

## **Working Life 2025 review**

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# **EFFECTS OF WORKING LIFE AND THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT ON OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AT WORK**

Executive summary

## DOCUMENTATION PAGE

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### Executive summary

#### Summary

Several future reviews have been published in Finland and elsewhere in the world. They have not, however, described changes from the perspective of occupational safety and health and well-being at work, nor proposed any actions to be taken by the occupational safety and health administration. The Working Life 2025 review responds to this need. The future review looks at working life comprehensively starting from the question what kind of work will be done and who will be the future employees and ends up considering the employees' health and safety at work, well-being at work and the effects of new technologies on work.

The Working Life 2025 review has been written by looking back in time and following the foreseeable development trends up to the year 2025. The writers have placed themselves in year 2025 and looked at the situation then. The review does not describe what the working life in 2015 should look like or what the most favourable alternative would be. The writers have chosen the future outlook that in their opinion is the most probable on the basis of the present development trends.

In addition to the changes in work and working life, the review presents actions to be taken by occupational safety and health administration today in order to be able to meet the future challenges in time. The aim is also to avoid undesired development or to achieve a course of development that is better than expected.

The views presented in the text are based on a comprehensive review of literature, several separate articles and background memoranda, conversations, seminars, workshops, hearings of the personnel of the OSH department and the writers' own views. The analyses and actions presented are not official positions of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

The future review has been written in the Department for Occupational Safety and Health of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The strategic planning group of the Policy Unit takes primary responsibility for the review. All personnel of the Department have taken part in producing the content.

#### Keywords

Future, working life, work, labour force, occupational safety and health, occupational health, well-being at work, safety at work, polarisation, change

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This publication is an expanded abstract of the future review written at the OSH Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health: *"Working Life 2025 review. Effects of the changes in working life and the working environment on occupational safety and health and well-being at work."* The future review has been written in the Department for Occupational Safety and Health of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The strategic planning group of the Policy Unit takes primary responsibility for the review. All personnel of the Department have taken part in producing the content.

Several future reviews have been published in Finland and elsewhere in the world. They have not, however, described changes from the perspective of occupational safety and health and well-being at work, nor proposed any actions to be taken by the occupational safety and health administration. The Working Life 2025 document provides a comprehensive review of working life: It starts by discussing what kind of work will be done by whom and ends by discussing the health of workers, occupational safety and health, well-being at work and the impacts of new technologies on work in 2025.

In addition to the changes in work and working life, the review presents actions to be taken by the occupational safety and health administration today in order to be able to meet the future challenges in time. The aim is also to avoid undesired development, change the anticipated development or to achieve a course of development that is better than expected. The text proposes concrete recommendations for actions.

The Working Life 2025 future review has been prepared by looking back in time and following the foreseeable development trends up to the year 2025. The writers have, in a manner of speaking, placed themselves in that year 2025 and looked at the situation. Therefore, when the current state of affairs is reported, reference is made to the year 2025. The review does not describe what the working life in 2025 should look like or what the most favourable, the worst or an alternative scenario would be. The writers have chosen the future outlook that in their opinion is the most probable on the basis of the present development trends. However, the chapters indicating actions by the occupational safety and health administration have been written from the perspective of the year 2015, because those actions must be carried out today and from this time onwards.

The views presented in the text are based on a comprehensive review of literature, several separate articles and background memoranda, conversations, seminars, workshops, hearings of the personnel of the OSH department and the writers' own views. The analyses and actions presented are not official positions of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

# 2 SYNTHESIS OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

One factor with a significant impact on the working life and working environment of the future is the ever increasing acceleration of technological progress, robotism and advances in ICT, and the positive and negative effects on working conditions brought about by these trends. An increasing proportion of work and employees are easily and continuously in contact with each other around the world. The place where many tasks are done can be changed easily, work is flexible and the needs of employees are taking care of, as well as dangerous tasks have been mechanised. Also, Finland is more chemicalized than before.

The negative impacts of this development include unpredictable health effects, increasing strain on employees and constant change in the working environment, demands to master large quantities of data, ethical questions on robotism, and problems with data security. Technical progress also accelerates changes in trading and at working places and speeds up the establishment and demise of enterprises and institutions. All this will lead to extensive and profound polarisation at work and in working life. Employees will be divided into experts and non-experts. We will see substantial divergence in pay, increasing differences in health and significant distinctions in well-being at work. Diversification will occur at workplaces, too. There will remain a need for work that is bound to place and time and where technical advances cannot eliminate all dangerous tasks, for instance.

