



PHOTO: JOHAN WILLNER / IMAGEBANK-SWEDEN.SE

The Swedish Right to Public Access gives people the freedom to roam the countryside.

SOCIETY:

OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY – VITAL PARTS OF SWEDISH DEMOCRACY

Sweden is a free and open society. Its people have the right to take part in demonstrations, freedom of speech, a free press, the opportunity to move freely in nature and the right to scrutinise those in power. Openness is also about creating an equal society.

The Swedish constitution is governed by four fundamental laws: the Instrument of Government, the Freedom of the Press Act, the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression, and the Act of Succession. These take precedence over all other laws. The constitution states that all citizens have the right to freely seek information, organise demonstrations, form political parties and practice their religion.

Freedom of the press

In 1766, Sweden became the first country in the world to permit freedom of the press. Freedom of the press is based on freedom of expression and speech – a central tenet of most democracies. Those in authority must be held account-

able and all information must be freely available. The identities of sources who provide publishers, editors or news agencies with information are protected, and journalists can never be forced to reveal their sources. The law on freedom of expression was passed in 1991 to expand this protection to non-print media, such as television, film and radio. The law seeks to ensure a free exchange of views, information and artistic creativity.

However, the right to express an opinion also brings with it responsibilities. Freedom of speech, when abused, can be offensive, incite discrimination or violence, or have negative consequences for an individual or society. If a crime against the freedom of press or expression laws is suspected, the case is dealt

with by the Office of the Chancellor of Justice. The Chancellor of Justice is a non-political civil servant appointed by the government.

Public scrutiny

The principle of freedom of information means that the general public and the mass media have access to official records. This affords Swedish citizens clear insight into the activities of government and local authorities. Scrutiny is seen as valuable for a democracy, and transparency reduces the risk of power being abused. Access to official records also means that civil servants and others who work for the government are free to inform the media or outsiders.



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PRESS SUBSIDIES

Sweden has had tax-funded press subsidies since the early 1970s as a way of supporting newspapers that compete with other, higher-circulation publications. This is a way of promoting diversity and ensuring people get more than one side of a story.

PAPERS VERSUS NET

As in many other countries, printed paid-for newspapers in Sweden are losing readers to free dailies and online newspapers. In 2012, there were about 2.8 million paid-for newspapers, and about 1 million free newspapers printed daily in Sweden. On weekdays, 64 per cent of the Swedish population reads a morning paper. Of the 170 morning newspapers sold in Sweden, most can also be read on the internet. Thirty-five per cent of Swedes say they visit a news site daily.



PHOTO: MONYA LOOSE /IMAGEBANK SWEDEN.SE

Eighty per cent of Swedes read news on the internet at least occasionally.

INDEPENDENT

TELEVISION AND RADIO

Through the public broadcasting services Sweden's Television (SVT) and Sweden's Radio (SR), all citizens have access to a diverse range of programs free from advertising. The operations are run independently of the Swedish state and other economic and political interests. There are also several commercial channels and streaming services.



PHOTO: LOLA AKINMADE AKERSTROM

Through its laws and regulations, Sweden strives to ensure that no one is disadvantaged because they belong to a minority.

- However, documents can be kept secret if they involve matters of national security; Sweden's relationship with another country or international organisation; national fiscal, monetary or currency policy; inspection, control and other supervisory operations by public authorities; the prevention or prosecution of crimes; the economic interests of the general public; protection of the personal and financial position of private individuals; and the protection of animal or plant species. As of 1 January 2014, information linked to cooperation in the EU can also be classified.

Everyone is equal

In Sweden, human rights are protected primarily through three of the fundamen-

tal laws: the Instrument of Government, the Freedom of the Press Act and the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression. Public power should be exercised with respect for the equality of everyone and for the freedom and dignity of the individual. Public authorities should especially safeguard the right to work, housing and education, and should promote social welfare, security and a good environment for people to live in. Laws and other regulations may not lead to any citizen being disadvantaged because they belong to a minority, in terms of gender, transgender identity, ethnic origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation or age. ■

CONTINUING THE FIGHT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are being integrated into all areas of Swedish foreign policy: security, development, migration, environmental and trade policy.

The European Convention on Human Rights has been incorporated into Swedish law since 1995. Sweden has also signed and ratified several human rights agreements within the UN, International Labour Organization and the Council of Europe. The government is prioritising eight areas in its work for human rights in Swedish foreign policy:

- Democracy building. Millions of people still live in dictatorships. The government wants to strengthen public opin-

ion in favour of democracy, support the work of NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and establish better ties with democratic states.

- Strengthen freedom of expression. Sweden believes freedom of expression is a moral necessity and a practical tool in the fight for human rights.
- Abolish the death penalty. Sweden and the EU have long sought the abolition of the death penalty on the grounds that it is incompatible with human rights. ►

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ELECTRONIC ACADEMIC PUBLISHING

The OpenAccess programme promotes maximum accessibility and visibility of works produced by researchers, teachers and students by supporting electronic publishing at Swedish institutions of higher education.

www.kb.se/OpenAccess

THE RIGHT TO DEMONSTRATE

The Swedish constitution upholds the right of citizens to express their opinion collectively through public demonstrations. However, this freedom may be restricted by law if, for example, it threatens national security.



