

Feminist government

Sweden has a feminist government. In practice, this means a commitment to building a society in which women and men, girls and boys can live their lives to their full potential.

The progress made towards gender equality has contributed to Sweden's high levels of employment and growth. But it has not happened by itself; it is largely the result of political struggle and decisions, together with hard work from a strong civil society. However, important challenges remain and there is work to do for the feminist government. Women and men, girls and boys still do not have access to resources and power on equal terms.

The goal for Swedish gender equality policy is that women and men shall have the same power to shape society and their own lives. Sweden's government is committed to achieving this through a policy agenda that combats inequality and inhibitive gender roles and structures. Men and boys must be involved in and invited to participate in gender equality work. Gender equality must be central to all decision-making and resource allocation. Translated into feminist foreign policy, this means strengthening women's and girls' rights, representation and resources. In order to be able to do so, measures must be based on knowledge and reality. We need analyses that shed light on the power relations that affect the situation of women and girls. Using data disaggregated by sex and age is crucial.

Declaring ourselves a feminist government entails obligations. We must present real change. We work hard for realising our feminist agenda and will continue to do so through choices of paths, priorities, and allocation of resources. Gender equality is not only a goal in itself but also a prerequisite for sustainable development, and an essential part of the solution to many of the challenges we face in our time, nationally as well as globally.

This material provides an overview of main areas of gender equality policy in Sweden. It describes current political goals and strategies, and gives brief historical background to important reforms. It also identifies crucial remaining challenges and explains how the feminist government is addressing these and what measures are taken in order to create change.

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“Gender equality is a matter of human rights, of democracy and of justice. It is also an engine driving social development and creating genuine change in society and in people’s lives.”

Feminist government

The objective of Swedish gender equality policy is that **women and men shall have the same power to shape society and their own lives**. With this as its starting point, the Government is working towards six sub-goals:

- 1. Equal division of power and influence.** Women and men must have the same rights and opportunities to be active citizens and to shape the conditions for decision-making.
- 2. Economic equality.** Women and men must have the same opportunities and conditions with regard to paid work which gives economic independence throughout life.
- 3. Equal education.** Women and men, girls and boys must have the same opportunities and conditions with regard to education, study options and personal development.
- 4. Equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care.** Women and men must have the same responsibility for housework and have the opportunity to give and receive care on equal terms.
- 5. Equal health.** Women and men, girls and boys must have the same conditions for a good health and be offered care on equal terms.
- 6. Men's violence against women must stop.** Women and men, girls and boys, must have the same right to and opportunity for physical integrity.

***Gender mainstreaming* is an important strategy for reaching the gender equality objectives.** The aim is to ensure that a gender equality perspective and analysis is part of all policy making. Sustainable change in decision-making processes can only be achieved through long-term strategic work on gender mainstreaming. The Swedish Government Offices uses the Council of Europe definition of gender mainstreaming, which means an incorporation of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas, at all levels and all stages, by the actors normally involved in the policy-making process.

Gender-responsive budgeting – the application of gender mainstreaming in the budget process – is an indispensable tool for a feminist government to realise its policy goals. It implies a gender-based assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budget process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality. A gender equality perspective is to be applied in the budget process so that reforms are implemented with a gender-sensitive approach. This requires improved gender equality impact analysis and systematic use of data and statistics disaggregated by sex.

Sweden's feminist foreign policy

Gender equality is a fundamental objective of Sweden's feminist foreign policy. Ensuring the full enjoyment of human rights by all women and girls is both an obligation within the framework of our international commitments, and a prerequisite for reaching Sweden's foreign policy goals on peace, security and sustainable development. An action plan for the Swedish Foreign Service has been adopted in order to set the direction through long-term objectives and focus areas, and gender mainstreaming is applied systematically throughout the foreign policy agenda. In order to strengthen women's and girls' rights, representation and resources measures are based on the reality where they live, with the help of analyses that shed light on the needs, possibilities and power relations of those concerned.

