

Sweden

About

Sweden's Constitution sets out to combat discrimination, including, among others, on the grounds of gender in Article 2. Since 1 January 2018, the Gender Equality Agency is tasked with raising awareness of gender equality policy and gender mainstreaming, increasing coordination, contributing to knowledge and methods and supporting implementation.

Gender mainstreaming is Sweden's main strategy for achieving its gender equality policy objectives. Sweden has a history of gender equality legislation, with the first government bill solely focusing on gender equality in different spheres presented to the parliament (Riksdag) in 1988 (Prop. 1987/88:105). Since 2014, Sweden even has the world's first feminist government, meaning that gender equality is crucial to government priorities, in both decision-making and resource allocation. One of the main pillars of this feminist government is ensuring that gender equality is included in political policy, both nationally and internationally.

Gender mainstreaming – and to a lesser extent gender budgeting – take place at many different levels: national, government agencies, county administrative governments, county councils, municipalities, etc., despite the lack of a legal obligation in this respect. There is a de facto binding government decision regarding gender mainstreaming, impact assessment and gender budgeting [1] and the government in power decides the extent to which gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting will be implemented [2]. Overall, Sweden uses a variety of methods and tools to mainstream gender, although these sometimes lack institutionalisation and regularity.

Legislative and policy framework

In line with the Swedish Constitution, public institutions work to combat discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, national or ethnic origin, linguistic or religious affiliation, functional disability, sexual orientation, age or any other individual circumstances (Article 2) [3]. Legislation prohibiting gender-based discrimination in the labour market was adopted in 1997 (1997: 1118). The 1992 legislation on women's and men's equal rights in working life was replaced by the Discrimination Act in 2008 (2008: 567). The purpose of this Act is to combat discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities, using an intersectional approach, regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.

Sweden has no national action plan on gender equality, as such. Rather, there are several action plans related to different aspects of gender equality, with the most recent action plans addressing:

- prostitution and trafficking (February 2018);
- female genital mutilation (June 2018);
- gender equal pensions (January 2017);
- gender equal life income (December 2017); and
- feminist foreign policy 2015-2018 (February 2018).

Sweden also has a written communication, titled 'Power, Goals and Agency - a feminist policy for a gender equal future' [4], in which the government presents the focus of its gender equality policy. This document outlines the goals, the gender equality agency and the 10-year strategy to prevent and combat violence against women.

The overarching goal of Sweden's national gender equality work is to invest women and men with the same power to shape society and their own lives. There are six sub-goals, which have been in force since 2017 [5]: (1) Equal division of power and influence; (2) Economic equality; (3) Gender equal education; (4) Equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care; (5) Equal health; and (6) Elimination of violence against women.

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Structures

Government responsibilities

Sweden has appointed a Minister for Gender Equality, with responsibility for policy implementation and development, as well as for anti-discrimination and anti-segregation. The Minister is responsible for gender equality, children's rights, democracy and human rights, and newly arrived migrant establishment. The Minister for Gender Equality has the same autonomous power and authority as other ministries, although the responsibility for gender equality is not established by law[6].

Further tasks of the Minister for Gender Equality are coordination, development and follow-up of gender mainstreaming in their areas of responsibility. However, in accordance with the principle of gender mainstreaming, each minister is responsible for taking a gender equality perspective in their own decisions and for steering agencies and activities within their areas of responsibility to do the same[7].

Each ministry has a Gender Equality Coordinator, who is part of an inter-ministerial working group on gender mainstreaming that meets quarterly. The work is supported, coordinated and followed up by the Gender Equality Unit, which prepares and coordinates gender equality questions in the government offices. It also drafts gender equality policy for the government, as well as providing input to information, publications and training.

