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Contact person for accompanying spouses/partners
asa.karen.persson@gov.se

To the accompanying spouses/partners of posted staff

Christmas message from the contact person for accompanying spouses/partners

Dear accompanying spouses/partners,

The year is drawing to a close, and so is my first term as contact person for accompanying spouses/partners.

Here comes a brief summary of what's happened in this area and what's in the pipeline.

A number of accompanying spouses/partners and staff have contacted me regarding various questions, most of which concern working remotely and social insurance affiliation. I have also heard from a number of ambassadors' contact persons requesting documentation for accompanying spouse/partner meetings. Many of these contact persons have also shared thoughts and ideas, which is something I value greatly.

Work on developing a best practice as regards working remotely is in progress.

Late last year, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency designated a (new) contact person for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. She initially handled all types of questions, but later indicated that she had been informed that her role was only to answer questions concerning social insurance affiliation. The contact network at the Swedish Social Insurance Agency has subsequently been expanded, and my understanding is that internal communication at the Agency is also improving.

The Agency's decision that posted staff and their family members in the EU/EEA and Switzerland will be covered by the Swedish social insurance system rather than the local social insurance system in the country of posting has been met with mixed reactions. At the time of writing, we are awaiting feedback from the Agency as regards the procedure for receiving compensation for health care and pharmaceutical costs.

Sweden has a new government and I'm pleased to report that both the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs have expressed interest in issues concerning the family members of Ministry staff.

Late last year, we learned that the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs has initiated an inquiry to follow up some of the issues highlighted in the 2017 report 'Swedish social security in a globalised world (SOU 2017:05)'.

The ongoing inquiry is called 'One system for all – a review of the regulatory framework for sickness benefit qualifying income'. Among other things, the terms of reference state that the inquiry chair is to "analyse the need to increase sickness benefit qualifying income support for posted staff and their accompanying spouses/partners". In a meeting with the inquiry, it emerged that the forthcoming proposal involves a positive step with respect to sickness benefit qualifying income for accompanying spouses/partners. The report on this task will be presented by 20 April.

As regards bilateral agreements enabling accompanying spouses/partners to work in the place of posting, progress is slow. The process of reaching a government decision consists of many stages, and draft agreements get bogged down – sometimes in the host country, sometimes in the Government Offices. My hope is that the four agreements that are closest to being finalised will be prepared early next year.

Finally, I want to bring your attention to the external website spouses.se, which has been updated and supplemented with certain information.

I would now like to wish you all a truly delightful Christmas and hope that those of you who are working have a pleasant rest and those who aren't working will continue to enjoy the freedom and opportunities that life as an accompanying spouse/partner affords.

Åsa Karén Persson

