

English summary:

Sweden's gender equality barometer 2017

Time, power and money

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Trade union feminism as a starting point

The trade union remit is to work for good conditions at work and a living wage, in the light of the fact that the individual's living conditions are not only determined by the balance of power in working life. More dimensions must be added.

Trade union feminism opens a broader view and understanding of the world. Trade union feminism is a basis for achieving change by proceeding from the assumption that gender just as much as class moulds people's scope of action – in working life and in family life.

This is a summary of LO's gender equality report of 2017 "Sweden's gender equality barometer – Time, power and money". A report that highlights conditions of work and family life from a class and gender perspective. The aim is to describe the material conditions and power resources that underlie the scope of action available to women and men in different social groups. Or as expressed in the Swedish government's gender equality policy objectives; the power to shape society and your own life.

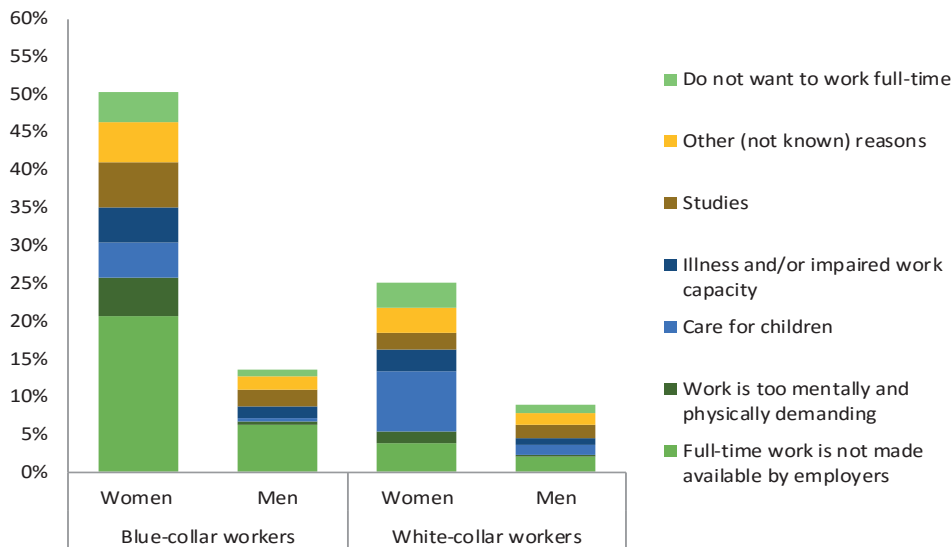
Conditions at work

Several conditions at work are of great importance for whether work can be considered sustainable or not. Inadequate working conditions are reported, particularly regarding employees' opportunities to exert power and influence over their work situation. On the one hand, shortcomings are sometimes common to blue-collar and white-collar workers. This is the case regarding having a heavy workload and work often being experienced as mentally demanding. The latter especially among women. On the other hand, class-based differences are prominent, where one example concerns that blue-collar workers in comparison with white-collar workers typically have little control and influence over the scheduling of working hours as well as work (also) being physically demanding.

Access to control and influence over one's work situation is founded on both type of employment in terms of permanent or time-limited contracts and whether it is full-time or part-time. This is fundamental to work being secure, steady and stable – or not. A permanent and full-time job instead of a time-limited part-time job, give a much more stable ground for exerting influence over work life and on living conditions. And job security is unevenly distributed between blue-collar women and men compared to white-collar women and men.

Worst off are women in blue-collar occupations. On average, a quarter of women in blue-collar jobs have time-limited employment contracts, often the most insecure types: on employers' demand – on-call and on-hour. Further, in general half of women in blue-collar jobs work part-time, often due to lack of being offered full-time jobs.

Part-time work and reasons for part-time work. Percentage of employees.



Source: Sweden's gender equality barometer, LO (2017).

Both time-limited contract and part-time work makes it difficult to be in control, not least because the economic terms of conditions, for a clear majority, emanate from work. The wage income is a central power resource when it comes to being economically independent and therefore, to be able to form your own life. In addition, which we turn to later, economic resources also gain significance in a broader sense, namely in terms of how the main responsibility for childcare and housework is distributed between women and men.

In general, both mental and physical work requirements are high in the Swedish labour market. This is not necessarily negative, but if combined with a low level of control and scope of action it is detrimental to the health of the individual. The group with least control over their work is women in blue-collar occupations, followed by men in blue-collar occupations and women in white-collar occupations. Men in white-collar occupations have most control over their work.