In the Budget Bill for 2017, the government announced its intention to establish the Swedish Gender Equality Agency [8], which was subsequently set up on 1 January 2018 to contribute to the effective implementation of gender equality policy. One of the Agency's key tasks is the systematic follow-up and analysis of the development of society and its impact on progress towards the achievement of the six sub-goals of Sweden's gender equality policy [9]. The work of the Agency requires close cooperation with other government agencies, municipalities, county councils, regions, civil society, enterprises and industry [10]. The work is carried out in the following areas:

- 1 | Analysis and follow-up of Sweden's six gender equality sub-goals and evaluation of the measures implemented;
- 2 | Support government agencies, county councils, regions and municipalities in the implementation of gender equality policy;
- 3 | Coordination and performance of certain assignments in the area of gender equality policy;
- 4 | Allocation of government grants to gender equality projects and women's organisations;
and
- 5 | Assist the government with expertise in international gender equality cooperation.

By 31 March each year, the Gender Equality Agency shall present, collect and analyse the measures adopted by relevant government agencies and other actors in order to reach the goals of Sweden's gender equality policy. The expectation is that the Gender Equality Agency will ensure that the priorities in the government's gender equality policy have an impact and contribute to more effective implementation of Swedish gender equality policy.

Independent gender equality body

The Equality Ombudsman (DO) is an independent government agency that works on behalf of the Swedish parliament and government to promote equal rights and opportunities and to combat discrimination [11]. The mandate of the DO also encompasses transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation and age. The DO's tasks are to influence, guide and encourage employers, agencies, municipalities and others to minimise discrimination. The DO receives about 2,000 reports each year, around 200 of which result in supervision (i.e. they are investigated for their compliance with the Act on Discrimination).

The DO also makes recommendations on reducing discrimination in the future. Although its decisions are not legally binding, they may result in a change, for example removing a discriminatory rule or bringing in a new way of working so as to prevent discrimination. Every year a small number of cases come before the courts.

Parliamentary bodies

As for representative elected bodies, the parliament maintains 15 committees, none of which is specifically dedicated to gender equality. In 2007, the Gender Equality Council (Jämställdhetsrådet) consisted of 48 organisations and networks, such as political parties, women's and employers' organisations and unions. Ten additional organisations became members of the Council in subsequent years. They met under the leadership of the Minister of Gender Equality once or twice a year [12] until the Gender Equality Council was disbanded on 1 July 1 2017.

Today, Sweden has Thematic Consultations, in which voluntary organisations participate. They are intended to broaden and deepen knowledge and perspectives on gender equality.

Regional structures

Sweden has 20 county councils (landsting), which are self-governing local authorities and one of the principal administrative subdivisions. These county councils are governed by a county council assembly (landstingsfullmäktige), which is elected by county constituents every four years, in conjunction with general elections. County councils' key responsibilities are public healthcare and public transport.

Each county has a county administrative board (länsstyrelse), a Swedish government agency that is responsible for government administration at county level. The board is appointed by the government for a six-year term and is led by a governor (landshövding). The county government comprises a state coordination agency, a service agency, and an appeal body, with supervisory responsibility.

Through ordinances, the government has assigned county administrative boards responsibility for developing county gender mainstreaming strategies for the period 2018-2020. They have an important role to play as coordinators of regional action to prevent violence against women (by men), honour-related violence and oppression, prostitution and trafficking for sexual purposes, and protection of children subjected to violence. They are also important partners in the new Gender Equality Agency.

Sweden has 290 municipalities, each of which has an elected assembly - the municipal council - which makes decisions on municipal matters. The municipal executive board leads and coordinates the work, with key responsibilities in the areas of social services, childcare, care for older persons and schools.

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) represents the government, professional and employers' interests of Sweden's 20 county councils/regions and 290 municipalities. There is an agreement between the state and SALAR to further gender equality-related actions at local and regional levels in the period of 2018–2020 [13].

