

# A Northern Democracy

Introduction to Central and Local Governance in Sweden



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# Welcome to Sweden!

Since 2009, [The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy](#) (ICLD) receives a large number of visitors from various countries. As professionals from the public and private sector these visitors are involved in different cooperation activities within the ICLD such as the International Training Programmes, Municipal Partnerships or study visits in general.

To meet the need of general and overall information we have produced this book – an introduction to the Swedish governance system and Swedish society that covers the most important features about Swedish governance. Our aim is that this introduction will provide answers to some of the most frequently asked questions and serve as a starting point for further studies.

I hope this book will be of both use and pleasure for our visitors.



*Jerker Stattin*  
*Chairperson*  
*Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy*

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# About ICLD

## The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy

The ICLD is a Non-Governmental Organisation based on the island of Gotland, east of mainland Sweden. It has been in operation since 2008 with the aim to promote local democracy in developing countries. For the ICLD, local democracy is about strengthening local institutions, decentralisation, local autonomy, citizens' involvement and collaboration between different actors at local level.

Co-operating with and strengthening existing institutions and authorities, as opposed to constructing parallel activities, are fundamental to the ICLD. Combining mutuality and local ownership, as well as acting on the diverse contexts of the co-operating partners, are also an integral part of the work.

ICLD's aim is to utilize and build on the experience and know-how existing in Swedish municipalities and regions, and also on research and knowledge development in an international context concerning local democracy and local self-government.

ICLD's operations are financed by Sida and cover three main areas:

- ▶ *Municipal Partnerships* – This programme supports development cooperation in partnerships between Swedish local authorities and local authorities in approximately 19 partner countries. The goal is to strengthen local democracy and local self-government in the relevant partner countries in order to reduce poverty and help to establish just and sustainable development.
- ▶ *International Training Programmes* – These programmes aim to reduce poverty by supporting local democracy development, effective local initiatives and to increase the capacity of local administration and local institutions. The programmes give key persons at local level in developing countries an opportunity to implement change projects in their contexts and to study Swedish experiences, models and expertise.
- ▶ *Knowledge and capacity development* – The Centre of Knowledge provides a research network and a meeting place for Swedish and international participants working with local democracy and decentralization.

The Board of ICLD consists of representatives from its three main principals – The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the University of Lund, and the Region of Gotland.

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Confederation of Swedish Enterprise  
[www.svensktnaringsliv.se](http://www.svensktnaringsliv.se)

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## List of abbreviations

DG	Director General
EMU	European Monetary Union
EU	European Union
ITP	International Training Programme
JO	Justitieombudsmannen (Parliamentary Ombudsman)
JÄMO	Jämställdhetsombudsmannen (Ombudsman for Equality)
NAO	Riksrevisionen (National Audit Office)
NBF	Fiskeristyrelsen (National Board of Fisheries)
SALAR	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions
SCB	Statistiska Centralbyrån (National Statistics Office)
SEK	Svenska Kronor (the Swedish currency)
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIPU	Swedish Institute of Public Administration
VAT	Value Added Tax

## Other information

In addition to the above sources of information, much valuable input to this book has been given through numerous discussions, interviews, seminars, study visits, etc. with various central and local government officials and their organisations. Furthermore, valuable information has been gathered from official documents such as strategies, policies, guidelines, and manuals developed by Swedish public sector organisations, as well as the vast framework of legal acts in Sweden.

# Introduction



## Basic facts on Sweden

Area	449 964 sq km
Population (2018)	10 230 000
Population density	20 inhabitants/sq km
Capital	Stockholm
Language	Swedish
Government type	Constitutional Monarchy
Head of State	Since 1973, King Carl XVI Gustaf
Religions	Lutheran (large majority), Roman Catholic, Ortho- dox, Baptist, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist
GDP per capita PPP	USD 47 000 (2017)
Natural resources	Zinc, iron ore, lead, copper, silver, timber, uranium, hydropower
Industries	Iron and steel, preci- sion equipment (ball bearings, radio and telephone parts, armaments), wood pulp and paper products, processed foods, motor vehicles, music
Labour force by occupation	Agriculture 2 %, indus- try 24 %, services 74 %
Life expectancy (2018)	Women 84,25 Men 80,78

“

*All public power in Sweden proceeds from the people. Swedish democracy is founded on the free formation of opinion and on universal and equal suffrage. It shall be realised through a representative and parliamentary policy and through local self-government. Public power shall be exercised under the law.*

*The Instrument of Government, chapter 1:1*

**Sweden** is a country with a comparatively small population and large geographical area situated in the far North of Europe. Neighbouring countries are Denmark, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia, Finland and Norway. Sweden's nature is characterised by large forests, numerous lakes and very long coast lines. From being a country dominated by rural settlements, today a vast majority of the population lives in densely populated settlements and cities in the Southern part of the country. The North of Sweden is very sparsely populated, but through good communications, and well developed infrastructure and transport systems, all parts of Sweden are connected to each other.

The historical basis of Sweden's industrial economy has been its ore deposits, large forests, and hydroelectric power, but today the focus has shifted toward increasingly advanced products. However, raw materials such as timber and metal, continue to constitute an important part of the modern economy. Only 10 % of Sweden's area consists of farmland and less than 3 % of the labour force works in agriculture. But due to increased efficiency in production, Sweden is, with the exception of a few products, self-sufficient in agriculture. The largest sector of the Swedish economy is that of services, but the well-developed industry is an important

backbone of growth in the economy and Sweden has many successful exporting companies in the areas of electronics, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, automotive and aerospace manufacturing, paper and others.

Sweden has traditionally been a very homogenous country in ethnic terms, but since World War II this is changing. Today, out of the 10 million inhabitants, roughly 19 % (i.e. born outside Sweden) are immigrants. Most have come from the neighbouring Nordic countries and elsewhere in Europe but a significant proportion is nowadays coming from different countries outside Europe.

Sweden is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of government. The administrative structure is highly decentralized and many important responsibilities are devolved to the regional or local level. Sweden is frequently cited as a country with a long democratic tradition, but the system of consolidated democratic governance is a relatively recent feature of Swedish society. Since the end of the 19th century, democracy and economic development have been reinforcing each other in Sweden and most probably, one would not have been realised without the other.

This book aims to describe the democratic governance system in Sweden, starting with a brief historical overview of the development of the Swedish welfare state, and introducing Sweden today. Naturally it is not possible in this limited space to fully describe and explain all features of a highly complex society. Therefore, the main focus will be on national, regional, and local government structures and division of responsibilities, elections, the role of political parties, media and civil society, public service delivery, new realities of Swedish democratic governance, as well as certain other aspects of Swedish society and governance systems.



Large parts of Sweden are covered with forest.



# 1. Modern History of Swedish Democracy and Development

Sweden's modern history is closely intertwined with that of its Nordic neighbours and through various periods, ruling over parts of Sweden has been shifting across borders. One of the most significant examples of this is the Kalmar Union of 1397 when the crowns of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark were united under one monarch – the Danish Queen Margareta. The Union was in place until 1521 but the whole period was marked by conflicts between the central government and the high nobility along with different rebellious groups who were struggling to maintain Sweden's national unity. In 1521, a Swedish nobleman named Gustav Vasa seized power and he was later elected as a king in 1523.

During Gustav Vasa's reign the foundations of the Swedish national state were laid. The church was nationalized and the rulers confiscated its assets. Administration was reorganized according to the German model, and power was concentrated in the hands of the king. In 1544, elective monarchy was abolished and hereditary monarchy was introduced. The following centuries were mainly characterized by a monarchy with absolute power, but with some important exceptions in periods with weak kings, when various features of parliamentary government were established.

From early in the 17th Century, Sweden

positioned itself as a great regional power after winning wars against Denmark-Norway, Russia, and Poland. Sweden's contributions during the Thirty Years' War under king Gustav II Adolf helped determine the political balance of power in Europe and through different treaties Sweden acquired important provinces of Denmark and Norway and ruled parts of Russia, Estonia, Livonia, and important coastal towns and areas of northern Germany. During this period a key figure in the development of public administration in Sweden, Axel Oxenstierna (1583–1654), served as a Lord High Chancellor. He was a close servant to the King Gustav II Adolf and Queen Kristina, during whose reigns he gained significant power in Sweden and the rest of Europe. Among other things, Axel Oxenstierna was the man behind the Statutes of Administration of 1634, which established a form of centralized government administration in Sweden, which is still partly valid in modern Sweden.

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*An nescis, mi fili, quantilla  
prudencia mundus regatur –  
Do you not know, my son, with  
how little wisdom the world is  
governed?*

*Axel Oxenstierna  
in a letter to his son written in 1648*

After continued warfare during the 18th Century, Sweden lost most of its overseas provinces and the borders were reduced to about the extent of present-day Sweden and Finland. Finally, Finland was lost to the Russians in the Napoleonic Wars 1809. A temporary exception of this string of losses was in the case of Norway, which in 1814 was forced into a union with Sweden. This was the last time that Sweden was involved in fighting a war. The union with Norway was peacefully dissolved in 1905, after many internal disputes on both sides of the border.

## Democracy taking root

Even though features of democracy in Sweden can be traced back beyond the Middle Ages, it was not until the 19th Century that real democratisation began to develop more rapidly. One important step for substantive democratisation and for citizens' participation in public debate was the introduction of free elementary education for all children in 1842.

In 1866 a comprehensive parliamentary reform created a two-chamber system that replaced a system based on the four estates (nobility, clergy, burghers, and peasants). This new system was more inclusive than the former system, but still only men, with a certain income or level of wealth, were allowed to become involved in voting or campaigning. In the 1880s only six percent of Swedish adults had the right to vote.

From the mid 19th century, people increasingly began to take part in popular movements, such as the workers' movement, the temperance movement and nonconformist churches. Within these organisations comprehensive adult education was introduced, and it is often argued that associations and organisations in the popular movements fostered an important democratic culture through their meetings and protests. They no longer accepted that the upper classes should make all decisions concerning cultural life or what was taught in schools, and thus developed a culture of self-education within the movements.

Around the turn of the century, there was a harsh debate concerning the right to vote that focused upon whether workers and women were educated and cultivated enough to understand important national political issues and take part in official business. Liberals and socialists argued that the working class indeed was educated enough, while conservatives believed that poor people and women of all classes didn't have sufficient knowledge or time to follow important issues in society. In the ongoing debate, many parliamentarians pointed to the will that workers and other groups showed within the popular movements to voluntarily gain knowledge and cultivate themselves. Eventually the struggle paid off and the right to vote was further extended, and finally included women in the election of 1921.

## A welfare state evolving

Built on a democratic foundation and not burdened by the costs of warfare since 1814, the Swedish economy, mainly based on forest industries and ore mining, expanded rapidly. From being a poor agricultural country, Sweden became increasingly industrialised and urbanised. Until the election of 1932 political power frequently shifted between the conservative parties and the Social Democrats, with rather unstable governments of short duration. Following the economic crisis of the late 1920s, unemployment increased, and the Social Democrats gained power in 1932. They then remained in power until 1976 (apart from 100 days in 1936 when Sweden had an interim government).

From 1932 until 1946 the Social Democratic Party and the Government were led by Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson. During his leadership, the idea of the Swedish welfare state was developed, which saw citizens as members of



Prime Minister  
Per Albin Hansson

one family, sharing the same goals, supporting each other and joining in the effort to make improvements for all. A 'service-democracy' began to take shape, combining economic growth and high taxation with all-encompassing social insurance coverage.

After World War II, optimism dominated, and there was a strong belief that social problems like poverty and unemployment could be solved by a large public sector and an interventionist state. The aim was also to level out differences between regions and different groups in society through public transfers. Among other achievements was the world's highest employment rate among employable women! The policies of 'The Swedish Model' were successful in improving human development in the whole of society, and it was long considered exemplary in Europe.

In the 1970's, it was clear that Sweden was not immune to global economic crises and it became increasingly difficult to finance the massive public sector. During the 1980's, commentators began to stress the need for deregulation of public activities, more competition,

and more privatisation, i.e. a more market-oriented public sector. Until 1991, when Sweden experienced a massive economic crisis, it had been possible to maintain a very low unemployment rate. When unemployment exploded, it created a major budget deficit, which required radical savings measures. There were huge cuts in children's benefits and pensions, and considerable personal contributions to health and child care were introduced.

Today, unemployment is down and the Swedish economy has recovered, even though there are signs that vulnerable groups still suffer from cuts in public spending. Since joining the European Union in 1995, Sweden has begun to conform more to the rest of Europe. But still, in relation to the size of its economy and population, Sweden has one of the largest public sectors, as well as the highest taxes in the world. Many Swedes would like to fully re-establish the welfare state, while others see this as less desirable, arguing for a less interventionist state.

## ► Human development in Sweden

The Human Development Index is released annually by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and is based on measurements of the countries' achievements in health, education and income. In 2017, Sweden ranks number seven in the aggregated index, even though its Gross National Income (GNI) is way below many other countries.

Life expectancy at birth (years)	Aggregated Human Development index (%)	GNI per capita (PPP US\$)
1. Japan (83,7)	1. Norway (0,953)	1. Qatar (116,818)
2. Switzerland (83,4)	2. Switzerland (0,944)	2. Liechtenstein (97 336)
3. Singapore (83,1)	3. Australia (0,939)	3. Singapore (82 503)
4. Australia (82,8)	4. Ireland (0,938)	4. Kuwait (70 524)
9. Sweden (82,4)	7. Sweden (0,933)	17. Sweden (47 766)

UNDP, Human Development Report 2017

## Economic development in Sweden

As mentioned before, the development of the Swedish democracy has been closely linked to economic development. It is interesting to know that in the mid 1800's, Sweden was an extremely poor country and over a period of approximately 70 years, 1,3 million people (almost one third of the entire population!) migrated mainly to United States due to poverty, lack of faith in the future, 'gold fever' and the like. Then something happened. During the period 1850 to 1970, Sweden was (along with Japan), the fastest growing economy in the world and today, Sweden is still among the richest countries of the world, in terms of GDP per capita. This gigantic leap can be explained by a number of factors, including:



Affordable energy has been an important contributing factor to economic development – from Karlstad Energi, where garbage is turned into heating energy.

- ▶ *Education for all* – By introducing public schooling for all in 1842, Sweden early on achieved a high level of literacy and knowledge among its population.
- ▶ *Inventions and free enterprise* – During early 19th Century, the climate for starting business in Sweden was very favourable and Swedish inventions were famous world-wide.
- ▶ *Natural resources* – By exporting such commodities as iron ore and timber across Europe, enormous amounts of capital were mobilized, which contributed to public revenues.
- ▶ *Infrastructure* – Massive investments, often with borrowed money, were made in railways and roads, creating jobs and boosting the economy.
- ▶ *Peace* – Sweden has not been engaged in wars since 1814 and didn't suffer from the two world wars.
- ▶ *Democracy* – By adopting the Instrument of Government in 1866, Sweden established democracy, and has since developed as a society with a low level of conflict among different actors, and with a strong consensus that investments in social welfare are also favourable for the economy.
- ▶ *Energy* – By having access to hydropower, Sweden had its own low-cost energy sources from early on.
- ▶ *Bureaucracy* – By developing effective and non-corrupt public administration, state funds have been efficiently utilized.
- ▶ *Taxes* – By developing an effective tax system, the state has gained from economic development, made investments in public welfare, and taken measures to stimulate economic growth.
- ▶ *Higher education and research* – By providing university education free of charge and allocating large sums to modern research, Sweden has become a global knowledge centre.

In addition to the above, Sweden has managed to stay flexible and adapt to changing economic



circumstances, and gradually move from being a country based on agriculture and natural resources, and later manufacturing, to today being a leading nation in new technologies and services. Being a small country, Sweden is very dependent on its export industries, and is thus vulnerable to global trends in the economy. This was clearly evident during the oil crisis of 1973, the banking and finance crisis of the early 1990's, or the IT bubble bursting in early 21st Century. But Sweden has managed to adjust to these realities and continues today to enjoy steady economic growth and relatively low unemployment.

Among internationally recognized companies with Swedish roots are: Absolut (Vodka), Alfa Laval (solutions used to heat, cool, separate and transport products), Atlas Copco (industrial tools and equipment), Electrolux (electrical appliances), Ericsson (mobile phones, telecommunication systems), IKEA (furniture), Volvo (cars, trucks, airplane motors), Saab/Scania (cars, trucks, planes, fighter jets), SKF (ball bearings), Tetra Pak (packaging), ASEA, now part of ABB (generators), Sandvik (tooling, materials technology, mining and construction), Skype (IP communication) and Spotify (streamed music).



PHOTO SCA image bank



PHOTO Janne Eriksson



PHOTO Karlstad Energi bildarkiv

Sweden has gradually moved from being a country based on agriculture and natural resources to being a leading nation in new technologies.



▶ NOTES

## 2. The Swedish Government System



*All public power in Sweden proceeds from the people.*

*Instrument of Government, Article 1*

It can be argued that the Swedish government system is constructed on the common Age of Enlightenment principle of three power-centres independent of each other, i.e. legislative, executive and judiciary power.

But, it can also be considered a monistic system, with only one power-centre, namely the citizens, as represented by the parliament. The people of Sweden elect a parliament, which in turn elects a government. With the help of administrative authorities, the government governs the country, and the courts administer justice in accordance with the laws laid down by the parliament, which represents the citizens.

Every fourth year the citizens elect members of the Swedish parliament, the Riksdag. On the same day, elections are also held for the political assemblies of Sweden's 290 municipalities and 21 regions.

### A unique constitution

Sweden has had a written constitution valid throughout the country since the middle of the 14th Century. This was the time when Magnus Eriksson's National Code was drawn up. Since then numerous Acts and Instruments have been developed and changed, reflecting the dominating ideology at the time and/or the status and position of the King. The most influential instrument in more recent times was the Instrument of Government of 1809, after the removal of King Gustav IV Adolf. This Act was not superseded by the present Instrument of Government until 1974. However, it underwent many radical changes over time, most notably the parliamentary reforms (1866, 1969), the suffrage reforms (1909–1921), and a new Freedom of the Press Act (1949).

Today there are four fundamental laws that together make up the equivalent of a Swedish constitution. They are

#### ► *The Instrument of Government of 1974*

In this fundamental law the relations between the Riksdag (parliament), government, the administration and the courts are laid out, as well as the essential features of the organisation of these bodies. In addition, fundamental human rights are protected.

▶ *The Act of Succession of 1810*

This Act contains provisions for the order of the succession to the throne and on the appropriate upbringing and education of royal heirs.

▶ *The Freedom of the Press Act of 1949.*

▶ *The Fundamental law on freedom of expression of 1991.*

When the present Instrument of Government came up for review there were voices expressing concern over inadequate safeguards for rights and freedom. A commission was thus appointed, and its proposals for amendment were adopted in 1979. The debate on the protection of rights and freedom didn't stop there however, and in 1994 the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom was incorporated into Swedish legislation. In the fundamental Instrument of Government there is a paragraph that states that no other legislation may contradict what is stated in the European Convention.

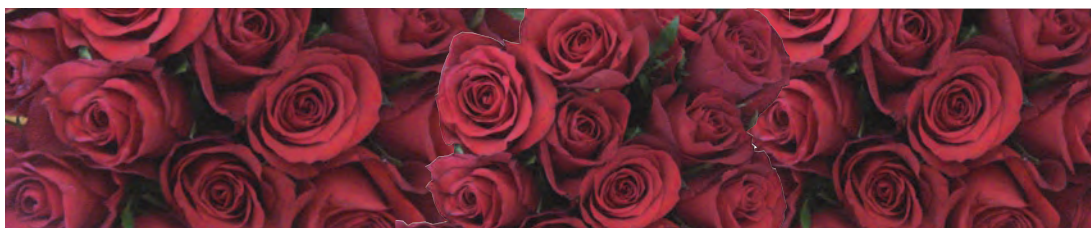
To make constitutional changes, the Swedish parliament must take the same decision twice and national elections must be held between the two votes. It can also decide to hold a decisive referendum on changes to the Constitution (i.e. fundamental laws), but this has not yet happened. The fundamental laws are above all other legislation and no other laws may contradict these. Under the Instrument of Government, the Head of State, the King or Queen, carries out primarily ceremonial tasks without any real political powers.

### A sad recent history of assassinations

Sweden is one of few democracies which in modern times has had two prominent and popular politicians assassinated in public.

- In 1986, the Prime Minister Olof Palme was shot to death in the street after leaving a cinema in Stockholm together with his wife. Although many theories exist of who was behind the assassination, the murderer has still not been found.
- In 2003, the Foreign Minister Anna Lindh was stabbed to death while shopping for clothes in a department store in Stockholm. A mentally unstable man was sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder.

In both of these sad instances the ministers were not protected by body guards but were out in public like 'ordinary citizens.' Many say that through these events Sweden lost its innocence and since then all prominent politicians are well protected by the secret service. The then Prime Minister Göran Persson described Anna Lindh's death as »beyond belief« and said it had hurt Sweden's open and democratic society.



### ► The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom was adopted in Rome in 1950, and Sweden was a signatory from the start. Since then, a number of additional protocols have been adopted. All the Contracting States, with the exception of Ireland and Norway, have incorporated the Convention into their own law. Once domestic judicial options have been exhausted, an individual may still seek redress at the European Court in Strasbourg for an alleged breach of the Convention by a Contracting State. The European Court is not a substitute for national courts, but an extension of them. The agreement of sovereign states to allow a supra-national court to review a judgement of the domestic judiciary is an historic and unprecedented step in international law. This places human rights firmly above the laws and practice of a state. Examples of actions taken by States as a result of findings from the European Court under the European Convention on Human Rights are

- Denmark amended the law on custody of illegitimate children.
- France passed a law relating to the secrecy of telephone communications.
- The Netherlands amended the law on detention of mental patients.
- Sweden amended the law on compulsory religious instruction.
- The United Kingdom outlawed corporal punishment in state schools.



### The Head of State of Sweden

Sweden is formally a constitutional monarchy, where the king or queen is the Head of State but has few political powers. The Swedish monarchy is one of the world's oldest and the current Swedish royal family has French origins and is related to most other royal courts of Europe. The Swedish King is Carl XVI Gustav (b 1946) and the Swedish throne is inherited by the oldest child of the current Head of State. This means that princess Victoria (b 1977) will eventually become the Queen of Sweden. In 1976 the King married Silvia Sommerlath, a German-Brazilian who was working as a hostess of the 1972 Munich Olympics when they met. Apart from Victoria they have a son and a daughter.

The Head of State is formally Sweden's first and foremost representative, but has limited political influence. The Head of State opens the Riksdag Sessions and continuously receives information on current affairs.

A majority of Swedish citizens wants to keep the monarchical system, but there are several political parties and a growing opposition arguing that inherited position and power is old-fashioned and undemocratic.

## The Swedish Parliament

Since 1969, Sweden has had a unicameral parliament, that is, there is only one legislative body. The citizens of Sweden elect a new parliament or Riksdag every fourth year (before 1994 the electoral period was three years). The Swedish Riksdag has 349 seats, which is comparatively large considering the small population. The main tasks of the Riksdag are to pass legislation, decide on the state's finances and to control the work of the government. The functions of the Riksdag are laid down in the

Riksdag Act, which is between a fundamental law and an ordinary law. The Riksdag is the highest decision-making body and most of the actual work is carried out in 15 standing committees. All MPs are members of at least one committee. Some committees are more popular than others, such as the Foreign Policy Committee, and it is in the committees where most negotiations take place. The Swedish Riksdag is often referred to as a working parliament, as opposed to a speaking parliament as for example in the United Kingdom.





PHOTO Riksdagen

The Swedish Parliament, the Riksdag, is situated in the centre of Stockholm, surrounded by water.

### Committees of the Swedish Parliament

- Committee on Agriculture and the Environment
- Committee on Civil Affairs
- Committee on the Constitution
- Committee on Cultural Affairs
- Committee on Defence
- Committee on Education
- Committee on Finance
- Committee on Foreign Affairs
- Committee on Health and Welfare
- Committee on Industry and Trade
- Committee on Justice
- Committee on the Labour Market
- Committee on Social Insurance
- Committee on Taxation
- Committee on Transport and Communications

There are several ways for the Riksdag to exert influence, apart from voting on issues. Individual MPs or groups of MPs can make proposals, especially in connection with the presentation of the government budget, through submitting motions. Usually there are over 3 000 motions made each year. MPs can also try to influence opinions through Question Time – either by putting an inquiry to a minister and allowing him/her a couple of weeks to reply, or a more instant procedure where MPs put questions to a minister directly in the chamber. A few times a year there are also important debates in the Riksdag concerning areas of special importance, such as economic policy or foreign policy. The most important working materials of the chamber, besides private members' motions, are

Government Bills (about 170 a year), of which the most important is the Budget Bill.

The Riksdag is convened from October to June, with a short Christmas break in December. Chamber meetings are almost invariably open to the public, but Committee meetings are not. However, committees are free to arrange public hearings for information gathering purposes. Political parties are the main actors in the Riksdag, and party discipline is usually very strict. Only when it comes to issues with high moral or ethical content are members allowed to vote on the basis of personal conviction. For example, there has always been a cross-party bloc in the Riksdag that is against the use of alcohol.

## ► Party discipline challenged on surveillance bill

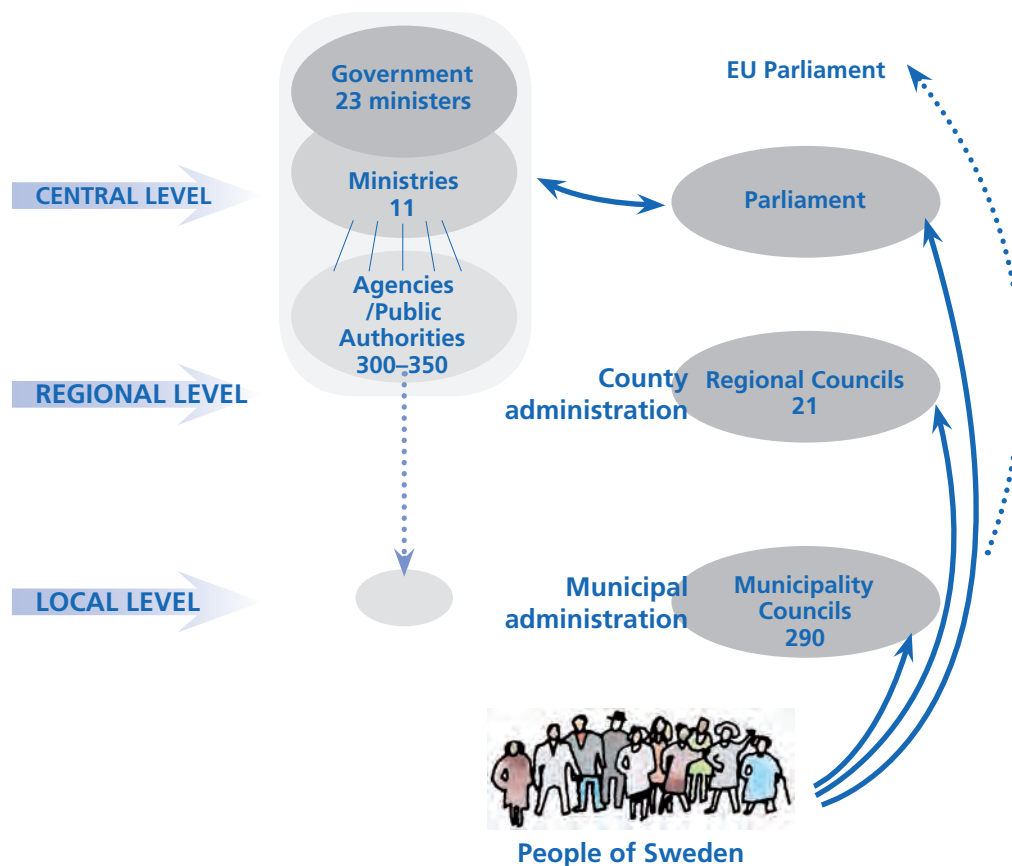
One recent example when party discipline in the Swedish Parliament was challenged is from June 2008. Then Swedish lawmakers voted in favour of a controversial bill allowing all e-mails and phone calls to be monitored in the name of national security. The vote was one of the most divisive in Sweden in recent years and many MPs of the Centre-right government had problems going along with the party line. The bill narrowly passed with 143 votes in favour, 138 opposed, one parliamentarian abstaining, and 67 absent.

Critics – including human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, and even the former head of the Swedish intelligence agency – argued that the proposal is an attack on civil liberties, does not go far enough to safeguard individual rights and integrity, and would create a »big brother« state, while supporters said it is necessary to protect the country from foreign threats. The massive criticism has continued and suggestions for further amendments have been made by the government.

## National government

The newly elected Riksdag, the Swedish Parliament, elects a Prime Minister who forms a Government and appoints ministers, as well as heads of various ministries. This gives the Prime Minister of Sweden a very strong position. At present there are 11 ministries and 23 ministers – 12 women and 11 men.

## Swedish government structure





### Ministries in the Swedish government

Currently there are 11 ministries serving the government. The number and type of ministries usually alters if there is a change in the political majority. However, the core ministries are always there.

To be appointed a minister, a person must be a Swedish citizen for at least 10 years. In the Swedish system, ministries are small and mainly concerned with formulation of policy and legislation. The fundamental laws do not allow ministers to act on their own and issue orders to the agencies. Such instructions must be decided by the Cabinet as a collective. Neither individual ministers, nor the Cabinet are allowed to interfere in the handling of individual cases at the agencies.

It is the responsibility of the Government to govern the country, but the task of implementing public policy is the responsibility of the state administration, the municipal/county

administrations and the courts. Decision-making within the government is collective, and business is settled at government meetings. The Government is accountable to the Riksdag and to stay in power it has to be supported by a majority of the Riksdag. To assist in government work there are various Government Offices, comprising the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministries and the Office for Administrative Affairs. The Government Offices have about 4600 employees. Only 200 of these are political posts, and the rest continue to work irrespective of changes in government, giving important stability and continuity to the democratic governance system!

“

*If liberty and equality,  
as is thought by some,  
are chiefly to be found  
in democracy,  
they will be attained  
when all persons alike share in  
the government to the utmost.*

*Aristotle c. 340 B.C.*



PHOTO Riksdagen

The Riksdag building was built between 1897 and 1905 designed by the architect Aron Johansson.

## ► The role of the Ombudsman, a Swedish invention

Since 2009, the Equality Ombudsman (DO), a government agency, has worked to combat discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities for all. Previously, several different Ombudsmen had this responsibility – the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination, the Disability Ombudsman and the Ombudsman against Discrimination because of Sexual Orientation.

DO is primarily concerned with ensuring compliance with the Discrimination Act, which prohibits discrimination based on a person's sex, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age. The Equality Ombudsman also monitors compliance with the Parental Leave Act, to prevent discrimination against employees who take parental leave.

DO has about 90 staff, who register and investigate complaints regarding discrimination and harassment, and who can represent victims in court, free of charge. The Ombudsman also monitors how employers, higher education institutions and schools live up to the provisions of the Discrimination Act, which requires active measures against discrimination.

In 2013, DO prioritised four areas

- Equal rights and opportunities for official national minorities
- Preventing harassment in schools
- Equal rights and opportunities in labour recruitment
- Making the links between Islamo-phobia and discrimination visible.

The Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman ensures that courts, public agencies and anyone who exercises public authority comply with legislation and fulfil their obligations in all respects. This is described in more depth later in the booklet.



### A Secular Society

The official role of religion in Sweden has diminished over the years. Since the year 2000, the Church of Sweden is only one among many religious communities, as its role was separated from the State. But it is still by far the largest one. 58 % of the population are still members of the evangelical Lutheran church, even though the numbers are decreasing.

In 1952, full religious freedom was implemented in Sweden, and increasing immigration since then has transformed Swedish society into a more multicultural one. Today Muslims, Jews, Orthodox Catholics, Hindus and Buddhists, as well as independent Christian communities, are well represented on the religious map.