Sweden has a national action plan for the implementation of the Security Council's resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and works actively to ensure that a gender perspective is integrated in all international operations in conflict and post-conflict countries.

Three important welfare reforms to promote gender equality in Sweden

Women and men must have the same opportunities for economic independence. In Sweden, some of the most important reforms concerning gender equality took place in the labour market and in social policy in the 1970s. These reforms pushed gender equality and increased women's prospects to have the same opportunities as men to enter the labour market, and to remain and develop there. Parts of the unpaid household and care work, often performed by women, became the responsibility of the public welfare system. Women thus gained access to employment and greater financial independence, which increased their well-being and bargaining power in the household. In addition, men were encouraged and enabled to participate in family life to a greater extent. These reforms also contributed to the development of a modern welfare state in Sweden. Nonetheless, continued investments in the welfare system are essential for gender equality, as a well-functioning welfare sector enables both women and men to participate in the labour market on equal terms.

Separate income taxation for wife and husband (1971)

Separate income taxation created an incentive for women to work, as their income was no longer seen as part of the husband's income. Hence it was more advantageous for both partners to work.

Development of public child care (government decision 1974)

The broad expansion of the daycare and pre-school system began in the 1970s. Previously, women had made child-minding arrangements with the help of mothers, nannies, friends and relatives. Women were often faced with impossible daily schedules and frequently had to work unsocial hours when the children's fathers were at home. The development of affordable public child care facilities available to all is a prerequisite to Sweden's large proportion of women in gainful employment. Together with public elderly care, this gives families an opportunity to combine professional life and family life.

First country to introduce gender-neutral paid parental leave benefit (1974)

In 1974, Sweden became the first country in the world to introduce a gender-neutral paid parental leave benefit. Since then, the parental leave reform has been revised several times. The family policy is aimed at supporting a dual-earner family model, which is a cornerstone for the development of gender equality and an important part of gender equality policy. In 1995, the first reserved month was introduced. Under this reform, each parent was entitled to a non-transferable month of paid parental leave. The policy was expanded in 2002 to two months.

Today, women and men are entitled to 480 days of paid parental leave (16 months) per child. Ninety of those days – 3 months – are reserved for each parent and cannot be transferred to the other parent (the third reserved month was introduced in 2016). Introducing a third reserved month for each parent was a measure to achieve a more even distribution of unpaid household and care work, and gender equality in the labour market.

The parental leave system has contributed to the high proportion of women in the Swedish labour market. In 2014, the employment rate of women was close to that of men, and well above the Lisbon target for women's employment. Promoting equal economic opportunities for women and men is a fundamental part of the gender equality policy. Parental insurance, combined with an extensive system of public child care and elderly care, has made it possible for parents to combine work and family life.

Gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting

Gender mainstreaming an important strategy for reaching gender equality objectives

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy used to implement the gender equality objectives, combined with 'special measures', which are also used to promote development in specific policy areas (such as extra funding, extra focus, action plans, etc.). This dual approach is necessary for moving forward on gender equality.

The Swedish Government Offices defines gender mainstreaming as the incorporation of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas, at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in the policy-making process.

Responsibility for the entire Government

Every minister is responsible for gender mainstreaming in his or her areas of responsibility. The Minister for Gender Equality is responsible for coordination, development and follow-up of gender mainstreaming. Heads of Division are responsible for gender mainstreaming in his or her areas of responsibility.

In order to use gender mainstreaming as a strategy for gender equality, it is important to have clearly formulated goals in different policy areas to strive towards. Consequences can then be analysed and measured with reference to these goals from a gender equality perspective.

Gender-responsive budgeting a strategic tool for realising policy objectives

Gender-responsive budgeting is a strategic tool to help a feminist government realise its policy objectives. The budget process and the Budget Bill are of key importance in realising the Government's policy agenda and it is therefore important that budget work is conducted in a way that includes the effects and consequences for gender equality when decisions are made on the direction and distribution of resources.

