

# Exploring Best Practices in Combatting Violence Against Women: Sweden

Committee on Women's Rights & Gender  
Equality





**DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES**  
**POLICY DEPARTMENT FOR CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND**  
**CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS**

**WOMEN'S RIGHTS & GENDER EQUALITY**

# **Exploring Best Practices in Combatting Violence Against Women: Sweden**

## **IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS**

### **Abstract**

This paper was produced by the Policy Department on Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM). The paper examines the status of women in Sweden, a country known for its proven track record on gender equality: it delves into the issue of preventing violence against women and protecting victims of violence. Gender equality is a cornerstone of Swedish society, thus violence against women is a priority for the Swedish Government. Various vulnerable groups might still require greater legislative protection and government response.

## **ABOUT THE PUBLICATION**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BRÅ</b>	Swedish Council for Crime Prevention
<b>CDR</b>	Cause of Death Register
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>DO</b>	Equality Ombudsman (Diskrimineringsombudsmannen)
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FGM</b>	Female Genital Mutilation
<b>FRA</b>	European Union Agency for Human Rights
<b>GMGA</b>	Gender Mainstreaming in Government Agencies
<b>LGBT</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>ROKS</b>	National Organisation for Women's and Young Women's Shelters in Sweden (Riksorganisation för kvinnojourer och tjejjourer i Sverige)
<b>SKR</b>	Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young Women's Empowerment Centres (Sveriges Kvinno- och Tjejjourers Riksförbund)
<b>UN</b>	United Nations

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper was produced by the Policy Department on Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM). The paper examines the status of women in Sweden, a country known for its exemplary work towards gender equality. It delves into the issue of preventing violence against women and protecting victims of violence. It also brings forward many other elements concerning women in Sweden, ranging from legislative developments and gender balance in political and economic decision making to the situation of vulnerable groups who are most at risk. Gender equality is a cornerstone of Swedish society, thus violence against women is a priority for the Swedish Government.

Women's rights are a top priority for the Swedish government, who consider feminism and gender equality to be a cornerstone of Swedish society. In recent years, Sweden has demonstrated progressive gender politics and legislative advances granting greater protection for women suffering from domestic violence. Gender mainstreaming is the main strategy adopted by the Swedish government; Swedish politics have reflected this by having one of the world's highest representations of women in parliament and relatively low disparities in pay.

Despite Sweden's advances, men's violence against women has not been eradicated. To combat this, the government has a well-funded, far reaching and inclusive strategy which attempts to improve detection, enhancing crime-fighting and improves knowledge and methodological development. Importantly, this strategy considers the participation and involvement of men as crucial: prevention is a government priority, rather than only caring for victims after violence has occurred.

Shelters across the country serve women who suffer from physical or psychological violence against men. Two main organisations, the National Organisation for Women's Shelters and Young Women's Shelters (Roks), and the Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young Women's Empowerment Centres (SKR), are responsible for running shelters, with each one having a considerable degree of independence. Support also ranges from telephone (and computer) based help to counselling and information sharing. These services are free and confidential, and it is not necessary for a crime to have been reported to the police for women to use these services. Traditionally based on voluntary work, the protection of victims has over the years become more and more professionalised, with an increased municipal involvement: the municipal services have begun to play their part in supporting victims of domestic violence (both through counselling and sheltered housing).

Concerns still surround particularly vulnerable women in society, including (but not limited to) undocumented migrants and transgender women. A grey area applies to undocumented women both in the sense they are the most under researched groups of women (due to their irregular status), and also because they are not covered by the benefits system. Their position has been highlighted by support service providers in Sweden. Transgender women are also particularly exposed as they face difficulties in accessing shelters owing to their gender identity and/or expression.

Visit the European Parliament's homepage on [migration in Europe](#).

