

Openness and transparency – vital parts of Swedish democracy

Free speech, free press and overall transparency are pillars of democracy ensured by the Swedish Constitution.

Openness and transparency are vital parts of Swedish democracy. The democratic society is protected by four fundamental laws: the Instrument of Government, the Freedom of the Press Act, the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression, and the Act of Succession. These laws make up the Swedish Constitution and take precedence over all other laws.

The constitution states that all citizens have the right to freely seek information, organise demonstrations, form political parties and practice their religion.

Freedom of the press

Freedom of the press is based on freedom of expression and speech, which is a cornerstone of most democracies. In 1766, Sweden became the first country to write freedom of press into its constitution.

Sweden's Freedom of the Press Act states that those in authority must be held accountable and all information must be made available. The identities of sources who provide information are protected, and publishers, editors or news agencies with information are protected, and journalists ▶

A Stockholm Pride march, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.



Photo: Magnus Liam Karlsson/magbank.sweden.se

cannot be forced to reveal their sources.

The right to express an opinion is not an absolute right. When abused, freedom of speech can be offensive, incite discrimination or violence, or have negative consequences for an individual or society. Suspected crimes against the freedom press or expression laws are dealt with by the Office of the Chancellor of Justice, a non-political civil servant appointed by the government.

Public access

In Sweden, the principle of public access grants the general public and the mass media access to official records. This means they have the opportunity to scrutinise the activities of government on all levels – national, regional and local. Transparency reduces the risk of power being abused.

Civil servants and others who work for the government are also free to inform the media or outsiders. However, certain information

can be classified – for example if it involves matters of national security or sensitive information about health and medical care.

Everyone is equal

In Sweden, human rights are protected primarily through three of the fundamental 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 everyone 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 of gender, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.

Ensuring human rights globally

All areas of Swedish foreign policy – security, development, migration, environment and trade – should be based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.



Photo: Cecilia Larsson Lantz/imagebank-sweden.se

Sweden is one of the world leaders in gender equality. But there are Swedish industries where women remain under-represented, such as construction.

The European Convention on Human Rights has been incorporated into Swedish law since 1995. Sweden has also signed and ratified several human rights agreements within the UN, the International Labour Organization and the Council of Europe.

Since 2014, the Swedish government pursues a feminist foreign policy, striving to strengthen the rights and representation of women and girls globally. This policy is

based on the conviction that peace, security and sustainable development can never be achieved if half the world's population is excluded.

The feminist foreign policy entails foreign trade, among many other things. Backed by evidence that gender equality boosts economic growth, the government aims to ensure that their trade policy and trade promotion activities benefit women and men equally.

Learn more

Press and media subsidies

Sweden has had press subsidies since the early 1970s as a way of supporting newspapers – printed or digital – that compete with other, higher circulation publications.

The subsidies, which are a way of promoting diversity and ensuring people get more than one side of a story, are state financed.

Since 2019, there are also subsidies for news media outlets beyond traditional newspapers.



Photo: Susanne Walstrom/imagebank-sweden.se

Reading the papers is one way to keep up with the times.

Independent television and radio

Through the public broadcasting services Sweden's Television (SVT), Sweden's Radio (SR), and the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (UR), people in Sweden have access to a range of programs, both online and via more traditional formats, free from advertising.

The operations, run independently of the Swedish state, are financed by a public service fee which is income based and collected as a tax.

Press freedom

In Reporters Without Borders' worldwide press freedom ranking for 2021, Sweden ranked third, behind Norway and Finland.

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.

Swedes and internet habits

By international comparisons, Sweden has a quite high internet penetration. According to the Swedish Internet Foundation, Facebook and Youtube were the most used social media channels by Swedes in 2021.



Photo: Maskou/folio/imagebank-sweden.se

Social media are part of everyday life for many Swedes.

Internet users

Among Swedes aged 16–85, an estimated 94 per cent have home access to an internet connection, according to Statistics Sweden. The Swedish government aims for a 'completely connected Sweden' by 2025.

Much used mobile solutions like Swedish payment app Swish and the BankID electronic identification app help drive this development.

Social media in Sweden

In 2021, nearly 9 out of 10 people aged 16 and up in Sweden used social media, according to 'The Swedes and the internet', an annual survey of the internet habits of Swedish people, conducted by the Swedish Internet Foundation.

During 2020–2021, 95 per cent of internet users – aged 8 and up – claimed to have used social media at some point during the past year, according to the same report.

Most used channels

Youtube was the top social media, used by 81 per cent in total. Facebook was number two at 71 per cent and Instagram number three at 64 per cent.

Both Facebook and Instagram were most popular among people between 20 and 30. At fourth place was Snapchat, used by 38 per cent in total, but the figure was noticeably high for students between the ages of 16 and 19, 94 per cent.

Learn more

The right to demonstrate

The Swedish Constitution upholds the right of citizens to express their opinion collectively through public demonstrations. In order to assemble people for a public gathering such as a demonstration, protest or public meeting, a permit must be obtained in advance.

The police may deny an application for a permit only in exceptional cases, such as threat to national security.



Photo: Sofia Sabel/imagebank-sweden.se

A Gothenburg demonstration to prevent worldwide mortality in childbirth.

Publishing made digital

The National Library of Sweden – both a library and a government agency – has worked with advancing open access to academic output since 2006.

Based in Stockholm, it is a national coordinating body in the digital transition to open access to academic publications.



Photo: Ake Eson Lindman/KB

The National Library of Sweden.

Open aid

Openaid.se is a website about Swedish aid built on open government data. It was launched in 2011 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, with intent to create further trust for government aid and humanitarian activities. The site collates official government data so it can be accessed and studied easily by individuals, NGOs, aid recipients and officials.

Ombudsmen ensuring the law

Sweden has a long tradition of ombudsmen. The word ombudsman in fact comes from Swedish, meaning a person who acts as a representative.



Photo: Ann-Soff Rosenkvist/Imagebank, sweden.se

The Children's Ombudsman protects children's rights and interests, and makes sure that the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child is followed.

Sweden's first Parliamentary Ombudsman was appointed in 1810, after it had been decided that an institution independent of the king was needed to ensure that laws and statutes were obeyed. The same basic principles apply today.

The Chancellor of Justice

Supervises the government agencies and courts on behalf of the government.

The Equality Ombudsman

Fights discrimination and promotes equal rights and opportunities for all, mainly by ensuring that the law against discrimination is adhered to.

The Parliamentary Ombudsmen

Handles complaints from anyone who feels that they, or somebody else, have 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 lodge a complaint.

The Ombudsman for Children

Protects children's rights and interests. It also makes sure that the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child is followed.

The Media Ombudsman

Deals with press ethics. After an investigation, it may hand a case over to the Swedish Media 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.

Did you know?



Photo: Ulf Lundin/Imagebank, sweden.se

Nature for everyone

The Swedish right of public access (*Allemansrätten*) gives people the freedom to roam the countryside, as long as they ensure due care for nature and animals and show consideration for landowners and other people.

The Swedish National Environmental Protection Agency summarises this right with the phrase: 'Don't disturb, don't destroy'.

Useful links

www.do.se

Equality Ombudsman

www.government.se

Government Offices of Sweden

www.jo.se

Parliamentary Ombudsmen

www.kb.se

National Library of Sweden

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