



REGERINGSKANSLIET

Government Offices
of Sweden

How Sweden is governed

In *How Sweden is governed* the work of the Government and Government Offices is put in a wider perspective. What is their role in the Swedish polity? What is their relation to the Riksdag? What is the Government's role in EU cooperation? These are a few of the questions answered here. You can also read about how laws are enacted and about the budget process.

Table of contents

The Prime Minister and members of the Swedish Government

The Government Offices including ministries

Sweden's democratic system

The work of government

The State Budget procedure

The legislative process

Why public access to official documents?

Human rights in Sweden

Committees

Agency management

Sweden and the EU

Contact information



The Prime Minister and members of the Swedish Government

Every four years, the Swedish people go to the polls to elect their representatives in the Riksdag. The Riksdag appoints a Prime Minister who is given the task of forming a Government. Following elections in 2006, Sweden is ruled by a centre-right majority government with representatives from four parties; the Moderate Party, the Centre Party, the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party. Members of the Government are as follows:

Fredrik Reinfeldt
Prime Minister

Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth
Minister for Culture

Beatrice Ask
Minister for Justice

Carl Bildt
Minister for Foreign Affairs

Tobias Billström
Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy

Jan Björklund
Minister for Education

Ewa Björling
Minister for Foreign Trade

Anders Borg
Minister for Finance

Andreas Carlgren
Minister for the Environment

Gunilla Carlsson
Minister for International Development Cooperation

Eskil Erlandsson
Minister for Agriculture

Cristina Husmark Pehrsson
Minister for Social Security

Göran Håggglund
Minister for Social Affairs

Maria Larsson
Minister for Elderly Care and Public Health

Lars Leijonborg
Minister for Higher Education and Science

Sven Otto Littorin
Minister for Employment

Cecilia Malmström
Minister for EU Affairs

Mats Odell
Minister for Local Government and Financial Markets

Maud Olofsson
Minister for Enterprise and Energy,
Deputy Prime Minister

Nyamko Sabuni
Minister for Integration and Gender Equality

Sten Tolgfors
Minister for Defence

Åsa Torstensson
Minister for Communications

The Government Offices including ministries

The Government Offices comprise the Prime Minister's Office, the twelve ministries and the Office for Administrative Affairs.

Prime Minister's Office

The Prime Minister's Office directs and coordinates the work of the Government Offices and is also responsible for coordination of Sweden's EU policy.

Ministry of Agriculture

The responsibilities of the Ministry of Agriculture include matters relating to agriculture, fisheries, reindeer husbandry, Sami affairs, animal welfare, food, and hunting and game management.

Ministry of Culture

The Ministry of Culture is responsible for cultural issues, the media and sports. Cultural issues include museums, theatres, architecture, design, burial service, libraries and religious communities.

Ministry of Defence

The Ministry of Defence aims to fulfil the objectives set by the Government and Riksdag for defence policy, for national accident prevention and preparedness, and for preparedness for severe peacetime emergencies.

Ministry of Education and Research

The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for matters relating to schools, universities and colleges and adult education. The Ministry is also responsible for coordinating the Government's research policy.

Ministry of Employment

The Ministry of Employment is responsible for labour market policy, the working environment and working life policy.

Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications

The areas of responsibility of the Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications comprise matters relating to the business sector, IT, energy,

forestry, tourism, communications and infrastructure, as well as regional development.

Ministry of the Environment

The Ministry of the Environment is responsible for sustainable development, construction, climate policy, chemicals policy, sustainable planning, radiation protection and nuclear safety, and environmental supervision.

Ministry of Finance

The Ministry of Finance is responsible for matters relating to economic policy, the central government budget, taxes, banking, securities and insurance, international economic work, central, regional and local government.

Ministry for Foreign Affairs

The areas of responsibility of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs include: foreign and security policy, international law and human rights, global development and international development cooperation, trade policy and migration and asylum policy. Sweden's embassies and consulates abroad are also part of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and together they make up the foreign service.

Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

The areas of responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs relate to social welfare: financial security, social services, medical and health care, health promotion and the rights of children and disabled people.

Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality

The Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality is responsible for integration issues, gender equality, democracy issues, consumer affairs, youth policy and human rights.

Ministry of Justice

The Ministry of Justice is responsible for matters relating to the police authorities, judiciary system, prisons service and legislation.

Office for Administrative Affairs

The Office for Administrative Affairs acts as a joint resource for the Government Offices and is responsible for administrative matters of a cross-ministerial nature.