Gender-responsive budgeting, as an application of the principle of gender mainstreaming in the budget process ensures that a gender equality perspective is applied in the budget process, so that reforms are based on gender-equality impact analyses and are implemented using a gender-sensitive approach.

Strategic and systematic work for long-term development

This work should strengthen long-term development of gender-responsive budget work, for example through:

- improved mechanisms for internal management and control such as a formalised requirement in the budget circular that policy proposals and reforms presented in the Budget Bill must be based on gender-equality impact assessments
- training for 'know-how' and to improve methodology, and the use of new analytical tools;
- a strengthened process for support and coordination; and
- improved gender-equality impact assessments, and the use of statistics disaggregated by sex.

Gender mainstreaming in government agencies (GMGA)

Mainstreaming gender into ordinary work is a challenge. The policy must be coherent and implemented at all levels: governmental, regional and local.

Development programme in government agencies

The Swedish Government is trying to meet this challenge through measures such as a development programme to strengthen gender mainstreaming in government agencies. The aim is to further develop gender mainstreaming in government agencies so that the activities and services provided by participating government agencies contribute to achieving gender equality policy goals.

59 government agencies and one organisation in the programme...

The programme comprises 59 government agencies and one organisation, including agencies in the cultural, judiciary and health care sectors. These agencies are to integrate a gender equality perspective in their activities, based on a tailor made action plan developed by the respective agency. Reports from the participating agencies show that they have identified both critical challenges as well as positive results as regards their contribution to the achievement of the national gender equality policy objectives.

... and over 30 universities and university colleges

In addition, the Government recently expanded the programme to include more than 30 universities and university colleges. Universities and university colleges are to develop their work on gender mainstreaming in the period 2016–2019. While more women than men attend and graduate from higher education in Sweden, only 26 per cent of professors are women, and men have greater access to resources and funding for research. The goal of the Swedish government is that by 2030, half of all newly appointed professors shall be women. Further, a national group of experts for increased gender equality in higher education has been appointed.

Labour market

Gender equality is a question of justice and democracy. At the same time, gender equality is important for jobs and growth. To safeguard jobs, all skills must be put to good use on the labour market and women's employment rate and working hours must increase. Compared with other EU countries, Sweden has a large proportion of women in gainful employment. However, it is still very common for women to work part-time, especially women in families with children. When children are born, women reduce their time in gainful employment, while men's time in gainful employment increases.

Employment rate: women 78 per cent, men 83 per cent (age 20–64). The Swedish national goal is to strive for the employment rate to increase to well above 80 per cent by 2020, and for the differences in employment rate between women and men to be reduced by increasing employment of women.

Part-time work: Almost 30 per cent of women work part-time, but studies show that many in fact would prefer to work more. The main reasons for many women working part-time are that they can not find suitable full-time work, or are taking care of children. The Government's objective is that full-time work should be the norm, and part-time a possibility.

Increase in temporary employment affects women most

In recent years, there has been an increase in temporary employment in the labour market, which affects women to a greater extent than men. A legislative amendment has been introduced to ensure that general fixed-term employment will be converted into indefinite-term employment if the aggregate length of employment in a general fixed-term position exceeds two years.

Gender pay gap

When weighing in factors such as education, age, profession, sector and hours of work, the pay gap between men and women is 4,3 per cent (2017). Work in sectors dominated by women is generally valued less and these sectors have lower wage levels than ones dominated by men. Income disparities between women and men can also be explained by gender segregation on the labour market, and the fact that the equalising effect of the welfare systems has declined. The use of parental benefit days is currently unevenly distributed. The objective is a completely gender-equal sharing of parental benefit days. This is important for tackling women's less favourable working conditions and lower incomes. Education and labour market authorities also have an important task in promoting work in professions outside traditional gender roles. The Swedish Public Employment Service has therefore been assigned the task of tailoring its activities to promote gender equality and combat gender divisions in the labour market. Further, the Government will present an action plan for equal pay.

