is unique in international comparisons, which suggests the existence of causes that are specific to the British economy.**

When the pandemic hit, the advanced economies saw their employment rates plummet, but the UK is one of the few countries where this has not bounced back to pre-pandemic levels (75.0% in August 2024, after 76.2% in February 2020). Similarly, the UK is one of the only three OECD nations to have a higher economic inactivity rate today than before the pandemic (Graph 1.d.).<sup>iv</sup> The OECD also notes that health reasons (disability, mental health disorders, etc.) seem to be a more significant economic inactivity factor in the UK than in other countries. Both the OECD and IMF identify this high level of economic inactivity for health reasons as a factor hampering labor supply and therefore long-term growth.<sup>v</sup>

- **A major factor is the worsening mental health of adults, and this is of particular concern among young adults.**

While 40% of the rise in economic inactivity concerns 50-64-year-olds (this subgroup is three times larger than the 18-24-year-old group), the smaller subgroup of 18-24-year-olds accounts for 30% of this rise, at a higher pace of growth. In 2022-23, mental health was the main condition reported in 41% of incapacity benefit claimants (+10 points on 2018-19), followed by musculoskeletal disorders in 24% of cases.<sup>vi</sup> For under 25 year olds, the share of incapacity benefit claimants whose main condition was poor mental health

<sup>133</sup> <https://arbetet.se/2021/06/14/ska-det-finnas-ett-vilrum-pa-jobbet/>

<sup>134</sup> <https://chefstidningen.se/arbetsmiljo/dags-att-ta-en-tupplur-pa-jobbet/>

<sup>135</sup> <https://kollega.se/halsa/tupplur-okar-hjarnans-effektivitet>

<sup>136</sup> <https://www.unionen.se/rad-och-stod/flexibel-arbetstid>

was 69%.

**The upswing in economic inactivity due to long-term sickness does not seem to be solely a public health problem**

- **The ailing British health service (NHS) does not appear to be a structural cause of the phenomenon.**  
According to the Office for Budget Responsibility, the correlation between the sharp rise in waiting lists and people who have become economically inactive is fairly low (around 25%),<sup>vii</sup> even though disruptions caused by the pandemic may have prevented some patients from accessing NHS services on a timely basis.

- **Economic inactivity due to long-term sickness could have more to do with welfare benefits being conditional upon certain criteria.**

The British system provides for two types of welfare benefits if people are unable to work for health reasons: Universal Credit (UC) for people on a low or no income; and Personal Independence Payment (PIP), which isn't means-tested (Annex 2). On the one hand, the rise in economically inactive people due to long-term sickness correlates perfectly with the increase in incapacity and disability benefit claimants.<sup>viii</sup> On the other, within the economically inactive population due to long-term sickness, the proportion of incapacity benefit claimants rose from 58% to 83% between 2014-15 and 2022-23.

- **Claiming disability and, above all, incapacity benefits seems to trigger a welfare trap.**

The scheme for claiming incapacity benefit, the health element of Universal Credit, relies on the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) entailing a medical certificate from a GP and a health questionnaire. In 2023, 80% of WCAs resulted in incapacity for work. In cases of severe incapacity, the benefit amount is doubled and claimants no longer need to look for work. Such cases represented 2.3 million people in January 2024, when there were only 0.3 million in 2019.<sup>137</sup> The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) points to the existence of a welfare trap when you consider that transitioning from inactivity to full-time work paid at the minimum wage leads to the application of an effective tax rate of 89%,<sup>ix</sup> owing to the loss of benefits. Apart from the lack of financial incentive, there is no policy helping these claimants back into work. As such, according to the IFS, the likelihood of a benefits claimant returning to the job market the following quarter is less than 2%, when this rate is 10% on average for the whole of the economically inactive population.

**To address this situation, the Government is planning to bolster workers' rights and make it harder to claim welfare benefits by giving precedence instead to a back to work policy**

- **The Government recently presented an employment rights bill containing measures intended to shore up the employment rate.**

Unveiled on October 10 as a key pledge of the Labour party's first 100 days in office, the Employment Rights Bill<sup>x</sup> is aimed at regulating certain practices (zero-hours contracts) and strengthening social rights, Statutory Sick Pay (£116/week, limited to 28 days/year) by removing the four-day waiting period and the lower earnings limit (£128/week), a potential cause for the rising numbers of economically inactive people. In a country where such rights are financed directly by employers, the Government believes that the law could lead to a transfer of £5bn<sup>xi</sup> toward workers. The law is expected to come into force by 2026.

