



PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUS/FOLIO

In Sweden men and women enjoy the same rights at school, in the workplace and in the home.

## GENDER EQUALITY:

# The Swedish approach to fairness

Sweden has one of the highest levels of gender equality in the world. This is based on the belief that when women and men share power and influence equally it leads to a more just and democratic society. A well-developed welfare system makes it easier for both sexes to balance their work and family life.

Gender equality is one of the cornerstones of Swedish society. It means that women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all areas of life. Everyone has the right to work and support themselves, to balance their career and family life, and to not worry about being subjected to abuse or violence. In the Global Gender Gap Report 2010, Sweden is one of the world leaders in equality. The report, drawn up at the initiative of the World Economic

Forum, measures equality in four areas: economics, politics, education and health. It can be read at [www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org).

### **Gender equality at school**

Applying gender teaching in Swedish preschools is increasingly common. The aim is to give children the same opportunities in life, regardless of their gender, through teaching methods that allow each child to grow into a unique individual. Gender equality is an

important topic that is addressed continuously throughout elementary school to prepare students for further education.

A greater proportion of women than men complete their upper secondary education. Women comprise roughly 60 percent of all students in undergraduate university studies and almost two-thirds of all degrees are awarded to women. Significantly more women than men participate in adult education. ▶

**LEARN MORE**

**WORKING FOR EQUALITY**

Sweden has a number of government ministers and groups charged with making sure men, women and children have the same rights and opportunities.

- The Minister for Integration and Gender Equality coordinates the government's gender equality policy. Each government minister in Sweden is responsible for gender equality issues in his or her particular area of responsibility.
- The Division for Gender Equality is responsible for coordinating the government's work in this area and on special projects involving gender equality, as well as developing methods for implementing gender equality. Each county administrative board employs an expert on gender equality issues.
- The Equal Opportunities Commission can direct employers to take active measures to bolster gender equality under penalty of fines.
- The Discrimination Ombudsman seeks to combat discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities for all.



PHOTO: MARENETTE COLLIN

**Agneta Broberg, the Swedish Discrimination Ombudsman.**

**DID YOU KNOW THAT...**

**LIFE EXPECTANCY**

The life expectancy of the Swedish population continues to rise. In 2010, it was 83.2 years for women and 79.1 years for men.



PHOTO: FELIX ODELL / LINKIMAGE

**Both mothers and fathers in Sweden are entitled to paid parental leave.**

► The gender distribution among students in postgraduate studies and doctoral degrees is today equal.

**Parental leave**

In Sweden, parents are entitled to 480 days of parental leave when a child is born or adopted. Women claim most of the days. In 2008, men claimed about 20 percent of parental leave. The time can be taken in months, weeks, days or even by the hour. For 390 days, the maximum

parental allowance is SEK 910 a day. For the remaining 90 days the allowance is SEK 180. Sixty days of leave is allocated specifically to each of the parents, which means these days cannot be transferred to the other. In addition, the father of a newborn baby gets 10 extra days leave in connection with the birth or 20 days if they are twins. A parent adopting a child is entitled to take 1.5 years leave from the time the child comes under his or her care. ■

## Four ombudsmen became one

The Discrimination Ombudsman was established in 2009 to replace the earlier system of categorizing discriminatory issues. At the same time, seven anti-discrimination laws were replaced by a single law: the Discrimination Act. These changes were introduced to give citizens stronger and broader protection against discrimination. New provisions were introduced prohibiting discrimination due to age and transgender identity or expression.

The Discrimination Ombudsman reviews situations concerning gender equality in the workplace, the school system and other areas. Prior to 2009, there were four separate ombudsmen: the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination, the Disability Ombudsman and the Ombudsman against Discrimination because of Sexual Orientation.

The current Discrimination Ombudsman oversees compliance with the following laws:

1. The Discrimination Act combats discrimination due to gender, transgender identity or expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, disability or age.
2. The Act concerning Equal Treatment of Students in Higher Education aims to promote equal rights in the application processes at higher educational institutions.
3. The Act Prohibiting Discrimination and Other Degrading Treatment of Children and School Students includes preschools, schools for students with intellectual disabilities, and childcare facilities.
4. The Parental Leave Act mainly concerns the prohibition of discrimination against one sex or the other.