However, Sweden has become one of the most secular countries in the world. A survey in 2007 covering all faiths and religions showed that about 5 % attended a religious service during an average weekend. But most Swedes still practice the rituals. About half of weddings in Sweden are conducted according to the Church of Sweden ritual, and over 80 % of burials are conducted by a priest from the Church of Sweden.



In the Instrument of Government, chapter 11:9, it is stated that:

“*When making appointments to posts within the State administration attention shall be directed only to objective factors such as merit and competence.*”

### National government agencies

Under each ministry there are many agencies responsible for the implementation of policies at national, regional and local level. At the central government level there are agencies responsible for different sectors, such as higher education, agriculture and industry, military defence, legal courts, employment, and development cooperation. At regional level the county boards are responsible for representing the government in counties and regions. At local level the agencies that represent the government include police stations, post offices, railway stations, tax offices, and unemployment offices.

The central government agencies are all headed by a Director General (DG) appointed by the government. The process of nominating DGs is unusual for Sweden, as it is a rather closed process with little transparency. One third of DGs have a political background as state secretary, minister, county council or municipal commissioner, or similar, but the number of people with political backgrounds is gradually decreasing. An increasing number of women are being appointed DGs of state agencies.

Since 2006, the government has introduced more transparent ways of recruiting DGs of state agencies. This means that the process is supposed to be more open for people to apply and the recruitment should more clearly be merit-based. But still the appointment procedures are criticised for being ‘politicised’.

In Sweden there are around 300–350 central committees, boards, authorities and state companies that answer to the Government, and which fall under the different ministries. Their duties are to implement the decisions that parliament and government make. All government authorities are independent. This means that they are responsible for their own actions, but

must act according to the guidelines that the government has developed. Examples of such authorities are the National Social Insurance Board, National Board of Health and Welfare, National Labour Market Board,

National Tax Authority, and the National Board of Fisheries (see box below). Examples of state companies are the Post Office, Apoteket AB (pharmacies) and the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation.

### Guiding the work of agencies

According to law, public sector resources must be utilised in an optimal manner and used where they are most needed. Agencies' activities and results are therefore followed up and evaluated. Every year they submit an annual report to the Government containing information about expenses, revenue and results. On the basis of the reports the Government can follow up and evaluate agencies' operations. The annual reports together with budget data submitted by agencies are also the basis for work on the next year's national budget and appropriation directives.

The Government has thus certain opportunities to govern the operations of agencies. However, it may never rule how an agency is to apply a law or decide in an individual matter concerning its exercise of authority. In many other countries, an individual minister frequently has the power to directly intervene in the day-to-day work of agencies. In Sweden, however, this type of so-called ministerial steering does not occur. Instead, if the Government thinks an agency's application of a law is wrong, it must propose amendments to the law.



PHOTO Swedish police

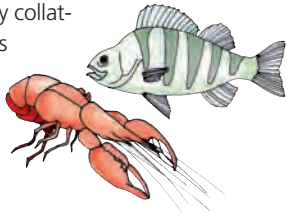
The police authority is one of the largest in Sweden in terms of staff.

### The largest authorities measured by number of employees (2013)

Authority	Employees
Police	28 000
Defence	21 000
Social Insurance Agency	13 000
Labour Market Administration	12 500
Prison and Probation Services	11 000
Tax Agency	10 500
Transport Administration	6 500

#### ► Safeguarding the interests of fish and fishermen

One of the over 300 Swedish state agencies, authorities, companies, etc. is the National Board of Fisheries (NBF). It was established in 1948 and is placed under the Ministry of Agriculture. NBF is represented at 15 different locations around Sweden in the form of laboratories, fleets of ships, investigation offices, field stations, etc. The head office is located in Göteborg on the Swedish West Coast. The mission of NBF is to create good conditions for a balanced fishing industry with sustainable and long-term returns on fish and shellfish. It is responsible for ensuring biological diversity and creating favourable conditions for competitive fishing companies, as well as ensuring the supply of good quality fish for consumers. NBF is working to regulate fishing through the use of quotas in order to let the natural environment recuperate sufficiently. It is also working actively to protect threatened species, and to minimise unnecessary collateral hauls. In addition, NBF is responsible for increasing and improving the opportunities for the public to fish in common waters.



### County administrative boards

Each county in Sweden has an Administrative Board, which is a government body working at regional level. The County Administrative Boards can be described as links between citizens, municipalities and regions on one hand, and

the Swedish government and central authorities on the other. The County Administrative Boards are led by County Governors, who are appointed by the central government.

Within its many areas of responsibility the job of the County Administrative Board is to ensure that the decisions of the government and the Riksdag are implemented with equal and effective impact throughout the county. Among the responsibilities of the County Administrative Boards are the following:

- ▶ Animal welfare
- ▶ Hunting and fishing
- ▶ Environment and nature conservation
- ▶ Ecologically sustainable agriculture and farm support
- ▶ Traffic safety
- ▶ Protection of national and cultural heritage
- ▶ General elections
- ▶ Security and crisis management
- ▶ Attractive housing
- ▶ Gender equality.

The County Administrative Board, when working to ensure effective implementation within each of the different areas of work, uses a variety of tools and methods. The Board works through:

- ▶ *Supervision* – by checking that a wide range of bodies (public and private) observe relevant laws and guidelines in relation to the above areas.
- ▶ *Financial support for various activities*. This includes livestock support, start-up grants for new land use, subsidies for solar energy, enterprise support, support for commercial services in rural areas, and support for the preservation of ancient remains, settlements and sites of cultural importance.
- ▶ *Regulatory duties* – through granting licenses, etc. These licenses include taxi licenses, licenses to trade in animals, mining, hazardous chemicals and waste, certain building licenses, fishing and hunting licenses, and permission to scatter a deceased person's ashes.

- ▶ *Co-ordinating the resources of the county* – through facilitating meetings and other activities.
- ▶ *Giving advice and disseminating information*.

The County Administrative Boards are very active in working for a preserved and improved environment. The Environment Inspection Committee within the Boards decides on licenses, and the conditions that apply to them, for operations that pose a potential threat to the environment. They grant nature reserve status to areas of particular environmental interest, and they also work with environmental issues that may affect human health in any way. They are also responsible for conducting continuous analyses of a county's air, soil, flora, fauna, and water. Another important role is to provide guidance and advice on environmental issues and safety to citizens, small and large companies and other organisations, as well as giving advice to farmers on how they can maintain pastures so that the countryside is preserved in the best possible manner.

## Local administration

The Swedish public sector has three levels of government: national, regional, and local. At the local level Sweden is divided into 290 municipalities, and at the regional level, 21 regions. Each of these units has a directly elected council. There is no hierarchy between municipalities and regions, as they have their own responsibility for different activities. The only exception is Gotland, an island in the Baltic Sea, where the municipality also has the responsibilities and tasks normally associated with a region.

Municipalities and regions have the right to levy income taxes on individuals and are responsible for providing a broad range of services including pre-schools, elderly care, health services, social services, housing, water supply, local roads, childcare, etc.

### What is the »Swedish Model«?

The governance system in Sweden is often referred to as the 'Swedish Model'. Does this mean that there are some unique features of the Swedish system, not to be found in other countries? Well yes, you could say that there is a distinct combination of characteristics that has developed gradually in Sweden mainly during the period late 1930s to the 1970s, the golden age of the welfare state and the period of more traditional industrialisation in Sweden. These characteristics include:

#### **The compromise between work and capital.**

In Sweden there is a long standing common agreement in the employment market. In 1938 employers' organisations and employees' organisations (trade unions) agreed on methods and standards for resolving conflicts of interests without interference by the state. It was formulated as the common interest of having 'rational production, industrial renewal, and a competitive export industry' in Sweden. This also includes what is often called corporatism, which means that there is a close relationship between organisations and the state, and that they are closely involved in the whole political process in Sweden.

**Striving for full employment.** In the Swedish Model the idea of combining low inflation, high economic growth and equal distribution of resources as a way to ensure full employment, has been (and still is) common. The Swedish state has a very active employment policy that includes unemployment benefits and a view of higher education as instrumental to full employment.

**Consensus-oriented and compromising political culture.** The decision-making process in Sweden has often been characterised as consensus-oriented with very few political conflicts. A lot of effort is put into planning, preparing and anchoring reforms, with broad participation and use of society's expertise.

**A strong society.** In Swedish society a large proportion of services are taken care of by state or local authorities. The size of the public sector and the levels of tax, are among the highest in the world. Welfare services are universal and available for all people who need them. This strong 'public'

ethos is illustrated by the fact that Sweden during the initial period of the welfare state was named *Folkhemmet*, 'all people's home', where the state acted as the 'parent' for all citizens.

**Centralised organisation of society.** At one time, the Swedish Model was based on a very centralised idea of the state and other organisations. The welfare state was built on centralised development planning and comprehensive reform programmes, complemented by the merging of municipalities from the 1950s and onwards. The development of far reaching local self-governance has been a gradual, rather recent process, which is a very important feature of the 'Swedish Model' of today (see below).

**Women's right to paid work.** The main features of the 'Swedish Model' are built on men's ideas and values. However since the 1960s the idea of it being 'natural' for women to stay at home and care for the household began to change. The right to paid work for women was accepted and complemented by the view that childcare should be put into the hands of the state. This led to radical changes and increased independence for women in Sweden at the time. But the issue of 'equal pay for equal work' for men and women is still on the agenda for public debate today.

**Transparency.** Sweden is an open society. The principle of free and open access to all official documents is written into the Freedom of the Press Act, one of the fundamental laws. This principle is often stated as one of the main reasons for Sweden being one of the least corrupt countries in the world. But that doesn't mean that Sweden is one hundred percent free from corruption. There are examples of unethical behaviour both in the public as well as the private sector.

Since the 'golden age' of the welfare state some of the above characteristics of the 'Swedish Model' are today less apparent than before. The Swedish state is today more decentralised and some would argue also less interventionist. Sweden is a more market-oriented society, including the public sector (allowing private alternatives for most services, etc.), and the comprehensive welfare systems are not as encompassing as before.

▶ NOTES



### 3. Elected Citizens' Representatives

In any democracy, free and fair elections are important cornerstones. To ensure that there are alternatives, and long-term commitment and vision, political parties have an important role. They also serve an important role as moulders of opinion between elections. But in Sweden, as elsewhere, political activities are not only the concern of political parties. Many other influential institutions and organisations continuously engage in politics. This means that citizens are represented by many other players apart from elected politicians and political parties. However, the focus in this part is on elections and political parties. In Chapter 7, democracy outside the domains of political parties and politicians is discussed and in Chapter 12 some challenges that political parties are facing in a changing Swedish are described.

#### Regular elections on four levels

There are elections for three levels of government in Sweden every fourth year; for the Riksdag, the region and the municipal council. Elections for all three levels are scheduled for the third Sunday of September, and seats are distributed according to proportional principles. The latest national election took place in 2018. Voting is for parties but there is, since 1998, an opportunity to express a preference for a particular candidate (The role of political



PHOTO Riksdagen

parties and individual voting are described in Chapter 4).

In addition, every fifth year there is an election to the European Parliament, in which Sweden currently has 20 seats. In May 2019, the latest EU parliament elections were held. The European Parliament is the only directly-elected body of the European Union and the 751 members of the European Parliament represent 508 million citizens across the 28 member states. In Sweden, as in most European countries, the turnout for EU elections is considerably lower than for national elections, at around 53 % compared to 87 %.

Besides the fundamental laws that are the Swedish equivalent of a constitution, the major legislation governing elections is the Swedish election law. Swedish citizens over the age of 18 are eligible to vote and to be elected in national elections. Foreign citizens that have been

residents of Sweden for at least three years, as well as EU citizens registered in Sweden, have the same right in municipal and county council elections. The electoral system used at all levels is proportional representation in multi-seat constituencies. Of the 349 seats, 310 are fixed constituency seats distributed among the 29 constituencies in relation to eligible voters. The remaining 39 are seats allocated in relation to the proportion of votes received. There is a threshold for national elections of 4 % for the entire country, or 12 % in a single constituency to avoid too many small parties in the Riksdag. There is a corresponding 3 % threshold at the region level, but no threshold at the municipal level. Since 1973, elections to the municipalities and regions are held on the same day as Riksdag elections, although there has recently been debate about separating the national and local elections.

In the election of 2018, 87,2 % (up 1,6 % from the previous election) voted in the national election, with fewer people voting in municipal and region elections. Well-educated people with higher incomes, women, old people, and urban dwellers, vote to a higher degree than other groups in Swedish society. Surveys done by Statistics Sweden show that:

- ▶ Young citizens are less likely to vote than older citizens. Participation is decreasing especially among first-time voters.
- ▶ Married citizens are more likely to vote than those not married.
- ▶ Women are more likely to vote than men.
- ▶ Blue collar workers are less likely to vote than white collar workers.
- ▶ Employed people are more likely to vote than unemployed people.
- ▶ Low income earners are less likely to vote than high income earners.
- ▶ Educated people are more likely to vote than uneducated people.

The above trend is worrying from an equality perspective, as it shows that there is a risk that elections and democratic participation are

increasingly becoming activities exclusively for the privileged in society.

## Women's representation

The first country in the world to introduce universal suffrage for women was New Zealand in 1893. In Sweden, women gained the equal right to vote in 1919 (and voted for the first time in 1921) – after 35 years of debate! Today Sweden has a very high proportion of women represented in political parties and elected assemblies compared to most countries. But few countries in the world have men and women sharing political power on an equal basis. The average proportion of women in parliaments in the world is around 17 %, while in the Swedish Riksdag 46 % are women. Empirical research shows that representation of women is often higher in countries with a proportional election system than in countries with a majority system.



## Representation of women in selected parliaments in the world

Country	Proportion of women in parliament	Introducing women's right to vote	Election system
Rwanda	67,5 % (2018)	1961	Proportional
Bolivia	48,8 % (2014)	1938	Proportional
Finland	47,0 % (2019)	1906	Proportional
Sweden	46,1 % (2018)	1921	Proportional
Switzerland	33,0 % (2018)	1971	Proportional
Afghanistan	23,6 % (2018)	1963	Mixed
USA	23,6 % (2018)	1920	Majority
Kenya	23,0 % (2017)	1956	Majority
Japan	10,2 % (2017)	1945	Mixed
Botswana	9,5 % (2014)	1965	Majority
Belize	9,4 % (2015)	1954	Majority
Iran	5,9 % (2016)	1963	Majority

The representation of women in other powerful social institutions (both private and public) is not as satisfactory as in the political sphere (even though it often is higher than in other countries), but there is a continuous debate on gender equality in Sweden. Gender in Swedish democracy and development is discussed further in Chapter 8.



### Women in the Riksdag through history

Year	Number	%
1921	5	1
1941	18	5
1961	43	11
1971	49	14
1979	92	26
1985	108	31
1991	115	33
1994	141	40
1998	152	43
2002	163	45
2006	164	47
2010	157	45
2014	152	43,5
2018	161	46,1

## The Referendum Instrument

As already mentioned, decisive referendums can be arranged for constitutional changes. Consultative national referendums are another instrument of direct democracy. They are not immediately decisive, but are used to measure the general opinion of the population on important issues. Such referendums have been organised on six occasions since 1922:

- ▶ On prohibition of alcohol (1922). Outcome = rejected.
- ▶ On driving on the right side of roads (1955). Outcome = rejected, but in September

1967 driving on the right side of roads was established.

- ▶ On national supplementary pension (1957). Outcome = approved.
- ▶ On nuclear power (1980). Outcome = the result of this referendum is still up for interpretation and debate. There were three alternatives and they were not formulated as clear Yes or No statements. The alternative that got the most votes urged a 'slow reduction' in the use of nuclear power, resulting in gradual termination when energy supplies from other sources could be guaranteed.
- ▶ On membership of the European Union (1994). Outcome = approved.
- ▶ On membership of the European Monetary Union, EMU (2003). Outcome = rejected.

It is also becoming more common to hold consultative referendums at municipal and regional level, even though cases are still limited. Most common are issues about municipal boundaries or changing the name of municipalities.

### ▶ Municipal Referendums 2006

Coinciding with the election of 2006, there were local referendums held in 22 municipalities of Sweden. However, 15 of them were held in municipalities surrounding Stockholm on the issue on introducing a congestion tax for vehicles entering and leaving the city during peak hours. Previously, it was only the municipality of Stockholm which had a say in the matter, but the surrounding municipalities organized referendums in order to show which way the winds of the opinion were blowing.

The other local referendums held were on issues of dividing a municipality into two, on a development plan for the centre of a town, on regulation of wolves and other predators (in four municipalities), and whether a shopping mall should be built.



## Ensuring free and fair elections

On a national level the Swedish Election Authority was established in 2001 and has as its main purpose to plan and implement legitimate elections and referendums. Elections should be carried out with a maximum of reliability and effectiveness, with democratic openness and citizen involvement as overall guiding principles. Before the establishment of the Swedish Election Authority, this was the responsibility of county administrations.

The Election Authority is led by a committee consisting of five members. It has the obligation to

- ▶ Appoint members to the Swedish Parliament based on the election result
- ▶ Appoint members to the European Parliament based on the election result
- ▶ Inform voters on when, where and how elections are organised
- ▶ Develop guidelines for and give training to local election committees
- ▶ Take responsibility for the design and development of all materials needed for the completion of an election, including information folders, envelopes, ballots, etc.

There are also authorities at the regional and municipal levels to help ensure free and fair elections. The local election committees at municipal and region level are responsible for the practical arrangements of elections. The municipal election committee arranges venues for elections to take place and appoints at least four persons from the public in each district to be election executors. Venues are open from 8.00–20.00 on the day of election. Citizens who are unable to vote on the day of election may vote in advance at post offices or at embassies abroad. As in most countries, there are screens in the venue, behind which the voting takes place. The voter puts a ballot into an envelope. There is one envelope for each level of election. The election executors make sure that a person is on the electoral register for that particular district and thereafter put the ballots

into ballot boxes. At the end of the election day, the local election executors count all ballots and organise them according to political party and level of government. This process is always open for anyone who wants to monitor it. When the counting is finished the ballots are put into security bags and transported to the county administration, which does the final cumulative counting and registers the number of votes for a particular individual.

## Distributing mandates proportionally

For national elections, Sweden is divided into 29 election constituencies that form the basis for the distribution of proportional mandates. A normal constituency elects between 10 and 12 members of the Riksdag. There are great differences between the various constituencies, however. The largest is Stockholm region, with 39 members. The smallest is Gotland region with only 2 seats. The electoral system is intended to distribute seats in the Riksdag between the parties as fairly as possible in proportion to the number of votes in the election. All votes, in principle, are of equal value, but seats are only awarded to parties attaining a certain level of electoral support. In order to participate in the allocation of seats and achieve representation in the Riksdag, a party must obtain at least 4 % of the votes in the entire country or 12 % in a constituency. These rules have been introduced to avoid splitting up representation in the Riksdag amongst too many small parties.

Seats in the Riksdag are distributed by the Election Authority on the basis of the reports from the County Administrative Boards. There are 349 Riksdag seats altogether, and of these, 310 are fixed constituency seats, allocated to the constituencies in advance, according to the number of voters in the unit. After the election these seats are allocated to the parties on the basis of the result achieved in the respective constituency. The purpose of the remaining 39 ‘adjustment’ seats is to achieve the best possible

proportional distribution of seats between the parties for the country as a whole. This means that the adjustment seats are first allocated according to party and then according to constituency.

For administrative reasons, during elections each municipality is divided into a number of election districts. The size of the districts varies, but as a rule there are about 1 200–1 500 eligible voters in a district. The division into districts is made by the county administrations on the advice of the municipal council.

Political debates and discussions are taking place all the time, but during election periods, intensity increases and the general public are more inclined to participate in discussions regarding government policy and different alternatives.

Every fourth year elections are held in Sweden for three levels of government – local, regional, and parliament. Around 87 % of Swedish citizens participated in the latest election to the Riksdag. For local and regional elections, participation is lower.



PHOTO ABF

▶ NOTES

## 4. Political Parties as Democratic Actors

One of many important institutions in a representative democracy is the political party. Political parties are important shapers of public opinion and fulfil an essential role in society, especially in relation to elections. Multiple political parties provide voters with alternatives and information, as well as an opportunity to exert influence on and participate in society's affairs.

The main role of political parties in a democracy can be summarised as

- ▶ to give/receive ideas and formulate programmes
- ▶ to recruit individuals for political activities
- ▶ to build support for programmes
- ▶ to nominate candidates for elections
- ▶ to provide stability and predictability to the political system, and
- ▶ to realise and fulfil ideas, programmes and election promises.

Political parties are the main political actors in Sweden and are considered crucial to the democratic process. The parties present in the Riksdag today have basically stayed the same since the 1920s. Today there are eight parties in the Riksdag. The Christian Democrats, the Green Party, and the Sweden Democrats are the 'youngest'. The others are the Left Party, the Social Democrats, the Centre Party, the Liberal Party, and the Moderate Party. The different parties often have ties with different interest groups, such as the business community, churches or trade unions.



PHOTO Per Claesson  
falkopingtiding.se



## ► Political parties in the Riksdag (2018)

- **Centerpartiet** (*the Centre Party*) – was formerly named the ‘Agrarian Union’, which was founded in 1913. The Centre Party promotes decentralisation, and most of its supporters are found among farmers and people that live outside urban areas. It has 31 seats in the Riksdag. The party leader is Annie Lööf.



- **Liberalerna** (*the Liberal Party*) – was established in 1902 and is based on the ideology of liberalism. The Liberal party has often been in the forefront of safeguarding the rights of vulnerable groups in Swedish society. The Liberal Party has 20 seats in the Riksdag. The party leader is Nyamko Sabuni.



- **Kristdemokraterna** (*the Christian Democrats*) – founded in 1964, is relatively new to the Riksdag where it has had members since 1991. The party has been led by the same person, Alf Svensson, since 1973. The party is based on conservative values combined with Christian ethics. It has 22 seats in the Riksdag. The party leader is Ebba Busch Thor.



- **Miljöpartiet de Gröna** (*the Green Party*) – with its roots in environmental and anti-nuclear issues, women’s rights and peace movements, was formed in 1981. In 1988 the Green Party was elected to the Riksdag, but lost its place in 1991. It was re-elected to the Riksdag in 1994. Instead of a party leader, the Green Party appoints ‘spokespersons’, one woman and one man. It has 16 seats in the Riksdag. The spokespersons are Per Bolund and Isabella Lövin.



- **Moderata samlingspartiet** (*the Moderate Party*) – is based on conservatism, but has a liberal view on economics. The Moderate Party is an advocate for the interests of private businesses and is very critical of the high levels of tax in Sweden. It has 70 seats in the Riksdag. The party leader is Ulf Kristersson.



- **Socialdemokratiska Arbetarpartiet** (*the Social Democrats*) – founded in 1889, this is the biggest party in Sweden, both in terms of members and voters. It has a history of safeguarding the interests of workers and has close ties to the

trade unions. After the election of 2014 the Social Democrats gained 100 seats in the Riksdag. The party leader, Stefan Löfven, is the current Prime Minister.



- **Sverigedemokraterna** (Sweden Democrats) – was founded in 1988. In ideological terms the Sweden Democrats is found on the far right. The party is highly critical of Swedish migration policies and want to radically limit immigration to Sweden, especially from outside Europe. The party has 62 seats in the Riksdag. The party leader is Jimmie Åkesson.



- **Vänsterpartiet** (*the Left Party*) – is the former communist party, but was renamed in 1990. It is based on a socialist ideology and voters are mostly found among youth, cultural workers, and women employed in the public sector. The Left Party has 28 seats in the Riksdag. The party leader is Jonas Sjöstedt.



After the Social Democrats gained power in 1932, it was not until 1976 that non-socialist parties managed to form a government without the Social Democrats. This change of power lasted until 1982. Later there was another period of conservative rule during 1991–1994, and from 2006–2014 an alliance of four Centre-Right parties governed Sweden. Since the election of 2014 the Social Democrats are back in power, leading a minority government together with the Green Party.

## National election results

Party	Percentage	Mandate
Social democrats	28,26 %	100
The Moderate Party	19,84 %	70
Sweden Democrats	17,53 %	62
Centre Party	8,61 %	31
Left Party	8,00 %	28
Christian Democrats	6,32 %	22
The Liberal Party	5,49 %	20
The Green Party	4,41 %	16
Other	1,54 %	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,00 %</b>	<b>349</b>

### ► Local political parties

For political parties to participate in elections in Sweden, they have to register with the National Election Authority. Today there are about 30 parties registered at national level, and close to 200 political parties registered to participate in municipal and region elections. Some local parties are very successful in local elections. For example in the Municipality of Dorotea in the North of Sweden, the party Dorotea Kommunlista gained 43 % of the votes in the municipal elections of 1998.

Party registration requirements are: the party name must include letters (i.e. not only numbers), the party must not be a subgroup of any other political group, and the application must have the written support of a certain number of people (for the Riksdag and European Parliament at least 1 500, to county councils at least 100, and for municipalities at least 50 voters). A party is de-registered if it asks to be, or if it has not registered candidates for two consecutive elections.

### Voting for an individual

Traditionally, all elections in Sweden are done according to party lists. This means that citizens vote for a party, and candidates are ordered according to the listing agreed by the political party. However, since the election of 1998, and according to the new Election Law of 1997, it is possible for Swedish voters to also express a preference for a particular individual. This is done by putting an x in front of the name of a specific candidate the voter would like to see elected to the political assembly.

To be elected to the Riksdag according to the 'preference for an individual' a candidate must have gained at least 8 % of a party's votes in an election constituency, or 5 % of a party's votes in a region or municipal election.

There are people and parties that do not like the fact that an individual can run their own campaign. They believe that politics

should not focus on personality, money, charisma or good looks, but on ideology and long-term visions for a society, which are formulated in collective organisations, such as political parties, and in their programmes. Others believe that Swedish society today is very individualistic, and this should also be reflected in the political process.

### State grants to political parties

Political parties in Sweden receive substantial public financial support for their activities, thus allowing them to be more independent of outside contributors. The support is granted in proportion to election results. Even parties not represented in the Riksdag receive funding, provided they got at least 2,5 % of the vote in either of the previous two elections. Furthermore, all parties represented in the Riksdag get financial support for their administration costs. The state support is close to 167 million SEK per year. In addition to this, all regions and municipalities voluntarily give grants to political parties active in their areas of jurisdiction. Other sources of funding are membership fees, gifts from organisations (e.g. trade unions), lotteries, etc. There is no public supervision of how funds are used, but all political parties have appointed auditors as well as employing professional accountants.

### Accepting private financial contributions

As mentioned above, political parties may receive funding from sources other than the state and/or municipal grants, e.g. an individual, an organisation, or a private business. For example, the Green Party may receive grants from environmental organisations, the Social Democratic Party receives contributions from the trade unions, and the Moderate Party is known to accept donations from the Swedish business community.

All established political parties have policies regarding the funding of election campaigns.

Among the parties active on the national level, the most liberal when it comes to accepting grants and gifts from individuals and organisations is the Christian Democratic Party. The most restrictive party when it comes to accepting external funding is the Left Party, but they have an informal principle that active members should contribute some of their income to the party.

Recently there have been voices demanding more supervision and oversight in the funding of political parties and/or campaigns, as there is a concern that commercial or other interests might 'buy' themselves influence in the political process. This issue has been even more urgent since 1998, when it became possible for an individual to run a political campaign. The argument is that there is an even higher risk that individual candidates could be bought by commercial interests or pressure groups to drive a certain issue in a political assembly, or at administrative level. The basis of this concern is to safeguard the Swedish system against opportunities for increasing corruption.

Since April 2014 there is a law that says that the identity of any person or organisation contributing over 22 000 SEK (approx. 3 100 USD) to a political party must be reported and publicised on an annual basis. There is no upper limit on financial contributions. If a political party is getting anonymous contributions, these funds must be handed over to the Swedish State Inheritance Fund.

## Regulating political activities – a sensitive issue

To regulate and lay down rules for political parties and other organisations engaged in political activities is a difficult issue, as this may limit democratic rights. Historically, it has been a tradition that independent, non-state organisations, such as political parties, trade unions, and NGOs, should be regulated as little as possible. A minimum of regulations has been the guiding light in this case. Of

course all of the above-mentioned types of organisation must, as anyone else in Sweden, abide by the rules set out in the Fundamental laws – the Instrument of Government, the Fundamental law on freedom of expression, and the Freedom of the press act – and other relevant legislation.



Posters are a common way to spread political messages. This poster is from the youth association of the Left Party, protesting against privatisation of education.

## 5. The Judicial Sector in Sweden

**A**n important part of any stable state is naturally the judicial sector. In Sweden the judicial system is normally described as the agencies responsible for ensuring legal security and the rule of law. The courts form the backbone of the system and agencies for crime prevention and investigation, i.e., the Swedish Police Service, the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority, the Swedish Prosecution Authority, the Swedish National Economic Crimes Bureau and the Swedish Prison and Probation Service are also regarded as part of the judicial system.

The aim of the Swedish judicial system is to guarantee the legal security and statutory rights of the individual. This requires a proficient and efficient system. Within the Swedish Government, the Ministry of Justice is primarily responsible for matters relating to the judicial sectors, including the budgets and administration of the public agencies. The Ministry of Justice is also responsible for core legislation in the fields of civil law, penal law and procedural law. Another key working area is preventing and combating crime.

### The court system in Sweden

It is a fundamental right of residents of Sweden to have their case considered by an impartial and independent court and anyone accused of a crime is considered innocent until proven guilty.

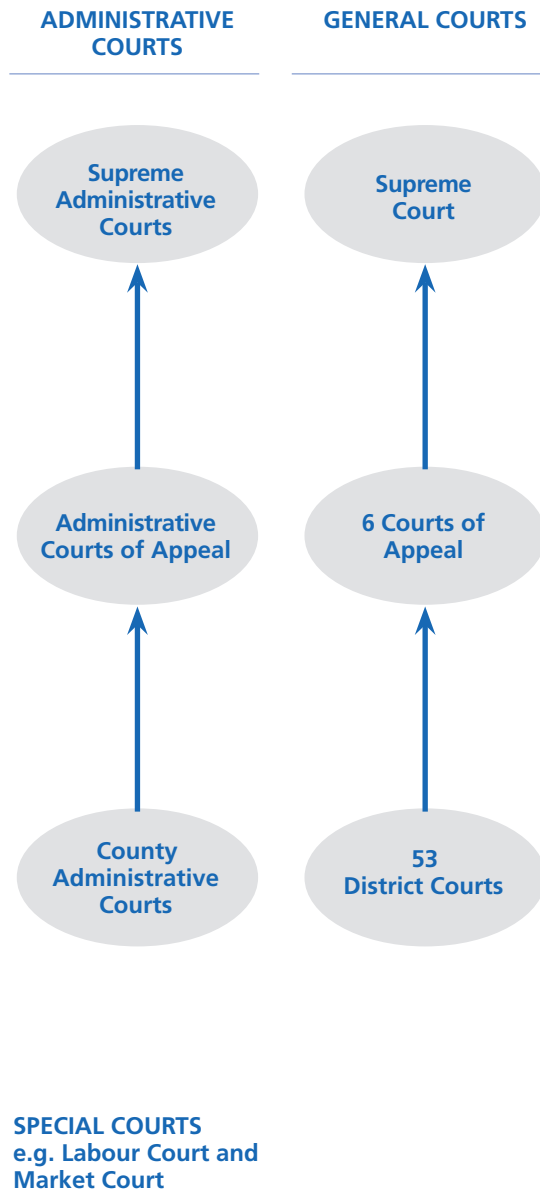
There are three kinds of courts in Sweden

- 1) the general courts, which comprise district courts, courts of appeal and the Supreme Court;
- 2) the general administrative courts, i.e. the administrative courts, administrative courts of appeal and the Supreme Administrative Court; and also
- 3) the special courts, which determine disputes within special areas, for example, the Labour Court and the Market Court. As a part of the public legal services, the Swedish court system has due process as its most important overall aim. All courts are independent according to fundamental legislation, and neither the Riksdag nor any other authority may meddle in how a court should decide in a particular case.





