



The Swedish welfare system, which entitles both men and women to paid parental leave, has been central in promoting gender equality in Sweden.

GENDER EQUALITY:

THE SWEDISH APPROACH TO FAIRNESS

Gender equality is one of the cornerstones of Swedish society. The aim of Sweden's gender equality policies is to ensure that women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all areas of life.

The overarching principle is that everyone, regardless of gender, has the right to work and support themselves, to balance career and family life, and to live without the fear of abuse or violence.

Gender equality implies not only equal distribution between men and women in all domains of society. It is also about the qualitative aspects, ensuring that the knowledge and experience of both men and women are used to promote progress in all aspects of society.

In 2006, the World Economic Forum introduced its annual Global Gender Gap Report, which measures equality in the

areas of economics, politics, education and health. Since the report's inception, Sweden has never finished lower than fourth in the Gender Gap rankings, which can be found at www.weforum.org.

Gender equality at school

Gender equality is strongly emphasised in the Education Act, the law that governs all education in Sweden. It states that gender equality should reach and guide all levels of the Swedish educational system.

The principles are increasingly being incorporated into education from pre-

school level onwards, with the aim of giving children the same opportunities in life, regardless of their gender, by using teaching methods that counteract traditional gender patterns and gender roles.

Today, girls generally have better grades in Swedish schools than boys. Girls also perform better in national tests, and a greater proportion of girls complete upper secondary education.

Whereas a few decades ago, the university realm was dominated by men, today nearly two-thirds of all university degrees in Sweden are awarded to

EQUALITY OMBUDSMAN

The Equality Ombudsman (*Diskrimineringsombudsmannen*, or *DO*) is a government agency that fights discrimination and protects equal rights and opportunities for everyone.

The Equality Ombudsman reviews situations concerning gender equality in the workplace, the school system and other areas. It is also responsible for ensuring that the law regarding parental leave is followed and that parents who go on leave are not adversely affected at work.

The Equality Ombudsman primarily oversees compliance with the Discrimination Act. This law prohibits discrimination related to gender, transgender identity or expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, age, religion or other belief.

www.do.se



PHOTO: SUSANNE WALSTROM/IMAGEBANK.SWEDENSE

Fathers in Sweden average about one-fourth of the parental leave.



PHOTO: CECILIA LARSSON/IMAGEBANK.SWEDENSE

Swedish law prohibits gender discrimination in the workplace.

- women. Equal numbers of women and men now take part in postgraduate and doctoral studies.

Parental leave

An extensive welfare system that promotes a healthy work-life balance has been an important factor in making Sweden a gender-egalitarian leader. Parents are entitled to share 480 days of parental leave when a child is born or adopted. This leave can be taken by the month, week, day or even by the hour. Women still use most of the days, with men taking around one-fourth of the parental leave on average.

For 390 days, parents are entitled to nearly 80 per cent of their pay, up to a maximum of SEK 946 per day.

The remaining 90 days are paid at a flat daily rate of SEK 180. Those who are not in employment are also entitled to paid parental leave.

Sixty days of leave are allocated specifically to each parent, and cannot be transferred to the other. In addition, one of the parents of the new-born baby gets 10 extra days of leave in connection with the birth, or 20 days if they are twins.

Parents who share the transferable leave allowance equally get a SEK 50 tax-free daily bonus for a maximum of 270 days.

Adopting parents are entitled to a total of 480 days between them from the day the child comes under their care. A single parent is entitled to the full 480 days. ■

A FEMALE ARCHBISHOP

For centuries, the role of archbishop has been held by men. In 2013, Sweden became one of few countries to break the trend when Antje Jackelén was elected by the Church of Sweden as its first female archbishop. Jackelén formally became Archbishop of Uppsala in June 2014 and therefore Primate of the Church of Sweden.

German-born Jackelén was ordained priest in Sweden in 1980. She received her doctorate from Lund University in 1999 and was bishop in Lund diocese before moving on to her current position.

The Church of Sweden – separated from the state in 2000 – promotes gender equality. Its highest decision-making body, the General Synod, has 125 women and 126 men on its 2014–2017 board.

Since 1960, women have been ordained as priests within the Swedish church and today some 45 per cent of all ordained priests are women. A closer look, however, reveals that pay inequalities for the same job are common within the church, with women making less money than their male counterparts.

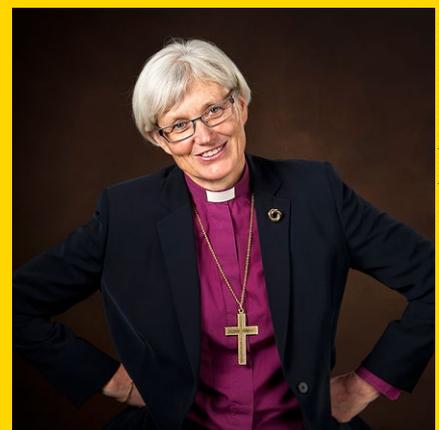


PHOTO: JAN NORDEN/KONVIC BY 30

Archbishop Antje Jackelén.

LEGISLATION

THE ABORTION ACT

Since 1975, women in Sweden have the legal right to an abortion during the first 18 weeks of pregnancy. This means that a woman can decide for herself whether to have an abortion through the 18th week of pregnancy without having to give a reason. After week 18, an abortion may be performed if there are special reasons for doing so, up to week 22. In such cases, an investigation is conducted before the National Board of Health decides whether to allow the abortion.

