



PHOTO: HANDIKAPPFÖRBUENDEN

In Sweden, people with disabilities have the same right to an independent life as everyone else.

## DISABILITY POLICY:

# DIGNITY AND DEMOCRACY IN SWEDEN

About 1.5 million people in Sweden have a disability of some kind. The principal goal of Sweden's disability policy has long been to ensure that people in this group have power and influence over their everyday lives. To achieve this goal, the focus has been shifted from social and welfare issues to democracy and human rights.

In 2011, the Swedish Government launched a new strategy to guide its disability policy for the period leading up to 2016. The aim is to give people with disabilities a greater chance of participating in society on the same terms as others. Ten priority areas have been identified, three of which are given special attention: the justice system, transportation and IT.

### The justice system

All citizens should feel that laws are reasonable and relevant, that the justice system is there for them, and that it is effective and ensures compliance with their legal rights. Accordingly, police authorities must analyse their operations

from a disability perspective. In 2010, the Swedish Prosecution Authority initiated a project to assess how it disseminates information to crime victims with disabilities and how they may absorb such information. In 2012, the Swedish National Courts Administration will develop an action plan for making Swedish courts more accessible.

### Transportation

Having the possibility to travel without hindrance is of vital importance to people with disabilities. All citizens must be able to work, study and take part in community activities on equal terms.

To this end, the Swedish Government

has instructed the country's municipalities to initiate moves to make facilities such as bus and tram stops more accessible, and it is also reviewing The Disability and Public Transportation Act. In addition, it is planning to introduce a new law, establishing the rights of travellers using local and regional public transport.

### IT strategy

The public sector is using the internet as an information channel to an increasing extent. New IT tools may give people with disabilities a greater degree of independence. Special emphasis is therefore being placed on digital inclusion in Sweden's national IT strategy. ■

## PUBLIC SUPPORT

### CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

The Swedish Government and Parliament establish guidelines for disability policies, mainly through legislation. Government agencies have a national responsibility for specific sectors, including education, health care and employment. Their task is to accelerate the pace of development in their particular sectors and ensure compliance with policy.



PHOTO: FREDRIK SWEGERLÖHNER

Discrimination is illegal.

### COUNTY COUNCILS AND MUNICIPALITIES

The county councils are responsible for health and medical care. The 290 municipalities are responsible for education and social services among other things. They also have ultimate responsibility for providing people with basic security in the form of public support and services. These include the provision of personal assistance, representatives for people with mental disabilities, special transport services, and grants for modifying the homes or motor vehicles of people with extensive disabilities, enabling them to lead independent, active lives. The Government grants made available to municipalities for the provision of these services form an important aspect of disability policy.



PHOTO: BILDARKIVETSE

The Education Act states that children in need of special assistance at school should be provided with it.

## THE AIM: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

General inaccessibility means that people with functional disabilities do not have the same opportunities as others to participate in community life. The Swedish Government is working to overcome this problem in various ways.

In Sweden, there is social welfare for all, but there are also special programs designed to address the needs of people with disabilities. One important feature of the Act concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (LSS) gives disabled people the right to personal assistance, in principle free of charge. The amount of help they receive is determined by the extent of their disabilities.

### Modification to housing

People with disabilities can apply for municipal grants so they can have their accommodation modified. This may involve having doorsteps removed, support rails mounted, doorways widened, automatic door openers fitted, or special elevators installed. Such grants cover all types of disabilities, including mobility disability, impaired vision, mental disorders and allergies. The first such grant was made available on a trial basis in 1959, and was introduced formally in 1963.

Anyone in need of extra support may live in group housing, where staff provide 24-hour assistance. Group housing usually comprises a number of apartments with a range of common amenities. Another alternative is the serviced apartment;

people can live completely independently but are able to call for assistance at any time. The family home is another option, enabling children with functional disabilities to live with a family other than their own during certain periods.

### Car allowance

People who have great difficulty traveling or using public transportation can receive a car subsidy from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. They might be in pain, or have breathing difficulties, reduced mobility or a poor sense of balance. Parents of children with functional impairments may also apply for a car allowance.

### Funding for job hunting

The state is responsible for helping people to find and keep jobs through its labour market agencies. Employers who hire people whose work capacity is limited are sometimes entitled to wage subsidies. The state-owned services and goods provider Samhall offers people with disabilities meaningful employment that furthers their personal development. People with disabilities can also receive various types of financial assistance from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. ■

## LEARN MORE

## THE SWEDISH LIBRARY OF TALKING BOOKS AND BRAILLE (TPB)

is entirely government-funded, and offers people with visual disabilities access to printed and audio materials, in collaboration with local

libraries. TPB also provides advice and information on talking books and Braille, and has a special service for university students.