Amidst these changes in working life, much is required from employers. Not all employers possess the competence or means to cater for continuous training of their employees or take the needs of workers with different degrees of work ability into consideration. Furthermore, as the ways of working evolve, the measurement of work performance and result changes. At advanced workplaces in many industries, the result of work is no longer measured on the basis of input but on output. However, this is not possible at all places of work due to the nature of the work done.

Leadership involves demands for wide-ranging competencies. Responding to these is difficult especially in small organisations that have no specific resources in HR administration. Mastering vast amounts of information, people's dependency on technology, operating within organisations and networks, internationalism and multiculturalism cannot be easily combined with the traditional basic duties of managers. The relationship between employee and employer changes as workers take ever more responsibility for their own actions and, on the other hand, offer their own expertise in virtual networks.

From the OSH administration's perspective, the consequence of such diversification and polarisation includes the lack of commensurability and difficulties with the setting of common universal standards. The modes of operation of the OSH administration and OSH enforcement, in particular, must become more diversified and be flexible. On the one hand, the OSH administration must make sure that employers have submitted appropriate guidelines involving dangerous factors at workplaces, such as noise levels and exposure to chemical hazards. The basics must be in order at all workplaces - the place of work must be safe, working must not endanger the mental or physical health of employees, and the terms and conditions of the employment relationship must be in compliance with the law. This will remain part of the key mission of the OSH administration.

On the other hand, the actions of the OSH administration must be more directed at narrow sectors and small groups of employees. For example, risks involving occupational safety and well-being at work are increasingly targeted at certain professional groups or positions with specific tasks inside various lines of business or doing short periods of time, instead of being sector-specific or broader risks. This means that risk assessments must be targeted more precisely. Of course, no professional group or position is free from work-related risks; they just are highly heterogenic and increasingly difficult to identify and verify in advance.

Occupational accidents as well as occupational diseases are decreasing very moderately. It is not easy to change this trend without constant investment in a culture of safety, because production and markets take new substances and technologies as well as ever more complex products in use at an accelerating rate. New technologies, new chemicals, new inventions and new methods of working bring with them potential risks that are difficult to anticipate; thus assessment of exposure and hazards in advance remain insufficient. In addition, constantly being in hurry and in a state of change cause psychosocial strain.

Investments must continue to be made in expertise on occupational hygiene; this will ensure that people have competence related to occupational hygiene available for them at the

workplace. Reasons for this include the aforementioned dispersal of risks between places of work and even workstations, and multiple exposure. Proactive measurement as well as advance assessment of concentrations and exposure must be enhanced.

We can counteract the negative input of diversification and polarisation by increasing cooperation on occupational safety and health at the workplace, by training members of work safety committees, and by engaging employees in safety management and risk assessment as part of the workplace management system. Recognition of the safety culture, especially in independent work, in the elimination of risks is very important at the individual level.

Technological progress increases the movement of employees from one location to the next. Work and leisure become mixed with one another, resulting in flexible working hours and making work independent of location. The employee decides increasingly how to organise work and makes quick independent choices; these require sufficient education and training. This also highlights the employees' ability and opportunity to set limits for working hours and the amount of work. Responsibility for working conditions and the development of them as well as supreme decision-making power remain with the employer.

The limits of working may become blurred. Work may become fragmented and be done according to different pay principles; such work may also involve traits of unpaid work. Boundaries between entrepreneurship, paid work and volunteerism will inevitably be obscured.

Changes in the locations of working and telework mean that risk assessments must be carried out on the premises where people work, and this must be taken into account in design and planning. For instance, work ergonomics of travelers has largely been ignored on trains where many people work using their computers, tablets, etc. The same lack of ergonomics pertains to other modes of transport and public spaces, such as libraries.

The costs of absence from work and the financial benefits of investments made in occupational safety and health and well-being at work must be brought to the attention of the public and employers, in particular. The OSH administration can contribute to greater understanding of the significance of safe work, healthy employees and well-being at the workplace as part of work productivity. All the above mentioned changes mean that the importance of a safety culture as a way to increase and enhance productivity and employees' work and functional capacity in working life will be emphasised even more than before. A proactive safety culture must support organisation of work that promotes employees' opportunities for development and influence and experimental development of the ways of working.

