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Abstract

This article explores the potential of full-count historical census microdata to enhance our understanding of occupational activity and retirement among older men and women in Sweden between 1880 and 1910 – a period preceding the introduction of a universal pension system. Drawing on the SwedPop infrastructure, we examine how occupational information was recorded, coded, and interpreted in the Swedish censuses, with particular attention to the classification of retired individuals. We assess the applicability of the Historical International Classification of Occupations (HISCO) for identifying retirement status and demonstrate that a mechanical application of HISCO in the Swedish case fails to capture a significant group of retired individuals, especially former farmers with retirement contracts. By systematically analysing the original occupational text strings, we propose a revised coding scheme that better reflects retirement patterns. Our findings reveal a hump-shaped trajectory of occupational activity among older men, with a peak around 1900, and consistently low but non-negligible participation among older women. The study highlights the importance of contextual interpretation of historical sources and offers methodological insights for future research on ageing, work, and retirement using historical population data.

Keywords: historical census microdata, retirement, occupational coding, HISCO classification

JEL codes: N33, J26, J21, C82

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1. Introduction

The situation of older adults during industrialization remains a matter of scholarly debate. Did they benefit from economic transformation, or were they pushed aside? Work and retirement lie at the heart of this debate. Some scholars argue that rising prosperity, through private savings or public pensions, enabled older men to withdraw from work (Carter & Sutch 1996a; Costa 1998; Hannah 1986; Lazear 1986). Others stress that technological change and new forms of work organization made older adults obsolete in the labor market (Elmér 1960; Epstein 1928; Graebner 1980; Lee 2005). To assess the relative importance of these explanations, we need a clearer picture of employment patterns among older adults, including differences across demographic and social groups, regional variations, and the timing of major shifts. A long-run decline in labor force participation among older men in the twentieth century is well established (Costa 1998; Elmér 1960; Johnson 1994; Lazear 1986). However, levels and trajectories in the nineteenth century remains contested, and less is known about how the participation of older women in the labor market evolved.

Scholarly disagreements partly arise because much previous research on older men's employment has relied on aggregate data or small census samples (Carter & Sutch 1996b; Costa 1998; Dillon et al. 2010; Gratton 1987; Johnson 1994; Lee 2005; Ransom & Sutch 1986; Woollard 2002). Interpretations of the aggregated data in published census reports vary, as do assessments of the consistency and quality of the underlying data. Furthermore, existing aggregates are not always tabulated in a way that allows for meaningful comparisons over time (Ransom & Sutch 1986; Elmér 1960). In recent decades, the release of full-count, machine-readable individual-level census datasets has opened new avenues for research (Fitch & Magnuson 2025; Roberts et al. 2003a; Ruggles et al. 2011). These include the Swedish historical censuses from 1880, 1890, 1900, and 1910, which contain over 20 million individual records transcribed from the original census schedules and form part of the SwedPop research infrastructure.¹

¹ SwedPop (Swedish Population Databases for Research – www.swedpop.se) is a national research infrastructure which provides access to harmonized micro-level data from the major Swedish historical population databases, including the historical censuses, SweCens. SweCens was developed and digitized by the Swedish National Archives. For simplicity, we henceforth refer to SwedPop (2026) in the current

The main question addressed in this paper is to what extent big data in the form of full-count censuses, such as those from Sweden, can advance our knowledge on the employment and retirement of older men and women in the past. In essence, our inquiry boils down to three issues: the rationale behind the way occupational titles were originally classified; how this information survived digitization and harmonization; and whether existing coding schemes adequately capture employment and retirement in old age.

Coding of occupational titles has been a significant aspect of SwedPop's efforts to harmonize Swedish historical population databases. To this end, the Historical International Classification System of Occupations (HISCO) has been applied (van Leeuwen, Maas & Miles 2002). An attractive feature of HISCO is that it allows for the preservation of additional information that, while not strictly occupational titles, may help classify individuals into social classes (van Leeuwen & Maas 2011). Still, how to classify employment in old age and retirement were hardly major concerns when HISCO was created and subsequently applied. To the best of our knowledge, the system has so far not been assessed in this perspective. Furthermore, although the fundamental concept of HISCO is to provide a consistent framework to enable comparisons over time and space, the practical application of coding occupational titles from census schedules involves considerations and adaptations related to the local context.

In this paper, we examine the original census instructions, how retired people were classified and described in published census reports, and how the HISCO scheme has been applied to the occupational coding made by SwedPop. We then explore occupational titles, and related information, of men and women using the digitised full-count microdata from the four census years between 1880 and 1910. Our period of investigation coincides with the industrial breakthrough but predates the start of the universal pension system in 1914.

The paper has important implications for our understanding of the evolution of retirement in Sweden and for studying the employment of elderly people using full-count censuses. Firstly, we find that the census instructions signalled an awareness of

paper, but the actual data we use is from SweCens version 3.0, which was made available 15 January, 2024.

retirement as a phenomenon, which is an important consideration in understanding the context of the data. Secondly, we document that retired people were represented in the published census reports throughout our period of investigation, although the framework for occupational classification changed somewhat. Previous farmers on retirement contracts, a substantial group in numerical and relative terms, were accounted for in all the reviewed census reports. This paper explores, for the first time, how age, occupation, and retirement interrelated in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sweden. Overcoming the limitations of published reports lacking age-by-occupation tabulations, we reveal patterns of occupational activity and exit from work among elderly adults that have remained largely invisible until now. We reveal a hump-shaped pattern of occupational activity among older men over time, challenging the assumption that industrialization uniformly displaced older workers. For older women, occupational activity rates were much lower but increased over time.

Another important finding of our study is that a mechanical application of HISCO does not fully capture individuals with retirement contracts, which has broader implications for research using HISCO in Sweden and in other contexts. These individuals, regarded as retired farmers by their contemporaries, appear with occupational titles that seem vague to modern observers. We demonstrate how the information in the text-strings on which the occupational coding is based can be used to create a revised coding of occupations that is better suited to addressing questions related to the employment and retirement status of old men and women. Our approach can be applied on other types of population registers from Sweden from the same period and inspire research on similar sources from other historical contexts.

The paper proceeds in four sections. First, we situate our study within the historical literature. Second, we examine census instructions. Third, we analyze how retired individuals were represented in the published census reports. Fourth, we scrutinize HISCO's application to the Swedish censuses, showing detailed breakdowns of occupational activity and retirement by sex, age group and residence (urban-rural), before proposing a revised coding strategy and visualizing change over time for men and women in their 60s. We conclude by summing up methodological and empirical implications for future research.

2. Population censuses in previous research on the history of retirement

Researchers studying the historical evolution of occupational activity and retirement have relied on data from published census reports, which are limited by existing classifications and tabulations. Time series on the percentage of men over a certain age that are “in the labor force” form the basis of many studies in this field.² A striking feature of this literature is its almost exclusive focus on men, in both the construction of time series and in interpretations of long-term change. Scattered observations suggest that women were expected to retire earlier than men (Carlsson Wetterberg 1988; Stearns 1980, 45), yet little is known about long-run trends in this regard.

Costa (1998, 9) maintains that labor force participation among American men aged 65 and older was stable at over 75 percent from 1850 to 1880, after which it decreased. Johnson (1994) refers to England and Wales and also assumes that male labor force participation over the age of 65 was stable until 1881, followed by a steady decline. Costa (1995), Johnson (1994), and other researchers (see Lee, 2002; and Ransom & Sutch, 1986) pay considerable attention to the differences between rural and urban areas. They discuss the hypothesis that the long-term evolution of employment and retirement was driven by the structural shift from agriculture to manufacturing and services.

It is difficult to determine whether the pattern seen in the United States and England and Wales – from high levels of labor force participation by older men to a steady decrease – is representative of other countries. Costa (1998) presents data for Germany and France, but those countries' time series start later. Extending the time series for various groups further back in time for additional countries is an important avenue for research. The most straightforward approach, compiling numbers from published census reports, is limited by when such reports began appearing and their content.

² Strictly speaking, the term “labor force participation” is anachronistic when applied to data from before the 1940s. Historical censuses use the term “gainful employment” more often, but its meaning is not always clear. For more information, see Goldin (1990, 14–15), Moen (1988), Ransom and Sutch (1986, 3–5), and Silenstam (1970, 20). In this paper, we use the term “occupational activity” to refer to individuals recorded with an occupational title and not explicitly classified as retired, when discussing the Swedish historical censuses.

For England and Wales, published census reports only include employment figures by age from 1881 onward. Sweden has a long tradition of censuses that list retired people as a separate category. However, a fundamental restriction for researchers is that occupational activity and retirement status were not cross-tabulated by age in census reports until 1910 (Högman 1999). Consequently, Elmér (1960, 370), who compiled an uninterrupted series on the proportion of employed men and women aged 70 and older from 1910 to 1950, could not determine if the decline in occupational activity among men started around the introduction of the national pension system in 1914 or earlier.

Advancing research on the historical evolution of employment and retirement in old age requires going beyond the numbers available in official statistics. By investigating census enumerator books from 1851 to 1881, Woollard (2002) calculated age-specific employment rates and confirmed Johnson's assumption of stability. Recently, the increased availability of digitized microdata has given researchers the opportunity to create their own classifications, tabulations, and visualizations. One potential application is to study retired persons and other groups that are not classified as occupationally active in more detail. Whether this is possible depends on the accuracy and consistency of the original census-taking processes and later efforts to extract and digitize data from historical censuses.

