



Swedish
Institute for
Human Rights

Annual Report **2025**



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Mobilvägen 10, Lund

mrinstitutet.se

Phone: +46 46-287 39 00

E-mail: registrator@mrinstitutet.se

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



Executive summary



According to the Act (2021:642) on the Swedish Institute for Human Rights, we are obliged to submit an annual report to the Government of our analysis of developments in the field of human rights during the preceding year. We are also required to make suggestions to the Government on measures needed to safeguard human rights in Sweden. The annual report can support the Parliament in their evaluation of the Government's report on the cross-sectoral objective of the human rights policy, "to ensure full respect for Sweden's international human rights commitments". The annual report can also be used to support government agencies, regions, municipalities, civil society organisations and other actors working to strengthen respect for human rights in Sweden.

In our Annual Report, we present our observations of developments in the field of human rights in Sweden during 2024. The report also includes a thematic focus on the human rights of older persons. We have based the analysis in the report on our own assessments as well as on studies and reports from stakeholders such as civil society organisations, government actors, and rights holders. Unless otherwise stated, results of external studies are presented without assessment from the Swedish Institute for Human Rights.

We live in a time of increased global uncertainty. Democracy is more vulnerable than it has been for several decades, free elections are threatened by violence and manipulation, resulting in decreasing levels of freedom. We are witnessing war and armed conflict, even in our own neighbourhood. Independent institutions, free media, independent courts and constitutional human rights guarantees are being challenged and questioned. Sweden is not isolated from these developments. The

consequences of digitalisation, organised crime, economic fluctuations, climate change and pandemics are testing our resilience and revealing gaps in the protection of human rights.

Attitudes towards human rights in Sweden

Support for human rights is still strong in Sweden. In the survey Knowledge, Attitudes and Perceptions of Human Rights in Scandinavia (the survey) carried out in 2024 by the Swedish Institute for Human Rights in collaboration with the Danish Institute for Human Rights and the Norwegian Institute for Human Rights, 82 per cent of respondents stated that human rights are important to them and reflect their values. Half of the Swedes surveyed also said that the state should do more to protect human rights. A recurring criticism in the three Scandinavian countries is that human rights limit the scope for political action. There is sometimes talk of a juridification of politics. However, the survey suggests that there is little support for this criticism amongst the general

public, only 17 per cent in Norway, 20 per cent in Denmark and 25 per cent in Sweden agree that human rights place too many restrictions on political decision making, while about twice as many disagree.

On the other hand, the survey shows that many people are willing to accept restrictions of their rights, such as more extensive surveillance, if the aim is to fight serious crime. For example, a significant proportion of respondents are willing to tolerate government surveillance of electronic communications if it helps fight crime: 39 per cent in Norway, 41 per cent in Denmark and 45 per cent in Sweden. These high figures are probably related to the high level of trust in public authorities. At the same time, it is worrying that increased government surveillance is proving to have a chilling effect on freedom of expression and opinion. A

minority of respondents say they have changed their online behaviour because of fear of government surveillance.

A further finding from our survey is that the rights to housing, health, a healthy environment, freedom from discrimination and social security are considered to be under particular threat in Sweden. Failure to fulfil these human rights can also have a negative effect on the enjoyment of other fundamental rights. It is therefore important that the indivisibility and interdependence of rights are recognised in legislation and policy making.

The Annual Report contains two main parts. A section on human rights developments in Sweden in 2024 and a thematic section in which we focus on the human rights of older persons.

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Section 1: Human rights in Sweden 2024

The section on human rights in Sweden 2024 is divided into five sub-chapters dealing with different aspects of human rights. As human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent, some issues will be addressed in multiple parts of the report. For example, the report includes a specific chapter on the human rights of persons with disabilities. However, the human rights of persons with disabilities are also raised in other chapters, such as that on non-discrimination or economic, social and cultural rights.

The first chapter of the section on human rights in Sweden in 2024 focuses on developments in the area of the rule of law and civil and political rights. During 2024, the European Network of Human Rights Institutes (ENNHRI) has highlighted how so-called securitisation is impacting human rights, a development that we also see in Sweden. The term securitisation can be used to describe a process whereby the state increasingly categorises regular political actions or developments as security issues, thereby justifying limitations on rights and freedoms in the name of security.

The rule of law and civil and political rights

The state has a duty to protect the security of the population and in order to do so, it may be permitted to restrict certain human rights, for example in preventing disorder or crime. However, human rights treaties set out clear prerequisites for how this can be done. Any restrictions must be in accordance with the law, necessary in a democratic society and proportionate. Restrictive measures proposed in government inquiries must therefore be based on a thorough analysis of whether they are necessary for achieving the stated purpose, as well as whether they are proportionate to any foreseen human rights violation. We have noted shortcomings in these analyses in several proposed legislative amendments.