## Swedish Court system



## The general courts

General courts deal with criminal and civil cases. Criminal cases are the cases in which someone stands trial under the suspicion of having committed a criminal offence. Civil cases are cases where two parties are in disagreement, for example, over the contents of a contract or the custody of a child.

General courts are organised in three levels. The district court is the court of first instance. There are 53 district courts across Sweden. They vary in size, the largest having several hundred employees and the smallest having about ten. The next level is the court of appeal. There are six courts of appeal. In general, a person is free to lodge an appeal against the district court's decision with the court of appeal. The Supreme Court is the court of last resort. It consists of a minimum of 14 judges, entitled Justices of the Supreme Court. The main role of the Supreme Court is to try cases which may be of interest in terms of development of law.

Criminal cases start when a public prosecutor initiates proceedings against a suspect by submitting an application for a person to be summoned to a district court. When the case is brought to court judgment is announced after a main hearing attended by both parties, who state their claims and other circumstances relating to the case orally. During the main hearing, any witnesses and experts are heard and other evidence is also presented. In cases of a simple nature, the court normally delivers its judgment immediately. If the defendant in a criminal case is detained, the court has to deliver its judgment no later than one week after the completion of the hearing. Special rules apply to young offenders, e.g. that such cases are to be dealt with promptly.

## Public prosecution service

The Swedish public prosecution service includes the Prosecution Authority and the Economic Crimes Bureau. It employs around 1 150 people, out of which 800 are prosecutors. There are 40 local offices in Sweden – 34 are general public prosecution offices, three are international public prosecution offices and three are national public prosecution offices. One deals with anti-corruption, one with suspicions of crime among police officers and one for security cases. At four locations in Sweden there are also public prosecution service development centres, which promote methodological development and legal changes in various crime areas.

The Prosecutor-General is the head of the Prosecution Authority and supervises its work. He or she is the only public prosecutor entitled to initiate or pursue proceedings at the Supreme Court, directly or through an appointed representative.

## Judges in Swedish courts

Criminal cases are normally tried by one judge and three lay judges. Civil disputes are normally heard by a single judge or three judges. In the courts of appeal, criminal cases are decided by three judges and two lay judges. Civil cases are tried by three or four judges. In the settlement of family cases, lay judges normally take part in proceedings in both the district court and in the court of appeal.

Permanent judges are appointed by the Swedish government. In principle, a permanent judge cannot be dismissed, except in cases specifically set out in the Instrument of Government.

### ► Career path of a Swedish judge

It takes time and effort to become a judge. To have a career as a judge, candidates need a Master of Law degree, and most who are appointed have started after graduation as law clerks for two years at a district court or county administrative court, and after that as reporting clerks at a court of appeal or an administrative court of appeal. After at least one year of service at the court of appeal or administrative court of appeal, the trainee judge returns to a district court or county administrative court for a period of at least two years. Thereafter follows at least one year of service at a court of appeal or administrative court of appeal, during which the trainee is co-opted to the bench. After completing this period of probation, the reporting clerk is appointed as an associate judge. Reporting clerks and associate judges are referred to as non-permanent judges.

Most permanent judges are employed as district or county administrative court judges or as judges of appeal at a court of appeal or administrative court of appeal.

Every district court, court of appeal, county administrative court and administrative court of appeal has a number of lay judges. The lay judges in district courts are appointed by the municipal council in the municipalities under the territorial jurisdiction, and in county administrative court, the administrative court of appeal or the court of appeal, by the county council.

Lay judges are chosen for a term of four years and are ordinary citizens with differing occupations. To be chosen as a lay judge you should be a lawful Swedish citizen, and considered an independent person with high integrity and good general judgment. All lay judges have the right to take leave from their ordinary work to attend trials, and are paid for their services.

## Penalties issued by courts

One of the main duties of courts is naturally to decide on penalties for different offences. The most common penalty is a monetary fine, but for more serious crimes or in the case of re-occurring offences, the penalty may be imprisonment. Instead of prison, the court may also prescribe a conditional sentence, if the person convicted has no previous record, or probation, if, for example, the individual has an abuse problem and needs supervision.

The court can also commit a person to special care. Individuals who are mentally ill can receive forensic mental care, while young offenders may be committed to institutional youth care or community service for young offenders. Both conditional sentences and probation can be combined with fines or an order to perform unpaid community service work. Probation can also be combined with different orders for special care, such as treatment for alcohol or drug addiction.

### ► Getting legal aid

Those who lack the economic means to take advantage of their rights are entitled to legal aid. Legal aid is not restricted to matters dealt with before a court or by another public agency. It can also be given in connection with other legal matters. To be granted legal aid there are a number of criteria. For example the applicant's annual income shouldn't exceed 260 000 SEK. In the first instance, any legal expenses insurance that the applicant has. Legal aid is granted by the National Legal Aid Authority or the court in which the case is being processed. Defendants are legally represented by lawyers. The title 'advocate' (lawyer) can only be used by accredited members of the Swedish Bar Association. As with judges, qualifying as a lawyer requires extensive academic education and practical training. All lawyers in Sweden are in private practice.

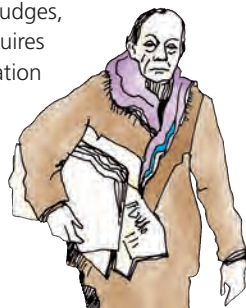


PHOTO Swedish police

## The Swedish police service

One important link in the legal system is the police authority. The Swedish police's duty is to safeguard the legal rights of the individual, to prevent and detect crime and to ensure that anyone who commits an offence is identified and brought to justice. The police service in Sweden has about 24 000 employees at the national and local level, making it one of the biggest government authorities in Sweden. The police service is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice.

The central administrative and supervisory authority of the police service is the National Police Board. It is headed by the National Police Commissioner who is appointed by the government. The Board is responsible for the development of new work methods and technological support. It is also – through the National Police Academy – responsible for the training of police officers. Within the Board are important units such as the National Security Service and the National Criminal Investigation Department.

- The work of the National Security Service is often surrounded by a great deal of confidentiality. In recent years, however, there has been a development towards greater openness. The Security Service is responsible for protection of sensitive objects, counter-espionage, anti-terrorist activities and protection of the constitution.

- ▶ The National Criminal Investigation Department provides investigation and criminal intelligence support in cases involving crimes with nationwide or international ramifications. This department is also in charge of the Police Helicopter Service, Swedish Police Peace Support Operations and the National Communications Centre.

The Swedish police organised in 21 regional police authorities, coinciding with the county administrative level. The police authorities are responsible for police work at the local level, e.g. responding to emergency calls, crime investigations and crime prevention. Responsibilities also include the issuing of passports and various kinds of permits and licenses. During the 1990s, initiatives were taken to establish a new police organisation – a community police service, with officers who are acquainted with the area in which they operate and who work in partnership with the local community. This is most visible in and crime prevention. Each community police station is responsible for a specific geographic area within the district. Activities are conducted in a problem-oriented manner, i.e., with a focus on the more direct causes of crime and public disturbances. Community police officers maintain a regular exchange of information with other public agencies in their area, such as schools, social services etc.

Traffic police is one part of the Swedish police force.



PHOTO: Swedish police

### ▶ Working in the police service

Out of the 24 000 persons working in the police service, about 70 per cent of employees are police officers. But there is also about 6 700 civil staff, often with special skills and in charge of e.g. corporate issues, staff development, legal and financial matters, IT and crime investigations. Around 35 % of the staff members of the police service are women but the proportion among police officers is less. Joining the police service is a very popular career choice in Sweden. Only about 5 to 10 per cent of applicants are offered a place in the National Police Academy. Traditionally police has been a predominately male domain, but nowadays there are active measures to recruit a workforce reflecting the society, thus increasing the proportion of women and ethnic minority officers. The Police Program comprises two years of full-time studies and six months of field training at a police authority. At present, police training is provided in Stockholm, Umeå and Växjö and as distance education.

## Crime in Sweden

Although criminality in Sweden might not be considered very serious by international standards, there has been a radical increase in reported crimes since national statistics started to be collected in the 1950s. In 2003, 1 250 000 criminal offences were reported in Sweden. This change is due both to an increase in crime but also an increase in reporting. But having said this it is also a fact that a large number of crimes are not reported. For example, a study carried out by Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention shows that only one fifth of those affected by violence reported the offence to the authorities. There is not one single reason for crime rates have increased in Sweden. Among the reasons could be increasing affluence in Swedish society from the 1950s, accompanied by an increase in the number of theft-prone objects, the expansion of urban areas, decreasing social control, globalization etc.





In general public spaces are safe in Sweden, although there has been an increase in reported crimes over the years.

Of the crimes reported to the authorities in 2003, around half were theft-related, 13 % were violent crimes, 12 % were vandalism and destruction, 6 % were traffic crimes (not minor incidents), 5 % were fraud-related and 3 % were narcotics-related. Violent crime and organized crime is increasing. Even though it is not common overall they are considered serious as many victims suffer physical injury and emotional trauma, their lives are affected afterwards and many need treatment. Annually around 1 murder per 100 000 inhabitants is committed in Sweden. In the capital of Stockholm the number is 3 murders per 100 000 inhabitants, which is similar to other European capitals. Car theft, burglary, shoplifting, pick-pocketing and robbery are examples of crimes of theft, category of crimes that constitute the majority of reports. For example in 2002, 60 000 car thefts and 120 000 burglaries were reported.

In Sweden, certain effort is put into preventing crime before they happen. The National Council for Crime Prevention is tasked with providing the overall know-how and research on crime prevention and the police service as well as the prison service work very actively with trying to prevent crime, with varying success. As crime trends and crime rates are affected by many factors over which e.g. the police have

little control, such as economic development and social and demographic changes in society, it is important that they cooperate with many different stakeholders at central and local level, such as schools, municipalities, the customs service, the prison and probation service, victim support centers and NGOs, among others.

## Prison service and treatment of criminals

As mentioned before imprisonment is one of the penalties issued by courts in Sweden. The length of sentences differ depending on crime but in general there is a view that prison should be an opportunity for treatment more than punishment, and therefore prison terms are usually limited.

### ► How many people are in prison in Sweden?

On average, approximately 4700 people are held in Swedish prisons every day. The proportion of the population in prison in Sweden is low in international comparison. Around 55–60 persons per 100 000 inhabitants are kept in prison facilities, which is about the same rate as other Scandinavian countries. By comparison, most industrial countries in Europe have a rate of around 100 while some Eastern European countries ranges between 150–300. The United States ranks high above Sweden with around 700 inmates per 100 000 inhabitants.

## Organisation of prisons

Prisons in Sweden are organized under the Prison and Probation Service. It has a head office, six regional offices, and a transport service. Its activities are conducted in remand prisons, prisons, as well as non-institutional treatment agencies such as probation organisations or care for drug abusers.

People who are suspected of criminal offences and who have been detained by a court while waiting for trial are held at remand



prisons. There are 31 remand prisons in Sweden with a total of 2000 places. The treatment of detained persons is regulated by law in order to make the situation of detainees fair and to try to limit their isolation during the period of detention.

There are 56 correctional institutions, or prisons, in Sweden. There are closed institutions with a very high degree of security to prevent inmates from escaping, while open institutions have no actual obstacles preventing inmates from walking away. Some of the closed prisons have high-security units where very serious offenders are being kept.

The most common offence for those who are in prison is drug related offences. Almost as many have been convicted of violent crime, but only a few percent are convicted of murder or manslaughter. Ninetythree % of all inmates are men, of whom 46 % have previously been in prison. All prisoners in Sweden are obliged to engage in some form of occupation, which may include some form of work, training or treatment. Activities in prisons are to be designed so that they promote prisoners adjustment to society and the time spent in prison should focus on measures to encourage not returning to criminal life. At the same time, account must be taken of the need to protect society. There are treatments to influence the behaviour of drug abusers, sex offenders and men using violence against their partners. To better prepare ex-prisoners to cope with life outside in society after release without committing crime again, and to help in the change from prison life to a life of freedom, there are several possibilities available for gradual release from prison, including electronic tagging towards the end of the prison sentence.

The prison service in Sweden has special prisons for women in six locations. In total there are around 260 female inmates in Sweden. The most common offence is theft and narcotic crimes. Around 70 % of the women in prison in Sweden are suffering from narcotics and/or alcohol abuse.

### ► Sentenced to life

Life in prison is the most serious penalty that is used in Sweden. All other prison terms are time limited from the start. Examples of crimes that could give life in prison are

- murder
- kidnapping
- arson
- espionage
- sabotage.

After having served ten years in prison a person can apply to have their sentence defined in length. In august 2008 there were 155 prisoners in Sweden serving a sentence for life. Out of those, four are women. The youngest of the prisoners was 22 years and the oldest 80 years. They are all in prison for murder, or murder-related offences.



PHOTO Swedish police

Sweden has a very high degree of weapons per capita. Most of them are for hunting but occasionally handguns or rifles are used in violent crimes. In 2007, the Swedish police organised the latest 'weapons amnesty' when people can hand in their illegal weapons with 'no questions asked'.

▶ NOTES

## 6. Local Self-Governance in Sweden



*Sweden has municipalities and county councils. The decision-making power in these local authorities is exercised by elected assemblies. The local authorities may levy taxes in order to perform their tasks.*

*The Instrument of Government,  
Chapter 1:7*

According to the Instrument of Government, local self-governance is one of the fundamental principles of Swedish democracy. The decisions of Swedish local government have a direct impact on local society and the private lives of citizens.

Sweden is a highly decentralized country divided into 290 municipalities and 21 regions, which are responsible for providing a significant proportion of all public services. They have a considerable degree of autonomy and have independent powers of taxation. Still, it is important to emphasise that Sweden is a unitary state.

The current Local Government Act, which came into force in 1992, defines the roles of municipalities and regions as follows:

- ▶ Municipalities are responsible for matters relating to the inhabitants of the municipality and their immediate environment.
- ▶ The main task of the regions is healthcare.
- ▶ The Swedish Parliament, or Riksdag, which has 349 members, is the supreme political decision-making body in Sweden.

It is important to emphasise that there is no hierarchical relation between municipalities and regions, since all are self-governing local authorities with clear responsibility for different activities, with one exception. On the Island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea, east of mainland Sweden, the municipality also has responsibility for tasks normally associated with a region.

Swedish local government is very diverse in terms of size, population, socio-economic structure, financial situation, culture, natural resources, municipal organisation, etc. However, the national framework of policies, and rules and regulations, is common for all municipalities and regions respectively, but the high degree of local self-governance also provides for a lot of freedom for each local unit to decide on local taxes, local priorities and local organisation.



The size between municipalities in terms of geographical area and population varies a lot. The largest municipality population-wise is Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, with 950 000 inhabitants and the smallest is Bjurholm in the north of Sweden, with 2 430 inhabitants. The biggest municipality in terms of area is Kiruna in Northern Sweden, at 19 446 km<sup>2</sup>. The smallest is Sundbyberg close to Stockholm, at 8 km<sup>2</sup>.

## Historical overview

Local decision-making on local affairs has been a tradition in Sweden since the Middle Ages. But from the 17th century it became more difficult for local villages and towns to defend their rights against the growing powers of the nobility, and thus the local autonomy temporarily declined. When the inhabitants of the local church units in the 18th Century gained increased rights to decide on financial matters, and cities and church units were assigned responsibility for poverty relief (and later provision of schooling), local autonomy once again increased. In 1862, reforms were initiated that separated secular and ecclesiastical affairs.

Secular affairs became the responsibility of rural municipalities, which had the same boundaries as local church units. At the same time, elected county councils were established. Increasing economic development and industrialization also led to increasing urbanization.

In the beginning of the 1950s, migration flows from the countryside to urban areas grew rapidly, leaving many rural municipalities with few inhabitants and an insufficient taxation base. Compulsory merging reforms were initiated by the Government, and in 1952 the total number of municipalities decreased from 2 500 to 1 037, and the average population and tax base in Swedish municipalities increased threefold. Further reforms, now voluntary, were carried through from 1962 to 1974, in which the number of municipalities decreased to 282. Today (2019), there are 290 municipalities in Sweden. The numbers are constantly fluctuating as municipalities have the right to decide to merge with other municipalities or to divide into two.

After World War II it was considered natural that affairs of local government be closely monitored by the state, in order to guarantee coherence in realizing the objectives

Municipalities in Sweden vary greatly – they can be urban or rural, large or small, poor or rich, mountainous or flat.



of the welfare state. The shift from a top-down state-governed system towards a complex multilevel system of decision-making with public-private partnerships has evolved gradually over time, one important step being the Local Government Act of 1991. But as in any country, decentralization in Sweden is not free from power struggles between local and central authorities, and there are differing views on which level is most suitable to provide a certain service or collect a certain tax.

### Why local self-governance?

So what is the motivation for the relatively strong position of local self-governance in Sweden? For a long time there has been a consensus about the value of greater scope for local initiative and governance in Sweden. In simple terms, these values can be summarised as democratic values, and efficiency values.

- ▶ *Democratic values.* With local self-governance comes a potential for greater responsiveness, i.e. better ability to see, understand, and respond to local citizens' needs. Furthermore, the possibility for accountability may increase, as people have a better understanding of who is responsible for what decisions. The broader population is generally better represented in local assemblies, and decentralisation means a de-concentration of power and the creation of barriers to national authoritarian rule. In addition, proximity to the decision-making process gives citizens a greater opportunity to participate directly in local affairs.
- ▶ *Efficiency values.* Instead of having a hierarchical system of state organisations controlling and governing at every level, local self-governance is considered much more cost-efficient. With strong local autonomy, it is possible for neighbouring municipalities to cooperate on crosscutting issues. Furthermore, when the welfare system has to address new challenges, local entities can





solve problems in the most effective and efficient way, and become an inspiration for others to follow (or not to follow!), i.e. learning from each others' mistakes and successes.

## ► Legislation regulating activities of local government

Since 1974, local self-government is laid down in the Swedish Constitution (the Instrument of Government). Local self-government means that local authorities must be independent bodies, free to make their own decisions within certain limits. The key legal act regulating the activities of local government is the Local Government Act that came into force on 1 January 1992. This applies for both municipalities and regions, and regulates everything from municipal and region boundaries to the conditions for work in the assembly and committees.

Apart from the legally binding provisions, municipalities and regions may under the Local Government Act attend to matters of general concern. These are matters that are related to the geographical area of the municipality or region or to its members. A local authority may not normally undertake activities that the state or another municipality or region is responsible for.

The following areas are regulated in the Local Government Act

- division into municipalities and regions and membership
- the powers, organisation and working arrangements of municipalities and regions
- elected representatives
- assemblies and committees
- codetermination procedures
- financial administration audit
- assessment by the courts of the legality of local government decisions.

Most local authority tasks are regulated in what is known as special legislation. The tasks covered by this legislation include social services (the Social Services Act of 2001), health and medical services (the Health and Medical Services Act of 1982), environmental and public health protection (the Environment Code of 1998) and pre-school, compulsory and upper secondary education (the Education Act of 1985). Several special acts are what are known as framework laws that the Government or government agencies can supplement through ordinances or regulations. For instance, the National Board of Health and Welfare issues regulations for health and medical services that contain more detailed provisions than the Health and Medical Services Act.

Local authorities can be given some rights to issue their own local regulations. A municipality can decide on local traffic regulations, local public order regulations, refuse collection regulations, etc.

## Örebro University and the Municipality are learning from each other

Örebro is a town of 130 000 inhabitants, situated 200 km South-West of Stockholm. Its position makes it a natural logistical centre of Scandinavia and provides for a multifaceted business region. In the town of Örebro there is also a university with about 15 000 students.

In 2008, the Municipality of Örebro and the university embarked on a new cooperation project which aims to contribute to the development of both municipal operations and enrich university-level research. The multi-disciplinary 'Research School for Public Administration Development' aims to establish an environment which

- supports the development initiatives of the municipality
- inspires organisational and service development in other municipalities
- forms university research teams to focus on municipal development issues
- enriches Swedish research on issues of democracy, management, and effectiveness at local level.

The cooperation is seen as a win-win situation. The municipality will benefit from access to more systematic follow-up, evaluation and analysis, and the researchers of Örebro University will gain access to interesting cases and opportunities for applied research.

The research school is organised and financed jointly by the municipality and the university. It employs a total of 13 PhD-students from different academic disciplines, and is governed by a steering committee consisting of university and municipal representatives. Besides the many research projects and publications related to the research school, three main measures are used to ensure that learning, experience, and research results are shared and disseminated

- a joint academics/practitioners steering committee and reference groups
- a sequence of open seminars on local government finance and politics where local government and other regional stakeholder meet and discuss with Swedish and International researchers. Seminar themes are introduced alternately by municipal representative and researchers.
- an Örebro Municipality annual one-day conference where the researchers from the joint project, and some invited guests, make presentations on ongoing and planned research.



photo Örebro University

## Who is responsible for what?



*Municipalities and county councils may themselves attend to matters of general concern which are connected with the area of the municipality or county council or with their members and which are not to be attended to solely by the state, another municipality, another region or some other body.*

*The Local Government Act  
chapter 2:1*

The work of local governments is regulated by various legal acts. The principles of local self-governance are, together with the right to tax etc., laid out in fundamental legislation, e.g. in the Instrument of Government. The Local Government Act of 1991 defines the roles and responsibilities of municipalities and regions. Special legislation defines the regulated tasks of local government. Much of the legislation today is of framework-type, setting the broad goals rather than regulating in detail. The underlying principle of state direction of local government in Sweden today is that the state develops the goals and defines the framework, and then local government delivers these goals at the citizen/consumer level. The state steers, and thus controls the work of local governments through policies, legislation, rules and regulations as well as through economic grants and other formal and informal control measures.

The Local Government Act states that there are matters of general interest, which local authorities themselves should take charge of. Under these general powers, regions and municipalities engage in cultural affairs, leisure activities, water and wastewater management, street cleaning, generation of energy, communication, etc. There are also tasks that local authorities are obliged by special legislation to

handle. These include primary and secondary education, pre-school activities, social services, healthcare, dental care, elderly care, physical planning, environmental tasks, rescue services, etc.

Tasks that cover a larger population base, such as health/dental care or regional transportation, are normally assigned to regions.

## Tasks and responsibilities of municipalities

### ► Municipalities are legally responsible for

- Social services, including child care, care of the elderly, and social security benefits
- Pre-, primary and secondary schooling. (All education is free.)
- Libraries
- Matters related to public building projects
- Health and environmental care
- Sanitation and waste disposal
- Rescue services
- Water and sewers
- Order and safety.

### Municipalities are voluntarily responsible for e.g.

- Youth and recreation services
- Cultural activities, excluding libraries
- Housing
- Energy
- Trade and industry.

## Elected councils

Every municipality and region has a directly elected council as its main decision making body. There are currently close to 50 000 elected representatives in municipalities, including council and committee members. This means that 1 % of the adult population in Sweden holds a political position in a municipality or region.

97% of the locally elected politicians are part-time and unpaid representatives. In

municipality councils, in average 43 % of the members are women and 57 % are men. In the regional council assemblies, 48 % are women and 52 % are men. Approximately half the members in local government councils and regional assemblies are between 50 and 65 years old. Only 9 % are between 18 and 30 years old and close to 27 % are older than 65.

Some representatives work in sectoral and other committees, but are not members of the council. The council takes all the important decisions for the municipality. Local operational goals and guidelines are established by the council, which also sets the local tax rate and the level of fees for services. It furthermore approves the local budget, and decides on the structure of local government. All council meetings are announced and open to the public.

In addition, there is an indirectly elected executive committee that supervises the administration of local government. It usually consists of 11–17 members. The executive committees prepare most decisions made by the council, and they also draft the budget. The chairman of the executive committee is usually a full-time employee called the Municipal Commissioner.

## Organising local government

Swedish legislation is very flexible when it comes to local government organisation, leaving room for alternative organisation of affairs and encouraging experimentation with innovative solutions. There are three overall models of organisation that municipalities in Sweden apply

*The sectoral model.* This is the traditional model of local government organisation, in which local elected representatives are grouped into different committees responsible for a particular sector of operations. Before 1992, all municipalities were required to establish separate committees to handle sectors such as schools, social services, building matters etc. Nowadays, municipalities that apply this traditional model often experiment with cross-

cutting committees, and committees organised by target groups instead of sector.

*The territorial model.* In this model, committees and administrations are organised on the basis of a territorial area with responsibility for geographic areas, in which they are responsible for operations. The municipalities that have adopted this model use a decentralised structure of district committees or neighbourhood councils. The model is not widely used in Sweden, but neighbourhood councils are applied in the three largest cities, Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö.

*The functional model.* This model of organisation is often referred to as the purchaser/provider model. The purchasing function is separated from the administrative functions, and committees are responsible for placing orders within their own municipal administrative offices as well as with outside contractors. There are municipalities in Sweden that have introduced this model in full, while others use it in parts of their organisation.



A majority of staff in the Swedish public sector are women.

## **SALAR – Safeguarding the interests of local and regional authorities**

An important organisation for local governments in Sweden is the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). SALAR is a voluntary association for all Swedish municipalities and regions. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions represents the governmental, professional and employer-related interests of Sweden's 290 municipalities and 21 regions. The Association strives to promote and strengthen local self-government and the development of regional and local democracy. The operations of the Association are financed by the fees paid annually by members according to their tax base, and from fees for services provided.

Every fourth year (after the national and local elections), SALAR has a congress with 401 delegates from electoral districts, based on population. The congress elects a Political Board with 21 members and as many deputies. The board is supported by a number of sector committees.

SALAR has a Managing Director and a Secretariat with about 400 staff members. The main tasks and objectives of SALAR are to

- represent and support Sweden's 290 municipalities and 21 regions
- develop local self-government
- promote cooperation between municipalities and counties
- provide service and assistance
- keep members well informed and operate as a national for members
- act as a central employer's organisation.

The last point means that SALAR represents the municipalities when negotiating with the employee organisations, i.e. the trade unions representing different groups of workers. The

cost of personnel is the largest budget item for municipalities and therefore the level of salaries is always an important issue, but at the same time the people working in municipality operations are their greatest resource, making fair working conditions an interest of all.

Over the next decade, municipalities need to recruit more than half a million personnel and achieve gender equity, which means attracting more men to work for municipalities. These are great challenges for most municipalities, and SALAR provides important support in identifying problems and solutions, and assisting with various services.

Many decisions taken by the European Union affect local and regional government in Sweden, and SALAR is thus playing an increasingly active part in European politics. The SALAR international unit, based in Stockholm and Brussels, looks after the European interests of the Swedish members and strives to influence policy initiatives at an early stage.

In order to fulfil their task of contributing to the citizens' security and welfare, municipalities and regions need to constantly renew and adapt their operations to new conditions. At the same time, demands are placed on stability, long-term thinking and credibility. Based on this, the SALAR congress in 2015 stated that the Association's activities during the mandate period 2016–2019 should be based on the following three directions:

- Democracy and self-government
- Welfare development and financing
- Attractive employer and attractive jobs.

SALAR website: [www.skl.se](http://www.skl.se)



## Tierp Municipality changed its organisation to become better at meeting citizens' needs



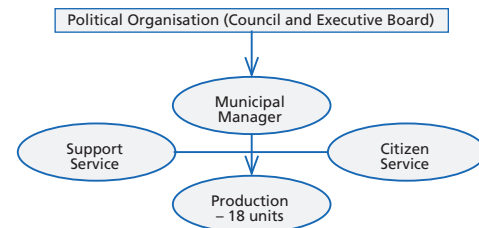
Tierp is a small-size municipality located about 120 km North of Sweden's capital, Stockholm. The municipality has a total of 20 000 inhabitants that live scattered in smaller settlements. The biggest town is the centre of Tierp, which has 6 000 inhabitants. The municipality as a whole has a positive population growth, which is rare in sparsely populated areas of Sweden where many municipalities suffer from people moving away to bigger cities.

According to the management of the municipality, Tierp was ten years ago in a situation of very low self esteem and many people, within and outside the municipality had negative perceptions of Tierp. The administration of the municipality hadn't changed much during the last three decades, and work was ineffective, old-fashioned and over-compartmentalized. The council politicians mostly cared about their respective committee and sector. This was also the case with the administration, with units protecting their own specific areas. There were often conflicts about who should pay for what, and politicians and administration interfered in each others' work. Both the political leadership and the management of the administration agreed that this was a problem and a committee was assigned to investigate how to re-organise the municipality to become more focused on holistic work, with clearer division of responsibilities.

Over several years the committee studied other municipalities and held discussions about what could be done to solve the problems. Interesting to note is that members of the committee agreed that no organisational charts were allowed to be drawn during the process. The focus should be on outcomes and citizens services, not on structures! Finally the committee had a proposal and the administration and the politicians agreed to create a totally new organisation. Since 2007, the Municipality of Tierp has worked with a radically different political organisation and administration. There are no longer sector committees in the council, but instead four thematic areas: Growth and development, Learning and the young, Care and life environment, and Democracy. This has led to broader political discussions. Furthermore, the

new organisation has made the division of responsibility clearer: the Municipal Council defines the overall goals, the Council Executive Board decides what should be done, and the Administration decides how it should be done.

The administration of the municipality is today divided into four main components: Municipal Manager, Citizen Service, Support Service and Production, as shown in the figure below:



The Support Service consists of a finance unit, an IT unit, a human resources unit, a procurement unit, and a unit for process support. Before the re-organisation, every sector department basically had their own support service. Now there is one support service for the whole organisation. The Municipal Manager is responsible for leading, coordinating, and developing the operations of the municipality so that they are conducted in an efficient manner and in accordance with



PHOTO: Tierp municipality

In citizen service centres, officers have broad knowledge about local government and local services.

political goals and decisions. The Production is led by three managers and is responsible for municipal services, including education, elderly care, health and social care, culture, recreation, and technical services such as water, sewage, waste, roads, etc. Citizen Service is the entrance point to Tierp Municipality, which offers citizens and businesses information, guidance, and advice through personal, web-based and telephonic services.

So has the situation actually improved in Tierp Municipality? When asked about their opinions of the new organisation, only 15 % of the politicians and 8 % of the administration said they preferred the old system. Citizens' views are yet to be systematically documented, but the Tierp Panel is a group of approximately 70 citizens who have volunteered to represent the community in dialogue with the municipality on different development issues. When they were asked if they knew about the Citizen Service functions 99 % said yes, and if they would recommend other people to contact the Citizen Service desk to get help, 98 % answered yes. This is a clear indication that the citizens of Tierp are satisfied with the new customer-focused organisation.

## Meeting local service challenges through »medborgarkontor«

Sweden is one of the countries that rather early started to establish local citizens service centres – 'medborgarkontor' – in order to improve quality and accessibility of public services delivered to citizens. The main reason for starting to work with the modality of service centres was to respond to new challenges in public service, such as urbanization and immigration, and to develop integrated service where citizens' needs were more in focus.

*medborgare = citizen  
kontor = office*

## What is a »medborgarkontor« in the Swedish context?

In general a 'medborgarkontor' is a multi- and cross-organisational form of cooperation, primarily between different departments of local government and/or different state agencies (such as social insurance, police, tax office), but sometimes also with private actors. To provide quality public services, different societal actors have been brought together, in physical terms in the same building, as well as through integration, with increased cooperation across sectors. Municipalities have a central role because they usually run the centres.

The overall purpose of 'medborgarkontor' is to improve public service and accessibility for citizens and businesses. Another purpose is to free the specialists in administration from matters which generalist officers can handle. In general there have been four goals for the establishment of citizen service centres in Sweden, namely

1. Improved quality of public services
2. Retain and/or develop services in a municipality and/or at a certain location (related mainly to accessibility in rural areas or suburbs of urban areas)
3. Rationalise and/or make service more efficient (i.e. better services at lower costs)
4. Develop local democracy (by improving local government information to the citizens and increasing the possibilities for citizens to affect local government affairs, to engage in dialogue, or to complain).

These goals are in no way mutually exclusive but are combined in different ways, depending on the situation of a particular centre.