## 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Sweden is the third largest country in the European Union (EU), located in Northern Europe. In January 2018, Sweden had a population of 10 128 320, with an increase of 1,2 % compared with the same period previous year.<sup>1</sup> The increase is partly due to the fact that many foreign citizens have been granted Swedish citizenship in the past two years: in 2017, in total 68 898 persons from over 160 countries became Swedish citizens, which represents an increase of 14 % compared with the previous record in 2016. Syrian citizens were the largest group to be granted Swedish citizenship: in 2017, Swedish citizenship was granted to 8 635 Syrian citizens which is nearly twice as many as in the previous year.<sup>2</sup>

In Sweden, politics take place in the framework of a parliamentary representative democratic constitutional monarchy. Executive power is exercised by the government, led by the Prime Minister. Legislative power is vested in both the government and parliament, elected within a multi-party system. The Judiciary is independent, appointed by the government and employed until retirement. The current democratic regime is a product of a stable development of successively added democratic institutions introduced during the 19th century up to 1921, when also women's suffrage was introduced.

Sweden is well known for progressive gender politics and an advanced welfare system. The Scandinavian nation is a forerunner of gender equality driven by both an intellectual and practical feminist movement. By the mid-19th century women were given compulsory primary education, and at the start of the 20th century, social change in the realm of gender equality and work life gained traction, with gender neutral language to public offices applications among other accomplishments. By 1921, women had received the vote and present day Sweden consistently ranks among the top countries in the world for gender equality.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/population/population-composition/population-statistics/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/population/population-composition/population-statistics/pong/statistical-news/swedens-population-2017--population-changes2/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sweden.se/society/gender-equality-in-sweden/>

## 2. GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

### 2.1. Gender Mainstreaming as the Main Strategy to Achieve Equality

In Sweden, gender mainstreaming is seen as the main strategy for achieving targets within equality policy. In recent years, to strengthen the gender mainstreaming work in municipalities, county councils, regions, county administrative boards, academia and other public domains, the Swedish government has handed out various assignments gathering experiences and developing knowledge and methods for the ongoing gender equality work. The use of gender mainstreaming as a strategy to reach the goals declared for Swedish gender equality policy dates back to 1994. According to the strategy, gender equality work must be integrated into the regular operations and not merely be dealt with as a separate, parallel track. For the work to have an impact and in order to reach the national gender equality goals, the organisation must systematically highlight and analyse the impacts of various proposals and decisions for women and men, respectively. The resulting knowledge shall in a next stage inform the design of the planning, implementation, follow-up and development at all levels of all public operations.<sup>4</sup>

#### 2.1.1. The Gender Equality Agency

The Swedish Government has commissioned **the Gender Equality Agency** to support 58 government agencies and one organisation with the work of integrating a gender perspective in all of their operations, in the context of the so-called “Gender Mainstreaming in Government Agencies (GMGA) programme”. Up until January 2018 the assignment was commissioned to the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research.<sup>5</sup>

The support provided by the Gender Equality Agency to the government agencies is offered in both the planning and implementation phases of the agencies’ development work. The programme includes, in particular, training activities, identifying and disseminating best practices and documenting the results of the agencies’ work.<sup>6</sup>

#### 2.1.2. The Equality Ombudsman

The **Equality Ombudsman** (Diskrimineringsombudsmannen, DO) is a government agency combatting discrimination and protecting equal rights and opportunities for everyone. The Equality Ombudsman reviews gender equality situations related, for example, to workplaces or educational institutions and oversees their compliance with the Discrimination Act which prohibits discrimination related to gender, transgender identity or expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability or age.