The rapid changes and the number of measures taken to increase security thus risk undermining the principles of legal certainty and the protection of human rights. We have continuously identified shortcomings in the form of short investigation times, inadequate human rights impact assessments in government inquiries, overlapping inquiries making it difficult to assess the overall effects of the reforms, investigations where the investigator is instructed to submit proposals even if the investigator does not consider the proposals to be appropriate or effective, and in some cases short response times for consultation bodies.

We have therefore called for an overall review of the reforms in this area and the impact they may have on the enjoyment of human rights. An important step along the way, and in line with our recommendations to the Government in the Annual Report 2024, is that the Swedish National Financial Management Authority has now been tasked with clarifying the instructions for impact assessments in the work of public investigations.

In the second chapter we turn to economic, social and cultural rights. As mentioned above, in our survey, Knowledge, Attitudes and Perceptions of Human Rights in Scandinavia, respondents expressed greatest concern in relation to these rights. They considered several economic, social and cultural rights to be under threat in Sweden, including the right to housing and the right to an adequate standard of living. We have observed that economic vulnerability has increased in Sweden. Certain groups are particularly affected, including those born outside Sweden, older persons, single mothers and persons with disabilities. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) obliges the state to use the maximum of available resources to ensure that these human rights are fulfilled. Furthermore, the principle of non-retrogression prohibits unjustified deterioration of the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights.

Economic, social
and cultural rights

We have also observed that the security policies mentioned above show an over-reliance on the restriction of rights and freedoms, at the expense of long-term preventative measures; measures aimed at strengthening access to human rights, reducing exclusion and polarisation and counteracting discrepancies in access to human rights. These discrepancies can be one of the forces contributing to insecurity, for example driving the recruitment of children and young persons into criminal gangs.

During the year, Sweden was reviewed by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Among many recommendations to Sweden, the Committee noted that economic, social and cultural rights have a weak position in the country and recommended that the Government take steps to give full effect to the rights in national legislation and ensure that they are justiciable. This is in line with previous recommendations put forward by the Swedish Institute for Human Rights. We have argued that Swedish legislation needs to be reviewed to ensure that it is in line with the state's human rights obligations. Furthermore, actors in the judicial system need to explicitly take the convention into account in their decisions and

judgements. We have also urged the Government to ratify the additional protocols to the ICESCR and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which provide for individual complaint mechanisms.

The third chapter deals with equal access to human rights, highlighting the situation of specific groups whose human rights are at risk. We see that discrimination based on race, skin colour, ethnicity or national origin is still a widespread social problem in Sweden and that threats, hatred and harassment towards certain groups in society are increasing. A large number of LGBTI people experience discrimination with transgender people being particularly vulnerable to hate speech and threats. The human rights of Sweden's five national minorities - the Sami, Tornedalians, Jews, Roma and Swedish Finns - are facing challenges in several respects. We also see that anti-Semitism in Sweden has increased significantly in recent years. From a European perspective, there is also a clear increase in of racism towards Muslims. Almost one in two have experienced racism in their daily lives and more than one in four have experienced racist harassment. The Sami, who are also an indigenous people, have experienced increased intimidation and hatred, particularly if they wear visible Sami attributes.

Equal access to human rights

During the year measures were taken to counteract discrimination and hate crime. Among other things, a government inquiry has proposed a national strategy for strengthening Jewish life in Sweden and a new action plan to combat racism and hate crime has been presented. However, it is important that those affected are fully involved in both the development and implementation of the strategies. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset has presented its final report, which the Swedish Institute for Human Rights supports in its entirety. It is now urgent that the Commission's proposals are fully implemented to ensure justice and redress for historical human rights violations.

Sweden has been praised in a review by GREVIO, the expert body that monitors compliance with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). GREVIO commends Sweden for its innovative approach, especially when it comes to legislation. However, we note that it is still difficult for victims to obtain redress, as few such offences are investigated and prosecuted.

The chapter also highlights the human rights of migrants and asylum seekers. Migration policy is another area undergoing major reforms that risk having a serious impact on individuals' ability to enjoy their human rights. Here too, there is need for a review of the overall consequences for the individual. In our supplementary information to the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review¹ of Sweden, the Swedish Institute for Human Rights has emphasised the importance of ensuring that migrants, including refugees, asylum seekers, persons covered by the EU temporary protection directive and irregular migrants, have effective access to the social services necessary to enjoy basic rights, including health care and education. We also emphasise that they should be guaranteed an effective opportunity for family reunification. We emphasise that the new EU pact on migration and asylum must be implemented with respect for the rule of law and human rights and that civil society should be involved in the process.

Environment and human rights is the focus of chapter four. In 2024, there have been important normative developments in relation to the linkages between human rights, climate change and the environment. This includes the recognition of a clean and healthy environment as a human right in itself as well as clarifications of the impact that climate change can have on the human rights of individuals and groups.