The goal of accessibility has always been a priority for 'medborgarkontor' in Sweden. This means that public service should as far as possible be accessible to all citizens in terms of:

- ▶ *Geographical accessibility*: right location in the town/region (e.g. close to residential areas, in a shopping mall, at a train station, community centre)

- ▶ *Physical accessibility*: easily accessed by old people, disabled, etc.
- ▶ *Temporal accessibility*: opening hours which suits needs of clients, 24 hour phone/web services
- ▶ *Content accessibility*: most services which citizens need should be represented in the centre
- ▶ *Attitude accessibility*: staff who are service minded and open for all questions and needs, and who work hard to help the clients.

### Service and dialogue policy guides civil servants in Botkyrka Municipality



Municipality of Botkyrka, south of Stockholm has adopted a 'Policy for service and dialogue' which guides the whole administration in its daily conduct of work. It takes the starting point in the needs of citizens and states that people expect the administration to be well coordinated, and that you are met with respect and are listened to, no matter who you are and no matter which individual in the administration you are interacting with.

All employees are guided by the following policies, namely

- **We are here for the citizens**, meaning that the service is there for citizens and should meet their needs, not the needs of the government. In practice this means, for example, that a question should never be left unanswered.
- **We use our joint competence**, which requires sharing knowledge and competence. By using internal and external competence effectively, it should be possible to solve most matters.
- **We implement and follow-up all matters**, meaning that if a matter is forwarded, everyone is responsible for seeing that it gets to the right person. Never leave a matter unfinished and do not refer citizens to more than one other person.
- **We show service-mindedness and understanding**, meaning being open for all matters and trying to understand the position of the citizen. Officials should be professional in meeting citizens and treat all people equally.
- **We are easy to understand**, means using simple and clear language, avoiding abbreviations and specialized terminology, and taking time to explain different matters.

- **We honour internal agreements**, meaning that all employees follow common agreements to ensure that everybody gets the same level of service from all parts of the administration.
- **We are personally available**, meaning that it is easy to find the right person to talk to and visitors are being acknowledged as important.
- **We are available via phone and e-mail**, meaning that it is easy to get in contact with the administration, and everybody who receives a message or a call is responsible for handling it correctly, and, if need be, forwarding it to the right person.

These guiding principle and policies tell citizens of Botkyrka what they can expect when meeting the administration, and officials become more aware of what is expected from them.



PHOTO Botkyrka municipality

### 'Medborgarkontor' in rural areas – the case of Fränsta



The Municipality of Ånge in Northern Sweden includes the rural village of Fränsta, where one of the first 'medborgarkontor' was established in 1992. Fränsta has around 1400 inhabitants and covers a geographical area 100km long and 40km wide. In the early 1990's, state agencies and local authorities needed to rationalise, and many in sparsely populated areas faced closure, including in Fränsta. This was one reason for establishing a 'medborgarkontor' in 1992, as a joint service centre in one building, where citizens could find most services that they needed – and set up a building for it. The local municipality and three state agencies – police, social security agency, and unemployment office – agreed to put one officer at the disposal of the service centre with each representing all the different authorities. Services were improved (e.g. longer opening hours, learning from each other, accessible to local people) and costs were lowered as they were shared.

The 'medborgarkontor' of Fränsta has one reception desk and one telephone line where citizens raise the issue they need help with, no matter what authority or sector the issue is related to. Then one of the generalist officers either assists with the inquiry personally, or forwards it to a specialist. Peak periods for the 'medborgarkontor' are during elections and during income tax return periods. Otherwise, social assistance and unemployment support are the most common issues dealt with by the centre.



As local municipalities in Sweden are free to organise themselves and there are great variations across Sweden, the structure, purpose, scope and content of 'medborgarkontor' differ as well – from very basic service centres that only offer information, to comprehensive service centres with integrated work procedures.

The kind of services that are provided depend on whether only municipal services are offered, or also other state agency services, e.g. the police, tax authority, unemployment office, and social security bureau. Among the services provided by municipalities at 'medborgarkontor' are administrative services related to e.g. social benefits, housing, technical issues, childcare, elderly care, integration of newly arrived immigrants, employment support, etc.

### Staffing in the public sector at local level

Local government employs over 1 million people in Sweden in the local government sector. Over half of all local government employees work in the health and social services sector, with about 20 % in the education sector. Close to 80 % of all local government employees are women! Approximately one job in three in the Swedish labour market is within the scope of municipalities or county councils. About 10 % of all municipal staff are employed in administration. Most municipalities have given full-time jobs to one or several of their elected representatives.

Most employees belong to one of the several major confederations of trade unions in Sweden. The biggest trade union in Sweden is the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union. Salaries and labour conditions are bargained for collectively between the trade unions and the Swedish Association for Local Authorities and Regions. The people (mostly women) employed in the municipal sector often have low salaries in relation to people working in other sectors. In the spring of 2003, the Swedish Municipal Worker's Union launched a major strike, demanding that the lowest salary



level to be increased by 16 %, and all other municipal workers' salaries to be raised by 5,5 %. The employees and employers' organisations later came to a two-year agreement which raised salaries from between 2 % to 5 %, giving priority to groups working within health and elderly care, as well as those working within the child-care sector. The lowest salary level was increased by 8 %.

The administrative staff at central and local level is recruited (mostly) on the basis of merit. As already mentioned, the Instrument of Government, states that recruitment should be based on objective factors such as competence and experience. At local government level, all recruitment is transparent and should be made on the basis of competence and merit and not for any other reason.

In both the public and the private sector, people employed have the right to get a legally binding contract for the position, if you are employed for more than one month. This includes salary, termination rules, vacation, etc. There is comprehensive legislation in Sweden regulating such issues as the right for leave to study, care for children, vacation, as well as legislation to prevent gender discrimination and other discrimination on the labour market.



Many municipalities have difficulties in recruiting personnel. Among the reasons are the low salaries and status of many professions in childcare and elderly care.

### ► Challenges in local government staffing

Even though local government is by far the biggest employer in Sweden, many municipalities have difficulties in recruiting qualified staff to many positions. The reasons for this are several, e.g. low salaries, low status, young people moving to cities, etc.

One example can be drawn from the health sector. During the period 1993–2000, the number of employees in the health sector decreased from 323 700 to 247 400 – a 24 % reduction. About 80 % of the staff working within the sector are women. Studies after 2000 predict that over 700 000 health care employees will need to be recruited in the next ten years. The trend is similar in child and elderly care. This is due to the fact that the Swedish population is growing older and there has not been enough new recruitment of workers into the public sector.

There are trends in Sweden's demographic profile that most certainly will affect public service delivery, and especially health care. Those working will have to support an ever-growing section of the population, as the average life expectancy will continue to increase. It is expected that the number of people above the age of 80 will almost double by the year 2030. Today, life expectancy in Sweden is around 80,5 years, among the highest in the world. Sweden has a high proportion of elders, whose welfare needs to be supported by people who work and pay taxes.

### Regional development

At the end of the 1990s, Swedish regional administrative geography started to change for the first time in 350 years, as the merging and/or increasing cooperation of counties and municipalities was encouraged and allowed on a trial basis. The dedication of the Swedish government to a new policy for regional development was further consolidated with the Government Bill 2001/02:4 A Policy for Growth and Viability Throughout Sweden. This policy is based on increased co-ordination of different policy sectors. Through regional growth programmes and with the help of



European Union Structural Funds, it aims to achieve stronger regions and local authorities, increased knowledge and skills, greater entrepreneurship, more focus on local economic growth, as well as an acceptable level of public services all over Sweden. This is to be done through

- ▶ Improved management of state-controlled activities
- ▶ More distinct responsibility for certain policy areas on the part of regions, and a more holistic development perspective
- ▶ A clear(er) division of responsibilities between the state and local authorities
- ▶ Learning and programmes as instruments for development
- ▶ Regional comparisons as a motor for change
- ▶ Coordination with European Union regional policies.

In 1997, new forms of regional authority were introduced in Sweden on a trial basis. Some counties decided to merge into new administrative regions covering a larger area, such as Västra Götaland Region in the West of Sweden and Region Skåne in the South. Both of them are governed by directly elected self-governing bodies.

In other parts of Sweden, municipal cooperation bodies were formed, taking a regional approach to the development of their area. One prerequisite for these bodies is that all municipalities in a county participate. The mandate of these organisations is also much more limited than that of the regional self-governing bodies of Västra Götaland and Skåne, which have taken over most previous county council responsibilities. The rationale behind both of these new forms of organisation has been that in larger entities it is more efficient to plan such social functions as employment, infrastructure, business development, etc.

Since January 2019, all county councils have become regions and thus taken over the regional development responsibility from the county administrative boards.

### About Region Skåne



Skåne is the region in Sweden that lies closest to continental Europe.

Today, the population of Skåne is just over one million, which is about 13 % of the total of 9 million.

Region Skåne, or Skåne Regional Council, is the self-governing authority of Skåne, the southernmost county of Sweden. The headquarters of Region Skåne's management is situated in Kristianstad. The highest decision-making political organ of Region Skåne is the Regional Council with its 149 members who are elected every four years by the inhabitants of Skåne in a general election. The Regional Board, appointed by the Regional Council, governs, develops and coordinates the administration of Region Skåne's activities.

Region Skåne acts as coordinator in many important issues of regional development. Its work lies within the areas of health, medical and dental services, trade and industry development, the environment, promotion of investment, town and infrastructure planning, public transport and culture. The competencies of the Regions are financed mainly by income tax, the level of which is decided by the Regional Assembly.

The political work of Region Skåne is focused on creating good conditions and opportunities for Skåne to become an attractive region in which to work, establish businesses, study and live. Cooperation stretches beyond the boundaries of the region, particularly into Denmark and the countries around the Baltic.



## 7. Citizens and Democracy in Sweden

**A**s stated in the first article of Sweden's Instrument of Government – *All public power in Sweden proceeds from the people* – it is important that citizens have the opportunity to participate in political affairs through direct and indirect means, and that the system is open enough for citizens, media and civil society to monitor and control the measures undertaken by government institutions. This does not mean that all citizens must be active in politics all the time for a system to be called genuinely democratic. Most Swedish citizens are not particularly interested in participating actively in politics in between elections. People rely mostly on media and civil society to channel their needs and to control the government. But there are also many people who find it important to organise and participate in public affairs and therefore the opportunity should be there for them to do so.

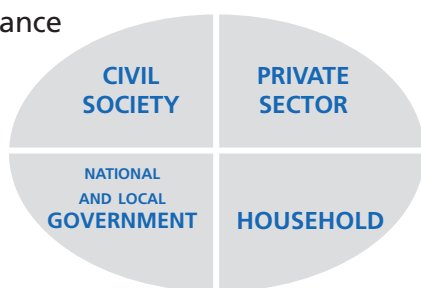
One of the most important participation and monitoring mechanisms for citizens is of course national and local elections. If the citizens are of the opinion that politicians have not fulfilled their mandate in a satisfactory way, they might vote for the opposition in the next election. But there are also other ways for citizens to participate in political affairs and gain information and knowledge of, and influence, the governance of society.

### From »government« to »governance«

To understand the Swedish system of today it is perhaps more relevant to think in terms of 'governance' rather than 'government'. Governance as a term is broader and could be simply defined as *the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)*. It is important to remember that governance is more than government. It involves the interaction between numerous actors: individuals, businesses, the civil society and the state, in determining what happens and should happen in the society. The result depends on the different interests of various actors, their relative power, and the institutional arrangements, informal as well as formal.



## Governance sectors



Citizens in Sweden are participating in governance in all the different sectors of society. Not only in the exercise of government as politicians or civil servants, or through elections, but also as members of organisations, owners of businesses, or active citizens in general.

## The role of civil society in Sweden

Sweden is sometimes quoted as a country with a fairly limited civil society due to the large public sector and developed welfare state. However, research has shown that this

notion is not true. Swedish civil society is similar in size and activity in comparison with other developed countries. Naturally there are particularities to be found. In Chapter 1 the role of popular movements in the democratization of Sweden is described. Many of these movements are still a vivid part of Swedish civil society but have been complemented by a multitude of different types of organisations with many different tasks and missions.

Defining civil society is always difficult, but in general it is here seen to be the organised sphere of society which is not government or the private sector. Where to draw the line, could however also be difficult as there are civil society organisations, e.g. sports clubs, that are run like a private company, and others that are closely related to the government, e.g. political parties or certain trade unions. Civil society organisations in Sweden play many different roles – building opinion, advocating, carrying out humanitarian work, safeguarding human rights, delivering services, gathering people

### Is fare-dodging a legitimate way to affect policy?

Planka.nu is a civil society network working locally in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Skåne and the region of Östergötland. It was founded in 2001 as a protest against increasing costs and privatization of public transport. The main goal for Planka.nu is to make public transport free of charge for the individual, i.e. fully paid via the county council's budget.

Planka.nu works through ordinary channels of advocacy, e.g. by arranging seminars, participating in debates, and writing newspaper articles. But the organisation is better known for using direct action and what they call 'self-reduction' of public transport costs. In practice this means fare-dodging, i.e. not paying to ride buses and subways.

This semi-criminal activity is financed by the fund 'p-kassan' – a kind of free riding insurance. All members pay an annual fee of 100SEK. If they get caught fare-dodging there will be a fine of 1 200SEK for not having a valid ticket. In this case, the individual will pay 100SEK and the p-kassan will pay the rest. Planka.nu is non-profit and the surplus from p-kassanis, for example, used to buy subway passes for paperless migrants, or funding underground publishing.

According to the calculations of Planka.nu, all those in Stockholm who make less than 40 000SEK per month would benefit by letting a small tax raise finance public transportation, instead of paying for tickets. In the view of Planka.nu, free public

transportation is thus a way of taking from the richest and giving to the rest. The argument is also that it would help fight segregation (as many poorer groups live in suburbs far away from city centres), and create a better urban environment.

For many people, the goals of Planka.nu sound relevant, but there are also many who oppose their civil disobedience methods. Not surprisingly, public transport companies and municipalities are very frustrated by the activities of Planka.nu and call it stealing from other citizens. Anyhow, Planka.nu has managed to put public transport issues higher on the agenda in local discussions and is continuing to grow.





with a common hobby, providing health and recreation, cultural activities, etc. Many organisations play several complementary roles. In relation to the government, civil society plays an important monitoring role and is also often influential when it comes to affecting policies and advocating a cause.

There are an estimated 200 000 civil society organisations in Sweden and among the 10 million people there are more than 32 million memberships, i.e. an average of over 4 memberships per Swede. Only one out of ten citizens is not a member of a civil society organisation. Among the most common types of membership organisations are sports clubs and trade unions. However, the fastest growing types of organisations are 'ownership' organisations such as tenants associations, and organisations working for a common good, e.g. drug prevention, environmental protection, humanitarian work, etc. It is interesting to know that the term 'charity' has a very negative connotation in Sweden, compared to e.g. the UK or USA. In Sweden the understanding of the concept often is limited to the provision of social services to the most vulnerable and this is something which the welfare state see to. Few organisations would thus call themselves charity organisations.

Traditionally, membership and democratic structures have been key aspects of popular movements and organisations in Sweden, and still are. But other new types of organisations are continuously gaining ground, such as foundations, special interest groups, and network organisations. Special interest groups often gather people around a fairly narrow issue, such as a certain medical diagnosis, and work professionally to conduct advocacy and build opinion around the issue.

During the 1990s, 'looser' and more flexible network organisations grew in activity and engagement. These organisations do not always have a formal structure or formal membership, but mobilise people, often globally, around different issues that people identify and show solidarity with. Organisations and people with otherwise different agendas can in this way gather around a common agenda and become a stronger voice. One successful example was the International Campaign to Ban Landmines which gathered people and organisations all over the world, and eventually managed to push for a treaty banning the international use of landmines. Other examples of network-based organisations are Attac and the vegan movement. Some of the newer civil society organisations often have a more action-oriented approach, e.g. disarmament actions, or ecologically motivated sabotages, which often draw criticism, but also attract young people who want 'action now!'

Civil society organisations in Sweden are mainly financed by self-generated revenue, such as membership fees, entrance fees, sales, etc. Around 60 % comes from such sources, while other important sources of revenue are public funding (about 29 %) and fund raising (about 12 %). An interesting fact is that Swedish organisations have a comparatively low portion of public funding. In Germany for example, almost 70 % of civil society revenue comes from the public sector. The reason for this is that in most other countries, civil society is more engaged as a welfare service provider,



Fund-raising is a key activity for most civil society organisations, e.g. this concert against violence organised by a coalition of organisations in the Northern city of Umeå.

while in Sweden these tasks are still mainly carried out by government. Even though civil society organisations have an estimated 100 000 employed professionals, a strikingly large share of work is done by unpaid volunteers (75 % in 2005, compared to, e.g. only 19 % in Ireland). The most common volunteer work is carried out in sport associations.

### ► The Animal Rights Movement

*Animal Rights Sweden* is one of Sweden's fastest growing popular movements. It was founded in 1882, but is often considered a new type of organisation. It is a non-party political, non-religious and non-violent organisation working against the commercialisation of animals' lives. Among its objectives are to stop the use of animals in scientific experiments, and to close down fur-producing factories. Currently the organisation has around 40 000 members, making it the biggest movement of its kind in Sweden.

*Animal Rights Sweden's* activities are financed by membership fees and grants from supporters. Its main instrument is broad lobbying and information activities for the public, but the organisation is also represented in many state agencies concerned with animal welfare.



There are an estimated 200 000 civil society organisations in Sweden. For some of them, demonstrations are a common way to make their voice heard. The image shows a demonstration outside the Riksdag.



### ► Sports associations – a backbone of Swedish civil society

In Sweden there are over 20 000 sports associations with over 3 million members, of which 2,3 million are active, and 600 000 have leadership positions. Among the most popular sports are to engage in are football, golf, track & field, gymnastics, ice hockey, handball, indoor bandy, and horse riding. In sport associations, volunteers annually carry out unpaid work which is equivalent to that of 700 000 full-time staff.

In sports associations people do not only keep fit but many are engaged in the leadership and organisational development of associations, which

are mostly democratically governed by elected boards, etc. Research has furthermore shown that youths who are actively involved in youth associations have better physical and mental health than those who are not. They also have a more positive view of the future and use less tobacco and alcohol than their non-sporting friends. Another positive side effect is that young people gain valuable experience of democracy in practice.





## Revitalizing local democracy

### ► The Kalix Rådslag – a pioneer in Sweden

Kalix is a municipality with 18 000 citizens in the far north of Sweden. After the elections in 1998 a coalition government including seven parties took power. Initially, it presented a community development programme where one key point was to broaden and deepen democracy, making citizens more involved in the democratic process. Thus, in cooperation with a local IT-company, the Kalix Rådslag was initiated. It can be described as an interactive discussion forum where citizens can present opinions and ideas and discuss with politicians, directly via the internet (or via telephone, letter or fax).

In October 2001, the citizens of Kalix had the opportunity to express their opinion via the internet about the local tax level, and how a budget surplus, if any, should be used. 51 % of all eligible voters participated and a majority wished to keep the tax level unchanged and use a surplus for elderly care and primary education. Through the Rådslag, politicians now know that the tax level is well accepted among the citizenry of Kalix, and which sectors to prioritise. The internet-based forum in Kalix has proven to be a valuable complement to more traditional democratic forums.

Today, many municipalities use this method for engaging in dialogue with citizens, but Kalix was a pioneer in this development!

As the participation in elections and the inclination to engage in political parties has decreased, several attempts to vitalise the work of the local councils in Sweden and strengthen their legitimacy are being made nation-wide. One way has been to hold municipal council meetings in other villages/towns than the centre of the municipality, i.e. taking meeting to the people. In addition, local authorities have realised that new and innovative measures are needed in order to engage citizens in local development and local democracy.

There are rather obvious reasons in Sweden for the need to work more actively to engage citizens in the democratic process – decreasing election turnout, radically decreasing party membership numbers, fewer active politicians, an ageing cadre of politicians, and low confidence in politicians expressed in polls. Among the reasons mentioned by municipalities and county councils for initiating democracy projects and other activities in order to strengthen participation by citizens are:

- To strengthen local democracy – have people more actively involved in the local political process
- To increase the effectiveness of local government
- To strengthen transparency in local government
- To identify and use knowledge of citizens as a resource for local government in shaping the future
- To better understand citizens' priorities
- To inform citizens about the purpose and services of the municipality and county councils in order to strengthen legitimacy
- To strengthen willingness to contribute to local development and increase participation in local elections.

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) uses a 'participation staircase' to describe the different levels of citizens' engagement in municipalities and regions. The five stages are

- *Information* – To be able to participate one needs information, and the first step is to provide accessible quality information to citizens.
- *Consultation* – This is when citizens are consulted about what alternative they prefer in a matter. Alternatives have already been prepared by the administration and approved by politicians.
- *Dialogue* – Here citizens are given an opportunity to meet (in person or via internet) with other citizens and decision-makers to discuss a situation in a service

area and give suggestions for improvement. The aim is that everyone who wants should have a say, and argue for their cause.

- ▶ *Influence* – This is when citizens are given an opportunity to participate over a longer period of time, and are part of the whole process as discussion partners – from idea to basis for decision.
- ▶ *Decision-making* – In this case, politicians have decided that the results of citizens involvement, e.g. in a referendum or consultation process, should be followed.



PHOTO GU image bank

Any vivid democracy needs arenas where citizens can meet and discuss pertinent issues – among themselves and with decision-makers.

### Open meetings in Botkyrka Municipality



In the Municipality of Botkyrka, outside Stockholm, there have been many innovative attempts to revitalise the work of the municipal council through engaging its citizens. Here, not only council meetings are open to the public, but also some committee meetings. The meetings of the Children and Youth, the Culture and Leisure, the Technical, Education and Employment, and the Healthcare Committees are all open to the public. One week before the meetings, the agenda and documents are available to all at libraries and citizens' centres.

Another approach has been to split council meetings into two parts with a longer interval in between, giving citizens and elected representatives a chance to meet. Other activities are often organised, e.g. an exhibition or presentation on a municipal company. In Botkyrka, the municipal council meetings are also broadcast on local television, with approximately 5 000 viewers each time, and debates on current affairs are available on video at libraries and citizens' centres.

## Citizen participation takes many forms

The ways in which citizens in Sweden participate in local democracy between elections differ between individuals, groups and municipalities. Some prefer to become active in an organisation that works to affect decision-makers, others like to demonstrate, submit letters to the editor in local newspaper. The important principle is that there should be opportunities for those who want to participate in the democratic process.

One of the initiatives that comes from the side of municipalities and regions is the introduction of 'citizens' proposals. This is a right for anyone who is registered in a municipality to raise an issue to be discussed at a council meeting. If it wishes, the council can also delegate the responsibility to deal with a citizen's proposal to the relevant committee. In that case, the

committee must report annually to the council on decisions taken, related to the proposal.

In Sweden, 194 out of 290 municipalities and nine out of 21 regions have introduced citizen's proposals. On average, municipalities receive 26 proposals annually, and regions, 17. The majority of all proposals are about streets, parks and technical matters. At county level the majority of proposals are naturally about healthcare. On average, 30 % of proposals result in favourable decisions.

Another method introduced by many municipalities is the 'youth council'. This is a local advisory council which provides an opportunity for young people to influence the work of local government, discuss important matters, and function as a referral partner for the council when deciding on issues relating to the young. It is also common that the youth councils organise activities, e.g. a youth cafe, disco, or campaign against drugs. In 2008 there were

133 known youth councils on Sweden. Most of the youth active in councils are between 13 and 18 years of age. Around 60 % are girls. The composition of youth councils differs between municipalities. In some, all young persons are welcome to participate, while in others members are elected from schools.

## IT in the service of democracy

Much development in the Swedish public sector is driven by the rapid development in technology. There are today possibilities, for authorities as well as citizens, to gain information much more easily and quickly than before. This development has also enabled increased public sector openness and dialogue with citizens. This in turn helps to improve accessibility and responsiveness to citizens real needs.

Sweden has good conditions for developing and using IT-applications for democratic

### In Vara, youth participation is prioritised

Vara is a medium-size municipality located in the South-west of Sweden. It has 16 000 inhabitants, half of them living in rural areas.

The municipality has a lower proportion of inhabitants of foreign background than the national average – 5,7 % compared to 12,9 %. Still, it became a concern of the decision-makers that two xenophobic political parties were gaining ground rapidly among young people in Vara. This led the municipality to introduce several different measures that would strengthen local democracy, and create arenas where people could meet and discuss matters of concern.

One particular target group of these initiatives was young people. Not only was it important to discuss issues of democracy with this group, but it was also seen as crucial to make this group feel

involved, as they were often inclined to move. From 2006 a youth council was established with 221 high school students of Vara. Through a web-based discussion forum the participants were, in groups of 2–5, able to give their suggestions on how to develop leisure and sport activities within the municipality. Since then, the youth council is consulted on a regular basis by the municipality.



purposes. In an international survey (The Global Information Technology Report 2016) Sweden is in third place among 139 countries when it comes to using internet. 87,5 % of Swedes use internet on a regular basis. The survey also shows that the mobile phone is the most common communication tool. On average there are 120 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. Facebook, one of the fastest growing and most established social media, had approximately 300 million users by November 2009, and 5,5 million of them were Swedes (out of a population of ten million).

For politicians, political parties, and other opinion-builders, blogs and Twitter are becoming increasingly important media for reaching people, and for political discussion.

## IT and service delivery in Sweden

From the perspective of individual citizens it is often not important who is delivering a service – e.g. which department, if it is central or local authority, private or public sector, but what is important is accessibility and the quality of it. IT is today a common tool to make services more easily accessible to citizens, as well as making their management more efficient.

In the case of Sweden, surveys have shown that telephone and internet are the channels which authorities prefer citizens to use when contacting them regarding a service matter. But for many citizens the personal meeting with an official is still very important. Nowadays, many service matters can be handled by people themselves on the internet or through button or voice directed automatic telephone services. Citizens take care of more and more service management themselves from their home or their workplace, no matter where the public authority is located or what the opening hours are. For many people this is very convenient, while others express frustration and want to meet, or talk to, a person.

In terms of using technology in the man-

agement of public services, Swedish local and central government are continuously developing new applications. Among them are:

- ▶ *Web pages* – where application forms can be down-loaded
- ▶ *Self managed service pages* – where citizens log in to their personal page and manage their own applications for benefits, tax returns, etc.
- ▶ *One telephone number* for the administration, where officials in a call centre answer questions and handle simple matters, or forward people to the right department
- ▶ *Automatic telephone services* – where citizens can use buttons or voice to get information or make applications
- ▶ *Personal meetings online* – where web-cameras are used to meet and discuss officials via the internet from home or work
- ▶ *Virtual meeting places* – ‘stations’ with web cameras, computers, earphones, microphone, printer/scanner etc. where citizens can contact relevant authorities. These can be placed where citizens naturally pass, e.g. in the library, community centre, shopping mall, or in the Citizen Service Centre if there is one
- ▶ *Service points* – similar to the above, but more like a decentralised Citizen Service Centre with information about local administration and services, and where a generalist service guide helps citizens to get the right information or reach the right person/department via telephone or web
- ▶ *Mobile service points* which move around and visit citizens in their location, on a periodic basis. Officials in mobile service points can bring with them equipment for searching for information, reaching authorities via web/telephone, printing the right application forms, collecting applications and so on. In Sweden, there is a discussion about the possibility of rural postmen and women providing the above mobile services.



## Using IT to involve citizens in local democracy

IT solutions are also used frequently to engage citizens more actively in the affairs of local government. Some examples of this have already been described in previous pages. Looking at the five stages of SALAR's 'participation staircase', the following are examples of how IT is used in Sweden to strengthen local democracy:

*Information* – the most important information channel of municipalities is the official webpage. It is a channel which is entirely under the control of the local administration, and facts and information can be formulated and designed as they want it. But it also put demands on the organisation for continuous updating, making information easily found and understood, and also accessible to disabled persons. Examples of innovative web-page practices are

- ▶ In Örebro Municipality important information is available also in sign-language for the hearing impaired.
- ▶ In Norrtälje Municipality there is a tool on the official website called 'talking web'. According to the request of the user, it reads information from the website as well as from pdf files. It is also possible to save spoken information in an Mp3 file.
- ▶ In Kalix Municipality council meetings are broadcasted directly via the web. It is also possible to follow the meetings afterwards on the official webpage.

*Consultation* – Consultation is about getting quick feedback on a particular issue. IT applications used in consultation offer people the opportunity to answer in a place and time that suits them. A citizens' panel can answer questionnaires and discuss via internet. It is also possible to use SMS to get feedback on suggestions.

*Dialogue* – One common way to engage citizens in dialogue – apart from meeting people in person in town meetings, focus groups, etc. – is through internet discussion forums. These can be entirely open, with everyone invited to

### Quick feedback for decision-makers in Kinda through the citizens' panel



Kinda is a small municipality with 9 800 inhabitants in the South-east of Sweden. As in many municipalities, decision-makers in Kinda saw that their citizens had a lot of opinions and a lot of experience to share, but also that it was very difficult to attract them to come to a meeting.

As part of a project involving approximately 30 municipalities under the umbrella of SALAR, Kinda started a citizens' panel in 2008. At the start, 35 people were part of the panel, but a year later they were 116. The panel gets inquiries and questions sent from the municipality via SMS and e-mail. The matters that are consulted with the panel differs a lot, from opening hours at the recycling station to willingness to pay more tax in order to increase staff numbers in elderly care. Around ten matters are put to the citizens' panel each year. Answers are summarized and sent to relevant committees and administrative departments, and then back to the panel.

*'I want to give my opinion. But I am not interested in spending several hours a week or getting involved in a political party', says Lina Jensen about why she is a member of the panel. The municipal manager of Kinda, Mr Anders Lind reflects: 'To my mind it is becoming increasingly important for the municipality to use new social media, of which the citizens' panel is one example. Everything from Facebook, blogs, and Twitter to e-petitions and the like will increase political discussion'.*



### Malmö is first to introduce e-petitions in Sweden

Malmö is Sweden's third largest city, and is situated in the South of Sweden. In July 2008, the municipality started using e-petitions in a project called the 'Malmö Initiative'. In the first year, over 200 petitions were submitted and discussed in the forum placed on the official webpage [www.malmo.se](http://www.malmo.se). Most of the proposals were about environment, traffic, and city planning, and few are about education and elderly care. Local media has shown interest in the method and newspapers every now and then publishes the five most popular petitions, as well as 'the five petitions that no one has signed'.

write and react to on suggestions, or they can be reserved for a limited group, e.g. a citizens' panel. It is important that there is a moderator to guide the discussion.

- ▶ In Västerås Municipality a method called 'the video kiosk' has been used to engage citizens in dialogue about the future of the municipality. The video kiosk is placed in a public space, usually in connection with other popular public events, e.g. a market, a sports competition, or festival. Citizens enter a booth and record their view or suggestions about how they want Västerås to be in 2026.

*Influence* – One way for citizens to influence decisions is to issue an E-petition. This is an idea or suggestion from a citizen to a municipality or county council that is put on the official web-site and other citizens can support the suggestion by signing it. The petition-maker can also attach or link relevant background information. Then it is possible to follow the number of signatures as this increases, showing the amount of support for the proposal. A municipality can choose how to handle petitions, whether it is seen as a forum to express ideas or if it is mandatory to take petitions under political consideration.

*Decision-making* – Deliberate referendums via the internet mean that politicians invite citizens to vote about different alternative solutions and a promise is made that the results will guide the final decision. Often issues that are decided in this way are practical and not larger ideological matters. Furthermore, it is important that all the alternatives that are given have been prepared by the administration and approved by the politicians before going to referendum. In order to ensure a secret ballot and other important principles, a well-developed web-application is needed.



Photo GU image bank

IT solutions are frequently used to improve access to public services.