#### 2.1.3. The Minister for Gender Equality

Within the Swedish Government, the **Minister for Gender Equality** is ultimately responsible for gender equality issues. On International Women’s Day, 8 March 2018, Lena Hallengren was appointed as the new Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality of Sweden. A new minister was needed, as on 7 March 2018, the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres appointed Åsa Regnér, the previous Swedish Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality, as Deputy Executive Director of UN Women with

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/en/support-coordination/gender-mainstreaming/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/en/support-coordination/gender-mainstreaming/government-agencies-higher-education-institutions/government-agencies-in-the-gmqa-programme/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/en/support-coordination/gender-mainstreaming/government-agencies-higher-education-institutions/government-agencies-in-the-gmqa-programme/>

responsibility for intergovernmental relations and strategic partnerships, as well as Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations.<sup>7</sup>

#### 2.1.4. A Feminist Government

On its website<sup>8</sup>, the Swedish Government presents itself as “the first feminist government in the world”. The Government also highlights that gender equality is central to its priorities, both in decision-making and resource allocation: “A feminist government ensures that a gender equality perspective is brought into policy-making on a broad front, both nationally and internationally. Women and men must have the same power to shape society and their own lives. This is a human right and a matter of democracy and justice. Gender equality is also part of the solution to society’s challenges and a matter of course in a modern welfare state – for justice and economic development. The Government’s most important tool for implementing feminist policy is gender mainstreaming, of which gender-responsive budgeting is an important component.”

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/3/announcement-secretary-general-appoints-asa-regner-of-sweden-as-deputy-executive-director-un-women>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.government.se/government-policy/a-feminist-government>

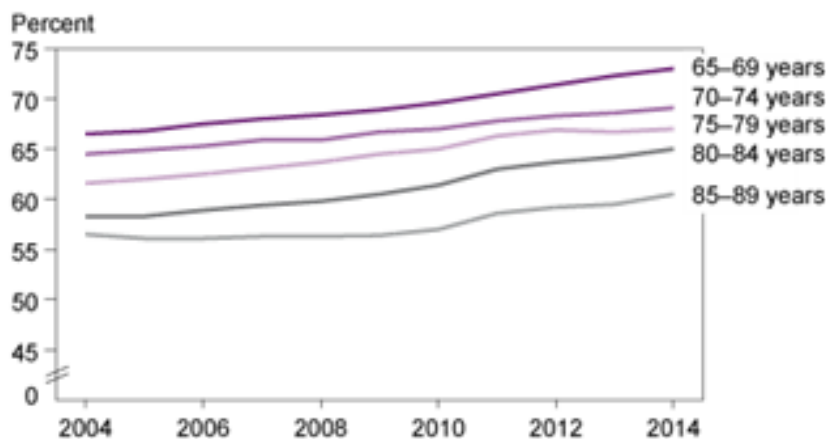
## 3. ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE AND PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

### 3.1 Economic and Political Power

In terms of the entire labour market, women earn 87 % of what men earn, when all pay is recalculated to full-time. Pay differentials are most pronounced in the county councils. The smallest difference is among blue-collar workers. According to Statistics Sweden's bi-annual report on gender equality, published in 2016, only 6 % of CEO positions in listed companies were filled by women, and 5 % of board chairpersons and 29 % of board members were women. Across private and public sectors, the report showed that 37 % of managers were women, compared with 62 % for the public sector.<sup>9</sup>

Despite robust laws in place for male child care, in reality, many women work part-time along with carrying the main responsibilities for child-care which can have an adverse effect on women reaching top level positions. In 2016, Statistics Sweden detailed that women still take over 80 % of given parental leave days. In light of the fact that more women than men work part-time, take longer parental leave and care for sick children, the differences between women's and men's annual income becomes even higher: women earn 81 % of what men earn. When working life comes to an end, women receive on average 67 % of what men receive in pension funds.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1 Women's pensions as a percentage of men's pension, by age, 2004–2014.**



Source: <http://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/living-conditions/gender-statistics/gender-statistics/peng/statistical-news/women-and-men-in-sweden-2016/>

### 3.2 Participation in Decision-Making

Sweden has one of the world's highest representations of women in parliament. After the 2014 elections, 43.6 % (152) of the 349 seats were allocated to women. At present, in total 12 of the 23 government ministers are women.<sup>11</sup> It has been suggested there has been a knock-on effect in Swedish politics in regards to women gaining seats in political

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/living-conditions/gender-statistics/gender-statistics/peng/statistical-news/women-and-men-in-sweden-2016/>

<sup>10</sup> Idem.