- **At the time of Labour's autumn budget, it outlined a strategy to combat economic inactivity, building on the plan initiated by the Tories.**

To deal with the subject of economic inactivity due to ill health, the Government intends, on the one hand, to implement the WCA reform which should lead to a 66% decrease in the number of incapacity benefit claimants by 2030<sup>xii</sup> and step up the fight against fraud by giving the Department of Work and Pensions powers to access benefit claimants' bank accounts. On the other hand, the Government is planning to publish the 'Get Britain Working' white paper, aimed at overhauling the way partially or fully disabled people are supported by the public employment service and by unlocking up to £240m for local initiatives combining health, employment and training. Indeed, the situation is a drain on public finances: the increase in the economically inactive population due to long-term sickness has added £15.7m to annual borrowing, according to the OBR<sup>xiii</sup> (welfare bill and foregone tax receipts).

\* \* \*

The recent surge in economic inactivity seems mainly to be driven by long-term sickness. Whilst the state of the NHS might appear to be an obvious scapegoat, analysts point to flaws in the design of health-related welfare benefits which seem to be triggering a welfare trap. To address this situation, which is taking a heavy economic toll, Labour is planning both to strengthen workers' rights and to make it harder to access welfare benefits, the

<sup>137</sup> In part because income-related ESA has been replaced with Universal Credit

growth of which does not appear to be sustainable amid a squeeze on the public purse.

#### ANNEX

- **Annex 1. ONS definition of economic inactivity**

Economically inactive people are those without a job but who do not meet the internationally accepted definition of unemployment because:

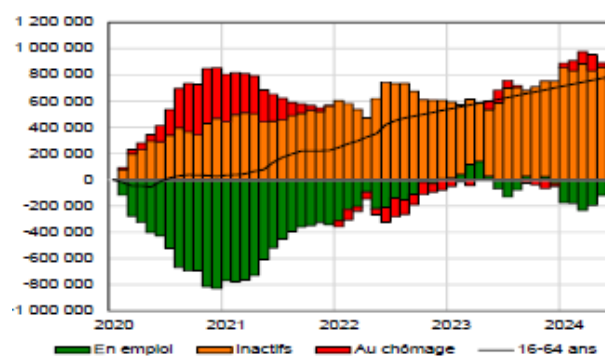
- They have not been seeking work within the last four weeks; and/or
- They are unable to start work in the next two weeks.
- The economic inactivity rate is the proportion of people aged 16 to 64 years old who are not part of the labor force.

- **Annex 2. Economic inactivity trends in the UK**

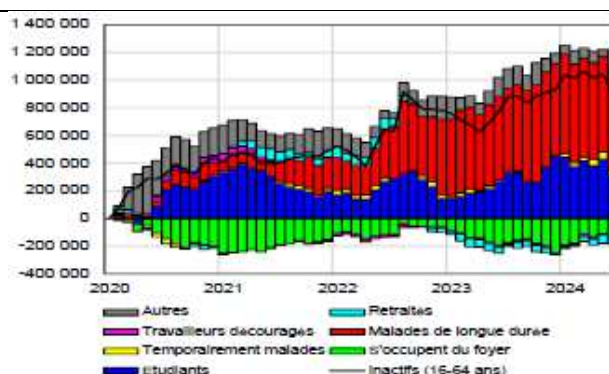
a) Economic inactivity rate (16-64-year-olds)



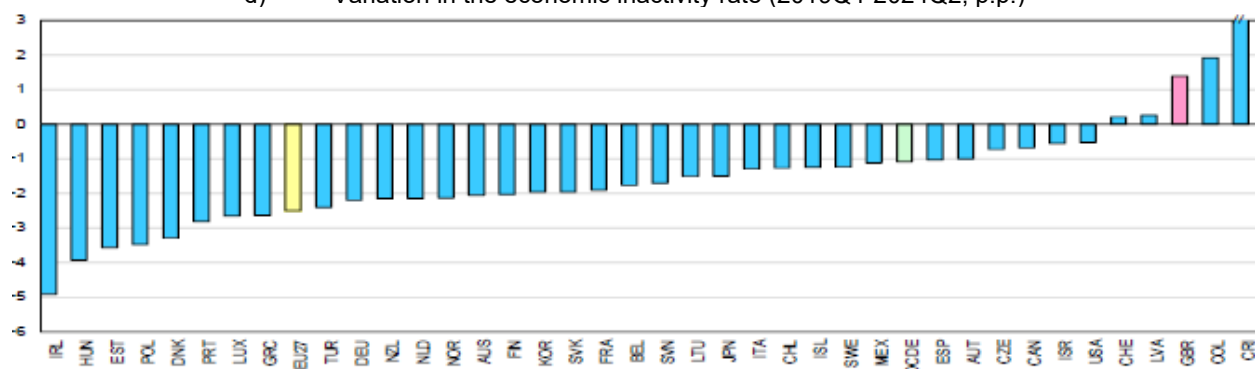
b) Growth in the working age population (in terms of spread from January 2020)



c) Growth in the number of economically inactive people (in terms of spread from January 2020)



d) Variation in the economic inactivity rate (2019Q4-2024Q2, p.p.)