SALAR has adopted the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local life, committing itself to promoting gender equality in its capacity as a political organisation, employer and service provider. By signing the charter, SALAR has adopted the strategy of gender mainstreaming, thus committing to work towards adopting a gender perspective in all of its planning, decision-making and work on behalf of its members. In numerous municipalities and county councils, the elected councils have also adopted the Charter, similarly undertaking to achieve gender equality in their own operations.

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Methods and tools

Note: the methods and tools listed under this section were the focus of EIGE's 2018-2019 assessment. If certain methods and tools are not mentioned in this section, this does not necessarily mean that they are not used at all by Sweden.

A de facto binding government decision guides the use of gender mainstreaming, gender impact assessment and gender budgeting [14].

Over the years, Sweden has developed many methods and tools to cover different stages of the gender mainstreaming process. In the past three years, gender impact assessment, gender monitoring and gender evaluation have all been undertaken. Several evaluation procedures have been adopted (with the exception of regular review meetings) to establish the degree to which reports from the evaluation studies are available.

Gender budgeting

Gender budgeting is widely used in most ministries, with some requiring an adjustment to make the outcomes more gender equal in the past three years. The government provides a clear statement of gender-related objectives in respect of budgets and each proposal in the Budget Act is accompanied by a gender impact assessment. Data on gender equality budgetary allocations are published.

In 2017, the government tasked the Swedish National Financial Management Authority with proposing methods to follow up and account for the overall effects of the gender equality reforms proposed and implemented, in light of the costs [15]. That follow-up shows gender differences among the recipients of several reforms, with women and men, girls and boys getting varying shares of the measures.

Training and awareness-raising

Government employees, including officials at the highest political level, employees of the government's Gender Equality Unit and the majority of employees in other ministries, participate in gender equality training on an ad hoc basis. The training includes general sensitivity to gender issues, as well as specific training on gender mainstreaming, understanding and performing gender impact assessment, and gender budgeting. The training takes up to four hours a year, with the exception of the employees of the government's gender equality body, who receive eight hours of training per year. The training is not compulsory, however.

Gender statistics

Since 1994, official statistics related to individuals must be disaggregated by sex unless there are special reasons for not doing so (Section 14 of the Official Statistics Ordinance, 2001: 100). There are also national regulations on the quality and evaluation of official statistics. Statistics Sweden has certified its entire production of statistics according to the international standards of marketing, opinion and social research, ISO 20252.

The production of official statistics is decentralised, and a number of agencies produce relevant statistics within their different fields of expertise. It is not possible to list all of the agencies that gather some form of data from a gender equality perspective. Official statistics include only part of the statistics produced by government agencies. Several agencies currently have requirements related to sex-disaggregated statistics in their instructions, including for non-official statistics.

Statistics Sweden has a specific unit in charge of promoting the production of sex-disaggregated data. The unit has been active since 1983 and is a legal obligation since 1994. Areas covered by national gender statistics are: population, health and social care, education and research, time use, parental insurance, unpaid work, income-generating employment, entrepreneurship, wages/salaries, income, influence and power, and crime (including violence against women). There are indicators for each of the six sub-goals of gender equality policy.

The gender equality web page of Statistics Sweden presents 172 tables with gender-disaggregated data, all at national level. The statistics are updated twice every year. Statistics Sweden also presents the development of gender equality every other year, in a publication titled 'Women and men in Sweden. Facts and Figures' (På tal om kvinnor och män [16]). Similar products are also developed at regional and local levels.

The Budget Bill adopts sex-disaggregated data and a gender perspective in several areas of expenditure. 'Gender equality and newly arrived migrant establishment' (Jämställdhet och nyanlända invandrares etablering Uo 13), for example, is followed-up on the basis of the gender equality indicators and the allocation of resources to gender equality policy. In Annex 3, 'Economic gender equality between women and men' (Ekonomisk jämställdhet mellan kvinnor och män), the indicators and the development of economic gender equality are presented more thoroughly, alongside a discussion of the areas of power and influence and unpaid domestic and care work.

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Good practices

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Endnotes

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