Requirement to conduct annual pay surveys

It is important to eliminate unjustified gender pay differentials. Therefore, the requirement to conduct annual pay surveys has been reintroduced, rather than every three years, which was the previous requirement. Social partners', including trade unions' responsibility for wage formation is a cornerstone of the Swedish model. However, it is important that wage formation leads to closing the gap between women's and men's incomes.

Women's representation at the top of the business world must increase

Another expression of inequality in working life is that women are under-represented at the very top of the business world. The Government has stated that the proportion of women on the boards of listed companies should amount to at least 40 per cent.

Parental leave reform

In Sweden, female and maternal employment rates are among the highest in the EU, and the child poverty level is one of the lowest in the EU. Swedish parents have relatively good possibilities of successfully balancing work and family responsibilities. But in terms of promoting gender equal parenting today, there is still work to do for a feminist government.

Generous family benefits, flexible leave and working hours and affordable, high-quality child care

Sweden's family policy is aimed at supporting a dual-earner family model and ensuring the same rights and obligations regarding family and work for both women and men. Generous family benefits, flexible leave and working hours for parents with young children and affordable, high-quality child care are the main factors of success.

In 1974, Sweden became the first country in the world to introduce a gender-neutral paid parental leave benefit. Since then, the parental leave reform has been revised several times. In 1995, the first reserved month was introduced. Under this reform, each parent was entitled to a non-transferable month of paid parental leave. In 2002, it was expanded to two months. In 2016 an additional 30 days were added, making 90 days non-transferable in the parental insurance.

480 days of paid parental leave per child

Today, parents are entitled to 480 days of paid parental leave (16 months) per child. Ninety of those days – 3 months – are reserved for each parent and cannot be transferred to the other parent (the third reserved month was introduced in 2016). Introducing a third reserved month for each parent was a measure to achieve a more even distribution of unpaid household and care work, and gender equality in the labour market.

The right for a parent to be absent from work full time is restricted to the child's first 18 months. Thereafter, parents who want to reduce their working hours or be on full-time leave must use parental benefit days to ensure their right to parental leave. In addition, parents have the right to decrease their working hours by up to 25 per cent without using parental benefit days until the child turns eight years old or finishes the first year of compulsory school.

Successful combination of work and family life for all parents

The parental leave system has contributed to the high proportion of women in the Swedish labour market. Promoting equal economic opportunities for women and men is a fundamental part of the gender equality policy. Parental insurance, combined with an extensive system of public child care and elderly care, has made it possible for parents to combine work and family life.

Continued modernization of the policy

Despite the measures of non-transferable months taken so far, the usage of the parental leave is still unevenly distributed between women and men. Women use three quarters of the parental leave. The uneven usage of parental leave combined with existing structures in work life and child care leads to economic consequences in terms of the gender pay gap and the uneven distribution of unpaid domestic work, part-time employment and sick leave. A more equal sharing of parental leave is one important measure that could strengthen women's position on the labour market and benefit gender equality. In 2016, the Government appointed a commission to revise the parental leave system. The aim was to modernize the policy so that it can better contribute to gender equal parenting and provide flexibility for various family constellations.

Health, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and abortion

In the area of health and medical care, unacceptable differences persist for women and men. Historically, illnesses that affect women more than men have tended to be less prioritised in the health care system. In light of this, the Swedish Government has proposed several initiatives to invest in women's health.

Free mammography screening and contraception

The Government aims to further reinforcing this area through a targeted primary care initiative for women's health, and free mammography screening since 1 July 2016. To safeguard young women's right to their own sexuality without unwanted pregnancies, the Government has also made contraception under the pharmaceutical reimbursement system free of charge to people under the age of 21.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights – a matter of women's power over their lives and bodies

Gender equality can never be achieved without the realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights. At this very moment, they are being challenged in Europe and there are actors who challenge these rights also in Sweden.