[www.tpb.se](http://www.tpb.se)

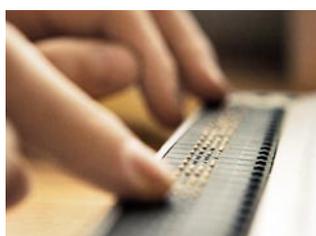


PHOTO: LARS LINDQVIST/  
SCANPIX

## THE SWEDISH INSTITUTE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (SIAT)

supports the development of products and services that improve the quality of life of people with disabilities in terms of accessibility and usability. Every year, SIAT produces 40-60 reports, books, brochures and films in Swedish (and some in English). SIAT also has the largest library in the Nordic countries in the field of disability and assistive technology, containing 13,000 books, reports and films as well as 250 journals and magazines.

[www.hi.se](http://www.hi.se)

## THE CENTRE FOR EASY-TO-READ

operates under the mandate of the Swedish Government and Parliament to make texts available to people with reading difficulties. It publishes books and a newsletter, and helps to make public information and other materials easy to read.

[www.lattlast.se](http://www.lattlast.se)

## THE INDEPENDENT LIVING INSTITUTE (ILI)

is a policy-development centre. It specializes in consumer-driven policies for disabled people's self-determination, self-respect and dignity. ILI provides information and training materials, and develops service solutions for people with extensive disabilities in Sweden and abroad.

[www.independentliving.org](http://www.independentliving.org)

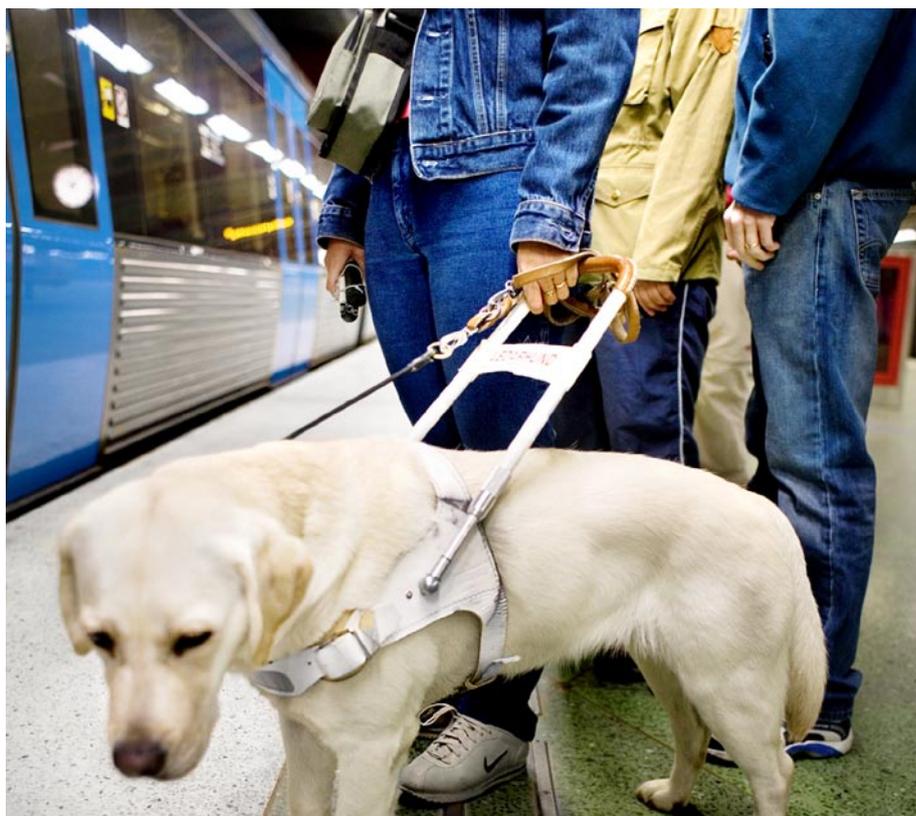


PHOTO: MELKER DAHLSTRAND

Stockholm has become more accessible over the past decade.

## STOCKHOLM FOR EVERYONE

Stockholm City Council has significantly improved accessibility in the capital.

For example:

- Some 5,200 pedestrian crossings have been converted to follow the established Stockholm model – a solution that includes a ticking sound when the lights turn green, contrast markings and a distinct curb showing where the roadway begins, plus a ramp enabling people in wheelchairs to access the walkway easily.

- About 10,300 deep cross-pavement drainage channels have been replaced with new, shallow, rounded ones.
- Now, 80 or more sports facilities benefit from improved accessibility thanks to their collaboration
- with Stockholm City's Sports Administration.
- About 360 bus stops have been modified by raising the curb height to facilitate boarding and alighting.