PHOTO: TOMAS ÖNEBERG / SVD / TT

People are free to express their opinion in demonstrations.

PRESS FREEDOM

In Reporters Without Borders' annual worldwide press freedom ranking for 2013, Sweden ranked tenth. The list is based on the degree of freedom that journalists and news organisations have in each country, and the efforts made by the authorities to safeguard this freedom.

NATURE FOR EVERYONE

The Swedish Right to Public Access (*Allemansrätten*) gives people the freedom to roam the countryside, as long as they ensure due care for nature and animals and show consideration for land owners and other people. The Swedish National Environmental Protection Agency summarises this right with the phrase: 'No disturbing – no destroying'.

- ▶ • Combat torture. The Swedish government draws attention to such abuse wherever it occurs and supports organisations that help victims of torture.
- Combat summary executions and arbitrary detention. For many years Sweden has supported a UN resolution concerning summary, extrajudicial and arbitrary executions, and will continue to act to bring this issue to international attention.
- Protect the rule of law. Sweden promotes the principles of the rule of law through organisations such as the UN, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and in talks with other countries.
- Protect human rights and international humanitarian law. Sweden works actively so that all states, large and small, will respect international law.
- Fight discrimination. In many countries, large groups of people receive far from equal treatment. The Swedish government wants to direct special attention to the rights of women, children and people with disabilities. ■

OPENNESS ON THE INTERNET

Sweden has the highest level of internet usage within the European Union. Out of a population of 9.6 million, 94 per cent have internet access in their home.



PHOTO: ULF HUETT / IMAGEBANK SWEDENSE

Social media are part of everyday life for many Swedes.

More than 97 per cent of people aged 16-34 use the internet on a regular basis. Fifty-five per cent of Swedes also access the internet using their mobile phone. Sweden has the top ranking in the World Economic Forum's Network Readiness Index, and ranks second after South Korea in the UN ICT development index.

Copyright and innovation

The growth of the internet has brought the world file-sharing, leading to debates about the infringement of copyright on books, music, films and software. The loud conflicts about piracy some years ago seem to have calmed down, partly because of the introduction of

successful products and companies that offer legal alternatives for music and video streaming.

Social media in Sweden

Social media have become an integrated part of many Swedes' everyday lives. Sixty-four per cent of the population use at least one social networking service. Sweden has around 475,000 Twitter users and more than 4.5 million Facebook accounts.

Open aid

In an effort to create further trust for government aid and humanitarian activities, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs together

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OMBUDSMEN

Sweden has had a tradition of ombudsmen since 1809. In fact, the word *ombudsman* comes from Swedish, as a person who acts as a representative. Back when it began, it was decided that an institution independent of the king was needed to ensure that laws and statutes were obeyed. The first Parliamentary Ombudsman was appointed in 1810, and the same basic principles apply today.

THE PARLIAMENTARY OMBUDSMAN

Handles complaints from anyone who feels that they, or somebody else, have been wrongly treated by a public authority or civil servant. There is no requirement for that person to be a Swedish citizen or to be a certain age; even children can lodge a complaint. www.jo.se

THE CHANCELLOR OF JUSTICE

Supervises the government agencies and courts on behalf of the government. www.jk.se

THE EQUALITY OMBUDSMAN

Fights discrimination and promotes equal rights and opportunities for all, mainly by ensuring that the law against discrimination is adhered to. www.do.se

THE PRESS OMBUDSMAN

This non-politically governed entity deals with press ethics. After an investigation, it may hand a case over to the Swedish Press Council for further action. www.po.se

THE CONSUMER OMBUDSMAN

Makes sure companies comply with marketing and product safety laws. It can intervene against misleading advertisements, unreasonable terms and conditions, incorrect pricing information and dangerous products. www.konsumentverket.se

- ▶ with Sida (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) launched www.openaid.se in 2011.

The site collates official government data so it can be accessed and studied easily by individuals, NGOs, aid recipients and officials. The aim is to further

transparency and openness in humanitarian efforts and to inspire other institutions to increase their transparency and openness towards the public. This initiative is part of a larger movement where Swedish government agencies provide more open interfaces to their data. ■



PHOTO: LENA GRANFELT / AGENT MOLLY & CO / IMAGEBANK SWEDEN SE

The Children's Ombudsman protects children's rights and interests. It also makes sure that the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child is followed. www.barnombudsmannen.se

OTHER USEFUL LINKS

- www.datainspektionen.se The Swedish Data Inspection Board
- www.manskligarattigheter.se The government's website on human rights
- www.naturvardsverket.se The Swedish National Environmental Protection Agency
- www.regeringen.se Swedish Government Offices
- www.rsf.org Reporters Without Borders
- www.skolinspektionen.se/beo/ The Child and School Student Representative
- www.sr.se Sweden's Radio
- www.svt.se Sweden's Television
- www.tu.se Swedish Newspaper Publishers' Association

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Further information about Sweden: sweden.se, the Swedish embassy or consulate in your country, or the Swedish Institute, Box 7434, SE-103 91 Stockholm, Sweden. Phone: +46 8 453 78 00; e-mail: si@si.se www.si.se www.swedenbookshop.com www.swedenabroad.com