Sweden's democratic system

Sweden is a parliamentary democracy, which means that all public power proceeds from the people. General elections, which are held every four years, are an important expression of the fact that we in Sweden live in a democracy. Some seven million people in the country who are entitled to vote are given an opportunity to influence which parties will represent them in the Riksdag, county councils and municipal-

ities. To be entitled to vote, you must have reached the age of 18 not later than on election day. This applies to all elections. Furthermore, there are special rules for the different elections.

- To be entitled to vote in the parliamentary election, you must be a citizen of Sweden and be or have been entered in the national population register.
- To be entitled to vote in municipal and county council elections, you must be a citizen of Sweden – or a citizen of another EU member state – or a citizen of Iceland or Norway – or have been entered in the population register in Sweden for three consecutive years before election day and be registered in the municipality/ county council

However, there are many ways of influencing Swedish politics, for example by joining a political party or sending in comments on reports presented by the Government or by taking part in referendums.

The Swedish model of government administration – three levels

Sweden has three levels of government – national, regional and local. In addition, there is the European level which has acquired increasing importance following Sweden's entry into the EU.

National level

At the national level, the Swedish people are represented by the Riksdag (Swedish parliament) which has legislative powers. Proposals for new laws are presented by the Government which also implements decisions taken by the Riksdag. The Government is assisted in its work by the Government Offices and approximately 300 central government agencies and administrations.

Examples: the police, the armed forces

Regional level

Sweden is divided into 21 counties. Political tasks at this level are undertaken by the county councils, whose decision-makers are directly elected by the people of the county in general elections. The operations of the county council are financed by government grants and county council taxes and charges and are regulated by the Local Government Act. At the regional level there are also county administrative boards which are government bodies in the counties. Some public authorities also operate at regional and local levels, e.g. through county boards. Examples: health and medical care, public transport

Local level

Sweden has 290 municipalities. Each municipality has an elected assembly, the municipal council,

which takes decisions on municipal matters. The municipal council appoints the municipal executive board, which leads municipality work. Operations are financed by local taxes, government grants, and charges, and are chiefly regulated by the Local Government Act. Other essential legislation for the municipalities includes the Social Services Act and the Education Act.

Examples: schools, child care

European level

On entering the EU in 1995, Sweden acquired a further level of government: the European level. As a member of the Union, Sweden is subject to the EU *acquis communautaire* and takes part in the decision-making process when new common rules are drafted and approved. Sweden is represented by the Government in the European Council of Ministers which is the EU's principal decision-making body.

The work of government

The duty of the Government Offices is to assist the Government in its task of governing the realm and achieving its policy objectives. The Government Offices are led by the Government and thus form a politically controlled body where the Government directs the work and sets priorities. Public officials in the Government Offices assist the Government by supplying background material and proposals for use as a basis for decisions and conducting inquiries into matters of both a national and international nature. Of the approximately 4 500 members of staff employed at the Government Offices, around 200 are political appointees. All the other members of staff retain their posts regardless of the political orientation of the government that is in power.

The duties of the officials may be divided into seven main categories applying to all the ministries alike:

- Legislation
- The budget process and the administration of government agencies
- Administrative business
- International cooperation
- External communication
- Special projects and programmes
- The ministries' internal support and development work.

One of the officials' tasks is to administer the government agencies that answer to the respective ministry by supplying background material for the annual appropriation directives and monitoring the agencies' operations. Their work may also include international

negotiations, for example in the EU. By international comparison, Sweden has small ministries and large government agencies.

Collective decisions

At their weekly cabinet meetings the members of the Cabinet take joint and collective decisions on all government business. Consequently, all the ministers have a say in government decisions and the Cabinet as a whole is collectively responsible for them.

When the Government takes a decision on an item of government business, it is the final stage in a long and careful preparation process in the Government Offices.

An item of business is initiated

A document arrives at the Government Offices by post, email or is submitted orally.

Registration

All matters are registered by the receiving ministry's senior registry clerk

Processing an item of business

The official dealing with the matter collects the additional data needed, agencies and organisations affected by the matter submit their views, the person or organisation that initiated the matter may submit a statement, the official responsible draws up a proposal for a decision, the proposal is discussed jointly with other ministers affected and their ministries and the proposal is finally reviewed by the relevant ministry's Director-General for Administrative Affairs.

Decision

The matter is reported to the minister responsible, the Government takes a joint decision and the person or organisation that initiated the matter and others affected by it are notified of the decision before it is filed in the ministry archives.

The State Budget procedure

Twice a year, the Swedish Minister for Finance takes a very public stroll from the Ministry of Finance to the Riksdag, attended by the cameras of the media. The intense interest is due to the fact that it is on these occasions the Government's economic and budget policy proposals are laid before the Riksdag.

In the spring, the Spring Fiscal Policy Bill is presented and, in the autumn, the Government's Budget Bill.