At the outset of census digitalization, scholars in the North Atlantic Population Project (NAPP), working with late-nineteenth-century censuses from Canada, Great Britain, Iceland, Norway, and the United States, questioned the reliability of the original records concerning retirement:

[...] a person may respond that he is a “retired brick maker.” Although that person is no longer performing the occupation, we still provide a code for “brick maker.” We then indicate in a separate variable that the person is “retired”. [...] These data were not collected consistently and cannot be used to generate accurate statistics on [...] retirement rates. Some retired or unemployed people may have given an occupational response to the census enumerators without also noting that they were out of work. (Roberts et al. 2003, 95).

Acknowledging a degree of uncertainty, Woollard (2002, 459–460) calculates age-specific retirement rates for England and Wales in 1851 and 1881. He bases these rates on the occurrence of words such as “retired,” “formerly,” and “superannuated.” His findings suggest that retirement escalated when men were in their early 60s. Woollard

also notes that, over time, it became increasingly common to use terms suggesting retirement.

As time passed, censuses grew more ambitious, issuing clearer instructions to enumerators. The 1901 Canadian census provides an extraordinary opportunity to discuss the accuracy of occupational reporting, as the enumerators were explicitly instructed to ask respondents if they had retired. Using this information, Dillon et al. (2010) showed that some older men with a reported occupation acknowledged retirement when asked follow-up questions. Based on this finding, they suggested a downward revision of labor-force participation rates for older men in Canada and similar countries. This seems to be a reasonable suggestion for censuses based on self-reporting, in which respondents may express an occupational identity that does not correspond to their current circumstances. However, downward revision is less obvious for censuses that collected occupational titles from administrative registers, as was the case in Sweden, as discussed below.

Although inaccuracies in historical sources are often assumed, recent studies have offered positive views of census data collection (Calabrese & van Leeuwen, 2024; Mol, 2025). Furthermore, Healey (2015) points out that errors and biases are not necessarily related to the original data collection, but rather to the subsequent processes of data extraction, classification, and coding. For instance, when evaluating the reliability of the 1910 Norwegian census for examining labor force participation, Modalsli (2025) discovered discrepancies in how retirement was coded for men and women in the digital microdata from IPUMS. In this dataset, retired male farmers were more often coded as "in the labor force" than women with equivalent occupational titles.

3. The Swedish censuses

The Swedish population censuses originated in the mid-eighteenth century, when priests were instructed to regularly compile information on their parishioners (Sköld 2004). This early form of census, known as *Tabellverket*, included complex tables with aggregated statistics describing the social structure of each parish. In the mid-nineteenth century, the census procedure was modernized by introducing centralised processing of individual-level data, and *Tabellverket* was rebranded as *Statistiska centralbyrån* (Statistics Sweden). The first census with the new organization took place in 1860 and was carried out every ten years thereafter. A consistent feature of the Swedish censuses

before and after 1860 was the central role of priests in collecting population data. Unlike countries such as United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Norway, Sweden did not employ census enumerators.

The Swedish censuses were primarily based on parish records, from which local priests extracted information to census forms, according to instructions from Statistics Sweden (Wisselgren & Vikström 2023; Mol 2025). Statistics Sweden considered basic demographic data such as age and marital status to be highly reliable,³ but had some concerns regarding information on occupations, particularly from before 1910. Local priests faced challenges in keeping track of everyone's jobs, particularly in areas with high migration, as Statistics Sweden explained (Statistiska Centralbyrån 1926, 3). Occupational information was considered more reliable in rural areas and small towns, where the priests had better knowledge of the inhabitants, than in bigger towns and cities. Over time, efforts were made to improve the reliability of the occupational information. The first major initiative occurred with the 1910 census when information provided by priests was cross-checked with poll tax records (Statistiska Centralbyrån 1917).⁴ It is important to keep this change in mind when assessing occupational activity and retirement rates in the empirical sections of this paper. Now, we will examine the actual instructions that Statistics Sweden provided to the priests.

3.1 The census instructions

In general, the instructions for occupational registration were similar across the four censuses we investigated, but they became more comprehensive with the 1910 census. All four censuses clearly stated that occupations should be reported for both men and women with their own occupation or income. While priests were also allowed to enter position ("*embete*") or type of employment ("*tjenst*") the word occupation ("*yrke*") was emphasised in bold in the instructions, indicating the statistical authority's primary

³ Here it may be noted that age heaping, an important issue in relation to censuses from other countries (see for example Dillon 2008), has not been a major concern for Swedish historical demographers.

⁴ A similar change was made in Norway (Modalsli 2025). Further measures to improve occupational statistics were taken in subsequent Swedish censuses (Axelsson & Wisselgren 2016). It should be noted, though, that an attempt to use enumerators in the 1935/36 extraordinary census to collect occupational information was considered inefficient and unreliable compared to the indirect information obtained from official records (Mol 2025, 11).

interest in the actual occupation.⁵ The 1910 instructions clarified that widows with no occupation should be referred to by their deceased husband's occupation, e.g., "shoemaker's widow."

Beyond such clarifications, some things clearly changed over time. For the 1880 and 1890 censuses, the occupation column was reserved only for information about occupation. However, for the 1900 and 1910 censuses, the same column was also used to provide information on ethnicities other than Swedish and disabilities. Additionally, the first two censuses instructed that more than one occupation could be added, although the first should be the main occupation. In contrast, the latter two censuses instructed to only state the main occupation.⁶

Some changes can be noted in the instructions on occupation for those no longer working. For the 1880 and 1890 census, it was instructed that a previous occupation could be listed if the person was currently not working.⁷ A former occupation could also be added after the current one for identification purposes. The instructions for the 1900 census included examples for how to fill in the census forms. The examples suggested adding a former occupation as a title following a person's name. In this case, the occupational column would include further information about the means of subsistence. It was explicitly emphasized that some kind of information about a household head's livelihood should be noted if they did not have a current occupation. Examples of such information were "pension recipient" or "pauper." The 1910 instructions clarified that, for those temporarily lacking work, the most recent occupation should be stated. For those who had ceased working, "former" ("*före detta*" or "*f.d.*") should be added to the stated occupation (IPUMS n.d.a).⁸

In summary, it can be concluded that the Swedish censuses ultimately relied on parish records maintained by local clergy. This differs from countries where censuses were based on self-reporting compiled by enumerators. As was the case elsewhere, the

⁵ The instructions for the 1910 census made the priority of occupation before office or employment more explicit.

⁶ We retrieved the census instructions for 1880, 1890, 1900 and 1910 from IPUMS (n.d.).

⁷ In Swedish: "[...] förut innehafda yrke för dem, som för närvarande ej till annat yrke eller näringsfång äro hänförliga".

⁸ In Swedish: "för person som upphört att utöva något yrke, skall uppgifvas förutvarande yrke eller tjänst med bifogande af bokstäfverna f.d., exempelvis f.d. kapten i kungl. Flottan, f.d. skomakaremästare."

Swedish census instructions left room for interpretation, and they evolved over time. However, the instructions consistently emphasized recording previous occupations for individuals no longer in active employment. This continuity suggests an underlying administrative logic rather than ad hoc practices. Therefore, what we may perceive as imprecision may have been obvious to contemporary parish priests.⁹ The following section further illuminates this administrative logic by showing how retired individuals were represented in the published census reports.

3.2 The published census reports

In addition to the census instructions, the way retired people were described in published census reports gives an idea of when retirement was officially recognized as a distinct life stage. This information also provides clues for coding and classifying these individuals in research based on historical census microdata. The following section examines how individuals with the designation “former” or other titles indicating retirement were classified and represented in published census reports.

Reforms to official statistics in mid-nineteenth-century Sweden resulted in more systematic publication practices, aligning with international trends and responding to growing domestic demand for information on social and economic conditions (Höjer, 2001). Statistics Sweden processed the census data and published extensive reports, typically with a delay of several years. Over time, these reports became increasingly comprehensive. They consistently included a narrative introduction, followed by tabular appendices presenting the population by sex, age, marital status, and place of residence. The census reports also classified the population into mutually exclusive occupational categories, though the definitions and structure of these categories changed over time.¹⁰

The first census report, published for the 1860 census, presented a taxonomy of ten major occupational groups, accounting for men and women separately (Statistiska Centralbyrån 1865). There was no separate group for retired people or those with no

⁹ See Calabrese and van Leeuwen (2024, 246-247) for a more general discussion on this matter.

¹⁰ The tables in the early censuses (*Tabellverket*) are difficult to compile because the categories overlap, cover more than just occupations, and change over time. However, a spot check of the 1840 census shows that men who had "gone out of service, having no fixed occupation" (In Swedish: "utur tjänst gångne, som ej hafva något besämdt näringsfång") and those living on "life maintenance agreements" ("undantag") were listed as separate categories (CEDAR 2018).

stated occupation. The statistics showed the proportion of the population working in the ten occupations and how they were distributed across different regions. No attention was paid to individuals who could not be grouped into these categories.

