

# Gender Equality in Academia and Research

## Sweden

COUNTRY: Sweden

---

### PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

#### Legal framework

In Sweden, the operations of research organisations are regulated by the laws and statutes that apply to the area of higher education, primarily the Swedish Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434) and Higher Education Ordinance (SFS 1993:100). According to Chapter 1, Initial provisions, section 5 of the Swedish Higher Education Act, “equality between women and men shall always be taken into account and promoted in the operations of higher education institutions”.

Unlike other countries, the greatest share of publicly funded research in Sweden is conducted in higher education institutions (HEIs), with research institutes accounting for only a small share. There are about 50 universities, colleges and individual education providers in Sweden, with higher education and research mostly conducted at state universities and colleges. The Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) reports that there are a few individual non-state education providers.

Within the legal framework, public sector HEIs have considerable autonomy, within an overall system of management by objectives. The main responsibility for higher education and research rests with the Swedish Parliament (*Riksdag*) and the government, which decide on regulations and allocate resources to HEIs. Within the framework of this legislation, HEIs take most decisions themselves, including their organisation, internal allocation of resources, educational offering, educational content and design, numbers of students admitted, and research undertaken. HEIs also have significant freedom in staff recruitment and selection.

As government agencies, research organisations are also subject to administrative and labour market legislation, such as the Parental Leave Act (1995:584), protecting the rights of pregnant women and parents. Equality of opportunity and treatment in work, employment, working conditions and further training is regulated by the Swedish Discrimination Act (2008:567), which aims to combat discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, disability, sexual orientation or age. The Discrimination Act allows for moderate preferential treatment of the underrepresented gender when hiring, provided it promotes gender equality and does not conflict with EU regulations.

The Discrimination Act requires all workplaces in Sweden, including research organisations, to document<sup>[1]</sup> their active measures to prevent discrimination (on all grounds mentioned) and promote gender equality among employees and students. According to the Act, “active measures” means pursuing prevention and promotion work by:

- Investigating the existence of any risks of discrimination or reprisals or any other obstacles to individuals' equal rights and opportunities;
- Analysing the causes of any risks and obstacles identified;
- Taking the prevention and promotion measures that can reasonably be expected;
- Monitoring and evaluating measures under points 1-3.

The provisions on active measures require all employers to continuously apply a four-step approach (investigate, analyse, take measures, monitor/evaluate) within five areas:

- Working conditions;
- Provisions and practices in respect of pay and other terms of employment;
- Recruitment and promotion;
- Education and training, as well as other skills development;
- Possibilities to reconcile employment and parenthood.

Employers must promote gender balance in different types of work, including management positions. They have to establish, follow up and evaluate guidelines and routines to prevent harassment, sexual harassment and reprisals, and carry out annual pay surveys.

For students, the Discrimination Act stipulates that the work of education providers on active measures should encompass:

- Admission and recruitment procedures;
- Teaching methods and organisation of education;
- Examination and assessment of student performance;
- Study environment;
- Possibilities to reconcile studies and parenthood.

Education providers are also obliged to have guidelines and protocols for their activities, with a view to preventing harassment and sexual harassment, and must follow up and evaluate those guidelines and systems.

The documentation must contain a summary account of the action plan for equal pay, with an implementation report included with the subsequent plan.

The UKÄ collects and reports sex-disaggregated higher education statistics annually as part of the Swedish government's instructions. Monitoring and reporting of gender equality is part of research organisations' annual reporting to the UKÄ, on financial data, including (sex-disaggregated) statistics for students, doctoral students and staff.

### **Policy framework**

Most public sector research organisations in Sweden are public agencies in their own right and report directly to the Swedish government. According to the 2005 Swedish Government Bill, all government agencies - including research organisations – must help to achieve objectives in relation to equal gender representation in governing organisations. Although quotas are not mandatory, decision-making boards, committees and panels involved in peer reviewing, recruitment, etc. are expected to be made up of at least 40 % of the underrepresented sex. Gender mainstreaming has been a strategy since 1984 and is both a binding policy approach and the main strategy the Swedish government uses to achieve gender equality policy objectives. The gender equality perspective must therefore be included in all government agencies' decision-making and policy development.

