



Survey Report 2018

CTIF – Commission Women in Fire and Rescue Services

1 Summary

The CTIF Commission for Women in Fire and Rescue Services has conducted a survey about working practices, maternity leave and particular issues that affect women.

In this report, we share recommendations from 15 countries and the varying conditions for women in FRS when it comes to pregnancy, parenthood and career support, as well as information about the pension age in each country and the differences between being a woman and a man within the fire and rescue services (FRS).

Pension is one important matter in the difference between genders. The questions in the survey about pension were relative to the general age of retirement in your country. What is the earliest age to retire as a firefighter and how many years are you required to work in FRS before you can retire? Is there any difference between a woman and man?

Can the pension be affected for a woman who works in FRS if the woman becomes pregnant and stays at home with the child?

As gender equality in parenthood is improving, the FRS will have a growing need to provide solutions for childcare at or near the workplace. The questions about parenthood were: How can you promote the parenthood of those in the FRS? Is there a preschool/ kindergarten or any other solution for the employees working in the FRS regarding childcare?

In this report, we can see the differences between countries in how they work with issues related to pregnancy. If a pregnant woman continues to work in FRS, does she have the same working conditions as she did before she was pregnant? In the Commission, we wanted to raise a question about this and how the pregnancy issue is taken care of in the FRS around the world.

One aim of the Commission is to attract more women to the FRS. For this reason, we want to share best practices from different countries for recruiting and retaining women in FRS. This work is an ongoing process and will continue with more surveys and recommendations in the future.

2 Objectives

The aim of the survey was to gather information about how the FRS in different countries deals with pregnancy, parenthood, pension, and career support, and to share best practices as recommendations from the Commission. The answers to this survey serve as a basis for our future work.

3 Introduction

The International Association of Fire and Rescue Services (CTIF) was founded in 1900 and currently has 38 member countries. In 2015, the CTIF Commission for Women in Fire and Rescue Services was established to promote inclusivity in fire and rescue services (FRS) and to improve working conditions for all women in FRS by developing and issuing recommendations.

The Commission collects and shares best practices from around the world for supporting women in FRS. To this end, the Commission conducts surveys to study the psychological climate and adaptation of FRS workplaces that include women.

The Commission has established four working groups in the areas of family and caring, statutes, technical and physical issues, and career support. This survey is an effort to explore three of the above-mentioned areas: family and caring, statutes, and career support.

The focus of this survey is on operational firefighters only - that is, firefighters who attend incidents, including those in a command role, and may put themselves at risk to save a life or property.

4 Methods

A web-based survey was created comprising 36 questions covering three areas: family and caring, statutes and career support. An invitation e-mail with a link to the survey was sent in March 2018 to 15 of the member countries represented in the CTIF Commission for Women in Fire and Rescue Services.

5 Analysis of questions

We can see from the survey that the situation for women in FRS varies from country to country when it comes to pregnancy, childcare, pension, and career support.

Topics

Pregnancy

In most countries, pregnant women in FRS continue to work; however, their working tasks can vary. The differences between the countries are due in part to relevant laws and regulations that require reviewing the risks of the occupation and then creating policies, action plans and recommendations for the FRS in question.

Working duties

In the 15 countries that have answered the survey, we can see that most women can continue to work operationally in FRS when they are pregnant (10 out of 15 countries) depending, of course, on the job duties that they carry out. In some countries, we see that pregnant women in FRS can continue with their same operational duties, while in other countries they can carry out only some of their duties or change to a non-operational role. Interesting to note is that in two of the fifteen countries women are not permitted to work at all as operational firefighters.

In Sweden, there is a regulation in the Working Environment Act stipulating that pregnant women, from day one, are not allowed under any circumstances to carry out “smoke diving”, which is one of the duties of an operational firefighter. In some fire departments, pregnant women are not permitted to continue with any of their operational duties (i.e., alarm response). Instead, these women are transferred within the FRS to work with other duties, such as education (internal or external), fire safety inspection or alarm-center operator.

In some countries, whether a woman can continue with her operational duties depends on the outcome of a risk analysis that is carried out by a company doctor. The risk analysis is based on the exposure to hazardous substances and physical danger that comes with operational working duties.