**IMPORTANT LAWS**

**THE ABORTION ACT**

Since 1974, women in Sweden have the legal right to an abortion during the first 18 weeks of pregnancy. This means that a woman can decide for herself whether to have an abortion through the 18th week of pregnancy without having to give a reason. After week 18, an abortion may be performed if there are special reasons for doing so up to week 22. In such cases, the National Board of Health and Welfare conducts an investigation before deciding whether to allow the abortion.

**THE ACT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

The Act on Violence against Women came into force in 1998. The law states that the violence and abuse to which a woman is subjected, for instance by a man close to her, adds up. Each blow and/or each instance of sexual and psychological degradation against the woman is taken into account. The sentence for this crime, a gross violation of a woman's integrity, is a maximum of six years imprisonment.

**THE ACT PROHIBITING THE PURCHASE OF SEXUAL SERVICES**

The way prostitution is viewed in society has a direct impact on gender equality. The Act Prohibiting the Purchase of Sexual Services was introduced in 1999. It made buying sexual services illegal in Sweden. This targets the purchaser rather than the adults or children involved in prostitution. As a result, street prostitution has declined dramatically along with the general acceptance of purchasing sex. The Swedish policy in this field has significantly contributed to change in other countries.

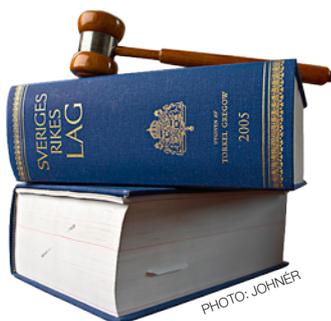


PHOTO: JOHNER

Sweden is one of the few countries that prohibits the purchase of sexual services.



PHOTO: NICHOLAS SÖDING / JOHNER

The proportion of women in top posts is increasing in Sweden.

## Women and men at work

Sweden has come a long way in making sure that women and men are treated equally in the workplace.

The Discrimination Act has two main sections dealing with gender equality at work. First, there is the requirement that all employers must actively pursue specific goals to promote equality between men and women. Second, the law prohibits discrimination and obliges employers to investigate and take measures against any harassment. Employers must not treat unfairly any employee or job applicant who is, has been or will be taking parental leave.

Pay differentials between men and women can largely be explained by differences in their profession, sector, position, work experience and age. However there are pay differentials that cannot be explained in this way but may be attributable to gender. These are called unjustified pay differentials. On average, women's monthly salaries are 94 percent of men's when differences in choice of profession and sector are taken into account. Pay differentials are most pronounced in the private sector.

**Economic and political power**

The government's gender equality policy is twofold: to ensure power and resources are distributed fairly between the sexes, and to create the conditions that give women and men the same power and opportunities.

In professional life, the proportion of women in top posts is increasing. The percentage of women heading Swedish private limited companies (with more than one employee, excluding the managing director) was 25 percent in 2009. This represents an increase of 16 percentage points since 1990. The proportion of women on the boards of listed companies is also increasing, having risen from 6 percent in 2002 to 22 percent in 2009. The figures are higher in the public sector. The majority of managers in municipal, county council and central government are women (52 percent). Almost half (45 percent) of all Swedish members of parliament and 46 percent of government ministers are women.

**Gender mainstreaming**

Gender mainstreaming, a term coined by the United Nations in 1997, describes the incorporation of the gender equality perspective into the work of government agencies at all levels. The idea is that gender equality is not a separate, isolated issue but a continual process.

For the EU, the Directorate-General for Justice is in charge of issues relating to gender equality and gender mainstreaming. The Directorate for Equality's mission is to coordinate and promote policy ▶

**HISTORY**

**1250s** King Birger Jarl passes a law on violence against women prohibiting rape and abduction.

**1921** Women get the right to vote and run for office.

**1921** The first five women win seats in government: Kerstin Hesselgren, Elisabeth Tamm, Agda Östlund, Nelly Thüring and Bertha Wellin.