The two Bills differ in content. The Spring Fiscal Policy Bill contains the Government's proposed guidelines for economic policy over the next few years. In the Budget Bill, these proposals are then turned into a central government budget for the year

to come, containing detailed proposals for the distribution of government expenditure between the various expenditure areas.

When the Minister for Finance presents the Spring Fiscal Policy Bill or the Budget Bill to the Riksdag, this represents the culmination of a process ongoing in the Government Offices throughout the year. Before reaching this point, forecasts have to be compiled, expenditure areas calculated and renegotiated and a host of decisions have to be taken.

The legislative process

The process from initiative to enacted law involves several steps. When the Government wants to introduce a new law, the procedure may, for example, be as follows: A committee of inquiry is appointed to look into the preconditions for what the Government wants to implement. The committee is given terms of reference, specifying what it is to do. When the committee has completed its work, it writes a report which is published in the Swedish Government Official Reports series, (*Statens Offentliga Utredningar, SOU*). The report is referred to several agencies and bodies for consideration as well as to the Council on Legislation which monitors the legal aspects. The Government then drafts a proposal, a bill, to present to the Riksdag. The bill is dealt with by one of the parliamentary committees which gives its views. The Riksdag then votes on the bill and, if it is approved, a new law can be promulgated and published in the Swedish Code of Statutes, (*Svensk författningssamling, SFS*).

Each year, the Government lays some 200 bills before the Riksdag. Some of these contain proposals for new legislation, requiring extensive deliberation and debate before a vote can be taken. Others involve major or minor amendments to existing statutes or propose policy guidelines of various kinds.

A certain amount of legislation affecting Sweden is enacted by the European Union. Some of these laws apply directly in Sweden without prior sanction by the Riksdag. Others must be incorporated into existing Swedish legislation.

Sweden has four fundamental laws
Sweden's fundamental laws, which make up the Constitution, hold an exceptional position in its legislation and cannot be amended as easily as other laws. The fundamental laws cover form of government and democracy, freedom of expression, freedom of the press and order of succession to the throne. For a fundamental law to be amended, it is required that the same decision is taken by the Riksdag on two separate occasions. A parliamentary election must have taken place between the two decisions. The fun-

damental laws take precedence over all other statutes and no other law may contravene the Constitution.

The 1974 Instrument of Government contains the basic principles of Sweden's form of government. It determines how the Government is to work, the fundamental freedoms and rights of the Swedish people and how elections to the Riksdag are to be implemented.

The 1810 Act of Succession regulates who is to inherit the throne, that is to say who is to be Head of State – king or queen.

The 1949 Freedom of the Press Act contains provisions on, among other things, the right to disseminate information in printed form and the principle of public access to official documents.

The 1991 Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression regulates freedom of expression within radio, TV, films and new media of a similar nature.

Why public access to official documents?

It is good for democracy to be scrutinised. Insight into authorities' activities provides guarantees against the abuse of power, and opportunities to exercise influence. The activities of the authorities concern us all. The media and others who are interested must be able to access information on different matters, irrespective of what an authority chooses to spread information about.

All documents such as letters, decisions and reports received by or dispatched from authorities, are in principle public documents and must normally be made available for anyone to read. Documents received by and dispatched from an authority are registered. If you want to know which documents have been received by an authority or to study them, you contact the authority. The Government Offices' public documents are available through its Records Centre.

The principle of public access to official documents also means that government officials and other central or local government employees are free to divulge information, that is to say they are entitled to say what they know concerning a matter to the media and other outsiders.

The principle of public access to official documents
One of the cornerstones of a democratic society such as Sweden is the principle of public access to official documents. It means that the activities of the authorities are as far as possible open to insight. The records of, for example, court sessions and meetings of decision-making assemblies are therefore normally available for public scrutiny.

In order to guarantee an open society with access to information about the Riksdag, Government and government agencies, the principle of public access to official documents has been incorporated into one of the fundamental laws, the Freedom of the Press Act.

The principle of public access to official documents means each and everyone is entitled to make a request to study public documents and usually without needing to divulge why or who he or she is.

“To encourage the free exchange of opinion and availability of comprehensive information, every Swedish citizen shall be entitled to have free access to official documents.”

(Chapter 2, Article 1, Freedom of the Press Act, which under Chapter 14, Article 5, as a rule also applies to aliens.)

Human rights in Sweden

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” These are the opening words of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In Sweden, human rights are protected under the Instrument of Government which is one of the country’s four fundamental laws.

The public sector, that is to say central, regional and local government, shall:

- safeguard the right to health care, employment, housing and education,
- promote a sustainable development that results in a good environment for present and future generations, and
- counteract discrimination of people on grounds of gender, colour, national or ethnic origin, language or religious affinity, functional disability, sexual orientation or age.

