



PHOTO: BERNO HJÄLMRUD/LINKIMAGE

Men and women in Sweden can work and care for their children on the same terms.

Gender equality in Sweden

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

Gender equality is a cornerstone of Swedish society. It means that women and men have the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all areas of life. It implies that they can work and support themselves, combine their career and family life, and that neither sex in a relationship need to worry about being subjected to abuse or violence.

In the *Global Gender Gap Report* 2008, Sweden was one of the world leaders in equality. The report, drawn up at the initiative of the World Economic Forum, measures equality in four areas: economics, politics, education and health. It can be read at www.weforum.org.

Parental leave

In Sweden parents are entitled to 480 days' parental allowance once a child is born or adopted. Women claim most of

the days. In 2008, men claimed about 20 percent of parental leave.

Parental allowance is a benefit parents (or the legal custodians of a child) can claim when they take time off work to be at home with their children. Parents can claim a maximum of 480 days' benefit for each child. This can be taken out months or weeks at a time, or by the day or hour. For 390 days, the maximum parental allowance is SEK 874 (about USD 110) a day. For the remaining 90 days the allowance is SEK 180 a day in the case of children born on July 1, 2006, or later, otherwise the allowance is SEK 60.

Each parent has 60 days of leave reserved specifically for him or her, which means these days cannot be transferred to the other parent.

The father of a newborn baby gets 10 extra days' leave in connection with the birth of their child. With the

birth of twins, a father is entitled to 20 days' leave. A parent adopting a child is entitled to take leave from work for 1.5 years from the time the child comes under his or her care.

The education system

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

The Swedish government has appointed a committee to plan and implement measures aimed at boosting gender equality in school, upper secondary school and adult education. On average, girls in Sweden have consistently higher grades than boys. In the past two decades, girls have caught up with boys in mathematics and science.

WORKING FOR EQUALITY

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



PHOTO: LEIF R. JANSOON/SCANPIX

Nyamko Sabuni, the Swedish Minister for Integration and Gender Equality.

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

A greater proportion of women than men complete their upper secondary education. Women constitute roughly 60 percent of all students in undergraduate university studies.

Almost two-thirds of all degrees are awarded to women. Significantly more

women than men participate in adult education. In postgraduate studies, women now constitute almost half of all new students.

They also account for about 48 percent of doctoral degrees, a figure that is steadily increasing. ■

Four ombudsmen become one

The Discrimination Ombudsman was established in 2009 to replace the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination, the Disability Ombudsman and the Ombudsman against Discrimination because of Sexual Orientation.

At the same time, the seven anti-discrimination laws were replaced by a single law, the Discrimination Act. These legislative changes were introduced to give citizens stronger and broader protection against discrimination. New provisions were introduced prohibiting discrimination due to age and transgender identity or expression.

The Discrimination Ombudsman reviews rights concerning gender equality in the workplace, in the school system and in certain other areas, including employment.

The ombudsman oversees compliance with the following government laws:

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



PHOTO: JOHNNY FRANZEN/JOHNER

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

The life expectancy of the Swedish population continues to rise. In 2008, it was 83.2 years for women and 78.6 years for men.

IMPORTANT LAWS

THE ABORTION ACT

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

THE ACT PROHIBITING THE PURCHASE OF SEXUAL SERVICES

The way prostitution is viewed in society has a direct impact on gender equality. The Act Prohibiting the Purchase of Sexual Services, which came into force in 1999, made buying sexual services illegal in Sweden. In the fight against prostitution, this targets the purchaser rather than the adults and children involved. One result of the new law is that street prostitution has declined dramatically. Swedish policy in this field has significantly contributed to change in other countries.



PHOTO: DAVID REICHOFFOLIO

THE ACT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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



PHOTO: MASKOT

In Sweden, the proportion of women in top posts is increasing in both the public and private sectors.