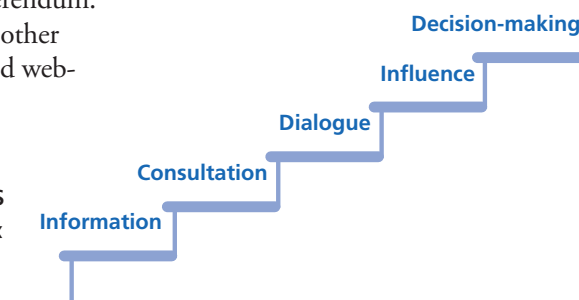
### Sigtuna Municipality invites citizens to have the final say



In the beginning of the 21st Century, politicians of Sigtuna Municipality were worrying about the constantly declining voter turnout in local elections. They decided on a number of different measures to allow citizens to also have a say and influence decisions between elections. One method introduced was that of deliberate referendums. Between 2005 and 2008, Sigtuna organized 14 such referendums. Most of them were about physical planning issues, i.e. how new developments should be designed, and where new roads and parks should be established. Other referendums were held on issues of elderly care in the municipality, on rural development, and general development of the municipality.

Even though the actual voting in deliberate referendums is web-based, the municipality put a lot of effort into arranging meetings to inform citizens about the different issues and introduce the procedures of voting. One very encouraging side effect of this endeavour was a significant increase in voter turnout in the last local elections! The Council of Sigtuna Municipality has decided to continue to use the method on important issues.

### Five stages of SALAR's »participation staircase«



## Liberal adult education

A feature of Swedish development often mentioned as a key to the successful democratisation of the country, is the widespread prevalence of voluntary, or liberal, adult education. For almost a hundred and fifty years, people in Sweden have come together to study on their own terms, to listen to lectures, and to take part in cultural activities. Citizens have on their own initiatives met in groups to learn more together, to strengthen their opportunities for influencing their own situation in life and in that way influence and change social conditions.

This feature of Swedish society developed during the mid-1800s when Europe was going through radical changes and Sweden was transforming from a mainly agricultural society to an industrialised one. Political ideologies became more influential than old religious and aristocratic dogmas, and the tradition of Nordic liberal adult education was born in opposition to classical education, which focused mainly on the education of the elites of society.

The study circle is the most typical form of liberal adult education found in Sweden. A small group of people meet regularly for a period of time, most often a night per week, to study a certain subject or theme or to take part in a cultural activity. An important part of study circle methodology is the exchange of experiences and ideas between the participants and their own analysis of the subject studied.

Today there are ten different study associations in Sweden, which conduct around 350 000 study circles every year, with about three million participants. They also arrange more than 200 000 cultural events with about 15 million participants or visitors. Each study association has its own more or less clear-cut profile, depending upon the popular movements and other organisations which are members of each association.

Furthermore, there are close to 150 'people's' high schools scattered around the country focusing on liberal adult education. Each semester they have around 20 000 participants in their longer courses and about 80 000 participants in their shorter courses.

Much of liberal adult education is supposed to give priority to activities that aim at bridging educational gaps and that are geared towards people who are educationally, socially and culturally disadvantaged. Particularly important target groups are people of foreign descent, school dropouts, physically or mentally challenged participants and the unemployed.

Liberal adult education is largely financed by grants from government, regional governments and local councils. A fundamental reason for Swedish government grants to liberal adult education is that it contributes to democratic development in society.



PHOTO Claes Herrlander, ABF

Courses in ocean navigation are offered by most study associations in Sweden.

▶ NOTES



## 8. Gender Equality Development in Sweden

Sweden has come comparatively far in the area of gender equality and is often cited as an international role model in this regard. In Sweden, there is a fairly even gender balance in most government bodies and the percentage of gainfully employed women is one of the highest in the world. This has contributed a lot to the development of the Swedish economy and society, and the well-developed social welfare system has made it easier for both men and women in Sweden to combine family and work. But even though Sweden can be said to be in the forefront of actively working with gender issues, there are still many areas in society where the situation is far from perfect and more work is needed. Ensuring gender equality requires continuous work in all sectors of Swedish society. This has been acknowledged by the Swedish government, as well as other actors in society.

Margot Wallström is a Swedish politician, member of the Swedish Social Democratic Party. She has served as Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Nordic Cooperation since October 2014.



### Sweden's feminist foreign policy

In 2014, Sweden adopted what it explicitly called 'a feminist foreign policy', putting the promotion of gender equality and women's rights at the centre of its diplomatic agenda. Describing what a feminist foreign policy would look like, Foreign Minister Margot Wallström explained in an interview that it meant »standing against the systematic and global subordination of women.«

Sweden remains the only country to proclaim and detail a feminist foreign policy – but the country is no longer alone in its approach. Others have also taken steps to integrate a focus on gender equality and women's rights into their international work, and several countries – including Australia, Finland, the United Kingdom, and the United States – have created ambassador-level envoy positions for global women's issues to elevate the role of gender equality in foreign policy.

The feminist foreign-policy have not been immune to critique. In 2017, a report from Swedish civil society organisations highlighted areas where the government contradicted its feminist foreign-policy goals, including its arms exports to authoritarian regimes with records of human rights abuses and the temporary suspension of the right to family reunification for refugees. Others point to the fact that the potential positive outcomes for wider adoption of feminist foreign-policy strategies are significant. One practical example is when Sweden was a member in the U.N. Security Council and insisted on women's participation in critical Security Council debates. Eventually gender parity among those providing input was ensured. In 2018, the Swedish government issued a handbook on feminist foreign policy.



*Gender mainstreaming improves the organisation's activities and frees resources. People get more for their tax money when you adopt a gender perspective. Which director general can afford to pass up such a chance?*

*Ulf Westerberg  
Director General of the National Board  
of Forensic Medicine*

#### ► Selected milestone years in Swedish gender development

- 1250 A law prohibiting rape and abduction of women is passed by King Birger Jarl
- 1921 Women have the right to vote and run for office in elections
- 1922 Kerstin Hesselgren, Sweden's first female member of the Riksdag starts work
- 1965 As the first country in the world, Sweden passes a law that prohibits rape within marriage
- 1975 A new abortion law is passed which give women the right to decide themselves about abortion until 18 weeks of pregnancy
- 1979 Female succession to the throne is introduced
- 1980 The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman is established
- 1995 A paternal month is introduced in the parental insurance system, which means that 30 days of parental leave has to be taken by the father (or left all together).
- 1998 The Riksdag passes the Act on Violence against Women
- 1999 The Riksdag passes the Act Prohibiting the Purchase of Sexual Services
- 2006 The Social Democrats, Sweden's biggest political party, elects their first female party leader, Mona Sahlin
- 2014 In his Declaration of Government, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (S) proclaims his government to be a 'feminist government'

#### ► Gender mainstreamed budget of Västra Götaland Regional Authority

In Västra Götaland Region, as in several other local authorities, politicians have decided to put extra focus on the situation of women and men. Ahead of each decision, the question is to be asked: 'How will this affect women and men respectively?' Furthermore, politicians should ask themselves a number of questions, such as: 'Are women and men being treated equally at care centres?' 'Are we aware of how women's and men's symptoms differ and how medicines are prescribed to them?' 'Why do women use public transport to a greater extent, and why do men borrow fewer books at the library?'

To begin with, the regional authority decided to introduce gender mainstreaming into the internal decision-making process when preparing the budget. Prior to each course of action, the operation concerned is required to consider a gender equality perspective. The budget instructions also call for an analysis of more traditional gender equality issues such as the gender pay gap and the prospects for acquiring additional job skills. Statistics are an important part of this effort, and care purchasers are urged to demand facts and figures that make clear how care is distributed between women and men today. How are women and men treated, for instance, in relation to mental ill-health, cardiac care and rehabilitation?

Gender indicators for health and medical care are included in the annual reports from 2006 and onwards. Scorecards specify what is to be measured in the quest for care on equal terms. What resources are being invested in gender-specific operations such as for enlargement of the prostate gland for men and incontinence for women? The authorities have decided that in searching for better and safer care, it is important to acquire an understanding of how the care and treatment of the sexes differ so that a gender equality perspective may be incorporated already when care programmes are developed and planned.

### ► Gender challenges differ between countries

When discussing gender, it is always important to notice that there are significant differences between sectors in different countries. For example, Sweden has one of the highest percentage of women in parliament (46 %) but less than 10 % women in senior academic positions; while for example in Egypt, women constitute less than 2 % of parliamentarians but over 40 % of senior academics.

## Swedish Government work on gender equality

There are many reasons why the Swedish Government sees gender as an important issue, and is working to mainstream it into all policy areas. But, just as working to strengthen democracy is a long-term effort, working to improve gender equality requires patience, commitment, and knowledge.

Gender equality was put high on the international agenda after the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. In the declaration adopted in Beijing, gender mainstreaming is emphasised and since then Sweden has, together with many other governments and international organisations, adopted a strategy to mainstream gender in all public affairs. An important position taken by the Swedish Government is that gender equality is not an issue for only one ministry.



PHOTO Janne Eriksson

The proportion of women is usually higher in low-paid sectors of the economy.

The policy is that a gender equality perspective should run through all areas of government policy. A policy for equality between women and men cannot be formulated independently of other policy areas. It affects all parts of society and, therefore, each minister in the Swedish Government is responsible for analysing, following up, and evaluating the work for equality within his or her area. The Minister for Integration & Gender Equality holds the overall responsibility for the Government's gender equality policy. There is also a State Secretary, plus Political Advisors, and a special division for these issues – The Gender Equality Unit.

## Government policy and action plans

A gender equality policy defined by the previous government in 2006 has two principal aims: to combat and transform systems that preserve the gender-based distribution of power and resources in society, and to ensure that women and men enjoy the same power and opportunities to shape their own lives. It is believed that when they share power and influence in all aspects of community life, the result is a more fair and democratic society. The policy has its focus set out on four sub goals

- Equal distribution of power and influence. Women and men shall have the same rights and opportunities to be active citizens and to shape the conditions for decision-making.
- Economic equality between the sexes. Women and men shall have the same opportunities and conditions with regard to education and paid work that provide them with the means to achieve lifelong economic independence.
- Equal distribution of unpaid care and household work. Women and men shall take the same responsibility for household work and have the same opportunities to give and receive care on equal terms.
- Men's violence against women must stop.

Women and men, girls and boys, shall have equal rights and opportunities in terms of physical integrity.

For the period 2007–2010, the Swedish Government did set aside approximately 400 million SEK per year for the cross-cutting policy area of gender equality. A gender equality perspective is to permeate all government policies, and through action in e.g. education policy, employment policy, and social policy, the government aims to create means for achieving a society in which men and women are equal. Among the measures initiated by the government are

- ▶ An action plan for combating men's violence. Altogether, over 900 million SEK was invested in 56 different measures up to the end of 2010.
- ▶ An action plan to combat prostitution and human trafficking. The action plan focuses specifically on the need for protection and support.
- ▶ A gender equality strategy in the labour market. Based on a general, all-round perspective, the strategy seeks to coordinate and develop gender-equality measures targeting working life, business, education policy and social policy.
- ▶ A programme to boost women's entrepreneurship and enhance knowledge and research in this area.
- ▶ A programme to promote gender equality in schools including training for teachers, establishment of gender school committees, and measures to improve health of pupils.
- ▶ A committee to promote gender equality in higher education, with a particular focus on reversing the trend towards fewer male students in higher education.
- ▶ A grant of 125 million SEK to the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions to be used for efforts to develop gender mainstreaming in Swedish municipalities and county councils.
- ▶ Establishment of the programme Jämi – Gender mainstreaming in government – at

the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research at Gothenburg University. The programme should develop and share research, and experiences of gender mainstreaming.

Even though the Swedish Government is working rather actively with improvement in the area of gender mainstreaming, there are those who believe that progress is too slow and not enough is being done. In Sweden there are many active civil society organisations which advocate for gender issues and women's rights. These organisations and activists serve as important knowledge sources and cooperation partners for central and local government. They are also important actors when it comes to monitoring the work of the public sector, as they follow and scrutinise it closely, often pushing for changes and improvements. Similarly, Sweden has many active academics and university departments conducting research on gender policy issues, and among other things providing informed input to discussion and decision-making in Swedish society.



PHOTO Örebro Universitet

According to Sweden's gender equality policy, women and men should have equal conditions and opportunities in respect of jobs and in terms of employment.



### ► Sweden pioneers prohibiting the purchase of sexual services

*'A person who, in other cases than previously stated in this chapter, obtains a casual sexual relation in exchange for payment shall be sentenced for the purchase of a sexual service to a fine or imprisonment for at most six months. That which is stated in the first paragraph also applies if the payment has been promised or made by someone else.'*

*Penal code chapter 6:11*

In 1999, Sweden passed a law on Prohibiting the Purchase of Sexual Services. This meant a rather radical shift of focus from the prostitutes to the purchasers of sex, making it illegal to buy sexual services. The law, which has had great importance for policy changes internationally, came after broad discussions in Swedish society and is seen as an important part of Sweden's goal of achieving equality between men and women. In this view, prostitution is regarded as an aspect of male violence against women and children, it constitutes a significant social problem and is harmful not only to the individual prostitute, but also to society at large. Another argument that has been heard in relation to the new law is that gender equality will remain unattainable as long as men buy, sell and exploit women and children by prostituting them.

## Working with gender in local government

At local level, municipalities and regions have in the past decade intensified their work with gender equality issues. National policies and guiding documents naturally apply to all levels of society, but all local authorities also have their own responsibility to work with gender issues. There is much interesting work being conducted with regards to gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting in municipalities and regions all over the country. But as the far reaching local self-governance gives a very diverse picture of local authorities, it is difficult to give a general picture of gender development in local authorities.

Municipalities are big employers, responsible for the local environment and carrying out many of the tasks that affect everyday life, such as health and social services, transport, schools and child care. This makes municipalities important actors in gender equality work, because they are well positioned to influence the functions that determine the terms of women's and men's everyday lives.

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) has a very important role to play in coordinating local authorities' work with gender mainstreaming and other gender issues. SALAR provides advice and support to its members, as well as constituting an arena for sharing experiences. SALAR has issued many publications with tools and methods for local authorities to use when working with gender. They have also collected and analysed information about different gender initiatives taken in municipalities and regions around Sweden. Their conclusion is that there are a number of factors which have promoted successful and sustainable work for gender equality development in local government in Sweden. Among them are

- Politicians who actively decide that the organisation should work for increased gender equality
- Politicians and officials who see gender work as a long-term commitment
- Management who initiates, formulates, and takes responsibility for short-term and long-term objectives. Small steps are needed, but a long-term vision is also important.
- Senior management, and the highest decision-making body include people with the overall responsibility for gender equality work
- Politicians, management, and staff get continuous training on gender issues and change management
- Management makes sure that successful results from projects are integrated in ordinary operations
- Clear communication from management

on what gender equality measures are to be taken in and outside the organisation

- ▶ Everyone should be included in the work at all levels, not only women
- ▶ Sufficient resources must be allocated to the work.

Since 1 January 1995, there is also an expert on equality issues located in each of the 21 county administrative boards (the regional government authority). This expert supports leaders in implementing national gender equality policies at regional level, and promotes integration of a gender perspective within the various regional policy fields.

## Gender and power in Sweden



*It's not enough to see gender mainstreaming simply as an administrative matter. There must be passion there as well, an inner fire that demands change. When you get involved in the gender equality issue as a man, some people seem to find it a bit suspect. They try to trip you up.*

*Anders Granath,  
Director of the Gotland County  
Administrative Board (2009)*

As mentioned, much remains to be done in the area of gender in Sweden. But why is it important to focus on gender issues? In Sweden, it is often argued that it is important to acknowledge the role of gender in our lives, and discuss its validity and impact, as it affects our societies and organisations in terms of

- ▶ The way we organise work – who does what and why?

- ▶ Who has access to formal and informal decision making power?
- ▶ Who decides what is important at home, at work and in society?
- ▶ What work should be paid and not paid?
- ▶ Who to prioritise in giving children and adults opportunities for education?
- ▶ Who takes care of the children and why?
- ▶ Who has the control over resources and why?
- ▶ Who should be leaders and managers and why?

In short, gender can be said to be a matter of power distribution in society, and about human rights, democracy and economic development. In other words, gender inequalities are unfair, but they are also costly in terms of lower outputs, lower well-being and lower efficiency. Women as well as men contribute to effective development but in different ways and on different levels. Women often have different priorities than men, and tend to invest income in ways that benefit children and the household to a larger extent. The best guarantee for sustainable economic development, in society and in organisations, is when attention



Boys and girls in Sweden are growing up in a society with improving gender equality.

to both women's and men's priorities and needs is integrated into all activities, and the potential of both sexes is utilized. Gender is relevant at all levels and sectors – in public life, in the workplace, in the family – and in order to work towards gender equality this whole complex has to be taken into consideration.

► **Central government managers soon to be treated equally**

During 2010, the Swedish Agency for Government Employers reported that the number of women working as managers in central government had been increasing rapidly. In total there are 4800 women in management position, which constitutes 38 % of all managers in central government. Ten years ago they constituted 21 %. If the increase continues at the same pace, the Swedish central government will have an equal number of female and male managers in seven years time. One factor which will contribute to the increasing proportion of women managers is the fact that a majority of people in management positions retiring over the next seven years will be men.

This trend of closing gaps is also shown in salary levels. In 2004, men working as managers were in general paid 3,6 % more than women. In 2009, that number was 0,2 %!

**Are management positions equally open to men and women?**

One area which is often in focus in Sweden is salaries. As in most countries, men are generally paid better than women for equal work. Wage inequality between men and women in Sweden has not changed much since 1990, even though there is a law on 'equal pay for equal work'. This inequality can mainly be seen in the private sector and as a result of wage increases for high-income earners. The only group who experienced a narrowed wage gap during the period 1992–2001 were women in the municipal sector. In general, women are over-represented in low-wage jobs and under-represented in high-wage jobs. In terms of representation at management level, the proportion of women on executive boards of large companies is very low compared to that of political assemblies. In fact, in 1999 the issue was raised by the then Minister for Gender Equality Affairs, who gave the private sector five years to improve the situation. – 'At least 25 % women on boards or otherwise there would be a law to allocate representation by quotas', she said. This created much controversy and debate, but also led to improvements in terms of women's representation in higher positions. However, the level of board representation has not reached the anticipated level yet. Among managers of private companies, it is now getting close to 25 %, as shown in the table below.

**Women and men working as managers in different sectors (2017)**

Sector	% women	% men
Central government	42,1	57,9
Region	73,3	26,7
Municipality	67,7	32,3
Private sector	29,5	70,5

## ► Few women are leaders in larger companies

Since 2003, the Second Swedish National Pension Fund has conducted an annual study to determine the proportion of women at mid-management level and on the executives and boards of 251 publicly quoted companies. The annual study of 2009 reveals that the proportion of female representatives on company boards has risen to 22,2 %, the highest level attained since the study started. Even so, the proportion of women on corporate executives has fallen to 13,8 % (from 14,3 %). Only 3,6 % of the companies have a woman chairing the board, and only 1,6 % have a woman as CEO!

Companies and industries with a high proportion of female employees have the highest levels of female representation at management level. The service and consumer goods industries enjoy the highest levels of female representation on their boards, while the healthcare and financial sectors boast the highest proportion of female executives. The lowest proportion of women on boards and executives is found in heavy industry.

*'A more equitable balance with respect to gender is decisive in ensuring the effective composition of a board. At the same time, it is important that we, as shareholders, should also pursue the issue of increased diversity in terms of age, background, experience and competence,'* notes Eva Halvarsson, CEO of the Second Swedish National Pension Fund.

## Political representation of men and women

As described in chapter 3, the political representation of men and women in parties and elected assemblies are more equal than in many other spheres of society. One example is that the proportion of men in the Riksdag is around 54 %, making the Swedish parliament one of the most equal in the world. At local and regional level it is a similar situation. Out of the positions of trust available in municipalities, 57 % are held by men and 43 % by

women. In region councils the proportion is 52 % men and 48 % women. Both at local and regional level however, the chairperson is more likely to be a man. 63 % of chairpersons in municipal councils and 62 % in region councils are men.

In terms of party leadership, four out of nine chairpersons of the eight parties represented in the Riksdag are women (the Green Party always has two leaders – one man and one woman).

## Elected to Riksdag by party – sex distribution from September 2018

Party	Women (%)	Men (%)
Green Party	75	25
Left Party	68	32
Moderate Party	54	46
Social Democratic Party	48	52
Liberal Party	40	60
Centre Party	39	61
Sweden Democrats	29	71
Christian Democrats	27	73



The political representation of men and women is rather equal in Sweden.

But as always numbers of representatives is only one important factor when looking at power and influence in political life. Real influence can sometimes be difficult to



measure, but some surveys suggest that men are more active in political decisions than women. During 2009, the Swedish Radio in the town of Jönköping chose to analyse municipal council meetings, looking at the amount of time men and women spoke respectively. The result showed that, even though the proportion of men and women in the council is close to 50/50, only a third of contributions to debates came from a woman. In addition to this, men used more time than women for their contributions.

## Gender budgeting in Sweden

### ► Gender equality is a prerequisite for growth, according to Finance Minister

In 2007, the Swedish Finance Minister Anders Borg held a lecture with the title 'Gender equality – a condition for economic growth' where he went through the differences in salaries and other income between women and men. He also pointed to the extreme differences when it comes to ownership, as well as describing the unequal division of unpaid work (household, caring for children, etc. where women perform the vast majority of duties). His conclusion was that Sweden is not a country where men and women are equal and only by using the full potential of all people, can the Swedish economy be strengthened. According to his calculations, the GDP of Sweden in 2008 would have been 15 % larger (+ 500 billion SEK) if women and men were participating in paid work to an equal extent.

Anders Borg suggested a number of measures to facilitate women doing paid work at the same level as men

- Work should always be encouraged – therefore, lower taxes on work and lower social insurance benefits
- Equality bonus for parents who share parental days equally
- Access to high quality childcare
- Employers need to be active in working for gender equality
- Women should be encouraged to start and own businesses.

He also argued that people on a personal level need to become aware that our 'choices' are not always conscious, but due to socially constructed gender roles.

On one hand, the analysis by Anders Borg was welcomed by (often surprised) gender experts and civil society activists. On the other hand, the Government for which Anders Borg works has been widely criticized by women's groups for systematically turning a blind eye to gender equality in relation to budgeting and other issues. Also the suggested measures to address the problems have sometimes been labeled non-progressive and anti-feminist by opponents.

In Sweden, the government aims to mainstream gender in the budget process and the economic policy. Gender budgeting in this context means that public revenue and spending are analysed from a gender perspective:

- What is the extent of public resources spent on men and women, girls and boys?
- How does public expenditure meet the different needs and priorities of men and women?

It is important that all stages of the budget process are analysed: income (taxes & fees), expenditure (what policy areas?), decision-making process (who is included/excluded in the process), and activities and results (what are the effects of expenditure?).

There are many different methods and models that can be used for gender budgeting. The Swedish Government has published a manual called 'Gender Mainstreaming Manual' SOU 2007:15, which introduces different methods that agencies can use when mainstreaming gender in budgets or other areas of work. It can be downloaded from: [www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/08/19/44/3532cd34.pdf](http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/08/19/44/3532cd34.pdf)

The Ministry of Finance has a central role in coordinating the budget work of the

Government Offices. This gives it a pivotal role in the government's work of gender-mainstreaming the national budget. According to the Ministry of Finance, the Swedish gender budgeting work focuses on three different areas

- ▶ Highlighting the gender equality perspective in the decision-making material that forms the basis of economic policy
- ▶ Highlighting gender equality in the economic management and control of public agencies
- ▶ Highlighting statistics disaggregated by sex as an important tool in the work.

In 2002, the project 'An Equal Share' was launched to work on gender mainstreaming of the central government budget process. The project worked in a number of areas, including method development and identification of training requirements. The project was ended in 2004 and the work of gender mainstreaming the budget process entered a new phase. The Swedish Government decided to adopt an action plan for gender mainstreaming, and consequently gender budgeting became a part of the regular work.

For the budget process of 2008 and 2009, the government had two new guiding documents which stipulate how the Government Offices should work with gender mainstreaming

- ▶ Action plan for gender mainstreaming in Government Offices in 2008 and 2009
- ▶ Revised indicators for gender mainstreaming in Government Offices.

The action plan contains five main working principles

1. All government bills should present consequences of proposals for both sexes
2. In all government bills, all statistics should be presented by sex
3. Steering of gender equality work of agencies should be made clearer
4. Clearer directives on a gender equality perspective in government investigative studies

5. Sweden should always ask for gender consequence analyses in negotiations in the Council of Europe.

## A critical viewpoint of the government



Even though the Swedish government evidently is working actively with integrating

gender mainstreaming in its work, there are organisations and researchers that claim that the government is not fulfilling its own ambitions. Sveriges Kvinnolobby (Sweden's Women's Lobby) is one of the organisations that throws light on weaknesses in official gender policies. Sveriges Kvinnolobby is an umbrella organisation founded in 1997. It has more than 35 member organisations and is religiously and politically independent. The main purpose of the organisation is to work to strengthen the position of women in Swedish society, and to advocate for women's rights, with a focus on decision makers.

In several reports, Sveriges Kvinnolobby has scrutinized government budget bills and compared them to the working principles of the government. Their conclusion is that the Swedish Government is far from fulfilling its own objectives and ambitions. For example, statistics are not disaggregated according to gender.

The report of 2009 is also critical of the government's policy of cutting taxes as this, according to the report writers, not only increases income gaps in Swedish society but also favours men. One third of the tax cuts of 18,4 billion SEK that were presented for 2009, would benefit the richest ten percent of men.

The 2010 report from Sveriges Kvinnolobby also concluded that

- ▶ Only half of appropriation letters to official agencies in 2009 contained provisions regarding gender equality
- ▶ Out of 250 statistical tables and diagrams based on individuals in the budget bill of 2010, only 39% were reported by sex and provided a gender analysis.

This is counter to what the government's own guiding principles say. But it is also said that the situation is improving year by year.

### ► The laundry bag opened the eyes of decision-makers

The tale of the laundry bag has become one of the foremost success stories in the gender equality field in the Stockholm County Council, and has signalled that healthcare in the county must place greater emphasis on gender equality in its work. It has also prompted managers to support the provision of accredited leadership training in gender equality. The laundry bag case has had a dramatic effect both on the way money is used in the healthcare service and how the operation is run.

Birgitta Evengård, a chief physician and clinical researcher, learned about the laundry bag at a meeting of the strategy group in her organisation. A nurse had observed that the laundry bags in the male patients' shower room at the skin clinic were always very heavy and difficult to cope with. The laundry bags in the women's shower room, meanwhile, were always light. The head of department investigated the matter, and the laundry bags were also subjected to scientific examination. It turned out that male patients with psoriasis and eczema were prescribed light therapy at the clinic to a much greater extent than female patients with the same problems.

Men were also given help with rubbing in the skin ointments, after which they used the ward's shower room, as a result of which the laundry bags in the men's room were always well filled. The women, on the other hand, were given a prescription and had to go to the pharmacy, pay for the ointment and rub it in themselves at home. A rough estimate showed that costs would be reduced by 22 per cent if the men were treated in the same way as the women.

## Gender statistics provide for objective decisions

Sweden can be said to be a world leader in gender equality statistics. Gender is an area which often relates to traditions, values, and beliefs. It is therefore believed that having access to sufficient data is one condition of successful gender mainstreaming, i.e. to be able to objectively show and prove what is the reality compared to what some people 'believe' is the reality. Therefore, there is a parliamentary directive in place since 1994 which requires all official statistics based on individuals to be broken down by gender. This means providing both quantitative and qualitative indicators as a basis for decisions and when reporting on performance. Not only need all statistics concerning individuals be collected, analysed, and presented by sex, but they should also clearly reflect gender issues and problems in society.

Already in 1984, the state agency Statistics Sweden started to publish a special booklet named 'Women and Men in Sweden – Facts and Figures'. It is believed that by exposing the situation for men and women, statistics actively contribute to change and the creation of equality in society. The booklet of 2008 presents statistics under twelve different headings: population, health, education, time use, childcare, care of the elderly, gainful employment, salaries, income, violence & crime, influence & power, and girls & boys in Sweden.



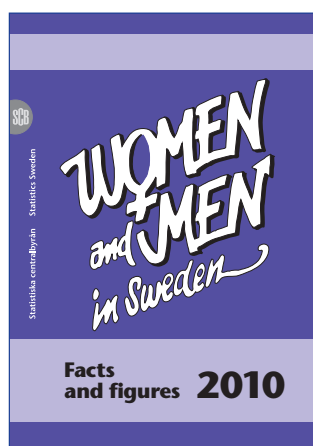
PHOTO Google images

## ► Some changes in Swedish society according to statistics

- The proportion of children aged 1–6 in municipal day care was 12 % in 1972. In 2007, the share was 86 %.
- In 1973, the sex distribution among parliament members was 15 % women and 85 % men. In 2008, the sex distribution was 47 % women and 53 % men.
- 7 % of all employed women and 4 % of all employed men in 1970 worked in occupations with equal sex distribution. The corresponding shares in 2007 were 18 % for women and 16 % for men.
- In 1974, men accounted for 0 % of days with a paid parental allowance. In 2007 it was 21 %.
- The proportion of women pensioners receiving only the minimum national basic pension was 39 % in 1983 and 8 % in 2002. For men the figures were 9 % and 2 %.
- In 1980, 29 % of women and 36 % of men were smoking daily. In 2006, the figures were 17 % of women and 13 % of men.

The official agency Statistics Sweden has also produced a handbook named ‘Statistics by sex’ which should help state agencies in their work with gender statistics. It emphasizes that making men and women visible through statistics mean that all results should be documented, analysed, and reported broken down by sex. It is still quite common that only when a situation differs between men and women, are statistics shown for this. But the guidelines for official agencies urge that also cases when the situation is the same or similar for men and women should be presented by sex.

The usage of gender statistics in official documentation is continuously improving. An internal follow-up of the budget bill in spring 2006 found for example, that the base of statistics disaggregated by sex could be improved. In the bill of that year, only half of the tables and graphs related to individuals were presented by sex. The government then formulated the objective that in future budget bills, all individual-related tables and graphs were to be presented, commented upon and analysed by sex, unless there were special reasons for not doing so.



Statistics Sweden annually issues summarised statistics in a booklet. As a rule, all statistics that are produced should be presented and analysed by gender.

### Sex distribution within the 30 largest occupations in 2008

Of all those employed aged 20–64, 58 percent of the women and 35 percent of the men work in the 30 largest occupations.

Only four occupations have an equal sex distribution, i.e. 40–60 percent of each sex. These are: *Administrators, public sector* with 60 percent women and 40 percent men, *Chefs and cooks* with 57 percent women and 43 percent men, *Doctors* with 47 women and 53 percent men as well as *University/higher education teachers* with 45 percent women and 55 percent men.

The most women-dominated occupation is *Office secretaries* with 97 percent women and 3 percent men. The most men-dominated occupation is *Carpenters, joiners etc.* with 1 percent women and 99 percent men.

### Occupational sex segregation 2008

Percentage distribution and numbers in 1 000s

Occupations with		Women	Men
90–100 % women	0–10 % men	23	2
60–90 % women	10–40 % men	48	14
40–60 % women	40–60 % men	14	12
10–40 % women	60–90 % men	15	48
0–10 % women	90–100 % men	1	24
Total	percent	100	100
	number	1 880	1 937

Source: Occupational Register, Statistics Sweden

Calculations are based on all employees aged 20–64 years. The occupations follow the classifications used in the Swedish Standard Classification of Occupations (SSYK). There are a total of 355 occupations.

Statistics Sweden

Women and men in Sweden 57



To achieve this, the ministries had to examine why all individual-related tables and graphs in the budget bill were not disaggregated by sex. To support this work, the Government Offices provided training on gender statistics for officials working on the budget bill. Since then, most (but not all) statistics presented in the budget bill is presented and analysed by sex.

One important basis with which to illuminate differences between women's and men's economic conditions is the distribution of unpaid work. Statistics Sweden has therefore been given the task of carrying out time-use studies every ten years. The first time-use study was carried out in 1990–1991, the second one in 2000–2001, and the third one 2010–2011.