Sources: Office for National Statistics (Labor market overview), OECD (Infra-annual labor statistics).

### • Annex 3. British health-related welfare benefits

The British welfare system provides for two types of benefits if people are unable to work for health reasons: a distinction is drawn between incapacity and disability. Incapacity benefits provide additional income for people with a work-limiting health condition: they are means-tested and conditional upon requirements for unemployed people. Disability benefits are intended to help disabled people with extra living costs: they are not means-tested, only conditional upon requirements, and employment is not a criterion.

- The primary benefit available to disabled people is the **Personal Independence Payment (PIP)**, the amount of which varies between £124 and £799 a month depending on circumstances. PIP is not income-related. The net number of PIP claimants rose by 98% between 2019 and 2024, so by around 350,000 a year, not least because of the rise in cases of mental and behavioral disorders (less than 10% of claims prior to 2020 versus 30% in 2024). Today, there are 3.3 million PIP benefit claimants, a third of whom receive the maximum amount. The costs of disability benefits amounted to £39.1bn in 2024, with this total expected to rise to £58bn by 2028.
- **Universal Credit (UC)** is the main incapacity benefit, and it is means-tested. It replaces various other welfare benefits, including the income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) dedicated to people who were unable to work. All new claimants must now apply for UC, introduced in 2013 and which is gradually (by 2028) replacing the former schemes. Among the major changes to UC are the requirement for claimants (called their 'commitment') to actively look for work (for 35 hours a week in theory). Although the UC amount is very variable (since it is linked to the housing and household components), its basic monthly amount is £393 (not including housing support). If claimants are unable to work for health reasons, they are **exempt from the commitment to look for work and they can receive an extra £416 a month – nearly double the basic amount**. There are 6.4 million UC benefit claimants. Since 2019, the number of claimants who are exempt on ill health grounds from the commitment to look for work has skyrocketed, **from 0.3 to 2.3 million by January 2024** (in part because income-related ESA has been replaced with Universal Credit).

Moreover, in the shorter term, **Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)** is a statutory benefit that guarantees a minimum income for employees who become too ill to work over a long period of time. Workers must be classed as employees and their wages must be equal to or more than the lower earnings limit, which is set at £123 a



week. To be eligible for SSP, a claimant must have been ill for at least four days in a row. Self-employed workers or employees who earn less than the lower limit are not eligible. The SSP amount is £116.75 a week and may be paid for up to 28 consecutive weeks. SSP is the legal minimum that must be paid to employees when they are off sick and can be supplemented by more generous enterprise-level schemes: many employers provide staff with higher levels of sick pay through contracts of employment or collective agreements.

- i Labour Party. [Rachel Reeves speech at the Labour Party Conference 2024](#). September 23, 2024.
- ii ONS. [Labour market overview](#). October 15, 2024.
- iii The Health Foundation. [Towards a healthier workforce](#). October 2024.
- iv OECD. [OECD Economic Surveys - United Kingdom](#). September 2024.
- v OECD. [OECD Economic Surveys - United Kingdom](#). September 2024 IMF. [2024 Article IV Consultation](#). July 2024.
- vi IFS. [Recent trends in and the outlook for health-related benefits](#). April 2024.
- vii OBR. [Fiscal risks and sustainability](#). July 2023.
- viii OBR. [Fiscal risks and sustainability](#) (2.21.). July 2023.
- ix IFS. [Three challenges for getting people on incapacity benefits into work](#). October 15, 2024.
- x UK Parliament. [Employment Rights Bill](#). October 10, 2024.
- xi <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/employment-rights-bill-impact-assessments>
- xii <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/work-capability-assessment-reform-estimated-number-of-claimants-affected/work-capability-assessment-reform-update-to-estimated-number-of-claimants-affected>
- xiii OBR. [Fiscal risks and sustainability](#) (2.1.). July 2023

## MINISTERIAL BRIEF