Women and men at work

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

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

Pay differentials between men and women can largely be explained by differences in their profession, sector, position, work experience and age. There are also pay differentials that cannot be explained in this way but may be attributable to gender. These are called unjustified pay differentials. On average, women's monthly salaries are 93 percent of men's when differences in choice of profession and sector are taken

into account. Pay differentials are most pronounced in the private sector.

Economic and political power

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

In professional life, the proportion of women in top posts is increasing. The percentage of women heading Swedish private limited companies (with more than one employee, excluding the managing director) was 26 percent in 2007. This represents an increase of 17 percentage points since 1990. The proportion of women on the boards of listed companies is also increasing, having risen from 6 percent in 2002 to 18 percent in 2006. The figures are higher in the public sector.

HISTORY

- **1250s** King Birger Jarl passes a law on violence against women (prohibition of rape and abduction).
- **1921** Women get the right to vote and run for office.
- **1922** Kerstin Hesselgren becomes Sweden's first female member of parliament.
- **1965** Sweden becomes the first country in the world to pass a law against rape in marriage.
- **1972** Joint taxation of spouses is abolished in Sweden.
- **1974** Parental allowance is introduced.
- **1975** New abortion law comes into force.
- **1979** Female succession to the throne comes into effect.
- **1980** The Office of the Equality Opportunities Ombudsman is introduced.
- **1998** The Act on Violence against Women is introduced.
- **1999** The Act Prohibiting the Purchase of Sexual Services is introduced.
- **2002** Parental leave increased to 480 days, with each parent entitled to two months of non-transferable parental benefits.
- **2004** The government decides to implement an action plan for gender mainstreaming in government offices.
- **2005** New legislation on sexual crimes further strengthens the absolute right of every individual to sexual integrity and self-determination.
- **2009** The Discrimination Act replaces the seven anti-discrimination laws.

The majority – 52 percent – of managers in municipal, county council and central government are women. Almost half (47 percent) of all Swedish members of parliament and 10 out of 22 government ministers are women. Among elected politicians in municipalities and county councils, women comprise 41 percent.

Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming is a term used in Sweden and elsewhere to describe the incorporation of a 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.

Thorough statistics

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

Violence against women

In 2008, about 28,000 cases of male violence against women were recorded. The number of reported cases has risen over the years, with more women daring to make a complaint. Legislation in this sphere changed in the early 1980s, making it impossible for women to withdraw an allegation.

Women who need help can turn to Roks, the national organization for women's and

girls' shelters in Sweden, the Swedish Association of Women's Shelters or All Women's House, Sweden's largest shelter association.

There are some 160 shelters in Sweden, largely run by volunteers. In Stockholm, Operation Peace for Women also promotes cooperation between agencies and organizations that are in contact with women exposed to violence. ■

Useful links

- www.scb.se — Gender equality statistics at Statistics Sweden
- www.sweden.gov.se — The Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality
- www.do.se — The Discrimination Ombudsman
- www.roks.se — Roks, the national organization for women's and girls' shelters in Sweden
- www.kvinnojour.com — The Swedish Association of Women's Shelters
- www.allakvinnorshus.org — All Women's House
- www.operationkvinnofrid.nu — The National Clearinghouse on Violence against Women
- www.genus.se — The Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research
- www.wombri.se — The Women's Business Research Institute
- www.forsakringskassan.se — The Swedish Social Insurance Agency
- www.kvinnofridslinjen.se — A hotline for women subjected to threats, violence or sexual assault

Published by the Swedish Institute
July 2009 FS 8
More facts can be found on
www.sweden.se

SI.
Swedish Institute

Copyright: Published by the Swedish Institute on www.sweden.se. All content is protected by Swedish copyright law. The text may be reproduced, transmitted, displayed, published or broadcast in any media for non-commercial use with reference to www.sweden.se. But never photographs or illustrations. For more information on general copyright and permission [click here](#).

The Swedish Institute (SI) is a public agency that promotes interest in Sweden abroad. SI seeks to establish cooperation and lasting relations with other countries through strategic communication and cultural, educational and scientific exchanges.

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