



PHOTO: ADAM HISE/SCANPIX

Every Swede has the right to protest unless it threatens national security.

Openness, transparency and democracy

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

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

Free press

Sweden was the first country in the world to permit press freedom in 1776. Freedom of press is based on freedom of expression and speech — a central tenet of most democracies. Those in authority must be held accountable and all information made freely available. Swedish citizens who provide publishers, editors

and news agencies with information are entitled to so-called source protection (*källskydd*) or anonymity protection (*anonymitetskydd*) as journalists can never be forced to reveal their sources.

The law of freedom of expression was passed in 1991 and concerns non-printed media, for example television, film and radio. The law seeks to secure a free exchange of views, information and artistic creativity.

With freedom comes responsibility

However, the right to express an opinion calls for responsibility. Freedom of speech 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 has been committed, the case will be passed on to the

Chancellor of Justice, a non-political civil servant appointed by the government.

Public scrutiny

The principle of public access means that the general public and the mass media — newspapers, radio and television — have access to official records. This affords Swedish citizens clear insight into the activities of government and local authorities. This is based on the idea that it does a democracy good to be scrutinized; transparency reduces the risk of abuse of power.

The principle of public access to official records also means that civil servants and others who work for the government are free to inform the media or outsiders about what they know. There are certain exceptions, though. Documents can be kept secret

IN SHORT

A DEMOCRATIC PRESS

Press subsidies have existed since the beginning of the 1970s and are designed to support newspapers that have a competitor with a higher circulation. This is a way of promoting diversity and making sure that people get more than one side of a story.



PHOTO: USA BLOOMERFOLIO

Most Swedes read a morning newspaper.

HIGH NEWSPAPER READERSHIP

In 2008, about 3.8 million newspapers, excluding free newspapers, were printed daily in Sweden. On weekdays, 83 percent of the Swedish population reads a morning paper. Out of the 165 morning newspapers sold in Sweden, 123 can also be read on the internet.

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 in addition to the commercial channels. The operations are run independently of the Swedish state and other economic and political interests.

REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

Sweden came third in Reporters without Borders' yearly worldwide press freedom ranking in 2008. The list is based on the degree of freedom that journalists and news organizations have in each country, and the efforts made by the authorities to safeguard this freedom.

if they protect any of the following interests: the safety of the country or its relationship with another country or international organization; national fiscal, monetary or currency policy, inspection, control and other supervisory operations carried out by public authorities; the prevention or prosecution of crimes; the economic interests of the general public; protection of the personal and economic position of private individuals; the protection of animal or plant species.

Everyone is equal

In Sweden, human rights are primarily protected through three constitutional

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 all 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 race, skin color or ethnic origin, or their sex. ■

Continuing the fight for human rights

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

In Sweden, the European Convention on Human Rights has been law since 1995. Sweden has also signed and ratified several human rights documents within the UN, the International Labor Organization and the Council of Europe. The government is prioritizing the following 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 create public opinion in favor of democracy, support the work of NGOs 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 been seeking the abolishment of the death penalty on the grounds that it is incompatible with human rights.
- **Combat torture.** The Swedish gov-

ernment draws attention to this abuse wherever it occurs and supports organizations that help victims of torture.

- **Combat summary executions and arbitrary detention.** For many years Sweden has been behind a resolution in the UN that concerns summary, extrajudicial and arbitrary executions, and will continue to take action to bring this issue to international attention.
- **Protect the principles of the rule of law.** Sweden promotes the principles of the rule of law in organizations 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.**
- **Fight discrimination.** In many countries, large groups of people have a long way to go before they receive equal treatment. The government wants to direct special attention to the rights of women, children and people with disabilities. ■

LEARN MORE

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 it threatens national security, for example.



PHOTO: YANAN LI / STOCKHOLM VISITORS BOARD

In Sweden, you're free to live your life any way you want.

BEST IN EUROPE

In 2009, Sweden topped a league table of all 785 members of the European parliament for their efforts in promoting transparency, openness and democracy and fighting waste and misuse of EU funds over the previous five-year term. The results were compiled by Open Europe, a British think tank that campaigns for transparency and democracy in the EU.

OPENACCESS.SE – SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

The OpenAccess.se program 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



PHOTO: HANS BJURLING/IMAGE BANK SWEDEN

A high proportion of people over the age of 55 have access to the internet in Sweden.

Openness on the internet

Sweden has among the highest internet usage within the European Union. Out of a population of 9.3 million, more than 80 percent use the internet.

The Personal Data Act came into effect in 1998. It protects people from having their personal integrity violated once they have given their personal details to internet operators.

Copyright on the internet

Copyright law protects the rights of the author, musician or artist. The growth of the internet has brought questions about copyright to a head: music, film, books, newspapers and magazines can easily be copied and distributed via the internet.

The Ipred law

Sweden's Ipred law, based on the EU's Intellectual Property Rights Enforcement Directive, means that if a record or movie company suspects someone of downloading one of their products, they have the right to demand information about who has subscribed to a specific IP address from internet or telephone operators. They can then demand reimbursement for their loss of income.

The company must have evidence that the person has downloaded the material illegally.

Children on the internet

Internet forums and social networking sites are popular among Swedish children, with 12- to 15-year-olds spending at least three hours a day surfing the internet. Half of all five-year-olds and one in five three-year-olds have used the internet. The Swedish government recently passed a law that makes contacting children for sexual purposes a criminal offence; it is illegal to try to set up a meeting with someone under the age of 15 with the purpose of committing a sexual crime. The law came into effect on July 1, 2009. ■

BLOGS IN SWEDEN

There are estimated to be 10,000-15,000 Swedish blogs.

OMBUDSMEN

Sweden has had an Ombudsman Institution since 1809. At that time, 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. To this day the same basic principles apply.

The Parliamentary Ombudsman handles complaints from anyone who feels that they, or somebody else, has 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 complain.

The Discrimination Ombudsman fights discrimination and promotes equal rights and opportunities, mainly by making sure that the law against discrimination is adhered to.

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.

The Press Ombudsman deals with press ethics. After an investigation it may hand a case over to the Swedish Press Council for further action.

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.



PHOTO: HANS SVENSSON/ACE BANK SWEDEN

NATURE FOR EVERYONE

The Swedish Right to Public Access (*Allemansrätten*) gives people the freedom to roam the countryside, with due care for nature and animals and consideration for land owners and other people. The Swedish National Environmental Protection Agency summarizes this right with the phrase "no disturbing — no destroying."

Useful links

- www.bo.se — The Children's Ombudsman
- www.do.se — The Discrimination Ombudsman
- www.jo.se — The Parliamentary Ombudsman
- www.ko.se — The Consumer Ombudsman
- www.po.se — The Press Ombudsman
- www.datainspektionen.se — The Swedish Data Inspection Board
- www.manskligarattigheter.gov.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.svt.se — Sweden's Television
- www.sr.se — Sweden's Radio
- www.tu.se — Swedish Newspaper Publishers' Association

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