Sometimes as part of a company policy, the risk analysis leads to an action plan, which details the working duties that a pregnant woman may and may not perform.

We can also see that in some countries a pregnant woman is given non-operational working duties once she is in her third month of pregnancy.

Working schedule and pay

The survey tells us that when a woman working in FRS gets pregnant the number of working hours does not generally decrease, but the time tends to be rescheduled to daytime-only hours. This is connected to the new working tasks that are assigned to the pregnant woman.

In many countries, we can also see that this shift to a daytime-only schedule has a negative impact on the pregnant woman’s pay. The base salary remains the same, but she loses the usual extra pay that is compensation for unsocial working hours (i.e., evenings and weekends).

In some countries, such as Sweden, there are laws against discrimination that prevent employers from lowering a woman’s pay because she gets pregnant. So, the pregnant woman’s salary remains the same by changing the name of the compensation from “unsocial working hours” to “other”.

Menopause

In most countries (11 of 15) there is no policy or action plan for when a woman goes into menopause. However, we can see that in the Netherlands and United Kingdom they have started to talk about it and have worked out an action plan for it.

Parenthood

Most countries (10 of 15) have not considered providing childcare at the fire station. If a solution for childcare were provided by the employer, more women and men would be attracted to working in FRS.

In Finland there is a solution for childcare that means part-time firefighters are welcome to bring their children to the station when they respond to an alarm. When the part-time firefighters arrive at the station, they decide together which one of them will stay there and take care of the children.

Pension

We can see from the survey that the general pension age is between 65 and 69, while the pension age for firefighters ranges usually from 55 to 60. In some countries, the pension age for firefighters can go as high as 67, as long as the firefighter in question can still pass the required physical tests.

In some countries, the general pension age is different between women and men, where women go into pension about five years earlier. However, there is no difference between women and men when it comes to the pension age for firefighters.

The pension age for firefighters in some countries is about five years lower for part-time/volunteer firefighters than for full-time firefighters.

There is also a difference between those who work operationally and those who work administratively in FRS. Those who have administrative positions generally go into pension at the same age as those who do not work in FRS.

The pension age for firefighters is usually lower than the general pension age. In many countries there is an agreement that says an operational firefighter can go into pension earlier if they have worked in FRS for a certain number of years (ranging from 20-40 years) and they have reached a certain age (ranging from 55-61 years old). These agreements are made between the employees (trade union) and employer (municipality, state, private employers' association).

We can see from the survey that, in the past few years, there has been an increase in both the general pension age and the pension age for firefighters. In the U.K., for example, the pension age for firefighters has recently gone up from 50 to 60 years of age.

Career support

The questions in this part of the survey were about how the country's FRS works with recruiting women and how they work with keeping women in the profession.

Eight of the fifteen countries said that their FRS doesn't have a formal programme or written policy to attract and retain women firefighters, while three countries did, and the remaining four did not answer this question.

Three countries have policies and action plans that are relevant to pregnancy (before, during, and after) and two countries have policies and action plans relevant to menopause (during and after).

Six of the fifteen countries said that they work proactively to encourage women to become firefighters. This can be done in several ways: participating in student trade fairs; campaigns; open-house events, where women are invited to try different firefighter tasks; network meetings for existing female firefighters; lectures at vocational schools; recruitment films; and collaborating with other "uniform professions," such as the military, police and paramedics.

In Sweden, a working group for female firefighters in the trade union Kommunal has worked closely with scientists and politicians to change the working environment law regarding pregnancy and exposure to hazardous substances. They succeeded in expanding the law to protect not only the foetus when a woman is pregnant, but also the baby when it is breastfeeding. The result is that not only pregnant firefighters but also breastfeeding firefighters are forbidden to work as smoke-diving firefighters.

Through an open dialogue with the manufacturers of FRS equipment, the cooperation between the trade union Kommunal and the scientists has also led to advancements in the development of protective clothing.