The resources to meet and deal with the high requirements at work are very unevenly spread in today's working life. This is worrying and very serious. Apart from strengthening financial conditions and giving social status, personal development and self-confidence, favourable working conditions can protect against physical and mental ill-health. Working life must be brought considerably more to the forefront when we seek the route to (gender) equal conditions at work, in economic resources, care work, housework and health.

Economic conditions emanating from work

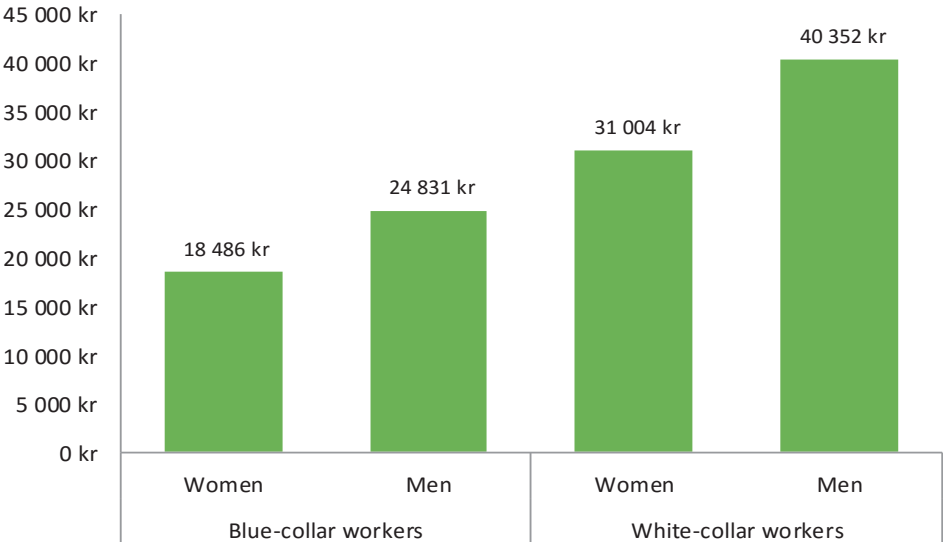
Fundamentally, women's and men's economic terms of conditions emanate from wage work, where wage levels in different occupations as well as job security are key determinants. There is clear gender and class-based wage patterns and differences with regards to access to full-time and permanent employment, that together with wage distribution (and dispersion) in the labour market, affect women's and men's wages in blue-collar and white-collar occupations.

The gender and class-based ladder is well-defined when we examine women’s and men’s average wages in blue-collar and white-collar occupations. Blue-collar women are placed on the lowest stairway and white-collar men at the highest.

To reflect the importance of part-time work on wage income, LO has developed a wage income measurement called “actual monthly wage”. This measurement takes both average wages for full-time and average working hours (as percentage of full-time) into account. Thereby we can calculate and show that the gender and class-based ladder in economic terms of conditions even deepens when working hours are included. Gender wage gaps within blue-collar become more prominent than when we look at full-time wages.

The scarcest economic resources are found among women in blue-collar occupations. In 2015, the actual monthly wage was on average equivalent to SEK 18 500 (gross).¹

Actual monthly wage SEK (kr). Gross (i.e. before tax is deducted). Wage level of 2015.



Source: Sweden's gender equality barometer, LO (2017).

One aspect of especially blue-collar women’s wages, which has become increasingly important is the significance of minimum wages. In Sweden, minimum wages are negotiated by the social partners and regulated in collective agreements. Compared to many countries, the collectively agreed minimum wages are high. Minimum wages are sometimes decisive for maintaining high wage levels within entire blue-collar women-dominated areas in the labour market. This is because both time-limited contracts and part-time work is common, and is an employer tool for keeping wages concentrated around minimum wages.

Employers’ practices regarding permanent or time-limited contracts as well as full-time and part-time thus have a great impact on wages and wage levels. The logic behind this is that when employers to a large extent use time-limited and part-time work as employment practises, both high staff turnover rates and less qualified tasks are promoted. Further, work

¹ In June 2017, SEK 18 500 in actual monthly wage corresponds to approximately EUR 1 900, USD 2 100 and GBP 1 700.

place (local) trade union strength and wage systems are undermined. This results in increased importance of collectively agreed minimum wages for overall wage levels.