Women and girls must have the right to decide and exercise control over their own body, sexuality, reproductive health and childbearing. When women have these choices, it increases their prospects of participating on a more equal footing with men in society. Sexual and reproductive health and rights is a matter of women's power over their lives and the right to decide freely over their own bodies.

Legislation on abortion based on right to planned parenthood and minimising health risks

In Sweden, women have the right to take their own decision concerning abortion up to the eighteenth week of pregnancy, and they do not need to give any reason for the decision. After the end of the eighteenth week of pregnancy, an abortion may be performed only if the National Board of Health and Welfare grants the woman permission to undergo the procedure.

Swedish legislation on abortion derives from the right to planned parenthood. Further, it is a manifestation of the basic principle of women's right to decide over their own bodies. The legislation on abortion is also based on the ambition to minimise health risks for women who become pregnant involuntarily, and the balance between, on the one hand, women's right to abortion and, on the other hand, the fact that the foetus is gradually developing during the pregnancy.

Preventing and combating men's violence against women

Men's violence against women is one of the ultimate expressions of inequality between women and men. This violence must stop. Preventing and combating violence and other abuse against women is a top priority for the Swedish Government. The work comprises all forms of physical, psychological, sexual violence and threat of violence that is directed toward women and girls. Combatting honour related violence and oppression as well as trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes are other parts of this work.

Violence-prevention measures

To stop men's violence against women, the Government is investing in violence-prevention measures involving schools, counselling centres for perpetrators and rehabilitation programmes for male offenders, provided by the Prison and Probation Service.

A national strategy to end men's violence against women

In November 2016, the Swedish Government presented a national holistic strategy for work to prevent and combat men's violence against women. It is guided by a set of objectives and indicators to enable improved evaluation and follow-up results. The Government puts strong emphasis on violence prevention and steps up work on changing gender stereotypes surrounding masculinity, violence and destructive masculine behaviour. Support to women's shelters that protect and support women subjected to violence is strengthened. More will be done to promote increased participation by men in these efforts to promote change. The Government has extended support to a national telephone hot-line that people, primarily men, who risk committing sexual assaults can call for advice and assistance in obtaining treatment.

Support to women's shelters

Furthermore, the Government has allocated more than EUR 10 million per year, in addition to already existing support, to women's shelter organisations, including shelters for women with substance abuse, women with disabilities and women in prostitution or human trafficking for sexual purposes.

Review of rape legislation

Strong legal protection against men's violence against women, including sexual offences, is crucial. The Government has altered the Penal Code's provisions on rape, and has introduced a consent-based regulation and a negligence offence regarding rape.

Involving men and boys in gender equality and promoting healthier gender norms

Knowledge about masculinity norms needs to be given greater emphasis in the understanding of the unacceptable differences between girls and boys, and women and men that exist in different areas. Stereotypical masculinity norms are a serious obstacle to achieving gender equality.

Traditional gender stereotypes hinder the empowerment of women and girls

Gender power relations and traditional gender stereotypes that link masculinity with violence hinder the empowerment of women and girls, and gender equality. Therefore, more focus must be placed on the root causes of violence. More effective prosecution of perpetrators is essential, as is lowering the threshold for men to seek help to change violent behaviour. Investments are needed in universal violence prevention in schools to change norms and attitudes associated with masculinity, violence and sexist behaviour.

Promoting healthier and more equitable gender norms for men has been shown to reduce men's violence against women and children, increase men's support to partners in accessing health services, reduce the disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities on women, and foster more equitable relationships at household, community and society levels. It has also been shown to improve men's health.

The Swedish Government has reached an agreement with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, with the aim of including more boys and men in the gender equality work and to put more focus on their role in and responsibility for the realisation of a gender equal society.