The survey asked whether the country's FRS had any programme or policy to support the mentoring of women firefighters. In two countries there is a mentorship programme for both women and men in the FRS. These programmes are in the form of conferences or consultations with designated mentors. In nine countries there is no such programme or plan for it. Four countries have not answered this question.

Only four of the fifteen countries reported having a formal gender-equality team or officer. When asked if their FRS had any form of gender-equality training, only two countries answered that they did.

The final question of the survey asked whether the country's FRS had any women in upper-management positions. Seven countries answered positively, saying they have women in every level of management, from watch manager to fire chief

6. Conclusions

The survey shows that there are significant differences between countries in how the FRS work with issues related to pregnancy, menopause, parenthood, pension and career support.

In general, these issues are addressed when employees begin to discuss them with management. The countries that have come furthest are the ones that have developed collaboration between the trade union, the employers' association and politicians. The involvement of all of these stakeholders leads not only to better policies at a given workplace but also to better legislation on the national level.

The conclusion for each topic in this survey is stated below, along with recommendations from the CTIF Commission for Women in Fire and Rescue Services.

Pregnancy

Implementing tools such as risk analysis, policies and action plans provides a better basis for working effectively with many issues. This applies to matters related not only to women who become pregnant, but also to women/men who enter menopause and to women/men who are away from the workplace for a longer period due to injury or parental leave.

The CTIF Commission for Women in Fire and Rescue Services is of the strong opinion that all countries must deal with these issues by:

- Producing policies and action plans that are based on risk analysis of the issue and in accordance with laws and regulations in the respective country.

Parenthood

The survey posed questions about how to continue with parenthood after pregnancy. What are the conditions for combining work with having children? We can see from the responses to questions about managing parenthood that the situation is different in each country. But are the right conditions provided?

In some countries today, there are good examples of conditions that support parenthood. We can see that some employers take the responsibility to provide access to childcare at the workplace. In addition, some countries have passed legislation that gives working parents the right to paid parental leave.

In general, the Commission sees a need in FRS to develop new ways of supporting parenthood, which will help to encourage women to choose a career in FRS.

The CTIF Commission for Women in Fire and Rescue Services is of the strong opinion that all countries must deal with these issues by:

- Being more flexible when making working schedules, in order to better accommodate the situation for parents.
- Considering different solutions for supporting the situation for single parents.
- Thinking in innovative ways to modernize the FRS organization, so that women and men can combine parenthood with full-time work.

Pension

The survey reveals that pregnant women's salaries and future pensions are reduced even when they continue to work. When women get pregnant or are still breastfeeding the baby, they are removed from the usual 24-hour shift and put onto a daytime-only schedule. The result is a loss of the usual compensation for evenings and weekends. This reduction in pay leads to a lower pension for women than for men in FRS.

In some countries, there are discrimination laws in place that prevent an employer from lowering a worker's pay because she is pregnant. This is dealt with in FRS by supplementing the pregnant firefighter's pay to match the normal compensation for evenings and weekends.

The CTIF Commission for Women in Fire and Rescue Services is of the strong opinion that all countries must deal with these issues by:

- Ensuring policies are in place so that a firefighter's pay is not reduced when she is pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Starting a dialogue with the government and other stakeholders about modernizing laws and regulations to prevent this kind of discrimination.

Support

In Europe, women have been working to extinguish fires for at least a century. Starting in World War I, when men were away fighting in the war, women took over their work as firefighters. Today we can see that, on average, there are as many female firefighters in some European countries (e.g., Sweden, Great Britain, Germany) as there are in the United States, about 4-5%.

How can we attract more women to the profession and how can we get them to stay? These questions were asked in the survey.

Even though we can see that some countries have made progress with this challenge, there is still a long way to go, particularly when it comes to leadership positions.

We have learned from the survey that the countries that have been more successful with promoting women in FRS have worked with educating their firefighters about gender equality and inclusivity, and have also implemented mentorship programmes.

The CTIF Commission for Women in Fire and Rescue Services is of the strong opinion that all countries must deal with these issues by:

- Implementing a mentorship programme for all new-hires, regardless of level or gender, including following up with the individual to support them in reaching a higher level in the FRS.
- Ensuring that all mentors are properly educated for the task of mentoring, including training