Hence, the conclusion is that high minimum wages are especially important for gender equal wages but also for equal wages in general. At the same time, secure and full-time employment would also in itself have significant positive effect on particularly on women's wages who are more affected by time-limited and part-time contracts.

Conditions of parenthood and housework

In Sweden, parental leave, unpaid care work and housework is distributed differently between women and men in blue-collar and white-collar groups. But, it is also clear that women still have primary responsibility for both care work (for children and elderly parents and relatives) and housework – regardless of class.

Women still take long periods of parental leave, which is a gateway to forming continued clear gender patterns when it comes to main responsibilities for planning and performing unpaid care work and housework – also when returning to work after parental leave.

In contrast, large groups of men continue to take shorter or even no periods of parental leave, which rather reinforces the perception of men's main responsibilities as being that of a “breadwinner”, even though women's and mothers labour force participation is very high.

Particularly for blue-collar women, the interaction between working conditions and conditions of parenthood and housework is important to understand. Uncertain and fragmented working conditions relate to pronounced responsibility for day-to-day care work and housework in a way that weakens blue-collar women's position in the labour market. For women in blue-collar occupations, part-time work and time-limited contacts do not stem from becoming parents – those terms are often an input variable in working life, leading to strengthening and reinforcing the logic of a gender traditional division of care work and housework.

The interaction between working life and family life conditions boosts existing gender and class-based differences. Even if large groups of parents feel that their and their partners' paid work is given equal priority when planning and performing care work and housework, there is a clear pattern of men's jobs being given higher priority. Blue-collar women experience that their work is set aside when unpaid work in the home must be done more than others.

In sum, the terms for combining work and family responsibilities are almost paradoxical – blue-collar women who have more insecure jobs, the most irregular working hours and who have least say in how, when and where they work, are also those that most often drop off and pick up children in childcare and school, and plan and do most of the everyday housework.

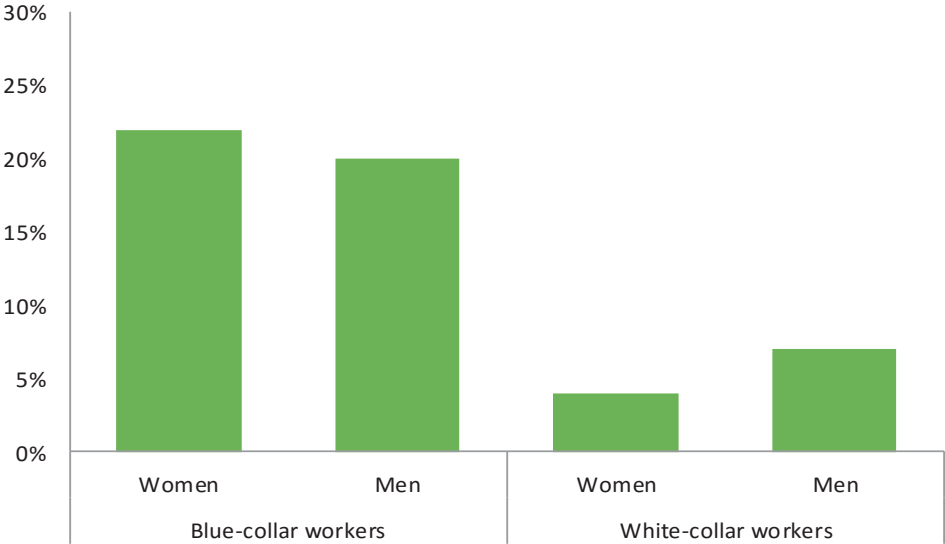
For Swedish family policy to promote gender and class-based equality, parental leave must encourage women and men to share responsibilities for care for children early on, to reinforce (rather than undermine) gender equal sharing of planning and doing care work and housework later. Women and men must be able to gain economic independence on the same terms. This entails men doing a greater share of the unpaid care and housework and women more of the paid work.

Conditions for combining work and family

Tax-financed welfare services such as childcare and elderly care form a social infrastructure that enables women and men with care responsibilities to combine paid and unpaid work. This social infrastructure is well developed in Sweden, but at the same, it needs to be both defended and developed.

In Sweden, the childcare that to a large share is tax-financed, is usually available on weekdays and office hours. These opening hours suits most parents. However, there are parents that do not have access to childcare when they work due to working inconvenient hours such as evenings, weekends and at night. This is considerably more common for blue-collar workers than for white-collar workers.