As government agencies, Swedish HEIs also adhere to the fundamental legal principles for civil servants, the “Values for Civil Servants”. These values include objectivity, impartiality and equal treatment.

To complement the Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance, the Swedish government has adopted a system of “appropriation directions” (*regleringsbrev*) or annual public service agreements for the operations of HEIs. These directions contain set targets for the recruitment of women professors. The recruitment goals are specified at university level, the first period was 1997-1999 and new goals were set for 2002-2004, 2005-2008, 2009-2011, 2012-2015 and 2017-2019 (Government Bill 1996/87:141). In 2020, the UKÄ examined the work from 2017-2019 and concluded that HEIs had not achieved their goals overall. Most ended up within a range of 10 percentage points of their goal, with the majority having recruited a lower proportion than initially planned. The proportion of women among newly recruited professors per research area remained stable or increased slightly between 2017 and 2018, decreasing again in 2019 in most cases. Medicine and Health Sciences was the only research area where the proportion of women among newly recruited professors was higher in 2019 than in 2017<sup>[2]</sup>. New and individual goals were defined for HEIs in 2021-2023, with the government targeting 50 % women among newly recruited professors by 2030.

Since 2016, all state universities, as well as Chalmers University of Technology and *Jönköping University*, have been tasked with working on gender mainstreaming. The Gender Mainstreaming in Academic (*Jämställdhetsintegrering i högskolor och universitet*, GMA) development programme aims to strengthen agencies’ work so that activities contribute more to achieving the government’s gender equality policy goals<sup>[3]</sup>. Priority areas are equal career paths within academia, the need to counteract gender-stereotypical career paths, and improving the throughput of women and men in education.

GMA requires institutions to gender-mainstream all of their operations according to agency-specific plans. The Gender Equality Agency (*Jämställdhetsmyndigheten*) coordinates the GMA programme and supports Swedish HEIs at the planning and implementation phases of their gender mainstreaming work. The Gender Equality Agency also coordinates learning and sharing of experiences among the agencies, identifying and disseminating best practices and documenting results. Prior to the establishment of the Gender Equality Agency, the programme was run by the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research, on behalf of the Swedish government. The assignments were transferred to the Agency on 1 January 2018. According to the appropriation directives for 2021 (U2020/02952) (to all HEIs), universities and colleges must continue their gender mainstreaming work so that the activities contribute to achieving gender equality policy goals (Com. 2016/17:10), for example, gender equitable career paths, non-gender-stereotypical study choices, and throughput. Each university and college shall continue to work on the basis of university-specific plans with development needs, goals and activities, and describe how gender equality will be mainstreamed and become part of the university's regular activities. HEIs have the option to receive support from the Gender Equality Agency in developing and evaluating their measures. Universities and colleges must report their measures and results, as well as how gender equality was considered in the distribution of research funds.

### **Other stimulatory initiatives**

Recent years have seen increased awareness and debate on gender-based violence in Swedish universities and research organisations. The GMA mission and the #metoo movement have likely influenced this development. The special #metoo call from Swedish Academia was signed by more than 2,500 women. #metoo was commented on by the Minister for Higher Education and Research, while the organisation of several seminars, debates and other events had a strong impact on work in academia.

Several initiatives have targeted increased knowledge and prevention of sexual harassment. For example, the government assigned the Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR) to report on HEIs' efforts to prevent sexual harassment, their procedures on handling suspected sexual harassment, and good practice examples<sup>[4]</sup>.

One overarching objective of the GMA is related to the national sub-goal to end men's violence against women. According to a survey by the Gender Equality Agency (reported in 2020), about one-third of HEIs prioritised initiatives linked to this sub-goal since 2017. Efforts were made to strengthen knowledge of sexual harassment and violence among students and staff, while priority was given to amending protocols on sexual harassment and discrimination.

The Gender Equality Agency is tasked with integrating gender-based violence into education. This reflects the new objective in the Higher Education Ordinance (SFS 1993:100) to include the subject of gender-based violence in all training where students are confronted with abused women and children. On behalf of the government (S2018/01831/JÄM) and in collaboration with five HEIs, the Agency offered support to 27 HEIs and 84 educational programmes. The Agency subsequently reported substantial need for further education for teachers and staff in this area.