Active responsibility and participation by men benefits all

Men must be involved in gender equality work and must be invited to participate, but men must also themselves take a more active and substantial responsibility for continuing gender equality efforts. This is to the benefit of men themselves, of women and of children, but also of society as a whole. Men have an important role to play as actors of change in promoting gender equality in many societies.

Men also need to become much more involved in sharing unpaid domestic and care work, in breaking the gender segregation of the labour market, in promoting talented women in business and in preventing violence against women. Men's equal sharing of parental leave with women has proven to have a positive effect on the development of women's wages and not least on men's relationships with their children. In order to promote a more even sharing and encourage men's usage of the parental leave days, the Swedish government introduced a third reserved month for each parent in 2016 and is currently reviewing the policy for further modernisation promoting gender equal parenting.

Elderly care and women's pensions

Since the mid-twentieth century Sweden has built a strong welfare system including a social security system and support for the elderly. This has contributed towards gender equality and to a relatively high proportion of the female population being in work, which has been extremely important to Sweden's economic development and social development as a whole.

We live longer today. This is a positive development, but it also creates challenges. A publicly financed welfare system requires that as many people as possible participate in the workforce, which in turn calls for a welfare system that supports such development.

Women's pensions improved but still lower than men's

The extension of parental leave and child care gradually improved opportunities for men and women to combine parenthood and careers. For women, this has meant improved pensions. However, men still use only around 25 % of parental leave, which to some degree sustains the gender pay and pension gaps.

Women are still working part time to a greater extent than men and earn less over their life cycle. This means that they get a significantly lower pension than men. Therefore, a thorough review of the pensions system from a gender equality perspective has been initiated.

Staffing a key factor for quality care of the elderly and improved working environment

The design of elderly care is in many ways a question of conditions for women. The majority of people working in elderly care are women, and the majority of users are also women. Relevant Government agencies are constantly working to integrate a gender equality perspective in core operations with the aim that there should be no unjustified gender differences in processing, approach and decision-making.

Policies for the elderly are designed with the aim that elderly women and men should be able to lead active lives, exercise influence in society and over their daily lives, be able to age in safe and reassuring surroundings in which they retain their independence, be treated with respect and have access to good care and health care. Older people in need of health care must be able to trust that health and social care is of good quality and that there is sufficient staff with appropriate training and experience. Many key factors affecting quality and efficiency in elderly care are related to staffing and availability of staff.

Therefore, the Swedish Government increased funding to increase staffing levels, with the aim of improving the quality of care of the elderly, increasing reassurance for elderly people and improving conditions to ensure the care provided is equal in every respect, including gender equality, throughout Sweden. Higher staffing levels can also allow for staff to spend more time with the older people and to better tailor activities to individual needs. This can also contribute towards a better working environment and , thereby increasing the attractiveness of the profession.

To supplement higher staffing levels, the Swedish Government has also invested in a training initiative geared towards basic level staff who care for the elderly and people with disabilities, aiming at strategically reducing crucial knowledge gaps, for example from the point of view of equality and gender equality.

Prostitution and trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes

Trafficking in human beings is a serious crime and has been called a modern form of slavery. It entails serious obstacles for the full enjoyment of human rights and has a very strong gender and child rights perspective. Almost 80 per cent of trafficking victims are women and girls.

Swedish ambassador to combat trafficking in human beings

The Swedish Government is stepping up its work against trafficking in human beings. An ambassador to combat trafficking in human beings has been installed, and will provide a strong support to the work against trafficking in the international arena. The ambassador will especially acknowledge the gender equality perspective and criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services as a way to decrease demand for sexual services.

Prostitution and trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes

The Swedish Government has for a long time given priority to combatting prostitution and trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes. This is one part of the government's work to combat men's violence against women. In 2018 the Government decided on an action plan to combat prostitution and human trafficking.

