



Annual Report 2026

Executive summary

Swedish Institute for Human Rights



Swedish
Institute for
Human Rights

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**The Swedish Institute
for Human Rights
monitors and reports
on how human rights
are respected and
realised in Sweden.**



The Swedish Institute for Human Rights

is Sweden's national human rights institution. Its mandate is established by law in the Act on the Institute for Human Rights (2021:642), and the Institute operates in accordance with the Paris Principles relating to national human rights institutions. Since October 2024, the Institute has been accredited with A-status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).

Each year, the Institute submits a report to the Government presenting its observations on developments in the field of human rights during the previous year. The purpose of the report is to provide proposals to the Government on measures needed to ensure the effective protection of human rights in Sweden.

The annual report also supports the Riksdag in its review of how the Government fulfils Sweden's international human rights obligations.

In addition, the report is intended to assist government agencies, regions, municipalities, civil society organisations, and other actors working to strengthen respect for human rights in Sweden.

The report is based primarily on the Institute's own assessments and analyses, as well as on information from civil society organisations, public authorities, and the experiences of individuals and groups whose rights are affected. When studies from other actors are referenced, this is generally done without evaluation by the Institute, unless otherwise indicated.

Human rights in Sweden 2025

The introductory chapter of the report provides an overview of developments in relation to human rights in Sweden in 2025.

The chapter addresses issues related to the principles of the rule of law and civil and political rights, including the quality of the legislative process, the independence of the courts, and freedoms such as freedom of expression and freedom of association. It also highlights that efforts to uphold the rule of law and combat crime often involve difficult trade-offs. The state has a responsibility to safeguard public order and protect individuals, including victims of crime, from having their rights violated. At the same time, the state must protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of all persons such as the rights to personal integrity, personal security and freedom of movement, including of those suspected of crimes. The report also notes a trend towards increased deprivation of liberty, particularly affecting children and young people.

The chapter further addresses economic, social and cultural rights, including the rights to work, housing, health and social security, and examines how factors such as the cost-of-living crisis, discrimination and digitalisation affect individuals' effective access to these rights.

Climate and environmental issues are also discussed from a human rights perspective, as well as equal access to rights and the situation of different groups, including women, children, older persons, LGBTQI persons, national minorities, Sami, asylum seekers and migrants, and persons with disabilities.

Finally, the chapter highlights important court cases and legal developments in Swedish and international courts, as well as ongoing international reviews of Sweden's compliance with human rights obligations.

Although the annual report covers several different areas of rights, a number of recurring patterns can be identified.

Shortcomings in the legislative process

The report shows that the quality of the legislative process is often insufficient from a human rights perspective. Legislative proposals are frequently prepared within short investigation and consultation periods, and thorough analyses of how different rights may be affected are often lacking. As a result, the Riksdag does not always have the information necessary to assess whether proposed restrictions on rights are necessary and proportionate.

Limited impact of international commitments

The report also shows that international human rights commitments – such as the European Convention and other human rights treaties – do not always have full effect in Swedish law and practice. In 2025, these frameworks have also been openly questioned in the political debate, particularly in relation to the work of the Council of Europe and the role of the European Court of Human Rights. When international law is treated as optional rather than binding, the protection of individual rights is weakened, as is the functioning of the rule of law. Such developments also risk undermining regional and international human rights systems, which are central to a rules-based international order.

Weak enforceability in practice

The report further shows that it is often difficult for individuals to have their rights upheld in practice. Many people do not know where to turn when their rights are violated or feel that reporting violations would be futile. This is serious, as rights without accessible and effective avenues for review and redress risk losing their meaning in practice. It also means that violations may continue without being exposed or remedied.

State Institutional Care for Children and Young People at a Crossroads

Chapter 2 addresses state child and youth care at the youth homes operated by the National Board of Institutional Care (SiS) for children and young people placed under compulsory care pursuant to the Care of Young Persons Act (LVU).

When the state takes a child into care, several fundamental rights come into play. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is based on the premise that the family is the natural environment for a child to grow up in and that separation from parents should occur only when necessary for the child's best interests and when less intrusive measures are not sufficient. A child who has been deprived of their family environment has the same rights as other children and is also entitled to special protection and support.

This chapter summarises the review of LVU placements at SiS youth homes from a child rights and disability rights perspective carried out by the Institute in 2024–2025.

The review shows a trend towards more prison-like environments, with extensive security rules, increased use of coercion and significant restrictions on children's everyday lives. It also shows that children and young people with disabilities are significantly overrepresented. The structure and working methods of SiS youth homes have several features that meet the criteria for unlawful institutionalisation according to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the care provided is not designed to meet the needs of the target group. The chapter also highlights that placements beyond the permitted time limits are systematic, which means that children and young people are arbitrarily deprived of their liberty. In addition, there are shortcomings in children's opportunities for redress: complaints of violence and abuse are rarely investigated in an independent, effective and child-friendly manner.

The Institute for Human Rights recommends that the Riksdag and the Government take the following measures:

1. Develop a strategy for deinstitutionalisation.
2. Prohibit the isolation of children and young people.
3. Prevent arbitrary deprivation of liberty at SiS youth homes.
4. Establish an independent complaints mechanism that can provide redress for children in care.

Academic Freedom – A Human Rights Issue

Chapter 3 addresses academic freedom as a human rights issue. The chapter shows how academic freedom both rests on and is a prerequisite for several fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression, freedom of information, the right to education and the right to benefit from scientific progress.