The 1870 published census report reduced the number of occupational groups to seven, including a residual category for individuals "without a stated occupation or fixed employment" (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 1874). This residual category was large and heterogeneous, consisting of several subcategories, including elementary school pupils, paupers, and inmates. However, these subcategories were created to capture people who were perceived as similar. There were two subcategories for people who had retired from work: "Pensioners, Former Practitioners of Trades (or Services), and Widows Without Occupation" and "Retired Farmers/Cottagers on Life Annuity."¹¹ Clearly, "pensioners" and "former practitioners of trades or services" were considered similar enough to belong in the same category, followed immediately by retired farmers. The census report explicitly states this: "Closely related are also the numerous persons in the countryside who live under *life maintenance agreements*."¹² The latter category merits further discussion.

Handing over a farm to a younger person – typically a son or son-in-law, though sometimes an unrelated person – in exchange for food and lodging was a practice with long historical roots in Sweden and elsewhere (Berkner 1972; Dillon et al. 2010; Dribe & Lundh 2005; Fertig 2018; Friedberger 1983; Gaunt 1987; Hajnal 1983; Held 1982; Lundh & Olsson 2002; Moring 2003; Wohlin 1910). Often, a formal retirement contract was established that stipulated the parties' obligations and rights. It is important to note that the retirement contract included both the aging male farmer and his wife. Although retirement contracts were probably less common during our study period, they existed in remote areas well into the twentieth century (Magnuson 2018; Götling 2001). A government inquiry showed that, in 1910, 10 percent of the rural population over the age of sixty received support from a retirement contract; however, there was significant regional variation in its occurrence (*Ålderdomsförsäkringskommittén* 1912).

¹¹ In Swedish: "Pensionärer, f. d. utövare af yrken (tjenster), enkör utan yrke"; "Födorådstagare (undantagshjon)". In addition, there was a subcategory for "Proprietors and Capitalists (Rentiers)" [...] "Husegare och kapitalister (rentiers)".

¹² In Swedish: ""Närstående äro ock de å landsbygden talrika personer, som lefva af *undantag*"" (Statistiska Centralbyrån 1874, XL).

Several changes were made to the occupational groups in subsequent censuses, indicating an increased interest in retirement. Of the ten subcategories of the residual category in the 1880 census, three concerned retired people: “Former officials and civil servants, together with household servants,”¹³ “Former practitioners of occupations,”¹⁴ and “Retired farmers on life tenure”¹⁵. A significant change occurred in the 1890 census report, which followed the guidelines decided upon at the Nordic Statistical Meeting that same year. The taxonomy for the no-occupation group (labelled V), shown in Table 1, was reshaped into three overarching groups: domestic servants, lodgers and laborers in group 1; seven sub-categories (a-g) of retired persons, along with students and widows, in group 2; and paupers, vagrants and prisoners in group 3.

In this taxonomy, we see that contemporary statisticians aimed to relate retired persons to their former employment. “Former practitioners of occupations” were distinguished by economic subcategories, such as agriculture and animal husbandry, mining and manufacturing industry. Notably, “Proprietors (capitalists)”¹⁶ and “Persons living on pensions” followed immediately after “Former practitioners of occupations”.

¹³ In Swedish: “F. d. embets- och tjänstemän samt betjening (gemenskap)”.

¹⁴ In Swedish: “F. d. yrkesutöfvare”.

¹⁵ In Swedish: “Födorådstagare”.

¹⁶ In Swedish: “Husegare (kapitalister)”.

Table 1. Subcategories for the “without stated occupation or fixed employment” residual category in the 1890 census report

Nr.	Category label	
	Swedish	English
V.1a	Tjenstehjon (inr. Vaktmästare, betjenter och dyl.) utan uppgifven anställning	Domestic servants (incl. caretakers, attendants, etc.) without specified employment
V.1b	F. d. tjenstehjon (f. d. dräng, f. d. pigga o. s. v.)	Former domestic servants (e.g., former farmhands, maids, etc.)
V.1c	Arbetare med ej uppgifven anställning (inr. Jernvägsarbetare)	Labourers without specified employment (incl. railway workers)
V.1d	Inhyreshjon (med ej uppgifven sysselsättning)	Lodgers without specified occupation
V.1e	Personer utan uppgifvet yrke, hvilka kunna anses tillhöra arbetarklassen	Persons without stated occupation, considered part of the working class
V.2a	Födorådstagare (förmånstagare, undantagshjon)	Persons receiving maintenance or annuities (retired dependants)
V.2b	F. d. yrkesutöfvare inom huvudgruppen I [Jordbruk och boskapsskötsel]	Former practitioners of occupations in main group I [Agriculture and animal husbandry]
V.2c	F. d. yrkesutöfvare inom huvudgruppen II [Grufbrytning och tillverkningsindustri]	Former practitioners of occupations in main group II [Mining and manufacturing]
V.2d	F. d. yrkesutöfvare inom huvudgruppen III [Handel och samfärdsel]	Former practitioners of occupations in main group III [Commerce and communications]
V.2e	F. d. yrkesutöfvare inom huvudgruppen IV [Allmän tjänst m.m.]	Former practitioners of occupations in main group IV [General public service]
V.2f	Husegare (kapitalister)	Property owners (capitalists)
V.2g	Personer lefvande af pensioner (utom f. d. embets- och tjänstemen) eller intagna å milda stiftelser	Persons living on pensions (excluding former officials) or residents of charitable institutions
V.2h	Lärlingar vid läroanstaltter (ej inräknade i familjer)	Students at educational institutions (not counted within families)
V.2i	Enkor utan uppgifvet yrke	Widows without stated occupation
V.2k	Personer utan uppgifvet yrke, hvilka ej tillhöra arbetsklassen	Persons without stated occupation, not belonging to the working class
V.3a	Fattighjon (arbets-, hospitals- o. dyl.) hjon, i hem och inrättningar intagna hjon eller patienter	Paupers (including workhouse inmates, hospital patients, etc.)
V.3b	Lösdrifvare	Vagrants
V.3c	Fångar (lifstidsfångar och fångar utan angifvet yrke)	Prisoners (including life convicts and those without stated occupation)
	Summa personer utan uppgifvet yrke eller bestämd anställning	Total persons without stated occupation or fixed employment

Source: Statistiska Centralbyrån (1895, 142-151).

The overall occupational taxonomy and the subdivisions of the residual group remained basically intact in 1900 and 1910. However, the occupational groups were broken down by age group for the first time in 1910 (0/15, 15/25, 25/50, 50/65, and 65+).¹⁷

In this section, we showed that, starting in 1870, census reports accounted for groups without an occupation. With each subsequent report, the information was refined and the group was divided into more subgroups. Including retired individuals in the no-occupation category, often referencing their former occupations, demonstrates that retirement was a recognized social status. This was particularly true for former farmers with retirement contracts. They were included in all the reviewed census reports, even though the overall occupational categorization system changed. However, while the published reports offer valuable evidence of how officials recognized retirement, they lack age cross-tabulations until 1910. Without this information, it is impossible to systematically study changes in retirement behavior over time by relying solely on the reports. To address this issue, we turn to the full-count microdata from the Swedish censuses.

4. The full-count census microdata

4.1 HISCO and SwedPop on retirement

The digitized, full-count census microdata analyzed in this paper were first released by NAPP and later by SwedPop.¹⁸ SwedPop coded occupational titles according to the HISCO scheme (SwedPop 2022). While HISCO aims to establish a uniform standard, coding historical occupations from specific sources with numerous alphabetical text strings is a complex process that often requires making trade-offs (Roberts et al. 2003a, 84; Roberts et al. 2003b; SwedPop 2022).¹⁹ The following section describes principal decisions made by SwedPop that could affect occupational activity and retirement among older people.

HISCO organizes occupational titles into nine major groups. If the source contains information on “past, present or future work,” the person is assigned a five-digit HISCO

¹⁷ The same applied to Retired farmers on life tenure and Capitalists/rentiers (Statistiska Centralbyrån 1917, 41*-42*, 45*).

¹⁸ The 1900 census was first released in 2008, followed by the 1890 census in 2012, the 1880 census in 2015 and the 1910 census in 2017 (IPUMS n.d.).

¹⁹ NAPP initially applied a modified version of HISCO to code occupations (Roberts et al. 2003b, 92-94).

code (van Leeuwen, Maas & Miles 2002, 34). People for whom the source field contains no occupational title, or for whom the information does not directly relate to a work activity, are given code -1. People who are explicitly described as not working are given code -2.

Three subsidiary variables – PRODUCT, STATUS, and RELATION – capture additional information. Since occupational entries in the original census records may contain more than one occupational title, SwedPop includes six variables for OCCUPATION, PRODUCT, STATUS, and RELATION, which enables the information provided in the source to describe up to six different occupations. PRODUCT describes the product associated with a particular occupational title. For example, it can distinguish between a laborer in a bakery factory and a laborer in a shoe factory.²⁰ STATUS describes employment status, education, and social position. For example, it distinguishes between apprentices, journeymen and masters in handicraft occupations. RELATION describes family relationships (codes 11-15) or whether an occupation has been undertaken or will be undertaken.