When assessing funding, processes and efforts to include a gender perspective in research have been strengthened. Recent years have seen several funding organisations undertake studies to assess whether and how gender affects the grant process, e.g. in review panels. The studies suggested steps to create a gender-equal process. According to the Swedish Research Council (VR) in 2020, the work resulted in several concrete improvements. One of the most important activities launched was training on gender equality issues for expert panels reviewing and assessing research applications where experiences from previous observational studies are presented. This resulted in a more gender-fair approval process<sup>[5]</sup>.

### **Key actors**

Part of the Ministry of Employment, the Gender Equality Agency was established in 2018 to contribute to more effective implementation of gender equality policy. The Agency works on:

- Analysis and follow-up of progress on the gender equality policy goals;
- Coordination and support for government agencies and organisations (government programme on gender mainstreaming in government agencies) as well as universities and HEIs;
- Development and implementation of training programmes.

It is committed to supporting and monitoring the 10-year “National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Men's Violence against Women”, including honour-related violence and oppression, human trafficking for sexual purposes and prostitution. It also assigns grants to projects on the mobilisation of women and gender equality.

The Agency is engaged in international exchange and cooperation. It supports the Swedish government's international commitments on gender equality within multilateral institutions, including the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe and the United Nations (UN).

The Equality Ombudsman (DO) is the government agency and legal body that focuses on gender equality and anti-discrimination in the labour market in general (including research organisations). It provides guidelines and carries out inspections of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in workplaces. From 2019-2021, the DO undertook an investigation of HEIs' compliance with the Discrimination Act concerning the duty to work with active measures for students. As of August 2021, the overall results have not been communicated, although individual reports were published by some HEIs.

The Ministry for Health and Social Affairs is responsible for promoting gender equality in society, while the Ministry of Education and Research is specifically in charge of HEIs as government agencies.

The UKÄ is the government agency responsible for monitoring HEIs' effective use of resources. It analyses their operations and its reports are the basis for government decisions on higher education. It is responsible for the official statistics on HEIs, such as distribution of teaching staff, by age and sex, as well as HEIs' financial reporting.

The UHR is another government agency with responsibilities in the education sector. One of its main focus areas is preventing discrimination and promoting equal treatment at universities.

The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for a number of government agencies promoting, supporting, organising and funding basic and advanced research. Chief among these is the VR, which promotes gender perspectives in research and equality between women and men in the research community. Another government agency devoted to funding research is VINNOVA, which works under the Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communication to promote gender equality research for long-term sustainable growth. The government-funded National Secretariat for Gender Research at Gothenburg University is in charge of monitoring research policy from a gender perspective and advising on gender research.

## **INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS**

The Discrimination Act obliges all research organisations to adopt and document active measures in respect of all grounds of discrimination in the Act. Many research organisations are also part of the GMA.

Some public research institutes received specific instructions on national gender equality concerns through the government's appropriation directions. For example, the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) is tasked with contributing to the implementation of the national action plan for the implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security 2016-2020 (decision of the government on 20 April 2016 (UD2016/07898/KH)). A report on the FOI's implementation of the national action plan must be submitted in connection with the annual report. Ordinance 2007:861 for the Swedish Defence Research Agency, specifying its task of conducting research, method and technology development and investigative work, states that the conditions for women and men must be highlighted and analysed where relevant. All project plans must specify how the conditions for women and men will be taken into account or otherwise justified.

In 2020, the Gender Equality Agency published a report on the results of GMA operations between 2017 and 2019. It concluded that the assignment had intensified the HEIs' work on gender mainstreaming and strengthened its organisation. The results included changed working methods to counteract gender-based study choices, promote equal career paths and the equal distribution of resources. However, HEIs show an ongoing need for targeted assignments, a demand for results, and support on gender mainstreaming<sup>[6]</sup>. The extension of HEIs' assignments until 2020 saw most analyse their plans for the previous period, while the majority of universities extended their previous plans with minor adjustments.