<sup>11</sup> <https://sweden.se/society/gender-equality-in-sweden/>

parties: out of fear of losing voters, each party has introduced women at a similar pace, demonstrating their commitment to equal rights.<sup>12</sup>

Several institutional, socio-economic and cultural factors might have contributed to the development of women's representation in Sweden. Moreover, "the system of proportional representation (party list system) coupled with the early development of the Swedish welfare system, women's opportunity to study and gain employment, low fertility levels and secular/protestant religious affiliation are of great importance explaining the high level of women in Swedish parliament."<sup>13</sup> Despite this, Sweden remains the only country in Scandinavia which has not seen a female Head of State.

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<sup>12</sup> Idem.

<sup>13</sup> Idem.

## 4. PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INTEGRITY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

### 4.1 Violence Against Women in Europe

According to the 2014 survey by the European Union Agency for Human Rights (FRA) for which more than 42,000 women were interviewed,<sup>14</sup> the scale of physical, sexual and psychological violence against women is still shockingly high in Europe:

**Table 2 FRA survey (2014) – experiencing violence**

#### **1. 62 million women in the EU have experienced violence since the age of 15**

- 1 in 3 women has experienced some form of physical and/or sexual assault since the age of 15, translating into 62 million women throughout the EU.
- About 13 million women in the EU experienced physical violence in the 12 months prior to the survey interviews. This corresponds to 7% of women aged 18–74 in the EU.
- About 3.7 million women in the EU experienced sexual violence in the 12 months prior to the survey interviews. This corresponds to 2% of women aged 18–74 in the EU.

#### **2. Women experiencing physical and sexual violence from their partner or former partner**

- 1 in 5 (22%) of all women who is or has been in a relationship has experienced physical and/or sexual violence from the partner.
- Of the women who indicate they have been raped by their current partner, about one third (31%) say they have experienced six or more incidents of rape by their partner.

#### **3. Violence does not stop in pregnancy and continues after separation**

- Pregnant women are especially vulnerable to violence: 42% experienced violence from their previous partner while pregnant (FRA 2014a:22).
- After breaking up with a violent partner, 1 in 6 women continued to be victimised by their former partner.
- 1 in 10 women has been stalked by a former partner.