For our purposes, the RELATION code 21 is particularly interesting, because it indicates that a person has withdrawn from an occupation. The Swedish examples mentioned in the HISCO manual refer to individuals whose previous occupation is not explicitly stated but whose current situation is understood as retired.²¹ We will return to these examples below. The HISCO manual also mentions examples in other languages where the source explicitly states the occupational title.²² There are also instances in which the source includes more than one piece of information regarding a person's relationship with the formal labor market. In such cases, the HISCO manual states, "family relations overrule temporal relations, which takes precedence over voluntary workers, homeworkers and those who cannot work" (van Leeuwen, Maas & Miles

²⁰ For some reason, most existing population databases have not put much effort into coding PRODUCT.

²¹ The Swedish examples, with suggested HISCO codes in square brackets, are as follows: "*Födoråd* [-1], *Födorådsägare* [-1], *Förmånstagare* [-1], *Gratialist* [-1], *Undantagshjon* [-1]" (van Leeuwen, Maas & Miles 2002, 320).

²² The HISCO manual presents examples of this in languages other than Swedish, such as "Conducteur de train pensionné [3-60.20]" in French or "Retired jeweler [8-80.10]" in English (van Leeuwen, Maas & Miles 2002, 320).

2002: 319). Thus, a “retired farmer’s widow” would be given the code 11 (“wife or widow”) on RELATION, rather than 21.

In its occupational coding guidelines, SwedPop (2022) acknowledges that some coding decisions are especially challenging. These choices can affect placement in social stratification nomenclatures, such as HISCLASS, or hinder studies of specific occupational categories. A notable choice made by SwedPop, which is important to know, is to use the code combination HISCO -1, STATUS -9 and RELATION -9 for titles that are not specific occupations. Such titles include “*födorådstagare*”, “*undantagshjon*” and “*pensionär*.”²³ This means that previous farmers with retirement contracts, who were listed as a sizeable group in the census reports, have become invisible in the occupational classification used in the full-count microdata.²⁴

To address this limitation, we turn to the original text strings in the census records, to develop a recoding strategy that more accurately captures retirement and restores important distinctions lost in the standard coding.

4.2 Recoding retirement using text strings

As mentioned above, previous farmers with retirement contracts were accounted for as a separate subcategory in the published census reports from 1870 onward, with the titles “*födorådstagare*” and “*undantagshjon*” being used to exemplify this category. Their representation in the census reports, as well as previous research, make it clear that the titles refer to previous farmers (Gaunt 1987; Wohlin 1910). There were also similar titles, and regional differences in what terms were used. For instance, in Blekinge County, the term “*gårdsman*” was commonly used to denote a retired farmer.²⁵ Furthermore, in some regions, parish priests simply used the term “former farmer” without mentioning a retirement contract (*Ålderdomsförsäkringskommittén* 1912).

We have made systematic investigations of all standardized text strings on which the coding of occupations has been based in the digitized censuses of 1880, 1890, 1900 and 1910, searching for titles with any of the following elements: *födoråd*, *fördel*,

²³ A “*före detta födorådstagare*” or “*före detta undantagshjon*” would, however, get RELATION 21. Moreover, a “*födorådsbonde*” would be coded as a farmer (HISCO 6-11.10) with RELATION 21.

²⁴ Interestingly, there is also an inconsistency compared to IPUMS census microdata for Norway from 1910, where men on retirement contracts have been coded as “In the labor force” (Modalsli 2025, 18).

²⁵ For discussions on this term, see for example Rötter (n.d.).

förgång, förmån, gårdsman/-kvinna and undantag.²⁶ We found around 145,000 individual observations containing any of these elements. The numbers we obtained by census year and sex are remarkably close to those in the published census reports, as seen in table 2.

Table 2. Number of men and women in rural areas with retirement contracts in census reports and in coded data

Year	Men		Women	
	Census report	Coded data	Census report	Coded data
1880	25227	24570	19067	19570
1890	21788	21688	17187	17401
1900	19353	19627	15962	15944
1910	13970	13664	12205	12291

Source: Statistiska Centralbyrån (1885, 1895, 1907, 1917); SwedPop (2026).

We suggest that persons with any of the above-mentioned text elements, which indicate that they are holding a retirement contract, should be coded with HISCO 6-11.10 and RELATION 21, as long as the person does not have an indication of family relationship (wife/widow, son or daughter). Using RELATION 21 for individuals with retirement contracts aligns with the HISCO manual²⁷; however, assigning them HISCO 6-11.10 is not suggested in the manual (see Leuween et al 2002: 320).²⁸ Our proposed solution of assigning them an occupation based on contextual understanding is comparable to the solution proposed by Maas and van Leeuwen’s (2025) for classifying unspecified workers (HISCO 9-99.00 and 9-99.20).

²⁶ Fahlgren (2025, 136-137) makes a similar investigation of the full-count census data for rural areas in the years 1900, 1910 and 1930.

²⁷ But not the practice in SwedPop.

²⁸ The HISCO manual explicitly instructs users to use HISCO-1 for “*födorådshjon*,” first in the general description of the coding procedure (p. 34) and then when providing examples of temporal relationships to work (van Leeuwen, Maas, & Miles, 2002, 320). It should be noted that HISCO -1 is a residual category used when the occupational title space in the original source is left blank or does not directly relate to a work activity (p. 34). Other groups included in this category are lodgers, rentiers, students, paupers, and tramps.

In addition to retired farmers, other titles associated with permanent withdrawal from work appear in the investigated censuses. These titles are less frequent than those for farmers, yet they are interesting since their occurrence reflects the historical evolution of retirement in non-agricultural settings.

In many societies, veterans of the armed forces were among the earliest recipients of pensions. The first pension funds for soldiers, sailors, and officers in Sweden were established in the seventeenth century and the beneficiaries were known as “*gratialister*” (Berkesand n.d.). These individuals had retired from active duty due to old age, illness or disability after a long period of service. In SwedPop, this occupational string is coded as “Other Military Ranks” (HISCO 5-83.40), unless another occupation is specified in the string. It is coded with RELATION -9, unless “former” is mentioned in the string. We suggest coding the title “*gratialist*” with RELATION 21 as long as the person is not a widow or child.

In modern societies, a “pensioner” is commonly understood to be someone who has retired from work and receives financial support. The association between retirement and pensions was less obvious in the past.²⁹ Although, as mentioned above, “persons living off pensions” was a specific subcategory in the published census reports for 1890 onwards, we find very few occupational strings with the element “*pensionär*” in the digitized census microdata. In SwedPop, these strings are coded as HISCO -1 unless they contain additional occupation-related information. We recommend coding the title “*pensionär*” with RELATION 21, unless the title indicates that the person is a widow or child of a pensioner.

In Appendix 1, Table A1, we provide the full list of occupational titles for which we suggest changes to their coding. The significance of our reclassifications is highlighted in the following section.

4.3 Age, occupation and retirement in the full-count data

As noted above, most historical studies on older men’s labor force participation focus on the share of the population over a certain age who report having an occupation.

²⁹ According to SAOB (1952), the original meaning of “*pensionär*” was simply a beneficiary (“*understödstagare*”). It is worth noting that the element “pension” in the Swedish context could also refer to the house and lodging received by a school pupil.

While this percentage is useful as a summary measure and a rough indicator, a more nuanced categorization of people without an occupation enables deeper analysis of retirement patterns and the livelihoods of older individuals. In our examination of the full-count census data, we distinguish three main categories: (1) Has occupation, (2) No occupation, and (3) Retired.³⁰ We further divide the category Retired into Retired original and Retired additions, to show the importance of our revised codings. For women, we also divide the No occupation category into No occupation married and No occupation others. The latter comprises unmarried individuals and widows. In retirement studies, 65 is a common cut-off point; however, in a long-term historical perspective, this threshold may be too high. Transitions from employment to retirement may begin earlier (cf. Rahikainen 2001; Svensson & Zuijderduijn 2024). In the following analysis, we use four age groups: 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, and 70 and over. We also tabulate the data by area of residence: urban and rural.

In the No occupation category, we place people without an occupational code (HISCO= -1 or -2) and who are not explicitly retired (RELATION not equal to 21). This may be persons for whom the field for occupational title in the original census schedule was left blank or was filled out by notifications on family relations (RELATION 11-15), disability and poor relief.

A clear age gradient emerges across all groups for men (Figure 1): the percentage of men with an occupation decreases with age, while the percentages of men who are retired or who do not have an occupation increase. This general pattern holds for both urban and rural men in all census years.

The key difference between urban and rural areas concerns the Retired additions category. In urban areas, men recorded as retired largely correspond to those explicitly coded as such, and our additions based on text strings have only minor effects. In contrast, in rural areas, the revised coding substantially increases the proportion classified as retired, especially in the earlier censuses. This indicates that standard HISCO coding in this case fails to capture a significant group of retired individuals.