HEIs' inclusion of gender mainstreaming is affected by a number of factors, including external factors such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, they chiefly focused on limiting the spread of the virus, and developing new routines and working methods for distance learning and digital exams. The pandemic saw gender mainstreaming lose momentum, with numerous HEIs postponing/cancelling planned activities, training and conferences on gender equality. On a positive note, the digital transformation meant that that digital meetings addressing gender equality in academia reached a wider target group. However, several HEI coordinators highlighted difficulties in anchoring their gender mainstreaming work in a digital workspace. During the previous programme period (2016-2019), HEIs had developed a gender mainstreaming plan specific to their own context. As a result of COVID-19, however, 35 % of HEIs now lack a revised or new gender mainstreaming plan, while a significant number will simply retain the same priority areas as in 2016-2019. These include broadened recruitment and participation, career development, resource allocation, training content and implementation. 27 % of HEIs have stated that they prioritised the new areas of postgraduate education and research conditions in 2020, together with qualitative initiatives (culture and structure). Another trend is the combination of gender mainstreaming and other tasks, such as equal conditions, quality assurance work, sustainable development (Agenda 2030), active measures in the Discrimination Act, violence prevention and sexual harassment<sup>[7]</sup>.

One large-scale research organisation initiative is the “National Collaboration Programme against Sexual Harassment and Gender-based Violence (2020–2025)”, which was initiated by the vice-chancellors at *Karolinska Institutet*, the Royal Institute of Technology and *Malmö University*. All HEIs were invited to join and many did. The programme establishes a broad understanding of gender-based violence and applies an intersectional perspective. Its goal is to establish research-based knowledge of inclusive work and study environments, as well as a sustainable organisation for the prevention of sexual harassment, gender-based violence and victimisation in academia. The programme will, by extension, strengthen and intensify work on organisational culture, with a focus on quality, sustainable development, work environment, leadership and equal opportunities.

## **RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES**

### **Model for equal distribution of research funds at *Kristianstad University* (HKR)**

Since 2016, HKR has successfully worked with a model for equal distribution of internal research resources. The work started with a revision of the existing resource allocation model, as the old model was considered outdated. The earlier model resulted in an economical budget deficit for the university and allocated resources based on position (i.e. a fixed share of working hours allocated to “research time”). As 70 % of the university’s professors were men, an assessment from a gender perspective found that about 70 % of research resources were automatically distributed to men. An assessment of the earlier model concluded that it sustained a gendered pattern for women and men’s research careers. In the new model, those deemed eligible for funding can apply for additional research resources on merit (assessment of research achievements and collaboration in previous years). Launched in 2018, the total distribution of research resources at the end of that year was 50 % men and 50 % women. In the second year (2019), the distribution corresponded to the gender distribution among teachers, i.e. 60 % women and 40 % men, which was also the case in 2020. At HKR, education and research in areas with a traditionally higher proportion of women (e.g. Health and Education Sciences) are emphasised, and the old model did not support the vision to attract and retain excellent researchers and teachers within these areas. By contrast, the new model creates financial leeway to make strategic investments in subject areas. The old model created a lock-in system for junior and aspiring researchers - especially those in teacher positions (often women) – who consequently had fewer opportunities to pursue their research interests. It benefited senior researchers – mainly men and those in subject areas linked to better external research funding possibilities. A consequence of the gender mainstreaming work is that HKR’s distribution model for research resources rewards research achievements (resource allocation) in a more transparent and equal way.

**Equality Office led by the Vice-President at the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH)**

KTH appointed a Vice-President for Gender Equality and Core Values in 2017, whose task is to promote gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities. HEIs in Sweden must work according to several government objectives and legal obligations within the broader equality framework. KTH also set up an Equality Office to coordinate implementation and support different units and management levels. Through the Equality Office, KTH is conducting research-based proactive work at both the strategic and practical level, with the aim of promoting gender equality, diversity and equal terms from an intersectional perspective. The KTH Equality Office comprises six people: the Vice-President, a special expert, three Gender Equality strategists and a pedagogical advisor. KTH also includes faculty positions with responsibilities for gender equality and equal opportunities. Work on gender mainstreaming and equal conditions at KTH's five schools is designed and implemented at local level, but coordinated via the Equality Office. The activities of the Equality Office include training initiatives, leadership development, recruitment and assessment, as well as career support, monitoring and evaluation. It works through dialogue and interactive working methods, with the experts at the Equality Office working together with staff and students. Although covering all university members, the Equality Office is mainly focused on educating and supporting leadership and managerial functions. In 2017, it started a one-year programme in Gender and Change Management (GOFL) for 18 women in senior positions at the university. The programme aimed for participants to act as change leaders, advocates and multipliers in their areas of the organisation.