Ombudsmen

The ombudsman system, which has been copied in several other countries, is an important function for guaranteeing transparency in the public sector. The task of the various ombudsmen, who are publicly financed, is to defend the interests of both private individuals and different groups. They also monitor how other public agencies carry out their assignments.

Examples: the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, the Disability Ombudsman

Committees

Some issues the Government has to deal with are more difficult to resolve than others and require more extensive preparation before a proposal can be

drafted and submitted to the Riksdag for a decision. Examples range from major policy decisions affecting the whole of Swedish society over long periods to smaller but technically complex issues.

In dealing with matters of this kind, the Government may choose to appoint a special expert or group, officially known as a commission or committee of inquiry, to report on the matter. Committees of inquiry carry out their work in accordance with terms of reference laid down by the Government. These contain government guidelines for the committee’s work, amongst other things the matter to be investigated and a closing date for the inquiry.

The conclusions of an inquiry are compiled in a report which is published in the Swedish Government Official Reports (*Statens Offentliga Utredningar, SOU*) series.

After a committee has submitted its report to the Minister responsible, its contents are referred for consideration to relevant authorities, advocacy groups and the public. They are given an opportunity to express their views on the conclusions of an inquiry before the Government formulates a legislative proposal.

Agency management

Each ministry is responsible for a number of central government agencies. Their main function is to implement the laws and perform the tasks decreed by the Riksdag and the Government.

Every year the Government takes a decision on the preconditions for agencies’ operations. This is effected on the one hand through what are known as appropriation directions and, on the other, through ordinances. The work of producing appropriation directions and ordinances is carried out by officials in the Government Offices. The appropriation directions establish the objectives to be achieved by the agency, the amount of money at its disposal and how the money is to be distributed between the agency’s different activities.

In many other countries an individual minister has the power to intervene directly in the day-to-day operations of government agencies. In Sweden such ‘ministerial control’ is prohibited. Suspected cases of unlawful ministerial interference are dealt with by the parliamentary Committee on the Constitution. Examples: Migration Board, Police Service, Tax Agency

Sweden and the EU

Sweden has been a member of the European Union, EU, since 1 January 1995. This means that some

decisions that were previously taken in the Swedish Riksdag are nowadays taken jointly with other EU countries. This applies, for example, to rules for trade with countries outside the EU, rules for agricultural subsidies and rural development and annual Baltic Sea fishing quotas. Legislation relating, for example, to taxes, health care and education is not decided at EU level.

In the EU context, the role of the Government is to represent Sweden in the European Council and the Council of the European Union, which is often referred to as the council of ministers. EU cooperation affects many policy areas and the work of all ministries and ministers. The ministries are responsible for preparing government business in their respective areas. For example, environment-related issues are dealt with by the Ministry of the Environment.

The Prime Minister has overall responsibility for the development and coordination of Sweden's EU policy. The Prime Minister's Office also includes the Minister for EU Affairs and the EU Department. In close cooperation with the Prime Minister's Secretariat, the EU Department is responsible for EU issues of a horizontal nature and coordinates instructions to Sweden's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels. The day-to-day coordination of EU matters is carried out by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs European Union Department under the guidance of the Prime Minister's Office.

If you would like more information about developments in a specific area of policy, please contact in the first instance the ministry responsible for the matter or the ministries' officials at Sweden's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels, which is the Government Offices' extended arm in the EU.

Contact information

Government Offices of Sweden

Switchboard: +46 8 405 10 00

Address: Rosenbad 4

Postal address: SE-103 33 Stockholm

Opening hours: switchboard, office of the senior registry clerk and office services

Switchboard: 7.45–18.15

Senior Registry Clerk: 9.00–16.00

Office services: 8.00–16.30

The Government Offices Records Centre

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9.00–12.00, 13.00–16.00

Address: Fredsgatan 8, Stockholm

Tel: +46 8 405 24 88

Email to the Government and ministries

Email messages to the Government and ministries should be sent to the senior registry clerk at the relevant ministry. All mail, whether traditional or electronic, is regarded as an official document and must therefore be registered in the official record. Among other things, this means that the material is accessible to all and that the public and media have the right to read the contents of all such documents. Individuals wishing to read incoming emails are referred, in the first instance, to the senior registry clerk of the relevant ministry.



REGERINGSKANSLIET

**Government Offices
of Sweden**

SE-103 33 Stockholm, Sweden

All inquiries about content should be directed to Information Rosenbad, telephone, switchboard +46 8 405 10 00.

www.sweden.gov.se, www.regeringen.se

Producerad av Information Rosenbad, artikelnr IR2007:010 engelska