The underlying reasons for people being involved in prostitution vary, but the primary factor that sustains both trafficking in human for sexual purposes and prostitution is demand. Efforts to undermine the market and to counteract the demand to buy sexual services are therefore fundamental in combatting prostitution and trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes.

The Swedish model: Purchasing sexual services is illegal

On 1 January 1999, Sweden became the first country in the world to introduce legislation criminalising the purchase, and not the selling, of sexual services. Since then, purchase of – and attempt to purchase – a sexual service has constituted a criminal offence in Sweden.

A person who obtains a casual sexual relation in return for payment, shall [if the act does not constitute another sexual crime] be sentenced for purchase of sexual service to a fine or imprisonment for at most one year. (Penal Code Chapter 6, Section 11)

The offence comprises all forms of sexual services, whether they are purchased on the street, the internet or in 'massage parlours', etc. The provision also applies to a person who takes advantage of a sexual service paid for by another person.

The legislation marks Sweden's attitude towards prostitution and ideas of a gender equal society. In the majority of cases, the seller is the weaker party, who is exploited by the buyer. Further, in most cases it is men who are acquiring casual sexual relations with women against remuneration. This is unacceptable. In Sweden, persons who sell sexual services are not punished. These persons should not risk punishment when seeking help because they have been selling sex.

By criminalising the purchase of sexual services, prostitution and its damaging effects can be counteracted more effectively. Active involvement of social services is key. Criminalisation can never be more than a supplementary element in the efforts to reduce prostitution, and cannot be a substitute for broader social interventions. The penalty is a fine or imprisonment for maximum one year. The most common penalty is a fine. In 2015, there were about 280 prosecutions.

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Gender equality policy in Sweden

Effects of criminalisation of sex purchase

The criminalisation has been evaluated and an Inquiry report was presented to the government in 2010. It concluded that the prohibition had had the intended effect, and is an important instrument in preventing and combatting prostitution and trafficking for sexual purposes.

According to the report, street prostitution in Sweden had halved since the prohibition was introduced in 1999. The Inquiry could find no confirmation that the criminalisation had had a negative effect on people exploited through prostitution.

Barrier for trafficking in human for sexual purposes

Trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes is considered to be substantially less prevalent in Sweden than in other comparable countries. The prohibition of the purchase of sexual services seems to act as a barrier for human traffickers and procurers. According to the Police, criminal groups that sell women for sexual purposes view Sweden as a poor market. They choose not to establish themselves here because of the prohibition.

Normative effect on attitudes toward purchasing sexual services

Furthermore, the Inquiry report concluded that the prohibition of the purchase of sexual services had also had a normative effect. There had been a change in attitude to the purchase of sexual services that coincided with making it a criminal offence to purchase sexual services. In Sweden, there is strong support for the prohibition (72 per cent are positive towards the legislation). The prohibition has proved to act as a deterrent to sex purchasers.

The Inquiry stated that those who have left prostitution have a consistently positive view of the ban. According to persons previously involved in prostitution, criminalisation of purchase of sexual services has made them stronger. They also point out that the buyers are the ones who entice young people into prostitution, and that there is no voluntary prostitution. The buyer always has the power and the people selling their bodies are always the ones being exploited.

In September 2014, an Inquiry was assigned with the task of evaluating the effect of the raised maximum penalty for purchase of a sexual service implemented in 2011. The purpose of the amendment was to make possible a more nuanced assessment of the penal value in serious cases of purchase of sexual services, such as when the person selling sex is a victim of trafficking in human beings.

Social initiatives to combat prostitution

Other initiatives aim at helping people to get out of prostitution or to stop purchasing sex. The social services in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö operate so called FAST (people with experience of prostitution) and KAST (purchasers of sexual services) groups that help with outreach activities, motivational interviews, different forms of therapy and psychosocial support.

Other preventive measures

The government also supports the development of guidance materials for professionals that have contact with people with experience from prostitution. The materials aim at developing their ability to see signals of for example children and young people at risk of falling into prostitution.