## Gender based violence



*The prevalence of gender-based violence shatters many people's image of Sweden as being the most gender equal country in the world.*

*Amnesty report, 2004*

Another area often discussed in relation to gender equality in Sweden is domestic violence. Traditionally, violence within the family was considered to be a private matter, but in the mid-1960s this started to change in Sweden, and domestic violence started to be seen as a crime. Every year, around 25 000 cases of physical abuse of women are reported in Sweden (the unreported numbers are thought to be much higher), and between 15 and 25 women are killed by their partner or ex-partner.

In 2001, Uppsala University and the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority published a report which startled both the public and Swedish policy makers. It was based on very comprehensive research and showed that

- ▶ 46 % of women in Sweden have been subjected to violence by men after their fifteenth birthday
- ▶ 22 % of women in Sweden between 18 and 24 years of age have been subjected to male violence in the last year
- ▶ 56 % of all women in Sweden have been sexually harassed.

The findings of the report showed serious problems with domestic violence in Sweden which were not previously known or acknowledged, and has led to discussion on how to better prevent it, and on how to assist existing victims. In 2004, Amnesty published another report on men's violence against women in Sweden, saying that the country didn't work adequately to curb violence against women, and failed to help women cope with their complicated situations. The report criticised Sweden for inconsistent prosecutions, old-fashioned judges and unresponsive government.

The different reports on spiraling gender-based violence in Sweden has been followed by many calls for action, not in terms of legislation (Sweden has passed a series of tough, progressive laws in the last decade) but in terms of changing attitudes. Advocates mean insist that strongly worded legislation clearly is not in itself a sufficient instrument to ensure women's right to lives without violence.



PHOTO GU images bank

A study done in 2001 showed that a fifth of young women in Sweden have experienced violence from men in the last year.



### ► Terrafem provides important support to abused and vulnerable women

Terrafem is a non-profit organisation that works for the right of women of all ages to live in a society without the violence and abuse of men. The organisation has five regional organisations, Terrafem Stockholm, Terrafem Malmö, Terrafem Göteborg, Terrafem Uppsala, and Terrafem Eskilstuna. Terrafem was founded in March 2000 by women who earlier on had worked with a shelter for immigrant women, the first of its kind in Sweden.

Terrafem targets immigrant women, not because they are necessarily more exposed to abuse and violence than ethnic Swedes, but because their interests are not sufficiently considered and protected by other organisations and government authorities.

Terrafem runs a national helpline which offers support in 43 languages. The organisation also gives legal advice, provides shelter for women and girls. A call to the helpline is free of charge, and will not be listed on a person's phone bill.

According to its constitution, Terrafem should: Offer a national helpline service as well as the possibility of obtaining shelter to women subjected to sexualised violence should

- Offer internal training to women who work as helpline volunteers as well as offer external training and lectures upon request to external contacts.
- Work towards creating public opinion from a perspective of both gender and ethnicity.

Terrafem is financed from membership fees, private donations and central and local government grants.

According to the Social Service Act, municipalities are charged with the responsibility to provide crime victim support, focusing especially on women and children as victims in close relationships. In reality however, municipi-

palities are often criticised for not providing enough support, and much of this responsibility falls on civil society actors. Only about 150 of Sweden's 290 municipalities run women's shelters. Instead, there are many, but often not enough, women's support groups working in communities that provide women in need of protection with shelter. Their activities include help-lines, woman to woman support, legal support in cooperation with lawyers, shelters, campaigns, lobbying, networks with female researchers and politicians, publishing books and magazines, and arranging conferences.

## The parental insurance system in Sweden

Since the mid-1970s, Sweden has a system in place which gives parents the opportunity to stay at home with children, with certain financial benefit from the state. This means that if you have children and want leave from your gainful employment in order to look after them, you can get a parental benefit. The benefit is paid out for a total of 480 days per child until they are 7 years old. For 390 days, payment is 80 % of benefits-based income, and for the remaining 90 days the level is lower.

The days of parental benefit are allocated to both parents, who decide how to allocate them between themselves. One parent may give up the right to parental benefit to the other parent, apart from 90 days that are fixed to the father and mother respectively (or the other partner if in a same-sex relationship). These periods are commonly called 'fathers' months', even though mothers receive the same amount of time. If you are a lone parent you are entitled to all these days yourself and you are also free to share parental benefit with a relative. In addition to the 480 days, fathers of a newborn baby get ten extra days of paid leave. A Swedish employer can never question a parent's right share this parental leave, and an employee has the legal right to return to the same, or an equivalent job afterwards.

It has been argued that the parental

insurance system is an important measure to strengthen gender equality in Sweden. Giving fathers as well as mothers the incentive to take an active part in caring for small children provides for a more equal division of labour among parents, and improves access to both parents for children. Furthermore, when fathers take a more active role in parenting, this gives more room for women to engage in productive labour, and not lose out on influence, career opportunities, salary increases, etc.

Still, most parental benefit days are used by mothers. But the trend is changing.

- ▶ In 1975, 100 % of parent days were used by mothers, 0 % by fathers
- ▶ In 1980, 95 % of parent days were used by mothers, 5 % by fathers
- ▶ In 1995 (when the first father month was introduced, 90 % of parent days were used by mothers, 10 % by fathers

- ▶ In 2007 79 % of parent days were used by mothers and 21 % by fathers.
- ▶ In 2017, 72,5 % of parent days were used by mothers and 27,5 % by fathers.

In Sweden, 70 % of all fathers take some period of parental leave, while the average in the European Union is around 30 %. Proactive Swedish policies in the area of parenting and gender equality are often stated as the reason for this. Couples where both parents have a higher education divides parental leave most equally, while in families with lower and with the highest income the outtake of paid parental leave remains unequal.



In Sweden, 70 % of all fathers take parental leave.

## The 3R (or 4R) – a method frequently used by authorities to gender-analyse operations

In the late 1990s, an instrument was developed by Mrs Gertrud Åström within a project at the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, called JämKom. The tool, 3R, has since then been used by many of Sweden's municipalities in order to analyse and review municipal activities from a gender perspective. It provides a general picture of how the operation is run and financed at the present time and of what changes are required to meet the differing needs of women and men. The survey seeks to answer the question: Who gets what, and on what terms? The analysis answers the question: How can we improve matters? The idea is that the gender patterns that are detected will form the basis for a discussion with those running the operation. How can we formulate a vision and new objectives for our work when we look at the operation from a gender equality perspective? What must change if we are to achieve the objectives?

The three R's in the instrument are

### **1R – Representation:**

#### ***How many men and how many women?***

This question should be asked throughout the organisation, at executive level, among staff, and among users of goods and services. Count the heads! The question should answer how gender is distributed among those who take the decisions, those who work with them, and those who are exposed to them. Regarding the latter, an example could be how many men/boys and women/girls respectively use the municipal services of libraries and gyms?

### **2R – Resources:**

#### ***How are the organisation's resources – money, space and time – distributed between men and women?***

This question should answer what women and men get out of the operations and how much of the resources they have to put in. In regards to municipal services, for example, how much of the resources – money/space/time – are spent on

activities used by women and men? The results of the resources review should be related to the representation review.

### **3R – Realia:**

#### ***How come representation and resource distribution are divided between the sexes the way they are?***

This question needs to be discussed thoroughly and often with the use of an external facilitator. This review should give an indication of how women and men are viewed in the organisation, and the normative ways in which men and women are valued. For example, how come more resources are put into recreational activities used by boys than those used by girls? What is the reason?

*Realia* answers the question: What are the reasons for the gender distribution of representation and resource allocation? On what terms are women and men able to influence the design and use of the activity concerned? Representation and resources are about quantity. Who has access to what? *Realia* are the qualitative substance of an activity. The idea is that patterns will become clear through a survey of the first two Rs – patterns that will then lead on to questions about why things are the way they are.

### **4R – Realisation:**

#### ***How do we proceed from here?***

The Swedish Gender Mainstreaming Support Committee (JämStöd) is a central government initiative started in 2005 with a mission to promote and develop about and develop methods and models for gender mainstreaming in practice. While the SALAR, 3R model contains steps 1R–3R, JämStöd added a further step – *Realisation* – that involves drawing up and realising new objectives and measures.

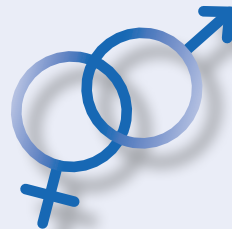
4R answers the question: What shape should the operation take if it is to achieve gender equality? After performing the analysis of 1R–3R it is time to decide whether the operation must



change to live up to the gender equality policy objectives. Perhaps current operational objec-

tives need to be reviewed and new measures need to be introduced.

One concrete example where the 3R-method led to changes in procedures is found in Lundby neighborhood council in Gothenburg Municipality. During a training seminar on the 3-R Method, politicians asked themselves how much of the local civil society funding support actually went to men and women respectively. All organisations who had received support in the last year were asked to fill in a questionnaire and give information about the proportion of men and women among members, leaders, staff, board, and participants in activities. The result showed that organisations dominated by men were given more generous funding support than those dominated by women. After realizing this, new application procedures were developed where all organisations now need to provide gender based statistics on different groups in the organisation's membership, management, and participation in activities.



▶ NOTES

# 9. Financing the Public Sector



*At the time of writing, the exchange rate of the Swedish crown against the US Dollar was 9 SEK = 1 USD*

**T**he public sector in Sweden is mainly financed by the citizens themselves through taxes and fees paid by households and the corporate sector. Most public sector income is presented in the central government budget. In 2018, the total expenditure of the public sector amounted to 2 264 billion SEK. This corresponds to just over SEK 226 500 per inhabitant.

In the beginning of the 1990s there was a severe economic recession in Sweden which produced a very large budget deficit as tax income fell and expenditure rose. To reduce this deficit, the current government cut spending and increased the taxes. But since then, government income and expenditure have been more in balance, which has enabled a continued high level of government spending as well as decreasing taxes.

Sweden has a large and therefore expensive public sector. However, it is extremely difficult

to make accurate comparisons of the size of the public sector between countries. This is because the sector is structured in different ways in different countries. For example, there are differences in how taxation and other systems operate. In Sweden there are many transfers that are subject to tax. In other countries, these transfers may be exempt from tax. For example, if a person pays tax on health benefits, then both public sector income and expenditure become greater than if the health benefit is exempt from tax.

## Taxes in Sweden

Sweden is internationally known to be a country with very high taxes. Many people would say too high, while others argue that the high tax level is needed to sustain the welfare system and provide all citizens with equal services. In general, the will to pay taxes is rather high among a majority of Swedes, and the Swedish Tax Agency has over the years developed an advanced and efficient tax collection system. Wealth is unevenly distributed in Sweden, with the wealthiest 1 % of the population possessing 25 % of the total net wealth. It has been the ambition of most Swedish governments to come up with different measures to have the richer segments of the population paying a

higher percentage of taxes than the poorer.

In 2018, the total tax revenue in Sweden was 2 113 billion SEK, of which 60 % came from tax on labour, i.e. direct income taxes and social security contributions. Most of the income tax is collected at the local level, but if an individual earns over a certain amount annually there is also a state income tax. The two main parts of the social security contribution are: a percentage (approx. 32 %) paid by employers as a payroll tax for all staff, and a general pension contribution paid by tax payers at 7 %.

10 % of total tax revenue in Sweden comes from capital tax such as company income tax, real estate tax, and other wealth taxes, and 30 % comes from taxes on consumption. Two thirds of the latter comes from Value Added Tax (VAT) and one third from excise duties. The current VAT rate in Sweden is 25 %, but a reduced rate at 12 % applies to food, hotel accommodation and camping. Newspapers, books, magazines, cultural and sports events, and passenger transports all have a VAT at 6 %. Excise duties have a long history in Sweden and have always been an important revenue source for the government. Today the most important excise duties are: energy and environmental taxes, taxes on road vehicles, taxes on alcohol and tobacco, lottery and gambling taxes, a tax on advertising, and fees for TV networks.



### ▶ Regulated sales of alcohol

The retail sales of alcoholic beverages are carefully regulated in Sweden. Spirits, wine and stronger beer may only be sold at special State-owned shops named Systembolaget. In smaller towns there is usually one such shop while in larger cities there are many. Systembolaget is open between 10.00 to 19.00 on weekdays and 10.00 to 15.00 on Saturdays, and you have to be over 20 years old to buy alcohol (in restaurants the minimum age is 18). Due to high excise duties on alcohol, spirits, and to a lesser extent wines, are expensive in Sweden. But the sales also provide a good income source for the government. The following is an example of the breakdown of the price of a bottle of Vodka and a bottle of wine respectively:

	Vodka 40 %, 70 cl		Wine 12 %, 75 cl	
	SEK	%	SEK	%
Retail price	229,00	100 %	70,00	100 %
Pre-tax price	42,81	18 %	39,44	56 %
Alcohol tax	140,39	62 %	16,56	24 %
VAT	45,80	20 %	14,00	20 %

Even though tax collection in Sweden is advanced and efficient, there is a gap between the amount of tax that theoretically should be paid according to the law and the amount that is actually paid. Measuring the actual gap is rather difficult, but it is estimated that undeclared income from work, 'black income', amount to about 115–120 billion SEK annually, or about 10 % of total income from work. The definition of black income is

- ▶ Payment for work carried out, that should be subjected to tax in Sweden, but has not been declared to the Swedish Tax Agency.



The construction, taxi, and restaurant sectors are among those often mentioned as most 'vulnerable' to tax evasion. Moving financial assets abroad and VAT-fraud are other reasons for the gap. Opinion polls show that 60% of the general public in Sweden consider tax evasion in society a big problem, while 10% don't see it as a problem. However, the trend over time is that people in Sweden are becoming more and more tolerant of tax evasion and hiring or conducting black work.

## The central government budget

The work to establish the central government budget begins more than a year in advance. In December, the Ministry of Finance presents the Government with forecasts of how Sweden's economy will develop. In January, it continues to review and update the forecasts of revenue and expenditure in the central government budget, government borrowing requirements, etc. At the same time, the other ministries scrutinize and revise the forecasts for their own expenditure areas and appropriations. The various appropriations (a total of over 500), are divided among 27 expenditure areas, and each specifies a sum that, subject to parliamentary approval, is to be used for a certain purpose.

At the end of February, the government agencies submit their annual reports and their budget documents for the three-year period, and this material is studied by the appropriate ministries. The main aims of economic policy over the next few years are set out in the Spring Fiscal Policy Bill, which is brought before the Riksdag in April. Generally speaking, this bill also contains a supplementary budget with proposed changes in appropriations for the current year.

During the spring and summer, the various ministries divide the funds into individual appropriations. The Government finally submits its Budget Bill to the Riksdag in mid-September. The Budget Bill contains proposals on expenditure ceilings, surplus targets for the

next three-year period and frameworks for the 27 expenditure areas, as well as proposals on how government funds should be distributed per appropriation during the coming year. It also reports the outcome of government activities in the various policy areas during the previous year. While the Riksdag discusses the Budget Bill, the ministries begin work on developing appropriation directions for the agencies under their jurisdiction. The Riksdag decides on the economic framework for each appropriation in mid-December, whereupon the Government has until the end of the year to issue its directions.

For the 2019 budget, total expected government revenue was 1 097 billion SEK and total expenditure was 1 026 billion SEK, giving a central government budget surplus of 71 billion SEK.



PHOTO Sandvik image bank

Energy is one of the smallest items in the Swedish central government budget.

In 2019, the 27 expenditure areas were allocated the following funds in the central government budget (SEK)

1	Governance	14,9
2	Economic and financial administration	17,3
3	Taxes, customs and enforcement	11,4
4	Justice	46,3
5	International cooperation	2,4
6	Defence and contingency measures	56,2
7	International development cooperation	44,9
8	Migration	13,6
9	Healthcare, medical care and social services	78,1
10	Financial security for the sick and disabled	97,7
11	Financial security for the elderly	34,5
12	Financial security for families and children	97,3
13	Gender equality and introduction of newly arrived immigrants	18,5
14	Labour market and working life	76,8
15	Financial support for students	25,0
16	Education and academic research	81,3
17	Culture, media, religious communities and leisure	16,0
18	Planning, housing provision, construction and consumer policy	7,0
19	Regional growth	3,5
20	General environmental protection and nature conservation	11,8
21	Energy	3,6
22	Transport and communications	59,5
23	Land- and water-based industries, rural areas and food	19,8
24	Industry and trade	7,3
25	General grants to local government	115,9
26	Interest on the central government debt, etc.	25,2
27	Contribution to the European Union	40,9

**Total expenditure**

**1 026 billion SEK**

### ► Sweden's contribution to the European Union budget

Since 1995, Sweden has been a member of the European Union, which now comprises 28 European countries. In terms of finances, Sweden is a net contributor to the EU, the largest being Great Britain and Germany. The explanation as to why Sweden pays more than it receives is based on the fact that the funds a country receives back from the EU budget consist mainly of agricultural and regional support. In Sweden, agriculture represents just 2 % of the economy. Differences between richer and poorer regions are also less in Sweden than in other countries in the EU. In 2018 the contribution to the EU budget was around 39 billion SEK, while the return in the form of grants was only 12,5 billion SEK.

## Financing local government



*Municipalities and regions shall administer their funds in such a way that requirements of a good return and adequate security can be catered for.*

*Local Government Act, chapter 8:2*

As mentioned before, a particularly large amount of responsibility for national welfare has been placed on local authorities. In any country, local autonomy is hampered if there are insufficient resources to reach the creative potential in local self-governance. In Sweden, as in many other countries, there are growing conflicts between the goals set by the State and the resources allocated to the local level to fulfil this vision.

### Local government revenues

The aim for all municipalities is to be self-financing. The principal sources of income for Swedish local authorities are the taxes that the inhabitants pay, the size of which is decided by politicians at the local level. Direct local income tax is the main source of revenue for municipalities. Tax revenues finance approximately 67% of the operational costs of municipalities, and 70% of the regions' costs. The highest combined regional and municipal tax in Sweden is just above 35% of income and the lowest is around 29,2%. The State wants to control the overall tax burden in Sweden, and there have been occasions when it has interfered with and frozen local tax levels, and also used the state grant system to keep local taxes down.

There are great differences between rich and less rich municipalities in terms of the tax base. In Danderyd Municipality outside Stockholm, the tax base per inhabitant is about 378 000 SEK, while the tax base per inhabitant in smaller municipalities in Northern or mid-Western Sweden is mostly around 165 000 SEK. This of course has an effect on the quality and quantity

of services provided in the municipalities. A relatively large portion of local revenue also comes from fees and charges for different services provided.



»Take from the rich and give to the poor«

The Swedish government has a policy that the same quality of services should be delivered throughout the country. To

ensure this, systems have been set up to redistribute resources within the nation. Since 1996, there has been an equalisation system that obliges richer municipalities to pay, and for poorer ones to receive, compensation. At both municipal and regional level, every entity either pays a fee or receives a grant through the equalisation system. The system aims to create equal preconditions for all the regions and municipalities of Sweden.

The equalisation system is under review as it is deemed highly complex with too many indicators. Currently its main parts are 'income equalisation' and a 'cost equalisation'. The income equalisation means that local authorities with higher than average per capita (taxable) incomes pay a calculated fee and those below receive a grant. This system aims to reduce the effects of wealth discrepancies. The system is quite controversial and has been much debated within the municipal collective.

There are 15 municipalities paying charges of which a majority are in the Stockholm area or in the region of Skåne. The only region paying charges is the region of Stockholm. Even though a grant may be small and insignificant compared to the equalization system as a whole, certain small municipalities receive a high amount per inhabitant.

The purpose of cost equalisation is to redistribute resources from municipalities and regions that have

- ▶ Less need for services to those who have larger needs
- ▶ Beneficial service production conditions to

those with more challenging production conditions, e.g. vast distances, high unemployment, etc.

The system targets structural differences – such as age distribution of inhabitants, existence of rural areas, factors of unit scale (e.g. small or big schools), socio-economic profile of inhabitants, and other. The system doesn't compensate for a high level of ambition in service quality or ineffective management of services. The system is exclusively financed through redistribution between municipalities.

In addition, there is also a structural grant system which is financed by the State. This is used to strengthen local governments which have a very small population and job market challenges. In 2015, around 2,3 billion SEK was paid in structural grants.

## Local level expenditure

The expenditure of local governments accounts for more than one fifth of Sweden's GDP. The largest operational cost for all municipalities is education, followed by elderly care and pre-school activities. The largest type of cost is personnel, which accounts for 56 % of expenditure. For regions, the primary expense is healthcare, accounting for over 90 % of the budget. Among the other expenditure areas of county councils and regions are traffic and infrastructure, regional development, culture, and certain kinds of education.

The budgetary period for local as well as central authorities is one year and (since 1997) runs concurrently with the calendar year. But since the adoption of the Local Government Act, the overall budget planning cycle is three years, giving an opportunity for authorities to be more flexible in their spending. The three-year period is 'rolling', and the budget year is always the first in the period. Municipalities are also required to complement their budget plans with annual operational plans. The long-term planning cycle puts big demands on authorities to be visionary and also to be

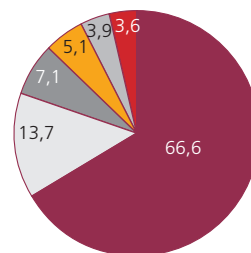
prepared for different future scenarios. Before the council approves the budgets (both annual and long-term), these must be available for scrutiny by the public and the media.

## The revenues and expenditures of Swedish municipalities (2018)

Sources of revenues and fields of expenditure of course differ between municipalities, but the general picture is as follows.

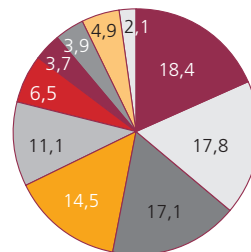
### Breakdown of municipalities revenues

Local taxes	66,6 %
State grants	13,7 %
Service (user) fees	7,1 %
Targeted government grants	5,1 %
Rents, sale of activities	3,9 %
Other revenues (e.g. interest)	3,6 %



### General breakdown of municipal operational costs

Elderly care	18,4 %
Compulsory school	17,8 %
Other activities (including public transport, water/waste, refugees, culture, infrastructure)	17,1 %
Pre-school activities	14,5 %
Care of the disabled	11,1 %
Upper secondary school	6,5 %
Business activities	3,7 %
Other educational activities	3,9 %
Care for individuals and families	4,9 %
Social benefits	2,1 %



Source: Statistics Sweden



# 10. Monitoring Public Affairs in Sweden

There are several control mechanisms built into the Swedish system that should audit and ensure that local and central government politicians and officials are meeting citizens' needs in an efficient and non-corrupt manner. Naturally, among the most important social institutions which represent citizens are, the media, elections and civil society. But there are also other official organisations functioning as monitoring and controlling agencies, as well as important guiding principles that are institutionalised in order to foster transparency and accountability.

## Openness of information

The free exchange of information and the transparency of all spheres of the government are important principles of Swedish democracy at the national as well as local level. To ensure the reliable availability of information and free access to official documents by the public, it has been seen as important to set up efficient and effective systems of information management at government institutions at different levels.

To ensure an open and democratic society with avail-



*To encourage the free exchange of opinion and availability of comprehensive information, every Swedish citizen shall be entitled to have free access to official documents.*

*The Freedom of the Press Act, chapter 2:1*

ability of information to citizens about the work of parliament, central and local government, and agencies, the principle of free access to official documents is written into the *Freedom of the Press Act*, a law with constitutional status. This principle was initiated for the first time in 1766, and gives the whole population of Sweden the right to request access to official documents whenever they so wish. All government organisations must give out any information that is requested. The media and other interested individuals or groups have the right to seek information on issues of interest. All documentation (e-mail, letters, photos, decisions, reports etc.) which is received or sent out by a government organisation is public and should be available for everyone to read. For example, a letter received by the Swedish Minister of Culture from her fellow minister in Nigeria is, according to the law, open for everyone to read.

All documentation received by public authorities is registered and archived. Any individual or media representative who is curious to know what has been received is free to contact any public authority. If you wish to see a public document, you normally do not have to reveal your identity or justify why. There are some exceptions to the rule, but they are very few. A document related to the security of the nation or the integrity of an individual can be exempted from the rule of public access.

Since becoming a member of the European Union in 1995, Sweden has lobbied for the very liberal Swedish system of openness and transparency of government to also apply to EU institutions. So far, European colleagues have not been convinced that this degree of openness is desirable.

## National auditing

Before July 2003, there were two major auditing bodies in Sweden – the Parliamentary Auditors (12 members of the Riksdag) and Riksrevisionssverket (RRV – The National Audit Office). Since then, a new national audit authority has been set up under the direct supervision of the Riksdag, namely the National Audit Office (NAO). This authority is led by three Auditors General who are appointed by the Riksdag. Each of the Auditors General decides of his or her own accord what will be audited, how the audits will be carried out, and what conclusions will be drawn from the audits. The independent status of the Auditors General is laid down in the Swedish Constitution.

One important role that lies with the NAO is to ensure democratic transparency, i.e. provide citizens with the opportunity to see how democratic decisions are made and implemented, how their tax money is used, and whether public administration follows directives, rules and regulations and achieves the objectives set for it. Audit results are used to support decisions, for purposes of accountability and informed public discussion.

The Swedish NAO has three primary tasks:

- ▶ *Financial audit* – The purpose is to examine and assess, in accordance with good auditing practice, whether the annual financial reports of public agencies are reliable, and whether their accounts provide a true and fair view of their operations. Financial audits examine the annual financial reports of, e.g. the Swedish State, the Government Offices (i.e. the Prime Minister's Office, the various ministries and the Office for Administrative Affairs), the public agencies reporting to the Government, the administration of the Swedish Parliament, the Parliamentary Ombudsmen, and the Swedish central bank (Riksbank). The NAO is also entitled to appoint auditors for foundations and state-owned enterprises. Financial audits cover more than 250 agencies.
- ▶ *Performance audit* – This audit should examine the efficiency and the effectiveness of public administration. It focuses on matters relating to the state budget, public administration, performance and results and other public commitments. The purpose of the performance audits is to promote development and enable the State to obtain good value for money. NAO carries out approximately 30 performance audits annually.
- ▶ *International operations* – The Swedish NAO engages in extensive international operations which consist of cooperating with other supreme audit institutions, work relating to the European Union (EU), as well as audits of international organisations and the international development cooperation.

Auditing has become even more important since a new budget process was introduced, where resources are not allocated in such a specific way as before. Thus it has become even more important that the work of government authorities is monitored, followed up, and

evaluated. Above all, scrutiny must focus on how authorities use the funds earmarked for their activities. The idea is to promote sound management of state funds and rational use of state assets.

The auditor's report on the annual report of the Swedish State is submitted to the Swedish Parliament and the government by the Auditor General responsible. Financial audits are submitted bi-annually. The Swedish Parliament, the Government or the organization audited decides itself what action it may need to take in connection with the audits performed by the Swedish NAO.

### ► Corruption in Sweden

In the 2008 corruption perception index of Transparency International, Sweden was listed as the least corrupt country in world together with New Zealand and Denmark. But this doesn't necessarily mean that the country is clinically free from all corrupt activities. Fighting corruption is an ongoing struggle in Sweden, as in any country.

In May 2007, the newspaper International Herald Tribune published an article which describes a slightly different reality than the rosy image of a totally corruption-free Sweden. Among the events described were

- Allegations that the company Saab offered huge, secret commissions to promote the sale of its Gripen fighter jet to the Czech Republic, Austria, and South Africa.
- The Swedish construction company Skanska has become the focal point of a growing scandal in Argentina.
- In 2005, several Swedish companies, among them Volvo, Atlas Copco and Scania, were caught up in investigations in the United States into alleged kickbacks to Saddam Hussein's regime under the United Nations' oil-for-food programme, which allowed Iraq to sell oil to buy civilian goods.

One explanation for these problems is that Sweden has a strong export industry, and many executives apply a different standard abroad than they do at home. *'There has been a belief here that corruption is no problem,'* says Krister van der Kwast, the chief prosecutor and the director of National Unit Against Corruption in Sweden. *'Now that's changing.'*

Corruption is not only restricted to Swedish companies doing business abroad, as a number of domestic scandals have revealed. The most publicized involved the state-owned liquor monopoly Systembolaget, in which store managers received bribes in exchange for having certain products offered in stores across the country. Several people have been convicted.

The anti-bribery convention of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has been part of the Swedish legal code since 1999, but Swedish authorities have been specifically criticized in the area of corporate bribery of foreign officials. The National Unit Against Corruption was created in 2003 and was made permanent in 2006.

*'It has taken 10 years, from the time corruption began to be highlighted internationally, for the issue to gain traction here'*, the Chief Prosecutor van der Kwast has said. *'Now you're beginning to see anti-corruption policies from companies and the government, but it remains to be seen how wholehearted they are.'* According to him the realization that rich countries like Sweden are a part of the problem, and therefore have to be part of the solution, is necessary if corruption is not to become an even more serious problem in an increasingly globalized world.

*'You hear people say that corruption is something they have in Africa, in South America, in Asia, but corruption takes two sides to happen'*, he said. *'The world is shrinking, and our big companies will face this problem more and more. They will have to learn to deal with it.'*

Quotes from  
International Herald Tribune 11th May 2007

## Parliamentary Ombudsman

Another institution that is set up to assist citizens in supervising the work of local and central government administrations is the Parliamentary Ombudsman (JO). This institution was set up in 1809. Supervision is conducted through inspections of authorities and inquiries into matters that have received media coverage. But most importantly, the office of the JO is a body to which individuals can turn with complaints about incorrect or inappropriate decisions by courts and authorities. The JO has the authority to scrutinise the work of central as well as local government organisations and individual officials. Anyone who feels that they have been mistreated by an authority can make a written complaint to the JO. Complaints must be in writing, though not necessarily in Swedish, and no one is allowed to stop you making a complaint. This applies even if you are in prison. If the JO finds that a matter has not been dealt with correctly, it writes to the authority at fault, criticising its handling of the matter.

In more serious cases, the Ombudsmen can request disciplinary measures against the official responsible or bring criminal action for misuse of responsibilities. The most frequent outcome is a critical advisory comment from an Ombudsman or some form of recommendation. Every year the JO receives almost 5 000 letters of complaint – of widely varying kinds. Most of the Ombudsmen's work consists of dealing with citizens' complaints. Each year about 10 % – 15 % of the complaints are found to be accurate and they are acted upon. The Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman is politically neutral.



## Monitoring and control at local level



*In years when assembly elections have been held throughout the country, the newly elected assembly shall elect auditors and auditors' alter nates to inspect activities for the next four years.*

*Local Government Act, chapter 9:1*

Annual auditing of local government work is carried out by elected auditors. Both region and municipal councils select at least three members of the council as auditors to scrutinise that work is conducted according to the decisions of the council in an efficient way. The elected auditors are always assisted by independent professional auditors. It is important that the auditors are neutral and independent.

Thorough auditing is seen as important as it gives legitimacy to, and trust in, the work of local authorities. It is also an important instrument to make the authorities accountable to the citizens' representatives in the council, and to safeguard the interests of citizens. The auditors scrutinise the work of local committees, boards, and municipal corporations, looking at both performance and finances. The auditors investigate if operations are conducted in a satisfactory way from a financial point of view, that accounting is accurate and that internal control procedures are sufficient. It is often stated in Sweden that auditing should not be seen as a controlling event, but as a process where dialogue forms a basis for continuous improvement in the work of local government.

Auditing should not focus on issues of 'right' or 'wrong', but rather look at issues of 'good' or 'bad' performance – guaranteeing optimal implementation of decisions. Annual reports are put forward to the council. As with most other official documents in Sweden,



all materials produced by the local auditors are available to the public, media, and other stakeholders.