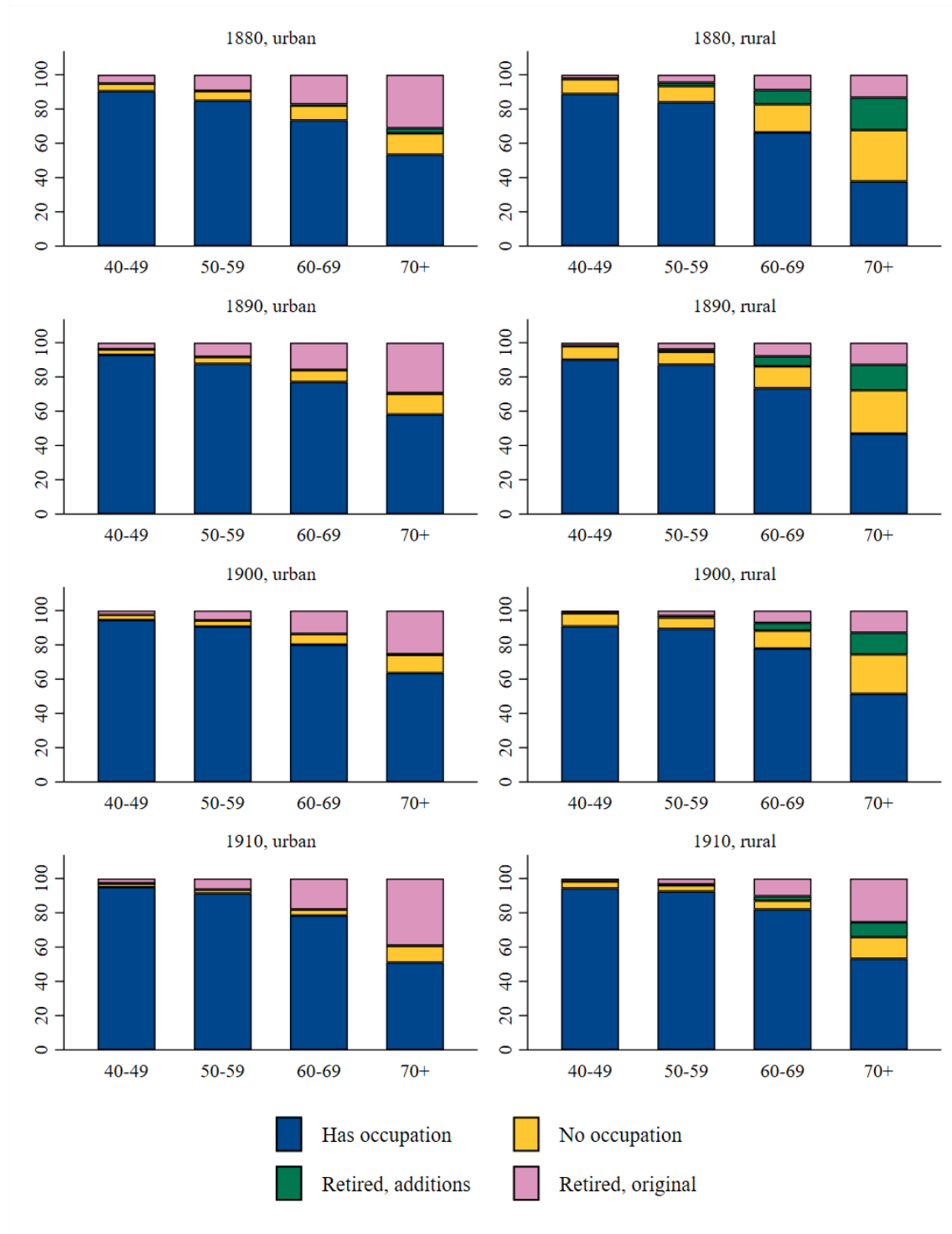
The same general age pattern applies to women (Figure 2), although they have much lower levels of occupational activity, which is expected based on previous

³⁰ Our ambition is similar to that of Dillon et al. (2010). However, our categories are not identical to theirs, and we do not make the same assumptions about the people in the various categories.

research (Humphries & Sarasua 2012; Burnette 2024; Nyberg 1994; Stanfors 2014). Across both urban and rural areas, relatively few women are recorded as having an occupation at older ages, and the majority are instead classified as having no occupation. Married women dominate this category at ages 40–59, while widows become increasingly prominent at older ages, especially above 70.

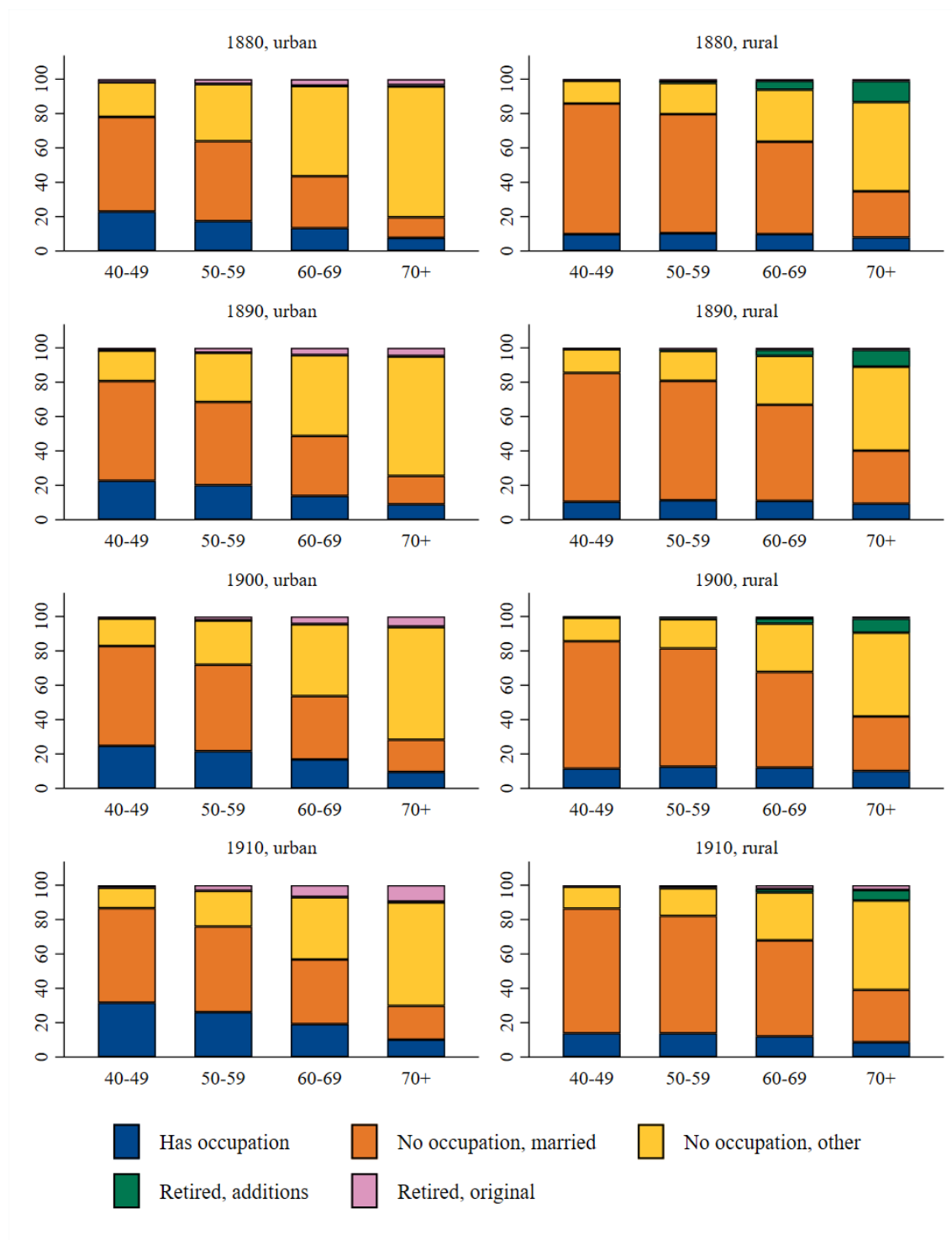
Compared to men, explicit retirement is less common among women, rarely exceeding 10 percent even at older ages. As with men, our revisions primarily affect rural areas. The addition of retirement-contract holders leads to a noticeable increase in the retired category, particularly in the earlier censuses.

Figure 1. Percentage of men aged 40 and above listed with an occupation, no occupation or as retired (HISCO + text strings)



Source: Author's elaborations from SwedPop (2026).

Figure 2. Percentage of women aged 40 and above listed with an occupation, no occupation or as retired (HISCO + text strings)



Source: Author's elaborations from SwedPop (2026).