THE ACT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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

PROHIBITING THE PURCHASE OF SEXUAL SERVICES

In 1999, Sweden introduced its Act Prohibiting the Purchase of Sexual Services, the first of its kind. The act made it illegal to buy sexual services in Sweden – along with procurement, which was already forbidden – without punishing the prostitute. In 2005, the offence was incorporated into the general criminal code. Sweden's legal approach of targeting the purchasers rather than the sex workers has been adopted by Norway, Iceland, Canada and Northern Ireland to date.



Swedish law targets the sex buyer, not the prostitute.



PHOTO: MEIKER DAHLSTRAND/RIKSDAGEN.SE

Sweden has one of the world's highest representations of women in parliament.

WOMEN AND MEN AT WORK

Sweden has come a long way in making sure that women and men are treated equally in the workplace. But pay differences remain, and in the Swedish private sector the proportion of women in top positions remains weak.

Two main sections of the Discrimination Act deal with gender equality at work. First, there is the requirement that all employers must actively pursue specific goals to promote equality between men and women.

Second, the law prohibits discrimination and obliges employers to investigate and take measures against any harassment. Also, employers must not unfairly treat any employee or job applicant who is, has been or will be taking parental leave.

The Swedish government strives to ensure that power and resources are distributed fairly between the sexes, and to create the conditions that give women and men the same power and opportunities.

Economic and political power

Pay differentials between men and women can largely be explained by differences in profession, sector, position, work experience and age. Some, however, cannot be explained this way and may be attributable to gender. On average, women's monthly salaries in Sweden are currently just under 87 per cent of men's – 95 per cent when differences in choice of profession and sector are taken into account. Pay

differentials are most pronounced in the county councils. The smallest difference is among blue-collar workers.

According to Statistics Sweden's bi-annual report on gender equality, published in 2014, only one in ten CEO positions for the largest 1,050 companies were filled by women, while three in ten executive positions were filled by women. In listed companies, only 5 per cent of board chairpersons and 24 per cent of board members were women.

Across all sectors, the report had 35.6 per cent of mid- to high level managers as women, who have traditionally had stronger representation in the public sector.

In 2015, 82 women and 90 men were heads of Sweden's top government agencies – positions appointed by the government, which also sets the salaries for these. Of the ten highest-paid, however, only two were women.

Sweden has one of the world's highest representations of women in parliament. After the 2014 election, 43.6 per cent (152) of the 349 seats were taken by women. Nevertheless, it was a drop from 45 per cent in the 2010 elections. At present, 12 of the 24 government ministers are women.

HISTORY

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

1845 Equal inheritance rights for women and men are introduced.

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

1965 Sweden passes a law against rape in marriage.

1972 Joint taxation of spouses is abolished in Sweden.

1974 Sweden becomes the first country in the world to replace maternity leave with parental leave.

1975 New abortion law comes into force.

1998 The Act on Violence against Women is introduced.

1999 The Act Prohibiting the Purchase of Sexual Services comes into effect.

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

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

2009 The Discrimination Act replaces seven separate anti-discrimination laws.

2011 Stalking – repeated harassment – becomes an offence. One aim of the law is to further prevent male violence against women. Sweden signs the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

2012 Statistics Sweden (SCB) publishes its gender statistics in the form of indicators related to the gender equality objectives.

SEK 1 (Swedish krona) =
EUR 0.11, USD 0.12

► Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming, a term coined by the United Nations in 1997, describes the incorporation of the gender equality perspective into the work of government agencies at all levels. The idea is that gender equality is not a separate, isolated issue but a continual process. To create equality, the concept of equality must be taken into account when resources are distributed, norms are created and decisions are taken.

In Sweden, gender mainstreaming is seen as the main strategy for achieving targets within equality policy. In 2014, the government assigned 41 government agencies to work actively with gender mainstreaming from 2015 to 2018 in a collective called the Gender Mainstreaming in Government Agencies (GMGA) programme. Their goal is to integrate gender equality in all aspects of each agency's work. The government has allocated SEK 26 million for the four-year period. ■

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In 2013, about 29,000 cases of violence against women were recorded in Sweden. Over the years, the number of reported cases has risen significantly as more women speak out. Legislation changes in the early 1980s removed the possibility of a woman withdrawing an allegation of violence once made; this was required to counter threats to women who lodged complaints.

Women who need help can turn to any of over 180 local women's shelters in Sweden. Most shelters are connected to either or both of two major national organisations, the Swedish Association of Women's Shelters (www.unizon.se), or the National Organisation for Women's and Young Women's Shelters (www.roks.se).

Other organisations that work with issues regarding violence against women include:

- The National Clearinghouse on Violence against Women promotes co-operation between agencies and organisations in contact with women exposed to violence. www.operationkvinnofrid.nu
- The National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women, based at Uppsala University, has been tasked by the government to raise awareness of male violence against women, honour-related violence and violence within same-sex relationships. It also works to improve and spread ways of assisting women victims of violence. www.nck.uu.se

USEFUL LINKS

www.allakvinnorshus.org All Women's House

www.forsakringskassan.se The Swedish Social Insurance Agency

www.genus.se Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research

www.government.se Government and the Government Offices of Sweden

www.kvinnofridslinjen.se Hotline for women subjected to threats, violence or sexual assault

www.scb.se Statistics Sweden

www.wombri.se Women's Business Research Institute

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