

ISF Report 2012:18

Outcomes of Decisions on Eligibility for Assistance Benefit

Swedish Social Insurance Inspectorate

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Summary

The Swedish Social Insurance Inspectorate (Inspektionen för socialförsäkringen, ISF) is an independent supervisory agency for the Swedish social insurance system. The objectives of the agency are to strengthen compliance with legislation and other statutes and to improve the efficiency of the social insurance system through system supervision and efficiency analysis and evaluation.

The ISF's work is mainly conducted on a project basis and is commissioned by the Government or initiated autonomously by the agency. This report has been commissioned by the Government and will be published in two parts, the first part in December 2012 and the second and final part in October 2014.

Background

The disability policy in Sweden is based upon the principle that each person is of equal value and has equal rights. In 1994, the LSS—the Act Concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (1993:387)—was implemented to ensure the rights of persons with major functional impairments to self-determination, independence, full participation and equality in living conditions.

Persons with major functional impairments and an extensive need for support in their daily lives may be entitled to personally tailored benefits, one of which is Assistance Benefit (Assistansersättning). Such assistance is provided by a limited number of individuals, placing constraints on the scale and amount of benefits any given individual can expect to receive. Certain conditions of need for help with specific, basic needs must be met in order to be eligible for Assistance Benefit.

Examples of these needs include help with eating, dressing and undressing, personal hygiene, communicating with others and a range of other activities potentially requiring detailed knowledge of the person's specific functional impairment. If a person is entitled to more than 20 hours a week of assistance to meet these fundamental needs, the person is also entitled, by the Social Insurance Code, to other forms of personal support in their daily life.

Objectives

The Government has commissioned the ISF to provide a basis for, and assess the causes for, the outcomes of decisions on Assistance Benefit for the period from 2002 up to and including 2013. This applies both to new applications and to the review of entitlements every second year. In addition, the report will examine whether there have been any changes over time and identify the potential causes of such changes. Finally, it will provide a follow-up concerning any other support that society offers to persons who are not eligible for Assistance Benefit, but who have an extensive need for support in their daily life. This report is an interim report, which has been defined in consultation with the Ministry of Social Affairs. In order to analyse what happens to the people who are not granted Assistance Benefit or stop receiving it, an overview of any other support the community offers them is needed. Also necessary is a description of the conditions that must be met for such aid to be granted. This report therefore aims to provide a description of the social support available for people with disabilities in Sweden. Furthermore, the annual outcome of decisions on Assistance Benefit between 2002 and 2011 is described.

Methods

This report is based on an analysis of the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (Försäkringskassan) records on Benefit Assistance. Furthermore, the description is compiled using various descriptive documents and the presentation of relevant regulations, and with official statistics from Statistics Sweden (SCB), Eurostat, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen).

Findings

Different types of social assistance are directed to persons with varying degrees of impairment. Throughout the period, the most extensive support, in terms of the number of recipients and the amount of expenditure, consisted of employment measures to increase the ability to work or study. For people with major functional impairments, specific support and service measures can be granted under the LSS if a person has a basic need for help and has an impairment that is covered by the law. If the basic need amounts to more than 20 hours per week, the person is entitled to assistance under the Social Security Code (SFB) administered by the Social Insurance Agency. If the basic need can be satisfied by less than 20 hours' assistance, personal assistance may be granted under the LSS administered by the municipality. For people with impairments who are not considered to meet the criteria to be granted Assistance Benefit or LSS, similar measures can be granted under the rules of other assistance in the Social Services Act (SoL).

The Swedish Social Insurance Agency's data for the period 2002–2011 show that Assistance Benefit experienced steady growth, in terms of both the number of beneficiaries and the granted hours per recipient, up to and including 2007. Thereafter, relatively large changes are evident in the proportion and number of refusals of new applications. The number of people being granted Assistance Benefit reduced by about a quarter, while the number of refusals increased by nearly 50 per cent in 2008. Thereafter, the refusals remained at a high level, compared with earlier years, and more applications were refused than approved. Compared with earlier years, there has also been an increase in the number of withdrawals of Assistance Benefit that are to be reviewed every second year. In particular, withdrawals based on the requirement of more than 20 hours of basic needs also increased from 2008 onwards compared with previous years. Despite the increase in withdrawals, the levels are still relatively low at less than 2 per cent for 2011. A likely explanation for this trend is that the concept of basic needs has gradually been clarified, first by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and then by the Supreme Administrative Court. Other findings include: that the share of beneficiaries older than 65 years is growing, that the most common reason for the benefit ceasing is death, that slightly more men than women are granted the benefit (54% versus 46% in 2011), and that the number of assistance hours granted grew by just above 3 per cent per year throughout the period.