Table 3. Total number of retired individuals by age and percentages of individual by type of original classification (unchanged, previously coded as having an occupation and previously coded as not having an occupation)

Men									
Year	Age	Urban n. retired	% no change	% prev. occ.	% prev. no occ.	Rural n. retired	% no change	% prev. occ.	% prev. no occ.
1880	40-49	2025	99.36	0.49	0.15	5200	85.38	0.94	13.67
	50-59	2579	98.10	1.05	0.85	11860	67.79	4.14	28.07
	60-69	2302	95.53	1.43	3.04	19558	50.92	4.31	44.77
	70+	1467	91.41	2.39	6.20	19021	40.80	3.92	55.28
1890	40-49	1710	99.82	0.06	0.12	3960	89.52	0.56	9.92
	50-59	2694	99.67	0.30	0.04	8890	74.41	4.04	21.55
	60-69	3116	99.10	0.77	0.13	19066	57.67	3.94	38.39
	70+	2337	98.55	1.03	0.43	22693	46.25	3.71	50.03
1900	40-49	1392	99.93	0.07	0.00	3263	91.17	0.89	7.94
	50-59	2162	99.31	0.51	0.19	6949	75.72	6.16	18.12
	60-69	3344	99.22	0.45	0.33	15860	61.24	5.43	33.33
	70+	3284	98.57	0.97	0.46	27050	50.05	5.23	44.72
1910	40-49	1796	99.78	0.11	0.11	3400	96.38	0.79	2.82
	50-59	3062	99.74	0.16	0.10	7072	87.99	2.64	9.36
	60-69	5280	99.51	0.09	0.40	17884	79.46	2.54	18.00
	70+	6887	99.22	0.39	0.39	38935	74.28	2.39	23.34

Women									
Year	Age	Urban n. retired	% no change	% prev. occ.	% prev. no occ.	Rural n. retired	% no change	% prev. occ.	% prev. no occ.
1880	40-49	849	99.18	0.00	0.82	1973	68.68	2.38	28.94
	50-59	1052	97.72	0.00	2.28	4349	36.47	2.00	61.53
	60-69	919	92.60	0.00	7.40	7876	16.19	1.50	82.31
	70+	513	80.31	0.97	18.71	10509	7.96	1.37	90.67
1890	40-49	842	99.41	0.12	0.48	1769	72.07	2.54	25.38
	50-59	1228	98.86	0.08	1.06	3390	43.30	3.04	53.66
	60-69	1347	97.55	0.07	2.38	7221	23.67	2.10	74.23
	70+	922	94.14	0.11	5.75	11099	10.60	1.84	87.56
1900	40-49	738	94.99	0.00	5.01	1409	73.31	2.06	24.63
	50-59	1135	94.01	0.09	5.90	2925	44.21	2.29	53.50
	60-69	1661	95.00	0.00	5.00	6292	25.49	2.18	72.33
	70+	1589	93.14	0.00	6.86	11910	13.74	1.66	84.59
1910	40-49	1148	96.86	0.17	2.96	1813	89.13	0.77	10.09
	50-59	2112	96.26	0.19	3.55	3436	73.25	0.73	26.02
	60-69	3149	96.51	0.06	3.43	6492	51.09	1.20	47.70
	70+	3361	95.03	0.09	4.88	12144	31.11	1.19	67.70

Source: Author's elaborations from SwedPop (2026).

Table 4. Proportions of men and women aged 40 and above who are retired, by availability of HISCO codes

Year	Age	Urban			Men			
		N. retired	N. with Hisco	% with Hisco	Rural N. retired	N. with Hisco	% with Hisco	% with retirement contracts, Hisco sample
1880	40-49	2025	2002	98.86	5200	5114	98.35	14.20
	50-59	2579	2557	99.15	11860	11754	99.11	29.22
	60-69	2302	2282	99.13	19558	19426	99.33	46.38
	70+	1467	1459	99.45	19021	18910	99.42	57.05
1890	40-49	1710	1691	98.89	3960	3907	98.66	10.21
	50-59	2694	2666	98.96	8890	8826	99.28	22.39
	60-69	3116	3095	99.33	19066	18919	99.23	39.52
	70+	2337	2320	99.27	22693	22563	99.43	51.48
1900	40-49	1392	1373	98.64	3263	3219	98.65	8.08
	50-59	2162	2136	98.80	6949	6851	98.59	18.74
	60-69	3344	3307	98.89	15860	15677	98.85	34.76
	70+	3284	3251	99.00	27050	26712	98.75	46.80
1910	40-49	1796	1784	99.33	3400	3366	99.00	2.85
	50-59	3062	3042	99.35	7072	7020	99.26	9.73
	60-69	5280	5242	99.28	17884	17774	99.38	18.88
	70+	6887	6854	99.52	38935	38602	99.14	24.44
Year	Age	Urban			Women			
		N. retired	N. with Hisco	% with Hisco	Rural N. retired	N. with Hisco	% with Hisco	% with retirement contracts, Hisco sample
1880	40-49	849	841	99.06	1973	1952	98.94	28.69
	50-59	1052	1040	98.86	4349	4319	99.31	61.68
	60-69	919	907	98.69	7876	7823	99.33	82.53
	70+	513	511	99.61	10509	10457	99.51	90.87
1890	40-49	842	837	99.41	1769	1747	98.76	25.07
	50-59	1228	1213	98.78	3390	3359	99.09	53.77
	60-69	1347	1320	98.00	7221	7168	99.27	74.33
	70+	922	877	95.12	11099	11043	99.50	87.65
1900	40-49	738	699	94.72	1409	1323	93.90	19.88
	50-59	1135	1065	93.83	2925	2761	94.39	51.21
	60-69	1661	1578	95.00	6292	6034	95.90	71.56
	70+	1589	1484	93.39	11910	11661	97.91	84.46
1910	40-49	1148	1116	97.21	1813	1773	97.79	8.80
	50-59	2112	2030	96.12	3436	3384	98.49	25.38
	60-69	3149	3036	96.41	6492	6393	98.48	47.43
	70+	3361	3213	95.60	12144	11971	98.58	67.88

Source: Author's elaborations from SwedPop (2026).

For men and women aged 40 and older, 3.9 percent were initially coded as retired. We identified an additional 2.5 percent. Table 3 provides summary measures of where the additions to the Retired category come from. Figures 1 and 2 and Table 3 show that substantial fractions of rural men and women who were previously coded as having no occupation have been added to the Retired category, and this percentage increases with age.

The additions shown above change not only the size of the retired population but also raise important questions about what “retired” means in the data. As a first step to clarify this, we can distinguish between two types of retirees: (1) individuals that are described as retired but for whom we do not know the former occupation and (2) individuals that are described as retired and for whom we do know the former occupation.

Group (1) includes persons labelled as “*pensionär*”. Group (2) includes persons who are described as “former” (“*f.d.*”) followed by an indication of the former occupation. The group also includes persons with titles indicating that they live on a retirement contract. As mentioned above, we have assigned them HISCO codes as farmers. The relative size of these groups has important implications for the opportunities of using the censuses to study the occupational origins and social stratification among retirees. If most retired individuals lack information on their previous occupation, it is difficult to assess their social status. However, if most retired persons have a previous occupation, it is not necessary to exclude them from a social class scheme, as is suggested in HISCLASS (van Leeuwen & Maas 2011, 181).

When focusing on people who are explicitly described as retired (Table 4), we can establish that almost all retirees also have occupational titles (group 2). In that sense, men and women appear relatively similar. Those who live in cities or towns, are described as “former” (“*f.d.*”), practitioners of an occupation. If they live in the countryside, the share of male and female retirees that have occupational titles is also high. These shares would have been much smaller if we had not coded people with retirement contracts as farmers. As people age, a greater proportion of men and women have titles indicating a retirement contract rather than being described with “former” and an occupational title. Over time, however, the prevalence of retirement contract titles decreases in all age groups.

4.4 Change over time among men and women in their 60s

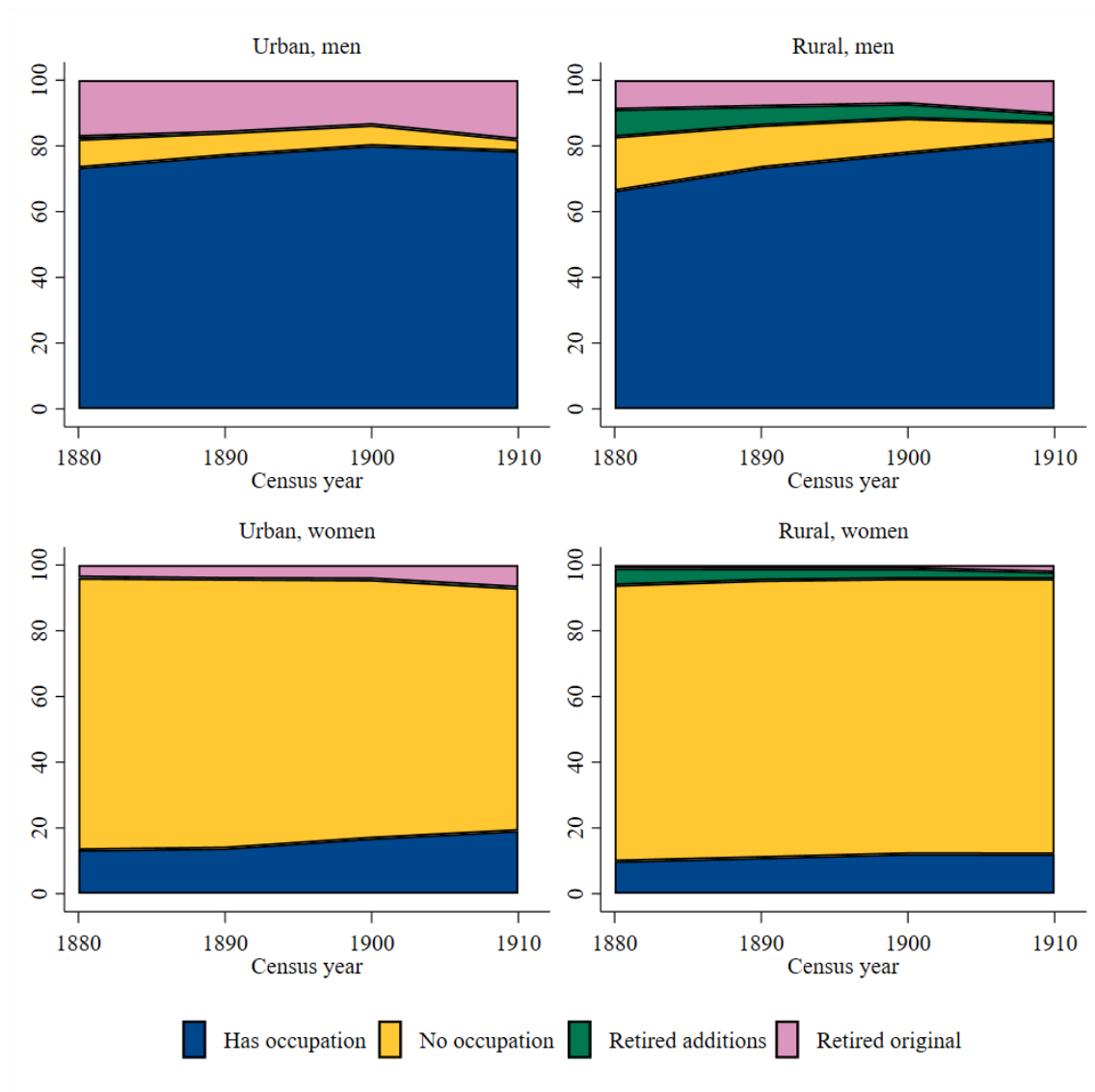
In the previous section, we presented census data organized by age group. To illustrate changes over time, we will now focus on men and women aged 60–69, a group often associated with retirement. We proceed in two steps. First, we examine how shares of people with an occupation, in retirement (including both original shares and our revisions), and without an occupation evolved between 1880 and 1910 in urban and rural areas. Second, we extend the analysis of occupational shares to a longer period, tracing developments from 1880 to 1950 for men and women nationwide.