The changes and trends mentioned above are mainly positive, although they do challenge traditional occupational safety and health from many different perspectives. They need to be seen as positive factors, and the OSH administration must make a strong contribution to raising the quality of Finnish working life to the top among European countries. In its own work, the OSH administration must take this re-thinking of work and working life further.

### **3 WHAT KIND OF WORK IS DONE, AND WHERE IS WORK LOCATED**

Jobs are created and eliminated at a rapid rate in different industrial sectors. The quick progress in automation has improved productivity and reduced the amount of manual and physical labour. Industrial production today is closer to service production where tailored solutions and innovations play a key role.

Environmental production and respect for nature have reached an important position in society at large. Business operations favourable to the environment are being developed, and consideration for the environment is expected in all work being done. In addition, more and more customers demand enterprises to operate in an environment-friendly manner. Green work has been and is being generated in all sectors of operation.

One can see in every industry how networking and network collaboration have become part of the daily life at workplaces and in undertakings, especially in international operations. Networking has increased the operation of businesses at the interfaces of various sectors, in particular, the aim being to generate new innovations. Such networking and cooperation have blurred the boundaries between different industries and sectors. These networks have accelerated both the distribution and reception of information. Instead of sitting on information as before, people today openly pass out information outside of their own organisation.

Social media is being widely used in network collaboration. Through social media, employers and employees reach not only their most important stakeholders and customers but other parties as well. Social media is where weak signals are detected first.

In the Finnish industrial structure, the most significant change has occurred in the service sector where the number of the employed has grown steadily for several decades. In contrast to the service sector, in the manufacturing sector the number of the employed has continued to diminish over the past decades. The number of the employed in primary production has been in a steady decline which, however, slowed down in the early years of the 2010s; since then, the number of the employed has remained stable.

### **Jobs of the future**

For fewer and fewer employees a place of work is a fixed location where they spend the entire workday. In expert duties, in particular, highly advanced technology has enabled working independently from place and time. On the other hand, such assignments often have to be completed within strict delivery times. Different projects with changing patterns of collaboration move experts and project workers from one site and country to the next. Establishment of different virtual companies is a commonplace occurrence. Those doing creative work are often self-employed persons who globally take their expertise to where it is in demand. Changes in work have moved some tasks away from the sphere of traditional workplace supervision.

Changes concerning workplaces have also introduced shifts to the organisation of work and work communities, which are in constant transformation. Different work opportunities have resulted in brisk mobility among employees. Some organisations have abandoned the monitoring of working hours and, instead, moved their focus on the quality of work and assessment of the results of work. These changes have highlighted the importance of trust at workplaces, and they entail specific challenges for leadership.

Multiculturalism at workplaces has brought along both advantages and challenges. Matching different cultures and agreeing on joint rules is part of everyday life at workplaces. Multiculturalism has given workplaces new kinds of perspectives and modes of operation, as well as extensive language skills that provide a significant asset in the international marketplace. Multiculturalism has increased the need for unambiguous communication.

Workplaces have focused on their core competencies to retain their competitiveness and top position in the market. Other duties at workplaces have been outsourced. A single workplace may have employees from many companies present every day. Also, many routine tasks have been automated.

The grey economy became more prevalent in the 2010s due to the financial plight of both employees and entrepreneurs. After the national economy picked up slightly, the grey economy was reduced at the same time. Still, the grey economy has not diminished back to its level in the 2010s. This is partly due to the slow economic growth but also an increase in private entrepreneurship. In 2025, there will remain a large grey economy despite all the measures taken to combat it.

### **Employees' skills and knowledge**

Employees are required to possess diverse and multidisciplinary knowledge and skills as well as, first and foremost, creativity besides mere technical performance. Indeed, the acquisition of new knowledge and new skills comprises an integral part of daily work. Knowledge and skills expire quickly, and demands are changing constantly. The increase in knowledge work requires efficient communication and interaction between people. Although employees are used to acting online and via mobile devices, social relationships and collaboration in working life are deemed to be important.

Employees must be prepared to act in an environment where the contents of work are diversified and varying. This also emphasises employees' ability to manage their own work. The organisation of work and quick, independent choices have been transferred more from supervisors to employees themselves. Employees are required to not only manage their work but, increasingly, manage and motivate themselves and set limits in terms of working hours and amounts of work, for instance.

### **Placement of work**

In 2025, most Finnish inhabitants and workplaces can be found in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and in growth centres around large cities with universities. The role of Finland in the international field of operations is strongly linked to innovations and technical progress which require efficient concentration of expertise.