Under international human rights law and EU law, Sweden has an obligation to respect the freedom necessary for research, teaching and the dissemination of knowledge. Developments in international norms also demonstrate that academic freedom has both an individual dimension – concerning the freedom of researchers, teachers and students – and an institutional dimension, relating to the autonomy and independence of institutions of higher education.

A review of the legal protection of academic freedom in Sweden shows that while the individual protection of researchers and teachers is relatively strong in many respects, the protection of the institutional autonomy of higher education institutions is more limited. The chapter also highlights a number of recurring risk factors for academic freedom, including political control and influence, the design of funding systems, insecure employment conditions, and threats, hatred and harassment directed at individual researchers and teachers, which may lead to self-censorship.

The Swedish Institute for Human Rights recommends that the Riksdag and the Government:

1. Ensure that Sweden fulfils its international obligations concerning academic freedom.
2. Ensure that efforts and reforms aimed at strengthening academic freedom have broad support among relevant stakeholders.

The Right to Social Security – A Safety Net at Risk

Chapter 4 addresses the right to social security. The right to social security is a fundamental human right. It means that individuals who, for example due to illness, unemployment, old age or disability, are unable to support themselves should receive assistance to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and housing.

The right is recognised in several international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

The right to social security entails that the state has a responsibility to ensure that individuals who cannot support themselves have access to support without discrimination. Such support must be available and adequate, in terms of both level and duration, to ensure an adequate standard of living. The principles and interpretations developed by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also emphasise that access to rights must not be weakened without very strong justification, and that the state must always guarantee a basic minimum level of protection, even in times of economic strain.

This chapter focuses on the element of the right to social security that concerns financial compensation for those who cannot support themselves. It begins with an overview of the content of the right and the state's obligations, followed by an analysis of economic vulnerability in Sweden.

The analysis shows that parts of the social security system risk being weakened at a time when the cost of living, as well as material and social poverty, are increasing. Several benefits are highlighted where compensation levels have not kept pace with developments in wages and living costs and therefore risk no longer ensuring an adequate standard of living.

In particular, the chapter highlights risks related to:

- > the level and duration of unemployment benefits,
- > the lag in assistance benefits in relation to wage and cost developments, and
- > daily allowances for asylum seekers, which have remained unchanged for decades.

The chapter also shows that several reform proposals in 2025 – including stricter eligibility conditions, qualification requirements and restrictions on social benefits – risk having discriminatory effects and leaving individuals without access to basic support, including children and other particularly vulnerable groups.

The Swedish Institute for Human Rights recommends that the Riksdag and the Government:

1. Review the compatibility of Swedish law with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
2. Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
3. Ensure that social benefits are available and adequate in amount and period of entitlement to secure a satisfactory standard of living for those who depend on them.

When Hatred Becomes Normalised – The Consequences of Racism for Individuals and the Obligations of the State

Chapter 5 examines how racist hate propaganda and racially motivated hate crimes affect people in Sweden and clarifies the state's obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

The chapter is based primarily on experiences shared during dialogues with rights holders and civil society actors prior to the Institute's submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which reviewed Sweden in 2025.

Under the Convention, racial discrimination includes any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin that limits people's ability to enjoy their rights on equal terms. Article 4 of the Convention requires states to criminalise certain racist acts, prohibit racist organisations and propaganda, and ensure that public authorities do not promote or incite racial discrimination. Article 6 further requires states to ensure effective protection and access to justice, including the right to compensation and redress.

Racist and xenophobic motives account for the largest proportion of reported hate crimes in Sweden. In the dialogues conducted by the Institute ahead of the review by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, participants described everyday experiences of hatred, threats and harassment in public spaces, online and in schools.

Many participants expressed concern that racist undertones in the political debate contribute to the normalisation of racism, both in digital environments and in society more broadly. Children and young people were described as particularly vulnerable in online environments. Several participants stated that they adapt their behaviour or conceal aspects of their identity or visible attributes in order to avoid harassment or attacks.

At the same time, access to effective remedies remains limited. Hate crimes are often not reported, and only a small proportion of reports lead to prosecution or conviction. Participants described a lack of knowledge about available remedies, weak support structures, low levels of trust in institutions and a perception that hate crimes are not prioritised by authorities.

The Swedish Institute for Human Rights recommends that the Riksdag and the Government:

1. Strengthen efforts across the justice system to combat hate crimes, in order to increase the number of cases that are investigated and resolved and to develop the police's preventive and trust-building work.
2. Take immediate steps to counter and clearly distance themselves from racist hate propaganda and xenophobic statements, particularly in the run-up to the Swedish elections in 2026.
3. Ensure that equality data can be collected, analysed and used in a rights-based manner, in close dialogue with and with respect for the groups concerned.

Follow-up on Previous Recommendations

In the concluding section of the report, the Swedish Institute for Human Rights follows up on recommendations from previous annual reports and notes that the Government's feedback remains limited. The Institute emphasises that more comprehensive and systematic reporting on how these recommendations have been addressed would be desirable.

As in previous annual reports, the Institute underlines the need for more coherent and systematic national efforts to promote and protect human rights. There remains a need for a new national strategy and action plan, stronger legal and institutional protection, and improved coordination of international human rights recommendations. The Government's decision to task the Swedish Agency for Public Management with evaluating the 2016 Strategy for the Government's work with human rights at the national level is a step in the right direction.

In this annual report, the Institute also follows up on earlier recommendations concerning the human rights of older persons. The assessment shows that the structural challenges identified in the 2025 Annual Report largely remain. The recommendations concerned, among other things, the need to combat ageism, strengthen the participation of older persons, abolish discriminatory age limits, introduce a system of supported decision-making, and ensure that Sweden takes an active role in efforts to develop an international convention on the rights of older persons.

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