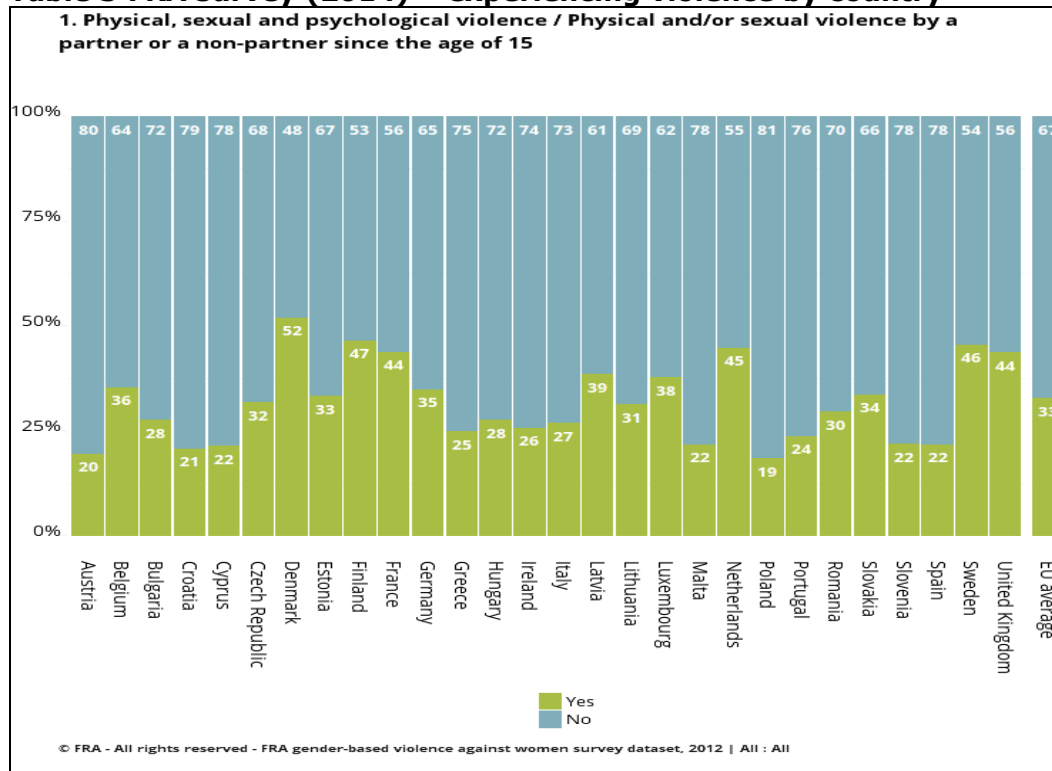
Source : [http://files.waveetwork.org/researchreports/2016\\_WAVE\\_Statistic.pdf](http://files.waveetwork.org/researchreports/2016_WAVE_Statistic.pdf)

The EU average for women experiencing physical or psychological violence in 2014 was 33 %, with Denmark (52 %), Finland (47 %) and Sweden (46 %) being on the top of the list. However, the FRA survey also suggests that the higher level of gender equality could also lead to higher levels of disclosure about violence against women: "Incidents of violence against women are more likely to be openly addressed and challenged in societies with greater equality". Bra has also indicated the Swedish system for recording each individual rape as a single offence (even if it regards the same people in the same year) contributes to the high number of reports.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup><http://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/survey-data-explorer-violence-against-women-survey?mdq1=theme&mdq2=3506>

<sup>15</sup><https://www.bra.se/bra-in-english/home/crime-and-statistics/rape-and-sex-offences.html>

**Table 3 FRA survey (2014) – experiencing violence by country**



Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>

## 4.2 Statistics of Victims and Abusers in Sweden

The **Swedish Council for Crime Prevention (Brå)**<sup>16</sup> presented a new report on 27 March 2018, which highlights crime trends up until the year 2015 (it does not include figures from 2016, which are still preliminary).

It notes that the number of women killed by a current or previous partner has gone down by almost 20 % since the early 2000s. In 2008–2013, an average of 13 women died every year as a result of domestic violence; down from an average of 17 in the first decade of the new millennium and the 1990s, according to Brå.

The average offender in 2000–2013 was aged 32 and the average victim 39. Around 60 % of offenders and almost a third of victims were unemployed or receiving some kind of jobless benefits in 2002–2013. "People involved in deadly violence to a large extent belong to socio-economically disadvantaged groups," reads Brå's report.

Since 2000, a suspect has been sentenced in around 80 % of all cases of deadly violence, or died before conviction (but confirmed as the likely perpetrator). The majority of those sentenced were found guilty of murder, rather than manslaughter.

