

THINGS WE DO, PEOPLE WE MEET – REFLECTIONS IN BRIEF

Sweden Study Tour (4) – Generous Parental Leave

When we talk about Sweden, its much-talked-about parental insurance system and parental leave come readily to mind.

Upon a child's birth or adoption, his or her parents will receive a parental leave allowance totaling 480 days. For 390 of the 480 days, the parent receives income at 80% of salary (up to a maximum payment of SEK 874 per day). For the remaining 90 days, a daily allowance of SEK 180 is paid. The allowance is taxable income. Of the 480 days covered by parental allowance, a period of 60 days is allotted to each parent, with the remaining period shared between the parents or used by one parent solely. In order to encourage men to participate in childcare, the father of a newborn child gets an extra ten days' leave on a temporary parental benefit in addition to the parental allowance.

According to the law, a parent may request his/her employer to shorten his/her working day to 75% of normal working hours, with proportional reduction in salary, until the child is eight. In practice, this right is exercised mainly by women.

A parent adopting a child is entitled to take no-pay leave from work for one and a half years.

While some Swedish academics consider that there is room for improvement in the way Swedish businesses implement family-friendly measures, its generous parental leave system is the envy of many parents in other countries. Sweden is a welfare state with a high tax regime, and therefore the situation is different from Hong Kong in many ways. There is, however, a great deal that we can learn from Sweden's family-friendly policies and principles.