Population centres that have sprung up around large cities due to production and labour have raised the cost level and increased concern for the sustainability of the environment. In addition, services are provided online more than before, so people do not use services in person, on the service provider's premises. For these reasons, the growth of such population centres is slowing down significantly, and their attractiveness is waning. Production is being relocated outside of the population centres. The industrial internet and technological progress support the preservation of production in Finland.

Some industrial production has returned to Finland in order to secure the quality of production and due to rising production costs in emerging countries. In contrast, many virtual services are being transferred to foreign countries.

Benefits provided by advances in information and communication technology enable employees to live far away from their workplace and large centres. Video and remote links both inside Finland and in international collaboration are widely in use. Telework has increased people's opportunities to accept assignments away from the workplace; this has reduced commuting, which still remains brisk and commonplace. Employees whose work cannot be detached from its location still have to travel a lot due to their job.



## 4 WHO ARE THE EMPLOYEES

The number of elderly people in Finland has increased. The share of people at least 65 years of age amongst the entire population has increased from approximately 17.5 per cent to slightly over 24 per cent in 2010–2025. There have been no changes in birth rate trends at the same time; they have remained fairly stable.

The number of working-age people has diminished by approximately 130,000 people in the past 15 years. The employment rate, i.e. the share of the employed amongst people aged between 15 and 64, has remained roughly the same since 2014, at about 70 per cent. This percentage has not risen as much as was anticipated back in 2014, because due to the recession there has been a decline in employment, especially among the middle class. In addition, many employees still leave the labour market and a similar number of employees is not entering that market. This change is moderated by immigration. The employment rates of men and women are nearly identical.

More and more people over 64 years of age have a full-time or part-time job or work as volunteers. Working in retirement has also become more prevalent. Young people's share of the workforce has decreased. Whether work is available for young people has been largely determined by economic fluctuations. Some young persons who have seen no demand for their expertise in the Finnish labour market have moved abroad.

In the worst case, young people to whom work has not been available have been shut out of working life. Efforts have been made to integrate young people in working life through different job bank experiments, work placements and apprenticeships. Still, the ever-changing needs of the labour market in terms of expertise have created challenges for young people moving into working life after their education.

### **Position of immigrants in working life**

Immigrants have influenced the Finnish workforce by making its structure younger, for example. The number of immigrants in Finland has increased constantly. In 2010, the number of immigrants was approximately 170,000; in 2025 that figure stands at nearly 400,000. The growth in the number of immigrants in Finland has not been regionally balanced. This growth has been especially large in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and large urban centres.

Immigrants are not a homogeneous group. Different targeted measures and tailored services have been implemented to improve immigrants' position in working life. Employers are more and more responsible for the targeted training of immigrants.

Clashes between different cultures at workplaces may be one factor with a negative impact on the work environment. Generally speaking, however, there has been a positive trend in the tolerance of employees and work-places. The diversity of the workforce has increased as employees have ever more varied backgrounds and personal characteristics. Workplaces are familiar with internationalism as well as have knowledge of international market and different cultures which need to be used for their advantage.

## 5 EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIPS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Full-time employment relationships valid until further notice, or "normal employment relationships", are still the prevailing form of employment relationship, but their share has slightly decreased over the past 10 years. Other, atypical forms of employment relationship, such as fixed-term, part-time and leased employment relationships have become more commonplace. "Atypical work" refers to all such work which differs from full-time work, agreed on until further notice, in terms of the form of the employment relationship, working hours or placement of the work.

Employers have begun to favour part-time employment relationship due to their desire to, for instance, balance out seasonal fluctuations in the need for labour. Work by old-age pensioners as well as part-time work by elderly people and those partially disabled have also increased the number of such employment relationships. Also, more young people are working part-time; indeed, part-time work is most common among the young age categories besides elderly people. The use of part-time employment relationships varies by industrial sector. Part-time employment relationships are much more common among women than men.

In the past 15 years, fixed-term employment relationships have steadily become more commonplace, but their share of the employment relationships of salary earners remains almost the same as in 2014, at approximately 16 per cent. Fixed-term employment relationships remain much more common among women than men.

Leased work has become more common in recent years; one reason for this is the need of businesses to arrange for substitutes. Leased work is typically more common among the young age groups. Reviewed by industry sector, the trade sector and the hotel and restaurant sectors have the greatest number of people doing leased as well as part-time work. In addition to the above, leased work is common in manufacturing. Leased work is fairly evenly distributed between women and men.