**1965** Sweden becomes the first country to pass a law against rape in marriage.

**1972** Joint taxation of spouses is abolished in Sweden.

**1974** Parental allowance is introduced.

**1975** New abortion law comes into force.

**1980** Female succession to the throne comes into effect.

**1980** The Office of the Equality Opportunities Ombudsman is established.

**1998** The Act on Violence against Women is introduced.

**1999** The Act Prohibiting the Purchase of Sexual Services is introduced.

**2002** Parental leave increased to 480 days, with each parent entitled to two months of non-transferable benefits.

**2004** The government decides to implement an action plan for gender mainstreaming in government offices.

**2005** New legislation on sexual crimes further strengthens the absolute right of every individual to sexual integrity and self-determination.

**2009** The Discrimination Act replaces the seven anti-discrimination laws.

► developments to combat discrimination on the grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. It also promotes awareness of gender equality and non-discrimination.

**Thorough statistics**

In Sweden all official statistics are collected, analyzed and presented by gender. Quantitative gender equality means equal distribution (50/50) between men and women in all areas of society. Qualitative gender equality means that the knowledge and experience of both men and women is to be taken into consideration and made use of, to promote progress in all areas of society. ■



PHOTO: KICKI FUNBO / BILDARKIVET.SE

**Swedish law prohibits gender discrimination in the workplace.**

## Violence against women

In 2010, about 27,000 cases of male violence against women were recorded. The number of reported cases has risen over the years as more women speak out. Legislation in this sphere changed in the early 1980s, making it impossible for women to withdraw an allegation.

Women who need help can turn to the Swedish Association of Women's Shelters or Roks, the National Organization for Women's and Young Women's Shelters. They can also ask for help from any of the approximately 130

local women's shelters located throughout Sweden.

Other organizations that work with issues regarding violence against women include the National Clearinghouse on Violence against Women, which promotes cooperation between agencies and organizations that are in contact with women exposed to violence, and the National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women (NCK) based at Uppsala University.

## Useful links

- [www.allakvinnorshus.org](http://www.allakvinnorshus.org) All Women's House
- [www.do.se](http://www.do.se) Discrimination Ombudsman
- [www.forsakringskassan.se](http://www.forsakringskassan.se) Swedish Social Insurance Agency
- [www.genus.se](http://www.genus.se) Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research
- [www.kvinnofrid.se](http://www.kvinnofrid.se) National Clearinghouse on Violence against Women
- [www.kvinnofridslinjen.se](http://www.kvinnofridslinjen.se) Hotline for women subjected to threats, violence or sexual assault
- [www.kvinnojour.com](http://www.kvinnojour.com) Swedish Association of Women's Shelters
- [www.nck.uu.se](http://www.nck.uu.se) National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women
- [www.operationkvinnofrid.nu](http://www.operationkvinnofrid.nu) National Clearinghouse on Violence against Women
- [www.roks.se](http://www.roks.se) Roks, the National Organization for Women's and Young Women's Shelters in Sweden
- [www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se) Gender equality statistics at Statistics Sweden
- [www.sweden.gov.se](http://www.sweden.gov.se) Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality Sweden
- [www.wombri.se](http://www.wombri.se) Women's Business Research Institute

Published by the Swedish Institute  
 Updated August 2011 FS 8  
 More facts can be found on  
[www.sweden.se](http://www.sweden.se)



**Copyright:** Published by the Swedish Institute at [www.sweden.se](http://www.sweden.se). All content is protected by Swedish copyright law. The text may be reproduced, transmitted, displayed, published or broadcast in any media for non-commercial use with reference to [www.sweden.se](http://www.sweden.se). However, no photographs or illustrations may be used.

**The Swedish Institute (SI)** is a public agency that promotes interest and confidence in Sweden around the world. SI seeks to establish cooperation and lasting relations with other countries through strategic communication and exchange in the fields of culture, education, science and business.

**Further information about Sweden:** [www.sweden.se](http://www.sweden.se), the Swedish embassy or consulate in your country, or the Swedish Institute, Box 7434, SE-103 91 Stockholm, Sweden  
 Phone: +46 8 453 78 00 Mail: [si@si.se](mailto:si@si.se)  
[www.si.se](http://www.si.se), [www.swedenbookshop.com](http://www.swedenbookshop.com)