## Questioning official decisions



*Any member of a municipality or region is entitled to have the legality of decisions by the municipality or county council tested by appealing against them to the county administrative court.*

*Local Government Act, chapter 10:1*

Yet another system of control over local authorities is in place in Sweden. Citizens can make appeals against local government decisions that they think have affected them in an unfair way. There are two different kinds of complaint that can be made:

- ▶ *Legality complaint* is about whether or not a decision has been taken in a correct way, if the decision indicates that the municipality has overstepped its mandate, or similar, i.e. whether the decision has been taken within the framework of the Local Government Act. Only citizens that are members of a municipality have the right to put a legality complaint to the Swedish Administrative Court of Appeal. The court can only focus on the legality of the decision and approve or rescind it, not change its content.
- ▶ *Administrative complaint* can be made by anyone who has been informed of the decision, i.e. any stakeholder. Complaints are put to the County Administrative Court, not later than three weeks after the stakeholder has been told the decision. The types of municipal decision that can be appealed in this way are building permits, exemption of garbage collection, level of social welfare, etc. The court has the right to make changes in the content of the decision.

## The role of the media in monitoring public affairs



*The purpose of freedom of expression under this Fundamental Law is to secure the free exchange of opinion, free and comprehensive information, and freedom of artistic creation.*

*The Fundamental law on freedom of expression: Portal paragraph*



*Public power shall be exercised with respect for the equal worth of all and the liberty and dignity of the private person.*

*The Instrument of Government: Portal paragraph*

Even though there are many ways for citizens to participate in public affairs, it is still a fact that much of citizen participation and/or monitoring of politicians/officials is done by the media, i.e. news-papers, magazines, Internet, television, radio, etc. Two very important instruments to ensure that media and others work independently from state influence is the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression and the Freedom of the Press Act. The latter was first established in 1766, and protects anyone, including an official or a politician, who wants to report to the media an abuse of power, misuse of public money, or similar issues in the public sector. However, this excludes information that could damage the security of the country. The provider of information has the right to remain anonymous. A journalist is obliged to keep the information source a secret, and the information provider cannot be prosecuted.

### ► Local media fighting corruption

In 1995, when the local authorities in the Municipality of Motala decided to cut down on milk for school children, a concerned economist decided, together with a journalist at the local newspaper Motala Tidning, to scrutinise the expenditure of local politicians. What they found became one of the most well known cases of corruption in Sweden. Top officials had been travelling luxuriously and extensively together with their wives, letting the taxpayers of Motala pay the bills. By cooperating with local businesses, private expenditure was concealed before reaching the auditors of the municipalities. The exposure of the scandal by the local media started an important discussion on the existence of corruption in Sweden. The corrupt local officials were sentenced to prison.

To ensure the availability of free and unbiased information to citizens, the media has an important role in every democracy. Some of the important responsibilities of the Swedish media are

- *To give information* on what is going on in Sweden and elsewhere in the world
- *To comment* on and analyse what is happening in society
- *To scrutinise and control* politicians, officials, organisations and the private sector. This task is much helped by the principle of open access to official documents.
- *To facilitate communication* within and between different groups in society, and thus provide a forum for debate and discussions.

It is important that different kinds of media are utilised in such a way as to result in the widest possible freedom of expression and freedom of information. All types of media are obliged to act and report with accuracy and impartiality and according to the principles set out in the Fundamental Laws, the Swedish equivalent of the constitution.

## Media in Sweden

By international comparison, the Swedes are large-scale consumers of mass media, dedicating about six hours a day to press, radio and TV. On weekdays, 87 % of the population read a daily newspaper, as a paper copy or online.

Before 1987, Sweden only had public radio and TV. But since then, numerous commercial TV and radio channels are operating alongside with two major and several smaller national TV channels and radio channels, which are publicly financed, free from commercial advertisements, and independent from the state. Public service broadcasting is financed by user fees and state contributions. One of the most important points in the charter between the public service television and the government is 'to scrutinize authorities, organisations and private firms which exert influence over policy affecting the public, and cover the activities of these and other bodies'.

### ► Different categories of Swedish daily newspapers

Swedes are keen newspaper consumers. There are several different categories of newspapers in Sweden with different intended target groups, including

- The morning newspapers of the major cities, sold mainly by subscription. The biggest papers in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö respectively are Dagens Nyheter, Göteborgs-Posten and Sydsvenskan.
- The evening newspapers of the major cities, sold mainly at outlets nationwide. The biggest are Expressen and Aftonbladet.
- The regional press, i.e. high-frequency (6–7 issues a week) and mid-frequency (3–5 issues/week) newspapers outside the major cities.
- Free newspapers distributed in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, and local free papers, normally published weekly.

Printed media is still important in Sweden, even though Internet media, blogs, etc. are

gaining ground. Most Swedes read daily newspapers and or magazines (Swedish and/or foreign), often on line, and the choices available are almost endless. As mentioned before, all types of Swedish media are obliged to act and report with accuracy and impartiality and according to the principles set out in fundamental legislation. It is however important to acknowledge that printed media in Sweden rarely is entirely non-political. Most often the national, as well as local newspapers have a certain political affiliation that is openly declared, and there are also newspapers that are owned by political parties. Page two of newspapers is often ‘opinion based’ and here the political editors comment upon current affairs. But the main thing is that the newspaper itself is prepared by non-political professional journalists striving to report events objectively, fairly, and accurately. It is interesting to note that while a majority of newspaper journalists working in Sweden say that they vote for left wing parties, most national and local newspapers are affiliated with the conservative or liberal party.

## Self-monitoring media

The Swedish printed press has voluntarily created a self-regulating system, through a Code of Ethics, a Press Ombudsman (PO), and a Press Council. This is not unexpected for a country with a long tradition of press freedom; the first Freedom of the Press Act was founded in 1766. The current Act dates from 1949. Anyone who considers that a newspaper article violates good journalistic practice can, within three months, complain to the PO. Internet publications can also be reported if the publishing company is a member of The Swedish Newspaper Publishers Association or The Swedish Magazine Publishers Association. To file a complaint is free of charge. The journalist can’t be the subject of the complaint, and the complaint must be against the publication. The PO receives approximately 400 complaints a year and decides if they are worth

investigation and if the matter can be settled with a correction from the publication. If that doesn’t work, the PO has to decide if the case should be dismissed or brought to the Press Council. In recent years about 30 percent of cases have been reviewed by the Press Council, and approximately 10–15 % of the original cases resulted in critical judgements. The paper is obliged to publish the statement of the Press Council and also has to pay a fee. The Press Council is free to decide what it considers to be good journalistic practice, but the code of ethics is the platform. The Press Council has a chairperson, three deputy chairpersons, and fourteen members, and is independent from the state.



Even though information and news are increasingly found on the internet and through other new technologies, printed newspapers and magazines are still popular media in Sweden.

▶ NOTES



# 11. Delivering Services to Citizens at Local Level

A characteristic feature of the Swedish model is its comprehensive system of publicly funded welfare services, from childcare to care of the elderly. Local authorities are the main providers of these services. Swedish local autonomy is wide-ranging, with almost two thirds of public sector activity managed by municipalities and regions. As mentioned before, there is a functional division of responsibilities for service delivery between municipalities and county councils. Some of these service areas are briefly described in this chapter.



## ► Providing services in a sparsely populated country

To provide equal services to all in Sweden is quite a challenge as the country is very unevenly populated. It is also a sparsely populated country by European standards. 37 % of the population live in the three regions that surround the biggest cities of Sweden, but that only covers 4 % of the territorial area. In the region of Norrbotten, 3 % of the Swedish population is living in an area that represents 24 % of the country. This naturally has implications for the provision of all municipal services, from education to water management. But at the same time there is the official ambition of the Swedish government to make sure that 'Hela Sverige skall leva' = 'The whole of Sweden should live'.

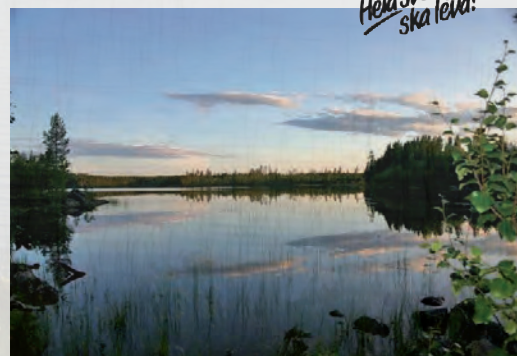


PHOTO Barbro Fransson

## Health services

Public health in Sweden is in general very good, especially by international comparison. The responsibility of health and medical care lies primarily with the regions, constituting around 90 % of their total activities. At about 1 000 local medical centres throughout Sweden, patients are able to receive basic forms of medical treatment, care and rehabilitation. Preventive services in the form of maternity and childcare are also usually provided at these centres. In Sweden there are furthermore some 75 hospitals of varying sizes, most of them run by regions. The regions are also responsible for the planning of dental care in their area, a service that has been subject to increasing fees over the years.

### ► Mental health in focus

In Sweden, most people worry about getting physically ill, but the risk of becoming mentally unhealthy is actually much higher. This fact tends to be overlooked by most people, and there are certain cultural barriers to seeking help for mental problems. A minority of those suffering from mental illnesses seeks help for it. But the reality is that

- Every year 13–15 % of the Swedish population suffers from a psychiatric illness
- Psychiatric illnesses make up 24 % of total illnesses in Sweden, and as much as 50 % of illnesses in the age group 15–44 years
- Suicides and psychiatric illnesses are the fourth most common cause of death in Sweden. For people under the age of 45, suicide is the single most common cause of death.

Even though Sweden shares, with Finland, USA, Russia, Japan and many other countries, rather high suicide rates, mental illnesses are not more common in Sweden than in most countries. But recently there have been much focus put on self-diagnosed mental problems such as anxiety, stress, worries, insomnia, etc.



PHOTO Rober Ekengren/ekengren.se

Swedish national and local governments aim to have holistic perspectives on health and the causes of disease among the population. Much effort is therefore put into preventive health, and the aim is to create a society where people live a healthy working and private life, mentally and physically. There are sometimes accusations that the Swedish state is over-protective of its citizens, as the health and security of Swedish citizens is very good in comparison with most countries. In the spring of 2003, the Swedish Parliament decided on a holistic national strategy for public health. The strategy is founded on one overall aim, which is:



*The creation of social conditions, which ensure good health, on equal terms, for the entire population.*

The strategy has 11 goals that have been identified as important to ensure public health. They are

1. Participation and influence in society
2. Economic and social security
3. Secure and favourable conditions during childhood and adolescence
4. Healthier working life
5. Healthy and safe environments and products
6. Health and medical care that more actively promotes good health
7. Effective protection against communicable diseases
8. Safe sexuality and good reproductive health
9. Increased physical activity
10. Good eating habits and safe food
11. Reduced use of tobacco and alcohol, a society free from illicit drugs and doping, and a reduction in the harmful effects of excessive gambling.

All the above goals are integrated with each other. In relation to the last three goals, it is interesting to see that the eating habits of the Swedish population have recently been developing in a positive direction, in response to international influence, as most people today eat more fruit, vegetables and fibres, and less fat than before. The problem is that people in modern-day society have become less and less physically active, which has well-documented negative consequences for health and well-being. The most obvious effect is increasing numbers of overweight people, which causes much illness. Lately there has been much focus on how to reverse this trend in society. One positive trend is that the number of smokers in Sweden has radically decreased in the last two decades.

## Education and childcare

Most educational services are the responsibility of municipalities, including preschools, activities, nine years of compulsory schooling

for all children, upper secondary schools, adult education, Swedish language courses for immigrants, and education for those with special needs. All education in the public school system is free of charge. Upper secondary school is non-compulsory but most students continue at this level, where all programmes run for three years and there are 17 different programmes to choose from.

### ► The 17 different programmes of Swedish upper secondary school

Arts  
Business and administration  
Child and recreation  
Construction  
Electricity  
Energy  
Food  
Handicraft  
Health care  
Hotel and restaurant  
Industry  
Media  
Natural resource use  
Natural science  
Social science  
Technology  
Vehicle



All programs comprise eight core subjects:  
Swedish, English, Mathematics, Natural science,  
Social studies, Religious studies, Arts & crafts,  
Physical education & health.

Municipalities are required to provide child-care and pre-school activities for all children from the age of one, if their parents are employed or studying. Also, when children have reached school age, municipalities are responsible for offering care at leisure centres until the age of 12. In 2016, 97 % of all children between three and six attended pre-school.

It is becoming more common for agencies other than municipalities to deliver child-care. 25 % of all pre-schools are privately run

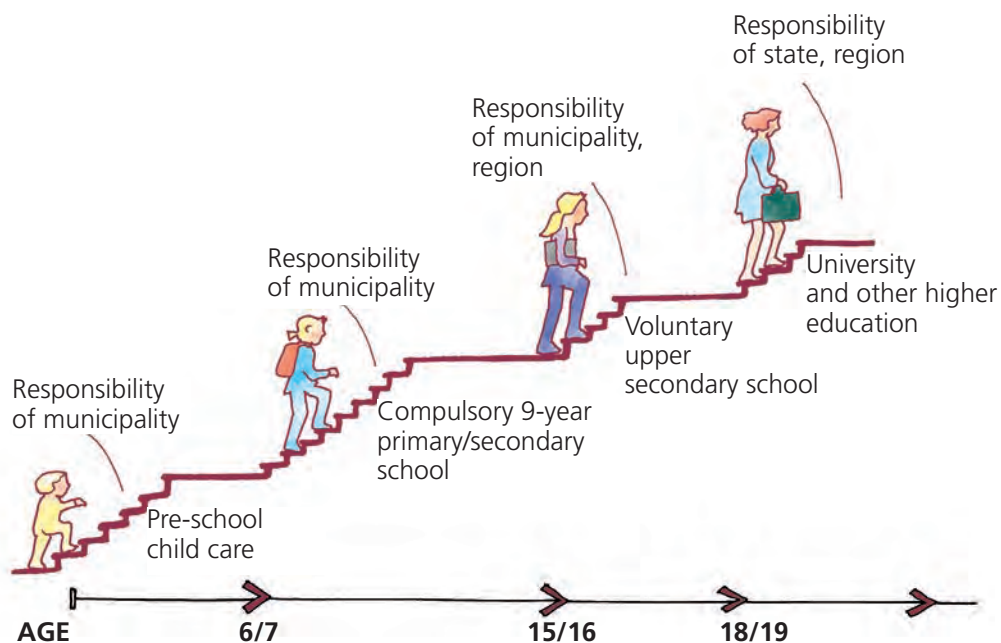


kindergartens or cooperatives that receive a subsidy from the municipality to deliver this service. Child-care is subjected to a fee, related to parents' income, but the fee has a ceiling.



### ► From primary school to university

After pre-school, it is time for Swedish children to start school. By law, Swedish children must attend school for nine years, and they start to attend from the age of six or seven (in practice it becomes ten years for most children). Most children attend municipal schools, which are free of charge, but there are an increasing number of children attending independent schools. Almost everyone, (close to 98 %) continues to study at the three-year upper-secondary schools which offer both practical and more academic programmes. More than a third of students then continue to study at university or other forms of higher education. Around 4 % of the Swedish GNP is invested in advanced research – one of the highest figures in the world. There are 14 state universities, 22 state university colleges, and three independent higher education institutions in Sweden with a total of 320 000 undergraduate students annually, out of which 60 % are women. All university studies are financed by the state and free of charge for students.



### ► Independent schools

In 2018, about 15 % of Swedish pupils in compulsory education (ages 6–15) and 27,5 % in upper-secondary education were enrolled in independent schools. There are currently 822 independent primary/secondary schools and 434 independent upper secondary schools in Sweden. Authorised independent schools are financed by a voucher system, which according to the law provides for equivalent resources compared to the local council-run schools. At the compulsory school level, the voucher value is determined by negotiations between the independent school and the local school board. At the secondary level, the government provides a 'price-list' per pupil for the different national programmes. Independent schools at the compulsory level are not allowed to charge fees for education. At the secondary level, small fees are permitted. Independent schools should conform to a nationally provided syllabus and teach the same democratic values as local council schools. Their performance and quality of education are evaluated against a nationally provided syllabus, by nationally provided tests, and by inspections. The debate on independent schools is vigorous, both at the local and national level. Some criticism is based upon the assumption that independent schools are run with a strong profit motive and it contributes to 'elitism' in society. Others argue that the increasing variety of schools in Sweden gives more freedom to parents and enriches the society.

## Social services

All vulnerable individuals or groups are entitled to municipal social services. These services include social assistance and economic support for everyday costs, treatment programmes for alcoholics and other addicted people, family and youth counselling, etc. In special cases, certain measures can be taken without the individual's consent. This applies to care of children and young people and care of adult drug and alcohol abusers. The percentage of people on social welfare differs a lot between municipalities and areas, depending on size of population and level of economic activity. A municipality with many inhabitants on social

welfare consequently also has a lower tax base. In the municipality of Filipstad, 23,4 % of inhabitants received economic assistance in 2017, while in the municipality of Danderyd outside Stockholm only 5 % received aid.

The social service measure affecting most people is economic assistance. In 2017, almost 408 000 people, both adults and children, received such support at some time during the year. The total cost for this assistance was SEK 10,7 billion. The number of people and the proportion of the population receiving economic support from municipalities have declined somewhat during the past few years. The receipt of support to single parents has declined the most but is still high, at 19 % of beneficiaries. Long-term support is still very high even though this has started to decrease. The aid system has increasingly taken the form of maintenance for unemployed refugees and other people who, born outside Sweden, have lived in the country for a fairly short time. More people on maintenance are unemployed or seeking work.

The aid system has an important impact in reducing poverty. Overall, people on support have income levels that are half those of people not receiving support. With varying success, there is a great focus on active measures to eliminate the need for long-term support, particularly for children.

## Care for the elderly

Sweden has a well-developed system for elderly care and invests 2,8 % of its GDP in this sector. Many immigrants and visitors from abroad would say that the system is too well developed, as it is more common in other countries than in Sweden that old people are taken care of by their families. But this is in part a misunderstanding. In Sweden also, the majority of care for the elderly is provided by families themselves. But municipalities provide extensive services like 'home help', enabling people to live on their own under secure conditions as long as possible. There are senior citizen houses,



and group homes that older people can move to when they so wish. Municipalities are also responsible for providing good health care for the elderly at service centres or at home.

Care of the elderly in Sweden is regulated under the Social Services Act, and all 290 local authorities are responsible for providing these services. The goal of municipal elderly care is to allow the elderly to live normal and independent lives as long as possible. This also means allowing people to live in their own homes as long as this is feasible. As people get older and become less able to move around, municipalities can give support to the elderly in their own homes, such as transportation services, personal safety alarms, meals on wheels, etc.

One aspect often forgotten when discussing the care of the elderly is that of physical planning. By making preventive measures in physical planning, the daily lives of the elderly can be much improved. General adaptations in the neighbourhood and the municipality can make it easier for everyone to lead a normal life. For example, sidewalks and stairs can be adapted for wheelchairs and walkers; commercial and public services can be developed to be close at hand; and cultural events, social centres, parks and leisure areas can be made accessible for all. Elderly and disabled people who cannot use regular public transport are entitled to a transportation service provided by the municipality for a reduced fee.

As mentioned before, Sweden has an ageing population. The reason is a combination of large groups of children born in the 1940s/50s that are now on the brink of retirement, very low birth rates since the 1980s/90s, as well as developments in welfare and scientific progress within medicine and care services, that enable people to live longer. This demographic development influences not only the demand for municipal care and elderly services, but also the financial prerequisites of providing these services, as there will be fewer people paying taxes to support a growing portion of the population. The table below shows how Sweden's ageing population is expected to increase over the next 30 years.



PHOTO Rober Ekengren/ekengren.se

#### Percentage of the population aged 65+ and 80+

Year	% aged 65+	% aged 80+
1980	13,4	3,2
2002	17,2	5,3
2020	21,5	5,5
2035	24,2	8,0

#### ► Churches providing elderly care

Recently there have been many examples of senior citizens' institutions being established by other organisations than municipalities, some of them by religious communities and churches. The organisation 'Tryggheten' (security) in Skellefteå in Northern Sweden has been established for fifteen years. The place is run by a foundation established by the local Swedish Church circuit. It is evident that it is a Christian establishment as there are morning, lunch and dinner prayers, everyday. But, the Church of Sweden is seen by many as a reliable provider of services for elderly care. The demand for alternative approaches to elderly care will continue to increase in Sweden. Reports show that the number of individual places available for the elderly in municipal institutions decreased by 13 500 between 2000 and 2005.

## Cultural Services

The Swedish regions sponsor cultural services such as county theatres, libraries, orchestras and museums. Regional cultural programmes are increasingly conducted in cooperation with the municipalities in the region. Sweden has a national cultural policy to provide for cultural needs throughout the country. Theatre in Sweden has long enjoyed substantial public financial support. Sweden has three national and 35 regional/municipal theatres as well as over a hundred independent theatre groups and production companies, of which about 70 receive project funding from central and/or local government. Many of Sweden's larger cities have municipal theatres that are financed primarily by the municipality where they are located. As they often provide cultural services throughout their county, it is common for the county council to also give a contribution. Some years back, there were larger numbers of independent theatre groups in Sweden, but they have now decreased due to a combination of falling ticket sales and public grants, and lower attendance figures.

Municipalities have the responsibility for more than 1 500 public libraries and nearly 100 museums. Most municipalities also give support to local theatres (as already mentioned) and to music groups.

Dance theatre is a popular and flourishing form of art. In Stockholm, dance has its own theatre, the *House of Dance*.



PHOTO Damsens Hus

### Municipalities support young musicians

A special feature of Sweden, often quoted as one of the reasons for it being the third biggest exporter of music (after the USA and UK), is the Kommunala

Musikskolan – The Municipal Music School. All but seven of Sweden's 290 municipalities give support to a musical or cultural school for young people to learn how to play an instrument or any other cultural expression, such as dance or drama. Over 375 000 students participate each year in the activities of Municipal Music School. The majority of music schools are run by the municipalities themselves, while a few are run by associations. Municipalities finance 80 % of music schools' budgets. Additional funds come from sources such as small fees for performances.



PHOTO Rolf Hallin

## Libraries, a cornerstone of Swedish democracy



*Libraries are man's best invention!*

*Willy Kyrklund, Swedish author*

An important democratic institution in Swedish society is the library. There are many different kinds of libraries, ranging from company libraries and university libraries, to public (or 'people's') libraries. The latter serve all Swedish citizens and are financed by local authorities. There are approximately 1 500 public libraries in Sweden. The public libraries were established in Sweden in the 1830s.

Public libraries have many missions. Their aims are to provide novels and leisure reading for free, to encourage children to read, to sup-

port students and other learners, and importantly also to provide citizens with accurate information about local events and societies, and to provide a meeting place for lectures, cultural events, etc.

When public finances have been in crisis, the libraries have been one of the first institutions to face cutbacks, and many libraries are working under high efficiency measures and decreasing numbers of visitors.

### ► Libraries in Sweden

In Sweden

- There are 290 municipal people's libraries with approximately 1 100 branches nationwide
- There are 90 mobile libraries or 'book-buses', with stops in 112 municipalities
- There are 70 research libraries
- There are close to 4 000 school libraries
- There are close to 100 hospital libraries.



## Services related to the environment

Swedish local authorities have been systematically working with environmental issues for a long time. Almost every municipality is involved in Agenda 21, the programme for sustainable development adopted at the UN conference in Rio in 1992. The work to improve the environment is often done through networks where local authorities are working together with state agencies, universities, NGOs, citizens, the media, and the private sector. Together these partners develop an action plan with common objectives and effective tools to improve the environmental situation at local level. Municipalities are also responsible for areas such as public health programmes.

## Water and sewage

Sweden has the benefit of being rich in water. Lakes account for 9 % of the total area of the country, and there are almost 100 000 lakes. Adding to this are numerous rivers and creeks that can be used to extract water for drinking and other purposes.

The main responsibility for providing citizens with water and sewage services lies with municipalities. The abundance of water means that only 0,5 % of the theoretically available resource is extracted for municipal use. For example, the capital of Stockholm uses only 3 % of the average outflow from the third largest lake in the country for supplying its metropolitan area with water. However, other large users of water in Sweden, such as industry and farming, withdraw about three times as much water as the municipal sector does.

Sweden has slightly over 2 000 publicly owned water works and an equal number of sewage plants. The responsibility for running these plants and providing customers with water and sewage services lies with municipalities, and is normally looked after by local authorities or municipal-owned companies.



In some countries, e.g. France and the United Kingdom, private companies manage the water supplies. Private provision of water services has been tried in a few Swedish municipalities, but today all water and sewage services are provided by the public sector.

► **Where does the drinking water come from?**

About one tenth of the Swedish public water works are based on the withdrawal of surface water. These rather large works serve 51 % of the population. Some 7 % of the water plants withdraw their water from artificial groundwater and these serve 23 % of consumers. The groundwater-based plants (more than 1 700 in number) serve the remaining 26 % of consumers.

The capital of Sweden is a city surrounded by good quality water.



Water and sewage management is financed through locally set fees. Each municipality determines the fees for wastewater services and public water. The fee should cover the investments, capital and running costs. Water services are mostly a self-sustaining operation and, according to Swedish legislation, profits are not allowed. If money is left over in a year from providing water and sewage services, a municipality should in their investment plan illustrate how that money would be used in the same sector in the future.





## Managing waste and refuse

*Wherever there are people, waste will be produced!*

Closely linked to municipal responsibilities for contributing to a sustainable environment are the provision of waste management services and the recycling of different materials. Previously, much waste was collected, only to be put into large landfills and dumps. But since the beginning of the 1990s, there is an increasing awareness that much of that waste could be used to produce energy or nutrient soil, or even be recycled into new products.

### ► What is water used for?

An average person in Sweden consumes approximately 200 litres of water every day. Only a small fraction of this is used for drinking and cooking, and most is used for hygienic purposes. For an average Swede

- 10 litres of water is for drinking and food
- 40 litres of water is for flushing the WC
- 40 litres of water is for dish-washing
- 30 litres of water is for laundry
- 70 litres of water is for personal hygiene
- 10 litres of water is for other uses.



### ► European Union points the way

In 2002, the European Commission published their vision of water management in the European Union by issuing a water directive. Through this they want to show the direction towards ambitious water management in Europe. Important parts of the directive include

- Protection of all water – lakes, rivers, coastal water and ground water
- Setting ambitious targets to secure 'satisfactory status' for all water by the year 2015
- Increased cross-border cooperation between regions, countries and other important stakeholders
- Ensuring participation by all important stakeholders in water management, including non-governmental organisations and local authorities
- Sustainable pricing of water and ensuring the principle of 'polluter pays'
- Sufficient balance between usage and caring for the environment.

## Consuming and recycling

In traditional societies, people didn't really produce much waste except that coming from food products, e.g. bones, fruit and vegetable peels, leaves, etc., all of it organic and some of it even used for other purposes. But as a result of modernization and industrialization, the way people live has changed radically.

There is a political consensus in Sweden that society should transform from a consumption-oriented society towards a recycling-oriented society, a society that is sustainable from both an environmental and energy-use point of view. Today, 15 % of the earth's population consumes 85 % of its resources. This is not sustainable in the long-term and instead of endlessly consuming commodities, we need to develop methods and measures to recycle used material in new products. So the challenge is twofold

1. A need to produce less garbage and waste overall, and
2. A need to learn to recycle better.





Sweden has come quite far in its recycling efforts, but still has a long way to go. Out of the household garbage produced in Sweden, about one third is recycled. Much of the rest is burned and used for energy, and an ever-decreasing amount ends up in a solid waste landfill. From January 2005 it is totally prohibited to put burnable waste in landfills. But this also might create the risk that a higher proportion of rubbish ends up in the natural environment.

Recycling is most of the time not profitable in short-term economic terms, that is. For example, recycled glass costs twice as much as newly produced glass. But glass can be used 30–40 times before it is useless, and recycling demands less energy than new production. In Sweden about 95 % of all glass is recycled. Although Sweden doesn't have the capacity to re-use this amount of glass, it is exported to countries in southern Europe for re-use there.

Household waste in Sweden has actually increased faster than the average population! From 1985 to 1999 the amount of household garbage increased by 2,4 % per year while the population only increased by 0,4 percent per year. Every year the people of Sweden produce over 4,2 million tons of household waste, which amounts to more than 469 kilograms per person. This is far from the desired goal – 300 kilograms – set by the European Union in 1990, but also far from reaching the levels in the USA, where the average person leaves behind 730 kilograms of garbage each year!

From the waste produced by households, about 30 % is recycled in some way. The following list shows the proportion of recycling for the most commonly used recycled products

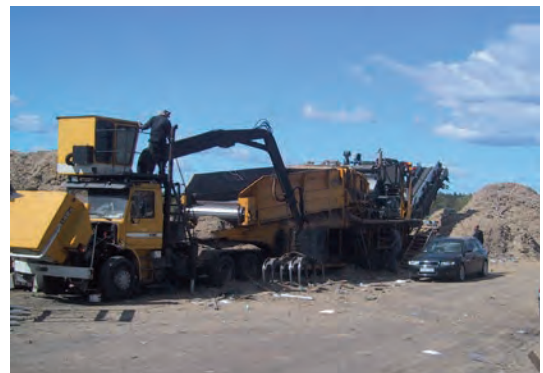
- ▶ 56 % of office paper is recycled
- ▶ 80 % of newspaper is recycled
- ▶ 86 % of cardboard is recycled
- ▶ 66 % of metal containers are recycled
- ▶ 96 % of glass containers are recycled
- ▶ 80 % of electronic waste is recycled
- ▶ 96 % of waste from fridges and freezers is recycled.



Households produce waste, and therefore pay the cost of waste management in municipalities. Most often this is done through a waste collection fee. There are municipalities that have established scaled fees, in order to provide incentives for residents to sort waste more efficiently and minimize the amount of waste produced.



PHOTO Karlstad Energi bildarkiv



Even though recycling in the short term is not profitable there is a consensus in Sweden that as much waste as possible should be reused in different ways.

▶ NOTES

## 12. A Changing Sweden in a Changing World

**L**ike most modern societies, Sweden is going through continuous changes which have an effect on all parts of the society, including the democratic systems of governance and the delivery of services. Thus, what has been known to the world as the ‘Swedish model’ has also gone through some radical changes. Sweden today is a much more international society than it used to be. This means that the Swedish population is changing to become much more diverse, as well as being affected, positively and negatively by the complex forces of globalisation.

### A diversity of Swedes

Sweden is changing in many ways. It is becoming a much more multicultural society from the influence of other countries through international cooperation, travels and media, but even more so from the many immigrants and refugees who have been finding their way to Sweden. Sweden is today a much more heterogeneous country with a multitude of cultures influencing and enriching the society at all levels – from values, opinion and religion, to food, music and language. Close to one fourth of the Swedes have roots in another country (with at least one parent born outside Sweden).

Sweden has been an immigrant destination for a long time. From the second world war to the mid-1970s it was mainly labour-immigration while lately a majority of immigrants are asylum seekers and refugees fleeing war-torn countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia. But there are also large groups of labour-immigrants and family reunions. The number of immigrants per year fluctuates.