In the early 1990s, less than half were convicted of murder, compared to almost 80 % in 2009–2013, a rise attributed to an increase in gang conflicts rather than, for example, domestic violence.<sup>17</sup>

In 2015, it was reported that around 5% of men aged 16–24 fear attack or assault, compared to around 7% of 25–44 years old. This compares to around 27% of women aged 16–24 years old, and 15% of 22–44 years old.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup><https://www.bra.se/nytt-fran-bra/arkiv/press/2017-02-28-brottsutvecklingen-i-sverige---ny-rapport-fran-bra.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.thelocal.se/20170228/fewer-women-killed-by-partners-report-deadly-violence-sweden-crime>



In their overall lifetime, 25% of women were subject to a crime in a close relationship, with around 24% experiencing psychological violence, and 15% experiencing physical violence. The Council noted that gross violation of a woman's integrity concerns violence against women in close relationships who experience repeated violations. In 2015, 1,844 cases were reported yet it was acknowledged that many crimes go under the radar due to lack of reporting. It was indicated by the 2015 National Crime Survey that 26% of crimes were actually reported, with the highest willingness to report arising from gross assault (64%) and the lowest for sexual offences (8%).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> [https://www.scb.se/Statistik/\\_Publikationer/LE0201\\_2015B16\\_BR\\_X10BR1601ENG.pdf](https://www.scb.se/Statistik/_Publikationer/LE0201_2015B16_BR_X10BR1601ENG.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Idem.

## 5 LAW AND STRATEGY: THE SWEDISH RESPONSE

### 5.1 Legislative Framework in Sweden to Combat Violence Against Women

In Sweden, violence against women is regulated mainly in different chapters of the Penal Code (*Brottsbalken*)<sup>20</sup>. The Penal Code applies, in particular, to the following:

- domestic violence,
- sexual violence (including rape, sexual assault and harassment or stalking),
- human trafficking,
- cyber violence and harassment using new technologies, and
- harmful practices, such as forced marriages.

There is no specific legislation on “honour” crimes but criminal acts in this context are covered by the Penal Code. However, there is a separate law on penalising female genital mutilation (FGM) (*Lag (1982:316) med förbud mot könsstympning av kvinnor*)<sup>21</sup>. It provides that FGM is considered a punishable crime in Sweden even if the act was committed in a country where it is not illegal. There is also a separate law on harassment and stalking (*Lag (1988:688) om kontaktförbud*)<sup>22</sup>.

### 5.2 National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Men’s Violence Against Women

Given the omniscient effect of gender in politics and government, it is unsurprising that stopping violence against women is a priority for the Swedish government. The National strategy to prevent and combat men’s violence against women came into force on the 1st of January 2017 for a ten-year period. It has four objectives:<sup>23</sup>

- increased and effective preventive work to combat violence;
- improved detection of violence and stronger protection for and support to women and children subjected to violence;
- more effective crime-fighting; and
- improved knowledge and methodological development.

The strategy itself is far-reaching and inclusive of different aspects of violence against women (for example includes measures to combat violence in same-sex relationships as well as measures that counteract destructive masculinity and notions of honour).

The participation of men is viewed as essential for this strategy. Prevention, rather than dealing with the consequences of violence against women, has been the government’s priority which requires a coordinated effort between all relevant actors at all levels. In doing so, the government has tackled key areas such as and breaking with the norms that justify violence, the purchase of sexual services and other restrictions on the freedom of action and life choices of women and girls. Improvements towards detection is also a very important factor.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.government.se/government-policy/judicial-system/the-swedish-penal-code/>

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-1982316-med-forbud-mot-konsstympning-av\\_sfs-1982-316](http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-1982316-med-forbud-mot-konsstympning-av_sfs-1982-316)

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-1988688-om-kontaktforbud\\_sfs-1988-688](http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-1988688-om-kontaktforbud_sfs-1988-688)

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.government.se/4ac3ba/contentassets/4bbb1643e427432682464d4559c41027/fact-sheet\\_national-strategy-to-prevent-and-combat.pdf](http://www.government.se/4ac3ba/contentassets/4bbb1643e427432682464d4559c41027/fact-sheet_national-strategy-to-prevent-and-combat.pdf)

Towards this strategy, the Swedish Government has allocated SEK 600 million to an action plan containing new measures for 2017–2020, in addition to SEK 300 million in development funds to municipalities and county councils.