Figure 3 shows that the percentage of urban men in their 60s who held an occupation increased between 1880 and 1900, before declining slightly from 1900 to 1910. These changes are mirrored by the share retired, which first decreased and then increased. Over the same period, the proportion of urban men without an occupation steadily declined.

The pattern for rural men differs markedly. Here, the share of men with an occupation increased in every census year, while the share of retired men declined until 1900 and then increased slightly. The share of men without an occupation declined between all years. Figure 3 further shows that our HISCO code revisions primarily affect rural men, especially in the earlier censuses. This is a plausible outcome, given that the retirement contracts captured by our revisions were more prevalent in earlier decades.

Among women in their 60s, the proportion with an occupation or retired status is considerably lower. Nevertheless, some changes over time are evident (Figure 3). In urban areas, the percentage of occupation-holding women rose from 13 percent in 1880 to 19 percent in 1910, with the majority of this increase occurring between 1890 and 1900. The retired share – unaffected by our revisions – remained at 4 percent until 1910, when it increased to 7 percent. In rural areas, the percentage of women with an occupation also rose, from 10 to 12 percent, while the percentage of retired women declined. As with men, our revisions impact earlier censuses more than on later ones.

Figure 3. Percentage of men and women aged 60-69 listed with an occupation, retired and without occupation in urban and rural areas 1880-1910



Source: Author's elaborations from SwedPop (2026).

Overall, evidence from the full-count censuses suggests that the early phase of Swedish industrialization was associated with an increasing occupational activity among older men and women. By 1910, only a small proportion of men in their 60s lacked an occupational title, and most of those without a current occupation were described as having had one in the past. For women, having no occupational title, either current or former, remained the most common situation. However, explicit descriptions of women's occupational activity – current or previous – became increasingly common over time, especially in urban areas.

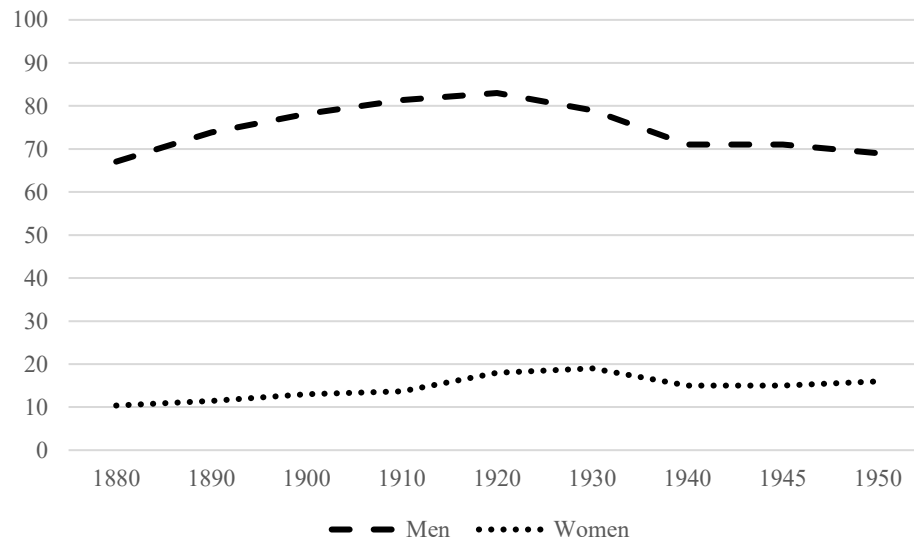
As noted in the introduction, most census-based research on the history of retirement has focused on the proportion of men with an occupation. Future research could extend series on retirement and non-occupation by age and sex, as we have done here for 1880–1910. Below, we relate our findings to previous research by connecting occupational shares from the full-count censuses to figures from published census reports covering 1920–1950. Figure 4 shows the long-run evolution of occupational activity for men and women in their 60s.

For men, a hump-shaped pattern emerges: the percentage of men with an occupation increases up to 1920 and then declines – more rapidly in the 1930s than in the 1940s. This suggests that labor force participation among older men peaked shortly after the universal pension scheme was implemented in 1914. These results are noteworthy in light of both previous research and our earlier discussion of census procedures. While earlier Swedish research has not made explicit claims about developments before 1910, international research generally suggests a decline in labor force participation from initially high levels (Costa 1998; Johnson 1994), though there is disagreement about when this decline began.

Rather, our evidence from Sweden instead indicates that industrialization was initially associated with an increasing occupational activity among older men. The main explanations for this pattern are to be found in rural areas, where most of the elderly population lived. The difference in census procedures between 1900 and 1910 is of particular interest, as data collection improved in the latter census. However, Figure 4 does not show a sharp increase in occupational activity for men in their 60s between 1900 and 1910. Instead, it shows a continuation of an earlier trend. Therefore, we find little reason to assume that occupational activity among older men was systematically overstated in the Swedish censuses.

Turning to women (Figure 4), we recall that relatively few women in their 60s were recorded as having occupations in historical censuses. Many likely engaged in part-time or informal work that was not systematically documented. Nevertheless, occupational activity clearly increased between 1880 and 1930, roughly doubling from 10 to nearly 20 percent. This development is particularly noteworthy given changes in census instructions, which became more explicit in directing priests to record women's occupations in 1910.

Figure 4. Percentage of men and women aged 60-69 listed with an occupation, nationwide



Source: Percentages for 1890-1910 are author's elaborations from SwedPop (2026); percentages for 1920-1950 are based on data from Statistiska Centralbyrån (1927, 1938, 1943, 1952, 1955).

5. Conclusions

The past 25 years have seen tremendous efforts to digitize and harmonize datasets covering historical populations. This paper discusses full-count census microdata from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sweden in relation to the history of retirement. Previous research on the quantitative aspects of retirement was restricted by existing classifications and cross-tabulations in published census reports. Now, we can create our own classifications and tabulations. Yet, it remains important to consider how the census data was initially collected, the meaning contemporaries placed on the information and how the census returns were converted and coded into a machine-readable format.

Previous research has questioned whether information on retirement status was consistently collected in historical censuses. Our review of census instructions and published reports reveals that Swedish censuses were interested in occupational titles not only as markers of social status but also as indicators of economic activity. There was a clear ambition to distinguish between individuals who were currently active in an occupation and those who had left it. This reporting became more detailed over time. However, key information on farmers' retirement, which was present in the published

reports, remained uncoded in the digital full-count versions. In the current study we use full-count census data from 1880, 1890, 1900, and 1910, which is available through the SwedPop research infrastructure. Within SwedPop, all occupations have been coded into HISCO. Leveraging these codes and refining them based on the original text strings allows us to recover information on farmers' retirement and sharpen the picture of occupational activity and retirement in rural areas. Our revised coding, together with the accompanying list of occupational titles, provides a resource for future research using other historical Swedish databases. More broadly, these findings underscore the importance of retaining original text strings alongside numerical codes in historical databases, so that classification schemes like HISCO can be properly adapted to the historical context.

By using digitized census microdata and simple cross-tabulations, we uncovered the correlations between age, occupational activity, and retirement correlated during Sweden's industrial breakthrough. These patterns were previously obscured in published census reports. Our analysis shows that the occupational activity of older men did not decline steadily, but rather increased and reached a peak plateau, before decreasing. Future research should focus on explaining the mechanisms behind this pattern. Another avenue of research is examining the individual- and group-level determinants of being listed with a former occupation versus having an occupation or having no occupation at all. The richer information in the 1910 census opens the possibility of studying the relationship between social class and retirement, and for addressing the broader question of whether older men and women were pushed out of gainful employment or were able to step down from advantageous positions.