An important prerequisite for the work of the Equality Office is that gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities are anchored in KTH's steering documents and central work processes. The Equality Office has been received positively. Its coordination with gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities work has resulted in clearer anchoring at management level, together with operational support for trade unions and the student union. Training and different working methods have been created to facilitate management and other key positions know-how on integrating gender equality. Regular meetings with responsible staff provide the Equality Office with an overview of the overall gender equality and equal opportunities work. Knowledge and awareness of gender equality has increased at KTH, and longer term effects at societal level are expected when graduates spread their knowledge of gender equality, diversity and equal opportunities beyond the university itself.

## **Equal funding of innovations at VINNOVA**

Every year, the Swedish Innovation Agency, VINNOVA, invests approximately SEK 3 billion in research and innovation. Since 2015, it has successfully integrated a gender perspective in its activities and promoted gender equality in the distribution of funds for research and innovation. VINNOVA makes an effort to include gender perspectives in the projects financed, recognising gender equality as a prerequisite for sustainable societal development and innovation. The funds managed by VINNOVA must benefit women and men equally. Since 2015, the number of women project managers has increased by approximately 10 % (from about 30 % to 40 %) and the total distribution of funding now has a range of 40–60 % and is thus in line with national gender equality objectives. VINNOVA's work is based on three key questions:

Who is being financed? The focus is on the project team and its gender composition, e.g. how many women and men are project leaders, how are time and resources allocated to different positions and tasks from a gender perspective, etc.;

What is being financed? This tries to incorporate a gender perspective in project aims and methodology, if relevant. Applicants have to provide information on their motivation for (or justification against) incorporating a gender dimension. The call manager at VINNOVA is supported to incorporate gender-related topics and criteria when setting up the call;

How is the process conducted? Firstly, applications are designed in a way that makes it possible to assess their gender aspects. Secondly, the review committee is composed in a gender-equal way, trained in gender bias, and knows how to assess the relevance of gender to the subject area.

VINNOVA set up a task force to plan and coordinate the work. The task force supports implementation through coaching and training, and also monitors and evaluates the work. Managers are responsible for implementation and the work is guided by government instructions and internal steering documents. In 2021, VINNOVA is working to integrate a gender perspective into its 10 mission areas to ensure more systematic application of gender mainstreaming in its work procedures. This is expected to lead to a better set of actions to promote gender equality and equal funding.

## Footnotes

[1] Employers with at least 25 employees are required to document all elements of their work on active measures. Employers with 10-24 employees are required to document their work on pay surveys. Employers with fewer than 10 employees have the same responsibility to take active measures, but are not legally required to document them.

[2]

<https://www.uka.se/download/18.224b0bb7171ac322a8ee693/1591250510175/rap...öljning%20av%20rekryteringsmål%20för%20professorer%202017-2019.pdf>

[3] The overarching goal of the gender equality policy is that women and men have the same power to shape society and their own lives. Six sub-goals are: (1) gender-equal division of power and influence; (2) economic gender equality; (3) gender-equal education; (4) gender equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care; (5) gender-equal health; and (6) stopping men's violence against women.

[4] <https://www.uhr.se/publikationer/publikationsbutiken/forebyggande-arbete...>

[5] [https://www.vr.se/download/18.47291b121711f04ce6e1128/1587987500640/En%20jämställd%20process\\_VR2020.pdf](https://www.vr.se/download/18.47291b121711f04ce6e1128/1587987500640/En%20jämställd%20process_VR2020.pdf)

[6] <https://www.jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/files/2020/04/Jämställdhet-i-akademin-2020.pdf>

[7] <https://www.jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/files/2021/04/Fortsatt-integreri...>