**Table 4 Measures included in the Government action plan**

Within the framework of the action plan, the Government intends to:

***For increased and effective preventive work to combat violence:***

- support the development and spread of universal violence preventive efforts with the objective of reaching all young people,
- conduct a review of sex and relationship education in schools,
- counteract demand for the purchase of sexual services,
- strengthen professional treatment of men who have been violent and investigate the ability of municipalities to work with perpetrators of violence early on, and
- further strengthen prevention of reoffending by convicted perpetrators of violence, both within the Swedish Prison and Probation Service and with other stakeholders.

***For improved detection of violence and stronger protection of and support to women and children subjected to violence:***

- provide training to professionals, in social services and health and medical care for example, and on routines for asking about exposure to violence,
- strengthen protection of and support to children who have witnessed or been exposed to violence,
- strengthen expertise in the field of honour-related violence and oppression,
- continue the development of knowledge support on prostitution targeted at health and medical care and social services.

***For more effective crime-fighting:***

- develop police methods and practices for preventing repeated violence,
- evaluate the 2014 legislative amendments on forced marriages and child marriages,
- prevent online threats and abuse.

***For improved knowledge and methodological development:***

- survey the extent of honour-related violence and oppression,
- develop national statistics on measures in social services and health and medical care, and provide guidance to municipalities on calculating the cost of violence,
- strengthen knowledge about effective violence prevention,
- amend the degree descriptions in the Higher Education Ordinance so that knowledge about men's violence against women and domestic violence are included in education and training for relevant professional groups,
- allocate funds for skills development for relevant professional groups.

Source: <http://www.government.se/4ac3ba/contentassets/4bbb1643e427432682464d4559c41027/fact-sheet-national-strategy-to-prevent-and-combat.pdf>

## 6. PROTECTION FOR VICTIMS

### 6.1 Background

Currently, three types of crime victim support organisations are available for abused women in Sweden: 1) **women's shelters and support centres for young women**, 2) **crime victims support groups** and 3) **municipal crisis centres**.<sup>24</sup>

Historically, organisations formed on a voluntary basis have borne the main responsibility for protecting women suffering from violence;<sup>25</sup> while these organisations have some official employees they mainly rely on volunteers and are supported and supplemented by government grants/municipal reimbursement.<sup>26</sup>

Shelters are offered by the **National Organisation for Women's Shelters and Young Women's Shelters (Roks)**, and the **Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young Women's Empowerment Centres (SKR)**. Both organisations' mission is twofold, while directly protecting women suffering from domestic violence they also hold a position in politics, attempting to mould public policy.

**The Crime Victim Support Association (BOJ)** purely focuses in providing individual support, and does not exclusively cater to women, and has around 100 local support groups.

Subsequent to multiple amendments to the Services Act, there has been increasing involvement with municipal services. This has challenged the role of voluntary organisations, who have been criticised of having less knowledge in areas of law and psychology. Considering they are volunteer-based and not a government outlet, this seems natural. Optimistically, it has also signalled to some that "violence against women has achieved official recognition as a problem in Sweden, beyond the jurisdiction of the women's movement".<sup>27</sup>

### 6.2 Roks, the National Organisation for Women's Shelters and Young Women's Shelters

**Roks, the National Organisation for Women's Shelters and Young Women's Shelters in Sweden** (Riksorganisation för kvinnojourer och tjejjourer in Sverige), is a feminist organisation working on the rights of women's and young women's rights and liberation, as well as equality on all levels. It is the largest member organisation for women's shelters and young women's shelters in Sweden. Roks aims at safeguarding the common interests of the shelters in their work against male violence towards women. It also strives to shape public opinion and actively works to make the public aware of the reality that the shelters face. There are around 100 women's and young women's shelters within the organisation. Most of the staff at the shelters are voluntary workers. In order to be accepted at a shelter one needs to attend a study circle arranged by the shelter.<sup>28</sup>

#### 6.2.1 The Women's Shelters

Each Women's Shelter is independent and has its own working methods. They offer support based on the individual needs and wishes of each woman. This includes conversational support, giving advice on police reports or custody disputes and going along as support

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<sup>24</sup> <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2013.847403>

<sup>25</sup> Idem.