Still, diversification has led to a situation where new and old as well as network-type virtual companies may have both traditional, hour- and month-based paid work and piecework. The same products and services can be provided through a franchising arrangement or as an entrepreneur, side by side, at the same company or on the same premises.

### **Entrepreneurship**

The number of private and micro entrepreneurs has grown constantly. Self-employment has become more commonplace regardless of industrial sector and profession. Private and micro entrepreneurship and other forms of self-employment besides paid work have become more common, and many people alternate between them. The majority of all entrepreneurs still start their business out of their own interests. The growth in the number of entrepreneurs has also been affected by increasing outsourcing and subcontracting of even very small duties. Businesses do not necessarily want to offer permanent or full-time jobs. Some employees have become entrepreneurs out of coercion or voluntarily, offering their expertise and professional skills to many undertakings and employers simultaneously. Persons left in a position between paid work and entrepreneurship or in a hybrid of these do not have the security provided by an employment contract and relationship, and few of them have occupational health care, for example.

## 6 FLEXIBILITY IN WORKING LIFE, ADJUSTMENT OF WORK, AND EQUALITY

Use of flexibility in working hours, such as flextime and working time banks, has increased especially in expert duties but in other jobs as well, when the nature of the duties make this possible. For a long time, some collective agreements have enabled the parties to agree locally on working time banks and other flexibility related to working hours. Use of study leaves has also become more prevalent during the past decade.

Greater project nature and fragmentation of work require employees to be flexible in terms of time and place. In expert professions, projects are implemented in varying groups of experts, with different international compositions and on different sites, and work must be done regardless of location, fixed workstation and time of day. Further, telework done at varying times and in different places involves specific risks and questions of responsibility.

Also, more and more work is done at someone else's home as people buy more services directly to their own home. The increase in work done at homes has also meant that the some work done by people during the day now has to be performed in the evenings and on weekends.

To facilitate the matching of work and family, day care centres and placements have been established at workplaces and in different business clusters, reducing the duration of employees' commute and diminishing the strain arising from efforts to match work and family.

The accumulation of pension throughout the career has enabled elderly people to move to jobs that are less demanding and pay less or for instance, to part-time work near the end of the career.

However, the use of atypical employment relationships mostly benefits employers only. Among employees, different temporary and part-time jobs have increased constant existence in a state of change and, thus, experiences of mental strain. By using zero-hour contracts, an employer can offer an employee work when it is available and even at a short notice. Often the employee is forced to accept the work offer not to forfeit future work opportunities. Flexibility, especially related to work independent from time and place, has become more frequent unevenly among different groups of employees. So, the positive effects of flexibility for employees have not been targeted evenly; the greatest beneficiaries of this trend include those working in expert positions.

Individual adjustment of work has become increasingly common. Employers are well informed of measures they can take to adjust work at workplaces. The measures of individual adaptation of work have been key from the perspective of the labour market, as the parties endeavour to utilise everyone's contribution in working life, including those partially disabled and elderly people, among others.

### **Equality and non-discrimination**

Equality and non-discrimination in working life have slowly developed in a positive direction. However, changing the attitudes and prejudices is necessary because workplaces and work communities have become more diverse in cultural terms.

The labour market is still divided in "women's jobs" and "men's jobs". In female-dominated sectors, the level of pay is often lower than in male-dominated ones, and the hours worked are fewer than average. The difference in pay has slightly contracted in the past few decades. Today, a woman's pay is approximately 85.5 per cent of a man's pay.

Partly this average pay difference between the genders has been narrowed due to women's higher level of education. One factor in this contraction of the pay difference is that the demand for labour in female-dominated sectors, such as health care and social welfare services, has increased whereas male-dominated fields, such as manufacturing, have seen a decrease.

Problems related to the working conditions of immigrants mostly pertain to low-paying jobs with low requirements for education and language skills. Employers find it easy to take advantage of immigrants' lack of knowledge of the Finnish labour legislation.

Multiculturalism at workplaces has introduced specific challenges to the operation, dynamics and communication of work communities. People coming from different cultures have diverging opinions of acceptable behaviour and modes of operation. In addition, differences in spoken language and the style of speaking cause misunderstandings.