Environment and
human rights

An historic ruling from the European Court of Human Rights in the so-called KlimaSeniorinnen case established that inadequate government action to combat climate change can constitute a violation of, among other things, the right to privacy. We also welcome a new EU directive that requires larger companies to identify and manage human rights and environmental risks in value chains and look forward to the Government implementing the directive in Sweden through legislation. However, we are concerned that Swedish climate policy does not appear to be achieving its climate goals. If Sweden is to ensure the right to a clean and healthy environment, stronger, just and inclusive measures are needed ensure that climate emissions are reduced.

1 The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a review process of the UN Human Rights Council. A working group of the UN Human Rights Council carries out the review itself, but it is also an open process that allows all member states to participate and scrutinise each other. The review concludes with a report in which each country reviewed is given recommendations on what it can do to improve the state of human rights in the country. Web source: United Nations Human Rights Council, Universal Periodic Review.

As we highlight in the Annual Report, the indigenous Sami people are among those who have been hardest hit by climate change, but also those whose human rights are curtailed by measures linked to the green transition. The Swedish Institute for Human Rights has previously emphasised the importance of ensuring that climate change mitigation and adaptation is grounded in the perspective of equality and inclusion and that groups particularly affected by climate change are given real influence in the design of measures for both climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The situation of environmental defenders is also addressed in the annual report. Under the Aarhus Convention, peaceful protest is a legitimate way to influence climate policy, and the state should ensure that environmental defenders can promote and defend human rights freely and safely without being subjected to reprisals. Against this background, the repression and vulnerability that characterise the situation of environmental defenders in Sweden and other countries is worrying.

The final chapter of the section on human rights in Sweden 2024 focuses specifically on the human rights of persons with disabilities. During the year, Sweden was reviewed by the committee that monitors the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). The committee's conclusions show that Sweden needs to approach the convention differently, inter alia in legislation, budgeting and action plans.

Human rights
of persons with
disabilities

During the year, the government has given two assignments to the Swedish Agency for Participation (MFD) that relate in various ways to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the Disability Convention). However, we still lack targeted and systematic work to realise the Convention in its entirety. People with disabilities still face greater obstacles to human rights fulfilment compared to the rest of the population, particularly in relation to economic and social rights. As last year, we note that there is a return to a medical model that focuses on the disability itself as a barrier to human rights fulfilment.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that the point of departure should be the human rights of the individual with the state obligation being the removal of obstacles to their enjoyment. This applies not least to social protection and support systems for persons with

disabilities. We would also like to reiterate the recommendation we made to the Government in the 2024 annual report on the need to review compliance of Swedish legislation with commitments under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Section 2: The human rights of older persons

The second part of the Annual Report is a thematic section on the human rights of older persons. In 2024, the Swedish Institute for Human Rights presented a report on the human rights of older persons in long-term care. During data collection for the report, we encountered experiences and knowledge that indicated numerous challenges in the fulfilment of the human rights of older persons in other sectors of society. We have therefore chosen to include a specific thematic section focusing on the human rights of older persons, highlighting challenges beyond the care setting based on what we learned in our dialogues with older persons and civil society representatives.

The human rights
of older persons

In the thematic section, we highlight some implications for human rights in the daily lives of older persons. We highlight, among other things, the implications of ageism on older persons' human rights enjoyment, the right of older persons to participate fully in society and in decisions affecting them, and the importance of taking the views and experiences of older people into account in policy development. We also highlight older persons' right to health, including access to care and treatment throughout life. In the section, we make several recommendations to the government that we believe can improve the respect, protection and fulfilment of older persons' human rights.

Our recommendations to the Government

1

Develop an action plan to expose and combat ageism in society

2

Ensure greater involvement of older persons in all relevant policy areas

3

Ensure that discriminatory age limits as well as language that discriminates against older persons, are removed from legislation

4

Develop a system of supportive decision-making for older persons based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

5

Take an active role in the development of an international convention on the human rights of older persons

In the Annual Report 2024, the Swedish Institute for Human Rights made 17 recommendations to the Government addressing issues in five key areas:

- A new human rights strategy and action plan
- Strengthening legal protection
- Strengthening institutional protection
- Improved follow-up of recommendations from international monitoring bodies
- Taking action to increase knowledge and awareness of human rights

These recommendations are still as relevant as ever, and we reiterate them in this annual report. In the follow-up of last year's recommendations, we see that the government has taken some measures, for example with regard to the recommendations on human rights impact assessments. However, little or no tangible action has been taken on, for example, a new national strategy for human rights nor on the several recommendations on strengthening legal and institutional protection.

In our dialogue with the Government, we have not received any feedback on the recommendations we made, and our assessment is that the performance report in the budget bill does not take our annual report or our recommendations into consideration.