[www.international.stockholm.se](http://www.international.stockholm.se)

## DISABILITY MOVEMENT A VITAL FORCE

Swedish organizations for people with disabilities have been influencing policy-making for over 50 years. Most of these organizations belong to the Swedish Disability Federation, an umbrella body designed to influence official policy. The Federation is an active member of the European Disability Forum (EDF), an independent NGO that represents the interests of 80 million Europeans with disabilities.

The organizations help shape public

opinion by presenting their members' demands and proposing improvements. In 2011, about 60 organizations for people with disabilities received state grants amounting to more than SEK 182 million (EUR 20.2 million/ USD 25.4 million) to help them pursue their activities. Most are organized on the basis of their members' disabilities. Many have special youth sections, and some focus specifically on children and families. ■

## ORGANIZATIONS

### THE OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN IN SWEDEN

promotes the rights and interests of children and young people as set forth in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

[www.barnombudsmannen.se](http://www.barnombudsmannen.se)

### THE NATIONAL AGENCY FOR SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS

coordinates the Swedish Government's support for special needs education, with a view to helping students meet their educational goals.

[www.spsm.se](http://www.spsm.se)

### THE NATIONAL BOARD OF HEALTH AND WELFARE

is a government agency with responsibilities in the fields of social and health services, environmental health, communicable disease prevention and control, and epidemiology.

[www.socialstyrelsen.se](http://www.socialstyrelsen.se)

### THE NATIONAL BOARD OF HOUSING, BUILDING AND PLANNING

is the authority responsible for town and country planning, management of land and water resources, building and housing. It works to improve accessibility in built-up environments and focuses on the adaptation of housing.

[www.boverket.se](http://www.boverket.se)

### THE SWEDISH AGENCY FOR DISABILITY POLICY CO- ORDINATION (HANDISAM)

coordinates and actively promotes progress in the disability policy field. It seeks to accelerate development towards a society in which everyone can participate equally, regardless of disability. Handisam is a Government agency.

[www.handisam.se](http://www.handisam.se)

## LAWS AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

The Act concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (LSS) was enforced in 1994. It is a human-rights law designed to offer people with extensive disabilities greater opportunities to lead independent lives, and to ensure that they have equal living conditions and enjoy full participation in community life. It can offer support in the form of personal assistance in everyday life, counselling, housing with special services, or assistance for parents whose children have disabilities. As its name indicates, the Act applies only to certain groups of disabled people. People not covered by it can seek assistance from their municipality under the Social Services Act. This and the Planning and Building Act are examples of laws containing clauses that apply specifically to disabled people.

In 2009, The Discrimination Act was introduced in Sweden, its general purpose being to strengthen the legal protection of the individual and to help victims of discrimination obtain redress and financial compensation.

The Act combats discrimination on the

grounds of gender, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, disability, sexual orientation or age, and is divided into two parts.

The proactive part of the law imposes a duty to take positive action and concerns working life and the educational system. The reactive part of the law deals with the prohibition of discrimination in working life, in the educational system and in other areas of society.

The Equality Ombudsman (DO) monitors compliance with these laws.

### International cooperation

The UN's Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities is a cornerstone of Swedish disability policy. The Swedish Government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008. Unlike the Standard Rules, the Convention is legally binding. As a result, Sweden has committed to ensuring that national legislation does not discriminate against people with disabilities. ■

## USEFUL LINKS

[www.av.se](http://www.av.se) The Swedish Work Environment Authority  
[www.barnombudsmannen.se](http://www.barnombudsmannen.se) The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden  
[www.boverket.se](http://www.boverket.se) The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning  
[www.do.se](http://www.do.se) The Equality Ombudsman  
[www.forsakringskassan.se](http://www.forsakringskassan.se) The Swedish Social Insurance Agency  
[www.handisam.se](http://www.handisam.se) The Swedish Agency for Disability Policy Coordination  
[www.nhr.se](http://www.nhr.se) The Swedish Association of Persons with Neurological Disabilities  
[www.rikstrafiken.se](http://www.rikstrafiken.se) The National Public Transport Agency  
[www.samhall.se](http://www.samhall.se) Samhall  
[www.skil.se](http://www.skil.se) The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions  
[www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se) The National Agency for Education  
[www.socialstyrelsen.se](http://www.socialstyrelsen.se) The National Board of Health and Welfare  
[www.spsm.se](http://www.spsm.se) The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools  
[www.sweden.gov.se](http://www.sweden.gov.se) The Government Offices of Sweden  
[www.trafikverket.se](http://www.trafikverket.se) The Swedish Transport Administration

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