## 7 TECHNOLOGY

In the past decade, significant progress has been made in information and communication technology, health and well-being technology, nanotechnology and environmental technology. The quickest increase has been in technologies that have introduced new solutions to environmental problems and recycling of waste, and where production is flexible. As a consequence of this change, it is important that people know how to use technology at workplaces as a competitive and production factor. The increase of virtual work and acting in networks on the global labour market can be financially attractive, but it may lead to unforeseen risks.

The amount of information accumulated in the Internet has grown explosively. Large data flows have enabled people to combine different data items and information sources with one another. Big data has created new professions that require from employees a completely new kind of expertise in searching for information as well as processing and understanding it.

More and more things and machines are connected to the Internet or linked to each other through it. Internet connections of things at workplaces have become more common. Efforts have been made to improve safety and health as well as facilitate people's daily lives and work by means of this trend.

Progress has certain disadvantages too. Phishing and information mining has become more commonplace. This trend has increased people's dependency on and trust in IT-technology which, in turn, has led to diminishing assessment and deliberative ability among users. Many people are incapable of action in exceptional circumstances, and this has increased the number of accidents and incidents both during leisure and at work. However, self-steering machines and vehicles would require quick reaction ability from their operating environment.

### **Health risks from of new technology**

In the best case scenario, technology can support people's work and functional capacity and enhance their health. In 2025, technology can be used to prevent illnesses as symptoms can be identified at an early stage. However, the challenges here are the identification of long-term risks related to the use of new technology and the assessment of harmful health effects.

With these new technologies, a new kind of strain has been put on the musculoskeletal system. Sedentary work has increased although the problems with it have been known for a long time. Working with mobile and wireless devices has increased the strain on employees' neck, shoulders and hands. Also, inactivity and obesity exacerbate the effects of this strain.

Experiences of mental and cognitive strain have increased. Advances in information and communication technology have increased "silent requirements" for working irrespective of the time of day. The phenomenon of mixing time with leisure has become stronger than before. In expert positions, in particular, being available around the clock reduces employees' possibilities for sufficient recovery and detachment from work.

For all groups of employees, the increase in the experience of mental strain has been influenced by changing requirements on competence in the use of new technologies, adjusting to incessant changes in the methods of working, and mastering a growing amount of information.

One common factor of these technological innovations is that often too little is known of the detrimental effects before wide-ranging distribution of their commercial applications.

## 8 SICK LEAVES, WORK ABILITY, AND OCCUPATIONAL ILLNESSES

### **Sick leaves**

In the long term, the share of sick leaves among the employed has remained in the 4%-5% range although different measures have been taken to reduce them. Physical health problems, such as musculoskeletal disorders, among those at the beginning of their work career have increased due to, e.g., people's inactivity, obesity and continuous sitting at a display terminal. In addition, raising of the pension age in 2017 and the increase of the number of elderly people in working life have contributed to the increase in sick leaves. Elderly people have no more short-term sick leaves than other employed persons, but long-term sick leaves are more common among them than other age groups. The increase of long sick leaves among the elderly has increased the number and share of sick leaves.

Working life is characterised by urgency, uncertainty, growing demands on expertise, the requirement of constant availability, the temporary nature of work, a state of change as well as cognitive strain and multi-tasking. These impact the mental strain and well-being at work perceived by employees. Sick leaves caused by experiences of mental strain and disorders of mental health and behaviour have increased compared to the situation in the 2010s. This increase has been moderate, however, because many new methods for reducing mental strain have been developed and are in use at workplaces.

The emergence of new exposure substances and the realisation of some health risks caused by new technologies have also contributed to sick leaves. Increased international mobility of the workforce, and travelling for work and during leisure are also increasing the number of sick leaves. Many different measures are being taken to reduce the number of people going on disability pension, and some success with this goal has been achieved. However, difficulties in acceptance to disability pension are evident as increasing sick leaves.

### **Work ability, and disability pensions**

The number of people going on disability pension under the earnings-related pension scheme has been on a downward trend since the early 2010s, but this decrease has slowed down since the late 2010s. In 2025, approximately 20,000 persons retired on a disability pension. Factors contributing to the downward trend of this number include the general atmosphere on extending careers, measures taken to prolong careers even at the work-place level, raising of the pension age, stricter requirements for going on a disability pension, and the decrease in the

size of the age groups. Measures to adopt work at workplaces and extensive rehabilitation opportunities for employees have also diminished the risk of going on a disability pension.

The disability risk has been dispersed more evenly amongst different groups of employees compared with the 2010s. However, the disability of those in a high socioeconomic position is still most commonly linked to disorders of mental health whereas those doing physical work most often go on disability due to musculoskeletal disorders.