In the year of 2000, there were 59 000 and in 2018, there were 118 000. The year of 2016 saw a peak with 163 000 immigrants arriving Sweden during a period when the whole of Europe saw an unprecedented amount of refugees arriving. This led to a change in policy and stricter border control. From being a country known for liberal migration policies, Sweden is today more restrictive than before in receiving people from outside the European Union, and rules have become

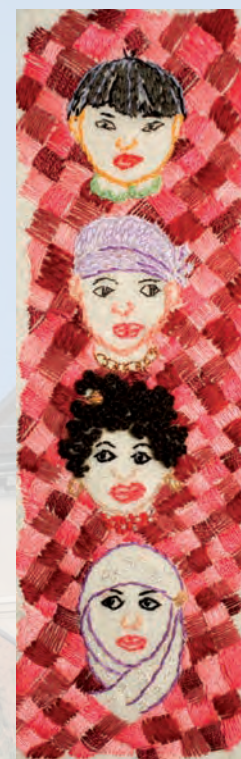
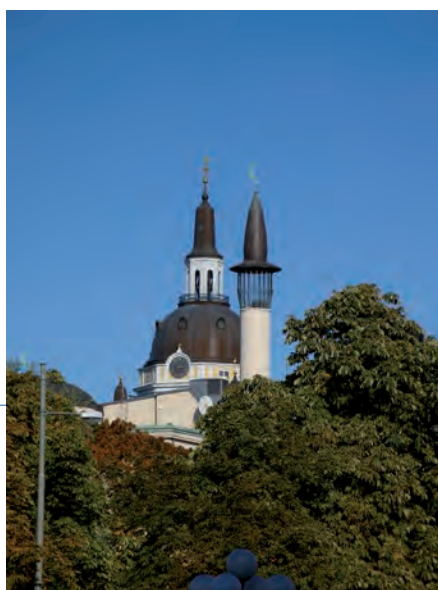


PHOTO ABF



### Islam – a »new« religion in Sweden

One result of the changing demographics in Sweden is that other religions than the traditional Lutheran Christianity gain influence in society. One of the major changes in recent decades is that today there are many hundreds of thousands of Muslims living in Sweden. The exact number is not known, as there is no registration of religion in Sweden, and many are not practising, i.e. secular Muslims. A majority of Muslims come from Turkey but there are also considerable numbers with a background from Albania, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Syria and other countries.

There are several larger Mosques in Sweden as well as many hundreds of neighbourhood mosques all over Sweden. As Islam is as heterogeneous as any religion, practising Muslims are often organised in various congregations within one of several major 'umbrella' associations. Those associations often conduct advocacy and information work as well as provide different services, such as legal assistance, marriage counselling, interpretation of documents, etc.

much stricter for gaining a permit of residence. Recent research shows that a majority of Swedes in general view immigration positively. But at the same time the anti-immigration party Sweden Democrats has gradually been gaining ground and many of the other political parties have also adopted a more immigration-critical rhetoric and policy.

Although the formal responsibility for migration policy is with the state and the National Migration Board, much of the responsibility for the reception of asylum seekers, and immigrants lies with municipalities. The central government subsidises the costs of receiving refugees and their relatives, and for their induction into the community. Municipalities provide services like accommodation, health-care, education, and Swedish language training to the newly arrived. In 2010, the main coordination role for support to newly arrived immigrants was placed with the Swedish Public Employment Service. In practice, municipalities will continue to play an important role in the introduction to Sweden.

In general, unemployment is much higher among immigrants than among ethnic Swedes, 15,4 % compared to 3,8 %. The group 'immigrants' is however highly diverse and it is in particular among newly arrived refugees from Asia and Africa that unemployment is high. In average it took eight years before half of the asylum-seekers who arrived in the 2000s gained employment. Education-level is decisive when it comes to unemployment rates among immigrants, but conscious or structural discrimination and/or racism may also have excluded newly arrived refugees and immigrants from employment. This has unfortunately further increased the segregation of Swedish society, and is considered a key problem that needs to be addressed.

The ageing Swedish population plus large numbers of long-term unemployed immigrants creates a dual challenge for municipalities as it affects the tax base and service expenditure costs at the same time. Some municipalities try to find a solution to these



two 'problems'. By emphasising labour market integration more in the induction for the newly arrived, there is a potential for solving some of the increasing recruitment problems that the municipal sector is facing. Stockholm, for example, has a municipal recruitment programme, which has successfully provided new employees for the elderly care sector.

### Arjeplog takes responsibility for managing immigration issues



In the last couple of years, a certain type of immigration has become the concern of Swedish authorities. The number of children who arrive in Sweden by themselves has increased radically. In 2009 there were 2 250 children under the age of 18 that applied for asylum in Sweden. Most of them came from Afghanistan and Somalia. 22 % were placed with distant relatives, and the remaining children were registered in the Swedish Migration Board reception system, and sent to any of the nine arrival municipalities. The large influx of refugee children caught the authorities by surprise and serious efforts are being made to arrange arrival places that can offer the right conditions and competence. During 2010, the government had formal agreements with 127 municipalities about receiving refugee children who come alone.

Arjeplog Municipality in the very far North of Sweden is one of the country's largest in terms of territory at 12 945 km<sup>2</sup>. But there are only around 3 100 inhabitants, giving a population density of 0,3 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. In 2008, the municipal council took a decision to accept persons with residence permits, as well as refugee children who have arrived alone in Sweden. Some arrive directly from abroad through the channels of UNHCR, and others from migration centres around Sweden.

The Municipality of Arjeplog organises an introductory programme for the newly arrived immigrants including training in Swedish language, guidance to Swedish society, and work internships. Children are immediately enrolled into the

ordinary school system. Usually the introductory period is two years.

The refugee children who arrive alone in Arjeplog are between 13 and 17 years of age. They are placed in groups in municipal housing which is staffed with caretakers, a cook, and a recreation officer. In total, Arjeplog can welcome 20 alone refugee children at a time. Most of the children come from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia. When the children turn 18, they have the right to their own housing and become 'ordinary' citizens of Arjeplog.

*–To me it is obvious why we in Arjeplog shall welcome refugee children who come alone, and other people who have fled war and starvation. Why shouldn't we be able to receive them as well as our neighbouring municipalities? In addition, I actually believe that it will contribute to the growth and diversity we need so much, says Alf Sundström, member of the executive committee of Arjeplog municipality.*





PHOTO Ann-Christine Haupt

### Samis – a national minority

In the very north of Sweden live the Sami people, an original ethnic group that lived in Scandinavia long before state borders were established. There are approximately 80 000 Samis living in four nation-states: Norway, Finland, Russia, and Sweden (where around 20 000 Samis live). The Samis have a language and culture that is distinct from the titular nationalities in the countries in which they live. In 1993 a Sami Parliament was established in Sweden representing the Sami people. It has the status of a state agency under the Ministry of Education. The Sami Parliament is a mix of an elected assembly and state administration body. The Swedish state has proven reluctant to grant the Samis the autonomy they seek and the Sami Parliament therefore has limited powers of self-governance. But still the establishment can be seen as a further acknowledgement of the Samis as their own nationality, and thus also important for their sense of identity.

The elected assembly consists of 31 members with a four-year mandate, representing different Sami-parties and groups. Meetings that last for 5–6 days are held at different places in *Sapmi* (the Sami country) three times a year. There is a secretariat in Kiruna Municipality with 19 employees that prepares meetings and works to implement decisions. The main activities of the Sami Parliament are to safeguard the interests of reindeer herding, to promote the Sami language, to appoint boards for Sami-schools, to distribute compensation for animal losses, and to distribute money from state and EU funds etc.

## Fighting increasing unemployment

From the beginning of 1970s until the beginning of 1990s, Sweden had one of the lowest unemployment rates in the world. The average unemployment in OECD and USA was constantly twice as high as in Sweden. But since the economic crisis in the beginning of the 1990s, the unemployment in Sweden has been closer to that of other countries. From 2007 to 2009, unemployment in Sweden increased from 6,6% to 9,3%, giving a situation where close to one-tenth of the Swedish workforce stands unused. In 2019, the number was back at 6,6% again.

Although Sweden in international comparison still has rather low unemployment rates, the new situation is putting high demands on central and local government to find ways to create employment and support the unemployed. High unemployment is costly for the whole society. For municipalities it means decreasing revenue from taxes as well as higher costs for local financial aid to individuals.

As described in chapter 2 the strive for full employment has always been an important part of the 'Swedish model'. Employment issues are also always high on the political agenda during election campaigns. The government that was elected in 2006 had an outspoken policy of what they call 'jobs instead of allowances', where tax-cuts for those who work and lower benefits for the unemployed and sick were important parts. Not surprisingly this policy was heavily criticised by the political opposition parties and trade unions.

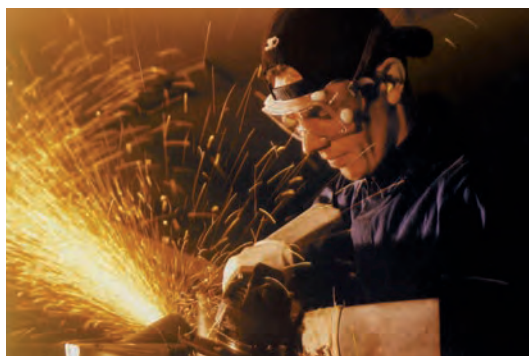


PHOTO Vattenfall

Skills development is one important method to fight youth unemployment.

The long-term goal of the Swedish Government's labour market policy is to achieve full employment. It is believed that an efficient labour market is an important prerequisite for both growth and welfare. The government wants to make it easier for potential employees and employers to find one another in an efficient manner. The overall objective of the Swedish Government's labour market policy is to contribute to an efficient labour market, to increase employment and to reduce social exclusion.

### Division of responsibilities in managing unemployment

The main responsibility for labour market policy lies with the central government. The Riksdag decides on overall policy and goals, and approves budgets. In the government, it is the Ministry of Employment that is responsible. The goal for the government has often been to improve the economic incentives for people to work and for employers to hire. Income taxes have been reduced, as well as the social security contribution of those organisations that hire persons from groups who have difficulties in finding a job, e.g. young people, newly arrived immigrants, and people who have been unemployed for a long time.

Under the Ministry of Employment are a number of state agencies working with employment issues. The most significant is

the Swedish Public Employment Service. It is a national agency with 320 local employment offices around Sweden. The agency has more than 12 000 employees, 63 % women and 37 % men. The Swedish Public Employment Service is financed from the government budget. In 2013, the grant totalled 69,7 billion SEK. The agency mainly works with matching job-seekers with available jobs. There are also a number of labour-market programmes on offer, such as the job development programme and youth job programme, which are for those with the greatest need for support. In addition, measures like job coaching are being used to strengthen the abilities of job-seekers to find a job.

In the first quarter of 2019, around 331 000 persons were registered with the Swedish Public Employment Service. To be registered is one of the conditions for getting unemployment benefits. Other conditions include to be fit enough and to work at least 17 hours a week, be prepared to accept offers of work, and cooperate fully with the employment office. If a job-seeker fails to fulfil these conditions, financial benefits may be withdrawn. Benefits are administered by several unemployment insurance funds, to which members pay a monthly insurance fee. Unemployment benefits are for a limited period – a maximum of 300 working days, or 450 working days for parents with children younger than 18.

Although local government does not have many formal obligations in the policy area of the labour market, in reality most municipalities take on large responsibilities. 85% of municipalities have labour market units. The reason is the high costs that local government pays for unemployment. Most municipalities work actively in cooperation with other municipalities, private businesses and the Swedish Public Employment Service to create employment, or support the unemployed. After all, municipalities have a lot of valuable knowledge about the local labour market. Different municipalities face different challenges and therefore measures differ. Some offer targeted training to immigrants, or adjust



Writing effective work applications is part of the training offered by official employment offices.

vocational education initiatives to local labour market needs. As Sweden's biggest employer, local government also plays an important role in creating opportunities for internships and jobs in municipal organisations.

## Democratic challenges

It takes time to shape democracy. Traditional procedural democracy, e.g. regular elections, political parties and elected assemblies, has been meeting some great challenges in Sweden in recent years, e.g.

- ▶ within the country, with decreasing voting rates and party memberships, and
- ▶ externally, with increasing power and control exercised by political and economic organisations outside the borders of individual countries.

Sweden's room to manoeuvre on national policy issues is becoming more restricted, as globalisation has somewhat erased real and imaginary borders.

The percentage of eligible voters that actually vote in Swedish elections is lower than it used to be, and the trend of voter-resistance is most visible among young people and immigrants, i.e. new generations. Political parties are suffering from a great legitimacy crisis, having lost a quarter of a million members between 1992 and 1997. This is a challenge yet to be solved by the traditional political parties, even though there has been limited new recruitment to youth branches in recent years. Around 5,5% of young people between the age of 16–24 are active in a political party. Total membership of the political parties in the Riksdag was 255 000 in 2017. This is to be compared to 1 582 000 in 1979, and then with fewer parties represented. In addition, it is interesting to emphasise that 33 % of Sweden's population is between the ages of 18 and 35 years, but among the people elected to municipal assemblies only 12 % are under the age of 35. This shows that young people are not sufficiently represented in decision-making bodies.

In addition to the decreasing engagement in political parties, surveys show that the confidence and trust that people have in politicians is gradually decreasing. But at the same time surveys also show that the interest and engagement in political and social issues among Swedes is greater than ever before. More than 40 % of the population state that they often participate in political discussions and then make sure to forward their views on the political matter. In 1980 only 6 % did so. This illustrates an interesting feature of Swedish democracy today. People are increasingly interested in political and social matters, and still very much politically active, but the way people organise themselves has been extended beyond political parties and other traditional institutions.

Sweden has for many years had among the very highest levels of organisational participation (but the lowest levels of religious involvement) in the world. Younger people who are politically active tend nowadays to organise in popular movements or one-issue movements, focusing on international issues, environment, feminism, human rights, anti-racism, cultural issues, or similar issues that a group of people find important and worth fighting for.



There are those who make their voice heard in the public space using unconventional methods such as the art of Graffiti, which most of the time is illegal.



These 'new' values are in the academic world called post-materialistic, which means that they are beyond issues of economic growth and material objectives. People with post-materialistic values tend to argue for democracy by the people as well as democracy for the people. Another interpretation of why citizens tend to move from traditional political organisation towards modern ones is that political parties and elected assemblies have gone through a process of being the voice of the people and listening to the people, and are now concerned only with governing the people, i.e. traditional political affairs have become an issue for the elite of society.

The great democratic challenge for political parties is to catch up with the changing reality and integrate these values and people in their political work.

## Sweden joining the European Union

In 1991, Sweden applied for membership in the European Union and in 1994 a referendum was held on whether Sweden should join or not. The result showed that around 52 % of Swedes voted yes, 47 % voting no, and in 1995, Sweden became a full member of the European Union. At present, the European Union has 28 member states and comprises most of Europe. When Sweden entered as a member, several of the fundamental laws of Sweden had to be changed and certain powers have been given to the EU-level. The EU membership has also contributed a lot to the internationalisation of Swedish society, and at all levels and in all sectors there are larger and smaller exchanges taking place with other member states.

In the European Union, member states try to cooperate and integrate policies on many different issues, including the free movement of good, services and people, the environment, and monetary matters. In other areas, such as

foreign policy, defence, migration, and many national policy areas, there is well developed cooperation but the decision-making power is still placed at the national level. Critics hold that Sweden has given up too much of its independence by joining the Union and that the costs are too high – in 2018 the contribution to the EU budget was around 39 billion SEK, while the return in the form of grants was only 12,5 billion SEK.

## Cooperating across internal and international borders

Since the mid-1990's the idea and practice of partnerships and increasing cooperation at local level has gained ground in Sweden, mostly due to Sweden joining the European Union.

The European Union encourages local partnerships, as a way to improve conditions for regional development, both by political means, but also through its Structural Funds, aimed at levelling out socio-economic differences in European regions. These partnerships usually involve the Swedish government through its regional growth proposition in 1997, which encourages counties/regions to form partnerships between private and public organisations to jointly develop an action programme for regional development. Usually these partnerships involve county boards, county councils, regional employment offices, municipalities, associations of local authorities, universities, private companies, and trade unions, etc. Again, more focus is put than on governance rather than government!

There is also increasing local co-operation across municipal borders in Sweden. Many smaller (and/or poorer) municipalities can earn 'benefits of scale' if they cooperate in setting up a certain service, e.g. a school or a waste collection system. With cooperation costs can be reduced, and quality can be improved by exchanging experiences and alternative solutions for service delivery problems.

However, some have criticised the new regions and different kinds of partnerships.



Often, the newly established regions are so large that they can only be governed in smaller units, and they have had problems finding democratic legitimacy among the population. One issue that has been raised over partnerships is that of accountability. How is it possible for citizens to hold a network of organisations accountable for their expenditure of public money?



### Swedish-Danish cooperation

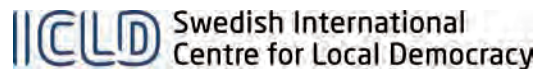
Another outcome from the entrance into the European Union has been the increasing co-operation between municipalities or regions from different countries, both within the EU and outside. One of the more formalised cross-border regional cooperation organisations is the Øresund Committee. It is a forum for local and regional politicians on both sides of the strait that divides the two states, Sweden and Denmark.

The Øresund region is the most densely populated area in Scandinavia, with around 3,5 million inhabitants. Human capital is extremely strong in the area. Within the region, 15 universities are found with a total of 120 000 students and 10 000 researchers. In the summer of 2000 the construction of a bridge that connects the two countries was finalised which has facilitated communication and also stands as a symbol of cooperation.

The goal of the regional organisation is to create a cross-border region where it is easy for people to live, work or study, as well as to create good conditions for business and trade to expand. The Øresund Committee mainly functions as a builder of networks and a political platform to increase cooperation across the borders between organisations, companies and individuals. There is a full-time office in Copenhagen with both Danish and Swedish staff and a council that meets on regular basis.

## Municipal partnerships create global links

Since the 1990s, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has funded partnerships between Swedish municipalities and local authorities in other countries. Today, around a sixth of Sweden's 290 municipalities are engaged in the municipal partnership programme.



As of 2009, the partnerships are administered by the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD). Previously, the responsibility was with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). It is believed by the Swedish Government that Swedish municipalities and regions have an important role to play in contributing know-how and experience to develop welfare and prosperity. But it is also emphasized that the gain should be mutual, and that it is important that partnerships are designed in a way in which Swedish local authorities also clearly benefit from the projects implemented.

International projects, such as the municipal partnerships, should never compete with the ordinary roles and responsibilities of Swedish local authorities. This is why the state is providing funding for the projects, including salaries for local officials who are involved. A municipal partnership project can focus on almost any issue which a Swedish, or a partnering country's, local government works with. It could for example be within the areas of management and administration, urban planning, education, health, social services, sports and recreation, environmental management, waste management, water and sanitation, local economic development, human rights, or European Union integration.

Today (2019) there are 19 countries that are included in the partnership programme. They are:

- ▶ Europe: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.
- ▶ Asia: Indonesia, China and Vietnam.
- ▶ Africa: Botswana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

An example of an ongoing municipal partnership project is the one between Robertsfors Municipality and Machakos County in Kenya. The project has been named »**Actions for Gender Equality**« and is focusing on Robertsfors' and Machakos' implementation function regarding policies and their steering methods to reach set gender equality goals. The partners will together also produce new structures and methods for their future gender equality work, based on their local needs and contexts.

## Privatising the public

As described earlier, it is today more relevant to talk about the Swedish welfare system in terms of 'governance' rather than 'government'. Previously, the State was seen as the one to provide citizens with services and implement important functions in society. Today, other type of actors are increasingly involved in areas that were previously monopolized by the public sector. Globalisation and the economic reality have affected the notion of how to govern a society, and with an increasing influence of neo-liberal ideas, the view of the role of the State has started to change. A new public management paradigm has also increased pressure on the public sector to be efficient and effective in its work, and comparisons are often made with the private sector. This has led to private provision of public services increasing in Sweden in many sectors, e.g. electricity and telephone have been deregulated, and competition has been introduced.

One area where this trend is seen is in housing. Traditionally in Sweden, most municipalities, or large property owners, have owned large numbers of rental flats which people have

rented by paying a monthly fee which has been officially regulated. This was often motivated as a way to provide more 'equal' housing. Along with many other things, many blocks of flats have been 'privatised' and sold to associations of tenants, i.e. private ownership instead. After the government gained power in 2006, the rate of turning rental flats over to tenant ownership radically increased due to more liberal regulation, e.g. in Stockholm alone, 35 000 public rental flats became owned by tenant associations. Those who favour this development argue that it leads to increased freedom, as people are empowered to control their own housing, and benefit from owning an appreciating asset. Those who oppose this development mean that it leads to increased segregation as you have to have economic power to be able to buy a flat, and in the case of Stockholm, most rental flats are found in suburbs while a majority of tenant-owned flats are in the central city.

## Public service delivery by private institutions

As already mentioned in Chapter 2, private alternatives for service delivery are increasingly common at local level, e.g. private schools, hospitals, elder centres, etc. After the 1991 election, when the conservative coalition won, the rate of privatisation increased all over Sweden. Since the 1990s it has become more and more common for municipalities to privatise public property and operations. This is especially the case with municipal-owned industrial estates and apartments, as well as sports and recreation facilities. The privatisation trend continues and the government elected in 2006 initiated the privatisation of five big State-owned companies working in areas such as banking, stock exchange, property management and spirits production.

Private delivery of public services is still a limited feature of Swedish society but gradually increasing, and it is a frequently debated issue. In 2018, 15 % of Swedish pupils

in compulsory education (ages 6–15) and 27,5 % in secondary education were enrolled in privately run schools. 17 % of all children went to independently run pre-school activities, and similar percentages of elderly people lived in private institutions.

Even though the numbers are still limited, it is a fast changing reality. For example, during the 1990s, the portion of privately run healthcare increased from 3 % to 10 % of total spending. The privatisation trend has moved further in technical and supporting activities of municipalities, i.e. where the contact with end-users is limited. For example, most municipalities have given the responsibility of solid-waste management to private or municipality-owned companies. It is interesting to note that a great majority of the Swedish population think that state and local governments are more reliable than private organisations when it comes to providing the services of education, health care, social welfare and elderly care. The exception is child-care, where more people think that private alternatives are as reliable. The support for collective (public) financing of welfare services is solid, but perhaps not always based on critical

evaluation, as there are successful private initiatives as well as failures in public service delivery.

Today, an increasing number of social welfare tasks and care for vulnerable groups in Swedish society is carried out by non-state agencies, such as non-profit organisations, NGOs, foundations, etc. Contributions from voluntary organisations and individuals play a decisive role for important sectors of social services and for people's welfare in general. The actual work is done by both salaried employees and/or by unpaid volunteers. In 1997, an estimated 7 000–10 000 people were employed in non-state organisations conducting social and humanitarian work in Sweden (today the number is probably higher). It is reckoned that about half a million people in Sweden received help and support through volunteer organisations at least some time during that year, and about one Swede in five aged 16–74 is estimated to have contributed with unpaid work in some way to the social sector.

According to the Social Services Act, municipal social welfare committees must, when necessary, cooperate co-operate with other social bodies and with other organisations and associations. The municipality may also contract with other parties to perform social-services tasks, e.g. counselling, support, service, care and nursing. The development of voluntary work, and the fact that the organisations undertake the provision of service and care, may be expected to continue. It might be that Sweden is approaching a more Anglo-Saxon model in which the non-profit sector plays an entirely different role in the welfare system.

There are different views on whether the increasing number of NGOs, non-profit organisations, etc. involved in work with vulnerable people is a good or a bad trend. Some argue that it is beneficial that there are more agencies and a diversity of agencies involved. Others believe that there is a risk that municipalities and the state will rely on these organisations to carry out a type of work that actually should be the responsibility of the public sector.



In the center of Stockholm a majority of flats are nowadays owned by tenants themselves, while in the suburbs, rental flats predominate.



### ► Stadsmissionen assisting the homeless

One example of a non-profit organisation working in the social sector is the Christian organisation Stadsmissionen ('city mission'), which does extensive work to provide food and shelter for homeless and poor people in the major cities of Sweden. The organisation is independent from state or municipal influence (but does receive grants) and it works to complement and challenge the efforts made by society to protect vulnerable groups and individuals. For example, in Stockholm there are an estimated couple of thousand homeless people living in the streets, most of them addicted to drugs and/or alcohol and many with a mental disorder. At present, one quarter of homeless people in Stockholm are women.



## Addressing a possible climate crisis

One change of global scope that Sweden and other countries need to adapt to, and address, is climate change. There is consensus among the world's climate researchers that the global climate system is changing and that human activity is contributing this. The consequences risk being dramatic, with significant negative impact on social development, economy, and eco-systems. Climate change is caused by increased concentration of greenhouse gases, mainly carbon dioxide. This in turn affects the temperature on earth. Since the mid-19th Century, the content of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased by 35 %. Industrialized countries are responsible for over 80 % of global emissions.

The well-known adage, 'Think globally, act locally' is relevant also for Sweden's work with climate change adaptation and mitigation. Global commitment, international policies, and radical structural changes will be needed. Sweden follows closely the work of the UN Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and works actively within the EU.

At national level, the Swedish Government develops a regulatory framework and makes investments, and has set ambitious targets, finances research, allocates resources to programmes and projects, and coordinates development and planning of climate change activities. But also at the local level, among municipalities and individual citizens, concrete changes need to happen to adapt to climate change and mitigate CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

### ► Where is Sweden today?

Sweden's emissions of the most important greenhouse gases decreased by 26 % from 1990 to 2017. During the same period, the economy grew by close to 60 %. In 2016, emissions amounted to 4 500 kg of carbon dioxide equivalents per resident compared with for example 6 800 kg for the EU, or 17 200 kg for Australia. However, studies indicate that emissions from Swedish consumption may be 25 % higher than from production.

With a 54,5 % renewable energy share of the final energy use in 2018, Sweden has the largest share of energy from renewable sources in the EU. Electricity production and usage is among the highest in the world per capita, both in industry and households. This is due to many years of comparatively low electricity prices. About



Hydropower is an important energy resource in Sweden.

PHOTO Vattenfall

80 % of the electricity comes from equal shares of hydroelectric and nuclear power. In terms of wind power, Sweden is far behind countries like Germany and Spain.

Biofuel accounts for approximately 30 % of the supplied energy in Sweden. About one third of it is used for district heating, which meets half of the country's heating requirements for commercial and residential buildings. It is estimated that the public sector should be able to save approximately 15–20 % in energy costs, primarily in buildings, through more energy-efficient heating, ventilation and lighting.

Public transport accounts for approximately 15 % of the distance travelled in Sweden, while cars are used for approximately 65 %. Local and regional efforts can make a major difference here. For example, in the less populated Bergslagen area of central Sweden, regional train travel has nearly tripled since 2001, when the four regions and the area's municipalities assumed broader, coordinated responsibility. Emissions from new cars have dropped rapidly in recent years. But Sweden still has a car fleet with large and energy-consuming vehicles. In 2017, only 2,3 % of cars in Sweden were electric or hybrid. The greenhouse gas emissions coming from Swedes flying increased 47 % between 1990 and 2017.

Public procurement accounts for about 25 % of GDP in Sweden. Two thirds is through the national government and one third through

local and regional authorities. Today, most public sector procurement includes strong environmental requirements. The Swedish Environmental Management Council (MSR) develops and supplies requirements, tools and training on including environmental requirements in public procurement. The MSR is jointly owned by the national government, the Federation of Swedish Enterprise, and SALAR.

## Swedish national policy on climate change

The official aim for Sweden's climate work is that the country should be an environmentally sustainable role model built on renewable resources, where economic growth is achieved in harmony with the natural environment. Sweden's national policy includes instruments that have been introduced since the early 1990s through decisions taken in the areas of energy, transport, environmental and tax policy. More targeted measures and instruments have been introduced in Sweden since 2002, principally in the form of increased CO<sub>2</sub> taxes, climate information initiatives and special climate investment subsidies. The aim is to make the country independent of fossil energy.

In 2017, the Riksdag decided to introduce a climate policy framework for Sweden, with new climate goals set for 2030, 2040 and 2045, a climate act and a climate policy council. The Climate Act confirms that the Government's climate policy should be based on the climate goals and legislates how the efforts are to be conducted. The Climate Act states that the Government must:

- ▶ present a climate report in its Budget Bill each year;
- ▶ draw up a climate policy action plan every fourth year to describe how the climate goals are to be achieved.

The long-term climate goal entails Sweden having no net emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere by 2045 at the latest, and to then achieve negative emissions. Emissions of greenhouse gases from activities in Sweden



Sweden aims to have a vehicle fleet independent of fossil fuels by 2030.

PHOTO Östersund municipality

is to be at least 85 % lower in 2045 than the levels of 1990. The remaining down to zero could be compensated through supplementary measures such as:

- ▶ uptake of carbon dioxide in nature as the result of further measures
- ▶ emission reductions carried outside the Swedish borders, and investing in climate projects globally; and
- ▶ carbon capture and storage based on the combustion of biomass, known as bio-CCS.

The emissions from domestic transport, with the exception of domestic flights, are also to be reduced by at least 70 % cent by 2030 at the latest, compared to 2010. The climate goal for domestic transports reaffirms an earlier policy priority of making the Swedish vehicle fleet independent of fossil fuels by 2030.

#### ▶ Sweden is »consuming« greenhouse gases

Although Sweden produces fairly low carbon dioxide levels compared to the rest of the EU, there is a different picture when looking at consumption. Measured in terms of the population of Sweden, emissions from a consumption perspective are equivalent to just over 10 000 kg CO<sub>2</sub> per capita. Approximately 80 % of emissions are caused by private consumption and 20% by public consumption. Private consumption is divided into the activities of eating, with just over 25 % of emissions, housing with just over 30 %, travel with just under 30 % and shopping with just under 15 %, with purchasing of clothes and shoes being the largest sub-item. The following five activities together account for around half of greenhouse gas emissions from private consumption and are therefore significant if Sweden is to reduce emissions

- How much do we drive and in what sort of car
- How do we heat our homes
- How much electricity is used at homes
- How much meat do we eat and what types
- How far do we fly and how often.

## Local action on climate change

Most local governments in Sweden nowadays work actively with climate change issues. A 2019 survey called the 'Environment Barometer' shows that out of Sweden's 290 municipalities:

- ▶ 54 % have adopted local climate strategies to reach zero net emissions until 2045;
- ▶ 64 % works systematically to reduce emissions from transports;
- ▶ 93 % have climate related conditions for buying or leasing own vehicles;
- ▶ 82 % have food strategies that aims to reduce climate influence in public operations, e.g. in school canteens.

Many municipalities in Sweden participate in national and international networks, and co-operate with other municipalities to strengthen their work with climate change adaptation and mitigation. One example of such a network is Klimatkommunerna (The climate municipalities). It is an association for municipalities and regions that work actively with local climate work. The 37 members' climate work is at the forefront in Sweden and the world, with tough climate and energy goals and ambitious measures.

The overall purpose of Klimatkommunerna is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Sweden through exchange of experience, advocacy work and the dissemination of good examples. Since its inception in 2003, the association has grown to now represent over 4 million inhabitants in Sweden.

## Sustainable urban development in Malmö City

*'Transport and buildings account for the largest climatic impact. This means that we generally must address the climate issue at the local level, that we have to work towards a sustainable city',* says Malmö Mayor Ilmar Reepalu (1985–2013)

Västra Hamnen in Malmö is an entirely new city district, situated by the sea in an area that before was used as a port and industrial site. From the end of the 1990s the area has become residential, with plenty of apartments, shops & restaurants, and recreation areas. Västra Hamnen is fully supplied by locally produced renewable energy. The majority of the heat is collected from the sea and from natural water reservoirs in the bedrock, using heat pumps. The remaining heat is produced by solar collectors. The electricity is primarily generated by a large wind power plant and to a lesser extent by solar cells. Biogas is extracted from waste and waste water, and after purification is returned to the district through the city's natural gas system. The CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the new city district are consequently close to zero.

In the Västra Hamnen area, you can live without having your own car, with effective bus traffic that ties the district to the rest of the city, good bicycle paths and pedestrian walkways. Investments have

also been made in renewable fuels and car pools. Greenery is also an important part of the attraction of Västra Hamnen, with innovative surface water management, green roofs and parks. This contributes to biological diversity, cooling, noise damping, rainwater management, and the attractiveness of the area.

The intent of the local authorities in Malmö is for all of Västra Hamnen to continue to develop as a leading example of sustainable urban development, with alternative energy systems, urban wind power on buildings and reduced car use with car pools. In Västra Hamnen, and other places in Malmö, space in streets has been reserved for the reintroduction of streetcars, as they are a more climate-friendly alternative.

In the 2010 climate index issued by the non-governmental organisation Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Malmö is in third position among 222 municipalities surveyed. The survey covers initiatives in three main areas; mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, transport and spatial planning, and energy efficiency. The City of Malmö has set as its aim to be the best in sustainable development by 2020, ... in the world!







NOTES