Credits

Tobias Karlsson, Helene Castenbrandt, and Luciana Quaranta jointly conceived the study, developed the research design, conducted the analysis, and contributed to the writing of the manuscript. Tobias Karlsson took a leading role in driving the project forward, particularly in the final stages. Helene Castenbrandt contributed especially to the historical contextualization and source criticism. Luciana Quaranta was primarily responsible for data construction and management, as well as the preparation of tables and figures.

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Appendix

Table A1: Full list of occupations re-classified as retired

OCCUPATION STANDARD	HISCO	HISCO RELATION	HISCO change	HISCO RELATION change
FD FÖDORÅDSTAGARE	-1	21	61110	
FD FÖRDELSTAGARE	-1	21	61110	
FD FÖRMÅNSTAGARE	-1	21	61110	
FD UNDANTAG	-1	21	61110	
FD UNDANTAGSHJON	-1	21	61110	
FD UNDANTAGSMAN	-1	21	61110	
FD UNDANTAGSÄGARE	-1	21	61110	
FD UNDANTAGSÄGARINNA	-1	21	61110	
FD UNDANTAGSÄGERSKA	-1	21	61110	
FD ANDRE KONSTARBETARE	99999	-9		21
FD ANSLAGSBITRÄDE	99999	-9		21
FD BANDMASKINIST	99999	-9		21
FD BANKTARE	99999	-9		21
FD BINDERSKA	99999	-9		21
FD BITRÄDE	99999	-9		21
FD BOMBAPTERINGSMÄSTARE	99999	-9		21
FD BRUKMAKARE	99999	-9		21
FD BRUKSBYGGARE	99999	-9		21
FD BRYGGERIANSTÄLLD	99999	-9		21
FD BRYGGERIINTRESSANT	99999	-9		21
FD BÖNÅS	99999	-9		21
FD ETIKETTÄGERSKA	99999	-9		21
FD FLAGGMÄSTARE VID FLOTTAN	99999	-9		21
FD FRACKMÄSTARE	99999	-9		21
FD GULDGRÄVARE	99999	-9		21
FD HANDELSFLOTTÖVERMÄSTARE	99999	-9		21
FD HANTVERKSARBETARE	99999	-9		21
FD HASPERSKA	99999	-9		21
FD HEMMANSBYGGARE	99999	-9		21
FD HETSMÄSTARE	99999	-9		21
FD HORNARBETARE	99999	-9		21
FD INSKRIPTÖR	99999	-9		21
FD JÄRNVÄGSANSTÄLLD	99999	-9		21
FD JÄRNVÄGSASSISTENT	99999	-9		21
FD KANALÅNGAREANSTÄLLD	99999	-9		21
FD KEMISK STATIONSASSISTENT	99999	-9		21
FD KETSMÄSTARE	99999	-9		21
FD KOKESARE	99999	-9		21
FD KOMMUNALBITRÄDE	99999	-9		21
FD KONSTMETALLER	99999	-9		21
FD KORTVARUAFÄR	99999	-9		21
FD LERINDUSTRIARBETARE	99999	-9		21
FD MARIN	99999	-9		21
FD MATERIALVÅRDARE	99999	-9		21
FD MILITÄRARBETARE	99999	-9		21

FD NÄRINGSIDKERSKA	99999	-9		21
FD PARKÄGARE	99999	-9		21
FD POSTENTREPRENÖR	99999	-9		21
FD PREPARERARE	99999	-9		21
FD PRÄSTFÖRARE	99999	-9		21
FD RANDSKÄRARE	99999	-9		21
FD RESTAURATION	99999	-9		21
FD SEKTERIST	99999	-9		21
FD SJÖMANSHEM	99999	-9		21
FD SLOTTSMAN	99999	-9		21
FD SPRITBOLAGSARBETARE	99999	-9		21
FD STATIONSANSTÄLLD	99999	-9		21
FD STUDIEPEDAGOG	99999	-9		21
FD STÅNGRÄTARE	99999	-9		21
FD STÖPARE	99999	-9		21
FD TIDNINGSARBETERSKA	99999	-9		21
FD TORNFATARE	99999	-9		21
FD TRAMPAREBITRÄDE	99999	-9		21
FD TRYCKSLAGARE	99999	-9		21
FD TÄCKARE	99999	-9		21
FÖDRÅDSTAGERSKA	-1	-9		21
BRUKSGRATIALIST	99930	-9		21
GRATIALIST	58340	-9		21
HUSARGRATIALIST	58340	-9		21
JORDBRUKSGRATIALIST	61110	-9		21
JÄRNVÄGSGRATIALIST	99999	-9		21
KLENSMEDGRATIALIST	83990	-9		21
MASUGNSGRATIALIST	72120	-9		21
MURAREGRATIALIST	95120	-9		21
NATTVAKTSGRATIALIST	58940	-9		21
SKOMAKAREGRATIALIST	80110	-9		21
SOLDATGRATIALIST	58340	-9		21
ÄNKEHJÄLPGRATIALIST	-1	-9		21
FATTIGPENSIONÄR	-1	-9		21
FATTIGVÅRDPENSIONÄR	-1	-9		21
FATTIGVÅRDSUTPENSIONERAD	-1	-9		21
HELPENSIONÄR	-1	-9		21
JÄRNVÄGSPENSIONÄR	-1	-9		21
PENSIONIST	-1	-9		21
PENSIONSINNEHAVARE	-1	-9		21
PENSIONSINNEHAVARINNA	-1	-9		21
PENSIONSTAGARE	-1	-9		21
PENSIONSTAGARINNA	-1	-9		21
PENSIONÄR	-1	-9		21
PENSIONÄR I PAUVRES HONTEAUX	-1	-9		21
PENSIONÄRSKA	-1	-9		21
RIDDARHUSPENSION	-1	-9		21
RIKSPENSIONÄR	-1	-9		21
STATSPENSIONÄR	-1	-9		21
TULLPENSIONÄR	31040	-9		21
EGEN UNDANTAGSHJON	-1	-9	61110	21
FATTIGVÅRDSUNDANTAGARE	-1	-9	61110	21

FÖDORÅDSHJON	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖDORÅDSKARL	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖDORÅDSKVINNA	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖDORÅDSTAGARE	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖDORÅDTAGERSKA	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖRDELSGUMMA	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖRDELSHAVARE	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖRDELSHAVERSKA	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖRDELSHJON	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖRDELSINNEHAVARE	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖRDELSTAGARE	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖRDELSÄGERSKA	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖRDELSÄNKLING	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖRGÅNGSHJON	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖRGÅNGSTAGARE	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖRMÅNSBONDE	99999	-9	61110	21
FÖRMÅNSHJON	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖRMÅNSTAGARE	-1	-9	61110	21
GÅRDSKVINNA	-1	-9	61110	21
GÅRDSMAN	62105	-9	61110	21
JORDUNDANTAGARE	61115	-9	61110	21
JORDUNDANTAGSINNEHAVARE	61115	-9	61110	21
JORDUNDANTAGSINNEHAVARINNA	61115	-9	61110	21
JORDUNDANTAGSÄGARE	61115	-9	61110	21
PÅ UNDANTAG	-1	-9	61110	21
SYTNINGSHJON	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAG	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAG I BRÖD	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAG I JORD	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGMOR	-1	15	61110	21
UNDANTAGSARRENDATOR	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSARRENDATORSKA	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSBESITTARE	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSBESITTARINNA	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSFÖRMÅN	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSFÖRMÅNSTAGARE	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSGUBBE	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSGUMMA	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSHAVARE	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSHAVERSKA	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSHJON	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSINNEHAVARE	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSINNEHAVARINNA	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSINNEHAVERSKA	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSKVINNA	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSKVINNA I BRÖD	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSMAKA	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSMAN	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSMAN I BRÖD	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSTAGARE	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSTAGARINNA	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSTAGERSKA	-1	-9	61110	21

UNDANTAGSÄGARE	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSÄGARINNA	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSÄGARINNA I BRÖD	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSÄGERSKA	-1	-9	61110	21
UNDANTAGSÅBO	-1	-9	61110	21
FÖDORÅDSTORPARE	61115	-9		21
FÖRDELSARRENDATOR	61110	-9		21
FÖRDELSJORDBRUKARE	61110	-9		21
FÖRDELSJORDÄGARE	61110	-9		21
FÖRDELSJORDÄGARINNA	61110	-9		21
FÖRDELSTORPARE	61115	-9		21
TORPLÄGENHETSUNDANTAGSINNEHAVARE	61115	-9		21
UNDANTAGSBONDE	61110	-9		21
UNDANTAGSBRUKARE	61115	-9		21
UNDANTAGSLÄGENHETSÄGARE	61115	-9		21
UNDANTAGSLÄGENHETSÄGARINNA	61115	-9		21
UNDANTAGSTORPARE	61115	-9		21

Comment: The standardized occupational titles come from SwedPop (n.d.) and codes for HISCO, PRODUCT, RELATION and STATUS from the historical censuses (SwedPop 2026). Titles without codes for the mentioned variables did not appear in the investigated censuses but in other SwedPop databases.

Source: See comment.

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