An alarmingly large share of people going on a disability pension due to problems with mental health are under 35 years of age, at the beginning of their career. Reasons why people under 35 are displaced from work are not solely attributable to work; instead, there are several factors in the background.

### **Occupational accidents**

In the long term, the total number of occupational accidents has decreased, albeit fairly little and rather slowly. This decrease is due to the decline in accidents that have befallen on salary earners. Occupational accidents of entrepreneurs have been on the increase for a long time, whereas occupational accidents of agricultural entrepreneurs have remained at roughly the same level for more than a decade.

The greatest decrease has been in occupational accidents that have caused disability of no fewer than four but no more than 30 days. The number of minor workplace accidents has fallen only slightly, whereas serious workplace accidents resulting in disability of more than 30 days has remained at the same level for several years.

Different nationwide programmes have been implemented to reduce workplace accidents in 2010s. These have been continued in the 2020s, and the same applies to the dissemination of "zero accidents" thinking. Information about the direct and indirect costs arising from accidents has been obtained, and this has affected work-place attitudes towards occupational safety and health. Workplaces understand the financial effects of investments in occupational safety and health, and this has led to an improvement of the culture of occupational safety and health at workplaces. Efforts have been made to reduce accidents occurring at workplaces by emphasising the significance of a culture of interaction and employees' joint responsibility for occupational safety and health. The increase in atypical employment relationships, the structural change in various industrial sectors, risks caused by new technologies, and changes in the forms of working have slowed down the positive trend in the number of workplace accidents.

The total number of accidents during work-related travel has also fallen slightly since the early 2020s.

### **Occupational and work-related diseases**

The number of occupational diseases has not changed much since 2012; today, the number of occupational diseases and suspected cases is approximately 4,400–4,500 per year. The number of occupational diseases has decreased in most groups of occupational diseases. By contrast, the trend has been unfavourable in respiratory allergies and skin diseases, and the number of cases of occupational diseases in these illness groups has increased.

Not all work-related illnesses are occupational illnesses, so for such cases no compensation is paid. The most significant among these are musculoskeletal diseases, work burnout and depression. Some tropical diseases, such as malaria, contracted during international work-related travel may have been associated with the work and reviewed as work-related illnesses but not as occupational illnesses.

The increase in discontinuous careers and short-term work, the mixing of work and leisure, and the number of people doing their own work have made it difficult to link reasons for illnesses specifically to work and a certain job. As people change their jobs frequently and certain illnesses appear several years after exposure, confirming the causal link of an illness as attributable to work is complicated with illnesses with a long latency period.

## 9 DURATION OF WORK CAREERS

The duration of work careers is moderately growing as a consequence of the pension reform made and the upturn in the economic situation. In 2025, the duration of a work career is approximately 34 years. This also includes people who have gone on a disability pension. Those who go on an old-age pension only have a work career lasting 38 years on average. The duration of work careers has not increased as much as people hoped when the pension reform was being made. Contributing factors include the alternation of periods of unemployment, entrepreneurship and studies, and family leaves. Work careers have become more dispersed and discontinuous, and employee mobility in the labour market has increased. Also, many immigrants do not reach the average duration of a work career before retirement. The duration of women's work career is two years shorter than for men's. These differences will even out in the future as more men stay at home and take care of their children and aging parents.

Another factor contributing to longer work careers is elderly employees' positive attitude and desire to work during their old-age pension. Extending the work careers of the elderly has been made possible by better adopting changes in work with the employee's individual resources.

More and more pensioners are interested in continuing to work on a voluntary basis. Still, new methods are needed in 2025 to make it easier to do voluntary work.

## 10 CHANGES IN MANAGEMENT, AND LEARNING AT WORK

In 2025, Finland has increasingly moved from conveyor-belt management to leadership that emphasises creativity and inspiration. As the moderate growth of the Finnish economy has clearly lagged that of several other developed countries, changes have been made to management besides difficult structural changes. As a consequence, changes are generally seen as opportunities rather than threats.

Creativity, innovativeness and vision are resources required for social development and corporate success in international competition. Managers and supervisors need to possess new kinds of management methods to find these resources and utilise them in working life. Workplaces where the managers have found new and different perspectives on leadership have also succeeded in enhancing the operation and problem-solving ability of the work community.

At successful workplaces, the employees have been engaged in the development of operations. Work culture is based on self-motivation, competence and a sense of community. Work careers at such workplaces are longer than at ones with an old-style management culture.