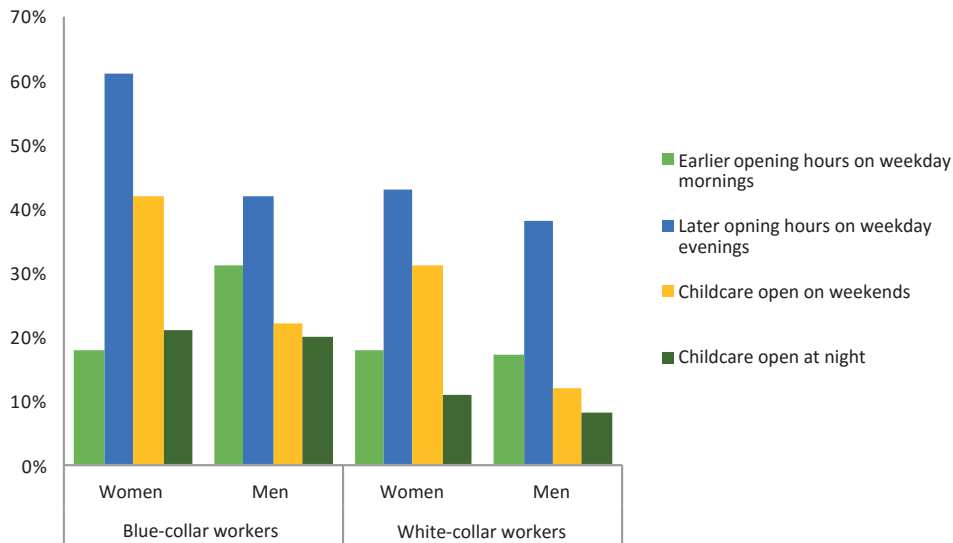
Childcare seldom or never open when working. Parents with children aged 1–12 years.



Source: Sweden's gender equality barometer, LO (2017).

There are great difficulties to access childcare beyond office hours on weekdays. This be the result of a changing working life where especially women and men in blue-collar occupations have work schedules containing unsocial (inconvenient) working hours, whereas the social infrastructure childcare has basically stood still in terms of opening hours. Today his discrepancy result in childcare opening hours that to a much greater extent cater for women and men in white-collar occupations. In addition, white-collar workers have considerably more influence over when they work and where, compared to blue-collar workers. Blue-collar workers, particularly women, express a need for childcare to be open later in the evenings and on weekends.

What opening hours' childcare would need to have to be available when parents are working.
 Parents with children aged 1–12 years.



Source: Sweden's gender equality barometer, LO (2017).

One difference between blue-collar and white-collar workers is also the purchase of private childcare services. None of the parents in blue-collar occupations states that they buy private childcare services, while a few per cent of white-collar parents' state that they do. All in all, purchasing private childcare services is a marginal phenomenon in Sweden.

Political reforms to make it easier for families with children to combine paid work with care responsibilities, through for example extended opening hours in tax-financed childcare would be an effective way of using public resources to lessen gender and class-based differences and difficulties in combining family and work.

Time, power and money – conclusions and policy proposals

Gender equality surveys have long shown structural differences between women and men in general. But the challenges of work and family balance are different for women and men in blue-collar and white-collar groups. There are common experiences of great time pressure and high workload, but the conditions of working life and family life reflect gender and class-based unequal distribution of time, power and money.

All in all, focusing on individual solutions to structural problems is insufficient for everyone. General welfare solutions, which benefit everyone, must be strengthened to break through and increase gender equality as well as reducing class-based inequality. Trade union and political strategies for increased equality must go hand in hand and be linked to concrete action. Time, power and money must be distributed more equally.

Time

Control over time and allocation of time between paid and unpaid work must be more evenly divided between women and men in blue-collar and white-collar occupations. To facilitate change, LO calls for:

- **Full-time as the norm throughout the whole labour market.** The part-time norm in women-dominated blue-collar occupations must be broken. Tax-financed organisations must take the lead and the social partners negotiate and develop how full-time jobs can be implemented in the public sector.
- **Individualisation of parental leave benefits.** The division of parental leave between mothers and fathers must steer towards a gender equal take-up through changes in the parental leave insurance. It is also important to find ways so that mothers and fathers allocate part-time work evenly between themselves when children are small.
- **Guaranteed childcare on inconvenient working hours and pre-school from the age of two.** Municipalities should be obliged to offer childcare on evenings and weekends to better cater to the needs of blue-collar parents. Pre-school should be introduced from the age of two and children of parents on parental leave and unemployed should be entitled to childcare/pre-school at least 30 hours per week.
- **Reinforcement of social equality through initiatives for high-quality and jointly tax-financed welfare services.** In addition to improvements of childcare, access to elderly care must be guaranteed. Elderly care is particularly important for women's labour force participation, employment and full-time work. Access to homes for the elderly must improve.
- **Abolished tax-subsidies for private housework services.** Privatised housework services are neither the answer to the needs of improved welfare services nor the answer to employment or gender equality. Instead general welfare solutions are effective for providing high-quality welfare services and at the same time decrease gender and class-based inequality.

Power

Power and influence over work must be more equally distributed between employees and employers, so that women and men in blue-collar and white-collar occupations have secure and sound conditions of work. To facilitate change, LO calls for:

- **Strengthened job security.** The insecurity of women-dominated blue-collar occupations must be broken. Time-limited employment contracts Fixed-term should only be allowed if there are objective reasons for a time-limitation. Repeated, consecutive, short-term time-limited contracts with the same employer should be abolished.
- **Improved preventive health and safety work.** Politics and employers must take greater responsibility for health and safety at work. Working life and work environment research, from a gender and class perspective, must be guaranteed to improve working conditions to enable blue-collar women (and men) to work until retirement age. Therefore, there must be special research initiatives directed towards small workplaces and women-dominated sectors.
- **Women's power over work must to be strengthened through more personnel and economic resources in the public sector.** Substantial public investment is needed in

healthcare, education and social services. New Public Management must also be reviewed and replaced. The forms of governance of these important welfare state institutions must support the professionalism and employee influence as it is a foundation of quality in welfare services.

Money

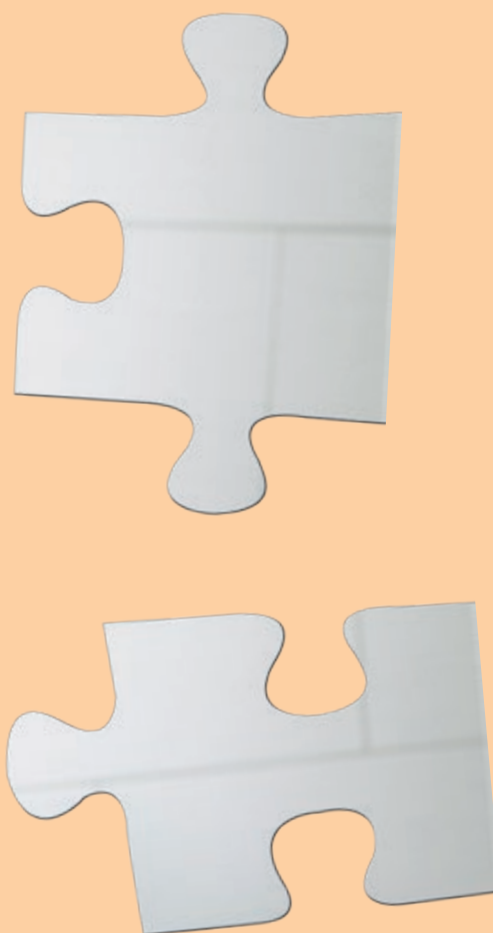
Money must be more equally distributed between women and men in blue-collar and white-collar occupations. To facilitate change, LO calls for:

- **Social partners to prioritize high and increased minimum wages.** One of LO's long-term wage policy targets is that all collectively agreed minimum wage levels for adults, who are not in training, must correspond to at least 75 per cent of the average monthly wage for blue-collar workers.
- **Social partners to take considerably greater responsibility for gender equal pay.** LO must a driving force for ensuring redistribution, recognition and upgrading of women's work. In this, it is important to decrease value discrimination stemming from wage differentials between women-dominated and men-dominated blue-collar occupations.
- **The Swedish government to pursue policy that leads to gender equal economic conditions.** The Government's objective for economic gender equality is that women and men shall have the same opportunities and conditions regarding paid work, which gives economic independence throughout life. This entails obligations and requires a gender equality policy agenda that also leads to greater equality in terms of class.



The report can be ordered from LO-distribution:
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Telefax: 026-24 90 26

August 2017
ISBN 978-91-566-3246-4
www.lo.se



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