

# Safety and health among undeclared workers

Carin Håkansta, NIVA 27 jan 2025

### Effects of non-standard work arrangements on health, work and families – solutions for the future in Sweden (2019 – 2025)









## Lack of research about health and safety aspects of undeclared work

Undeclared work OSH only one of many aspects

Precarious
employment
More than
undeclared
work



## All undeclared work is precarious but not all precarious work is undeclared

- Undeclared work part of complex socio-economic framework of vulnerable and marginalized communities including (often undocumented) foreign-born workers (Dell'Anno, 2022, Williams and Bezeredi, 2018).
- Undocumented status acts as a social determinant of occupational health (Flynn et al., 2015).
- Regulatory loopholes, inadequate enforcement, disparities in legal frameworks create cycles of socioeconomic vulnerability (Williams, 2019).





### **Undeclared workers...**

- often found in sectors with high accident and injury risks e.g. agriculture and construction, combined with evasion of OSH regulations and requirements,
- tend to be given more dangerous job tasks than standard workers (EFILWC, 2002, Papadopoulos et al., 2010).



### Undeclared workers are less likely to...

- get training/information about OSH risks and safety precautions due to lack of formal employment agreements,
- ask for the support they should be entitled to due to job insecurity
- receive sufficient care or fail to disclose and report workplace injuries (Quinlan et al., 2001, Papadopoulos et al., 2010).



### Government initiative aimed to strengthen the social partners in the battle against workplace criminality

Interviews with trade unions and employer organizations receiving 11 grants 2018-2021:

- → Construction (7)
- → Musicians (2)
- → Forestry (1)
- → Hotels and restaurants (1)

Article



Power resources and the battle against precarious employment: Trade union activities within a tripartite initiative tackling undeclared work in Sweden

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Unit of Occupational Medicine, Institute of Environmental Medicine, Karolinska Institutet, Sweden; Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute, Unity Health Toronto, Canada; Cape Breton University, Sydney, Canada Organisations identified as high-risk industries, including cleaning, car repair shops and beauty salons, did not apply. (Migrationsverket et al, 2021).









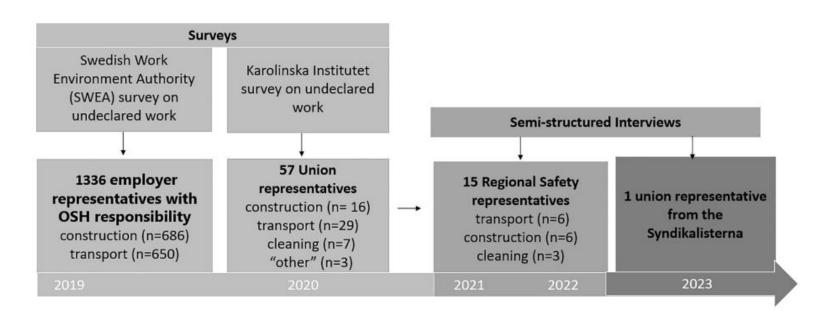
### SWEA survey to employers, KI survey to trade unions and interviews with unions





Surveys: 1336 employer reps, 57 union reps.

Interviews: 16 union reps





### Theme I: 'Realities of undeclared workers in construction, transport, and cleaning industries'



All three sectors: fear and culture of silence



Construction: vibrations, insufficient scaffolding, lack of PPE



Transport: negligence of safety precautions and vehicle maintenance



Cleaning: deceptive work schedules, insufficient training, language barriers



## Theme II: 'Cultural and sectoral perceptions and awareness of undeclared work'

- Construction and transport: normalisation and deliberate strategy to exploit people. Undermining fair labour practices and workers' rights + reinforcing divide between those who have (e.g. formal employees) and those who have not (e.g. undeclared workers).
- Transport: RSRs avoid dealing with undeclared work as it is seen as "scary".
- Cleaning: some employers exploit out of ignorance.



## Theme III: 'Impact of institutional structures on the role of regional safety representatives'



Construction: subcontracting chains hamper and complicate; unregistered workers make it difficult to identify those in need.



Transport and construction: Collective Agreements used as a facade in tenders.



All: problem that SWEA is under financed; slow process of joint inspections eroding the trust; strained collaboration with SWEA leading to a distancing (Transport: takes sides with the employers)



### Theme IV: 'Proactive approaches to address undeclared work among regional safety representatives'



Construction: Break down language barriers with apps, interpreters, multilingual web sites; increased efforts to recruit foreign-born workers (but union members usually prioritised); ID06 ineffective



Transport: more funding to SWEA, abolish employment subsidies due to cheating



Cleaning: advise workers to document transgressions; more SWEA surprise visits; increased OSH training for employers.



### Thank you!

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