The polarisation of working life poses constant challenges to the management of occupational safety and health. At workplaces which invest in innovativeness and creativity, safety management has been connected as part of other management. They have succeeded at

merging the relationship between work and leisure with measures agreed on by the various parties. Foresight and resilience are emphasised in safety management.

### **Learning at work, and training periods**

People in Finland hold education and training in high regard. In 2025, about one-half of young adults have a university degree. Almost 80 per cent of all adults have a post-lower-secondary qualification. Employees are willing to participate in different training events, even without pay and during their leisure. Investments in conversion training have helped people change careers and thus helped prevent unemployment. Workplaces that have invested in continuous learning encourage and even support the employees' training. Employees are granted training and study leaves.

Global change trends have reformed Finnish schools, teaching and pedagogical solutions. People still need broad basic knowledge, but what was enough in the early 2000s is no longer sufficient in 2025. Working life requires, in particular, communication skills, the ability to combine large amounts of information and master the big picture, and to use IT applications in flexible ways.

On the other hand, polarisation in terms of knowledge and skills is clearly evident in society. We have a permanent group of working-age people who have been unable to fulfil growing demands due to learning difficulties, for example, and have therefore been displaced from working life.

Crowdsourcing, which emerged in the 2010s, is a method that has spread to workplaces with experts, in particular. It has been proven as a good instrument to jointly find new, creative ways for continuous learning at work. Methods of co-creation have also been implemented to improve learning. There, the workplace has, together with its employees and own customers, developed a model for learning and training which serves the employer, employees and customers alike. Improved professional skills have an influence on the quality of the work.

## **11 MEASURES OF THE OSH ADMINISTRATION FROM TODAY INTO THE YEAR 2025**

Changes in working life have not diminished the need for OSH enforcement. As work independent from time and place increases, we need investments in safety management and especially in helping employees identify risk factors and assess risks. What polarisation and diversification require from OSH enforcement is supervision that is more accurately targeted. As boundaries between industrial sectors are broken, we have to find the professions and duties to which such supervision must be allocated. Safety culture and the principle of prevention can be furthered by using different tools of social media. At an early stage, the OSH administration should take different projects on occupational safety and health and well-being at work to social media to reap the rewards of co-creation and crowdsourcing.

Employers are still responsible for training and instructing their employees. The significance of orientation is emphasised as the workplace have more and more part-time and fixed-term employees, leased employees and private entrepreneurs. In addition, workplaces will have more partially disabled and elderly employees in the future. Orientation must be based on a risk assessment conducted at the workplace. The significance of risk assessment



becomes more pronounced. By its own measures, the OSH administration endeavours to ensure that employees can maintain their broad professional skills irrespective of their employer. From the perspective of occupational safety and health, competence is part of safety and health at work. In practice, a mechanism must be created that enables sufficient training of employees and continuous maintenance of their professional skills.

A specific challenge to the OSH administration comes from reaching employees in future. Information about occupational safety and health does not always reach people who act as multi-sector entrepreneurs or those who simultaneously do paid work and run their own business. Thus the position of an employer, which is becoming more and more vacillating, may require legislative amendments to protect all those who work. The OSH administration must do more networking and further increase its collaboration with various stakeholders. Exchange of information between the authorities and intelligence enabled by big data is used to reach employees, employers and workplaces.

The increase of multicultural and multilingual workplaces has stepped up competency requirements for OSH enforcement. By its own measures, the OSH administration aims to contribute to better understanding of different modes of operation by employees coming from differing cultural backgrounds. This must be observed in the recruitment of new staff for the OSH administration. Compliance with Finnish legislation must be secured.

The OSH administration actively monitors changes in working life, the economy and society as well as re-search influencing its own sector of operation, especially research related to safety and health perspectives involving new technology. The OSH Department continues regular meetings with institutions that research working life in order to ensure that its information is up to date.

The total strain (physical, mental, social) felt by employees is an issue that the OSH administration must re-view even more seriously than before. This total strain also includes the health of the brain. Monitoring new brain research is an essential part of the work done by officials of the OSH Administration. From the perspective of the OSH administration, the goal is to make the combined effect of live styles and workplace measures visible in the reduction of disability, thereby decreasing the number of sick leaves and people going on disability pension. New risks are also produced by rapid technological progress and increased use of chemicals and nanomaterials. Minimising these risks requires a new kind of targeted risk assessment.