<sup>26</sup> Idem.

<sup>27</sup> Idem.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.roks.se/about-roks>

when visiting the police, lawyers and social services for example. Many shelters also offer sheltered housing for women and their children.

All shelters have an emergency helpline where women can call if they need support. Callers can choose to remain anonymous and no calls are registered. A number of shelters also have a separate legal hotline. Some shelters have text telephones to cater for women with impaired hearing. Other shelters specialize in receiving adults subjected to incest.<sup>29</sup>

## 6.2.2 The Young Women's Shelters

There are approximately 30 young women's shelters within Roks, out of which around ten are independent organisations. The young women's shelters work the same way as the women's shelters but turn to younger women who, for example, have been subjected to threats, ill-treatment and sexual abuse, or, for some other reason, need to talk to another girl. They also actively work towards making the public aware of the girls' living conditions.<sup>30</sup>

## 6.3 The Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young Women's Empowerment Centres (SKR)

**The Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young Women's Empowerment Centres** (Sveriges Kvinno- och Tjejjourers Riksförbund, SKR) works towards tackling men's violence against women and providing them with support and empowering them. In line with the feminist values of Sweden, the SKR works on the ideology that gender equality must be addressed in many areas in society and discussed broadly in relation to men's violence against women. The SKR is an association of women's shelters (kvinnojour), young women's empowerment centres (tjejjour), relatives' associations and other organisations. While not officially affiliated with a political party, SKR works towards changing public policy in line with protecting women against violence.<sup>31</sup>

## 6.4 Crime Victim Support Association (BOJ)

The **Crime Victim Support Association** (Brottsofferjourernas Riksförbund, BOJ) offers direct support for more than 40,000 people per year in a multilingual setting. It also operates on a voluntary basis and provides a free, confidential service for all victims of crime.<sup>32</sup> BOJ offers emotional support, practical help, information services about filing police reports, investigations and legal proceedings and information in applying for crime victim compensation. Importantly, the services are not dependent on whether a crime has been officially reported.<sup>33</sup> There are in total 60 BOJ local victim support centres around Sweden, designed to complement action by the public authorities.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.roks.se/about-roks>

<sup>30</sup> [www.tjejjouren.se](http://www.tjejjouren.se)

<sup>31</sup> <http://unizon.se/>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.brottsofferjouren.se/ckfinder/userfiles/file/engelska%281%29.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.brottsofferjouren.se/english/>

<sup>34</sup> Idem.

## 7. VULNERABLE GROUPS AND VIOLENCE

### 7.1 Undocumented Women

Undocumented migrants are one of the most vulnerable groups in Swedish society, moreover, due to their irregular status, such migrants are an under-researched group and are not included in the country's Cause of Death Register (CDR).<sup>35</sup>

In its resolution of 4 February 2014 on undocumented women migrants in the European Union (2013/2115(INI)), the European Parliament highlighted the following:

"Migrant women are more vulnerable to physical abuse in general, but undocumented ones are even more so because their legal status puts them in such a position where they cannot reach to the police or hospitals or shelters for help and their abuser knows this and exploits this situation. Undocumented migrant women who find themselves in an abusive situation cannot even readily access women's shelters. Most state-run women's shelters require some form of identification in order to receive the person, so the victims are left with the awful choice between remaining in the abusive situation or becoming homeless."<sup>36</sup>

Over the years, Sweden has increased asylum seekers social rights.<sup>37</sup> In Sweden, most survivors of domestic violence have access to support services regardless of immigration status, because access to welfare state services is based on residence within a municipality as opposed to a particular immigration status. However, the grey area is for undocumented migrants, as they are not covered by the benefits system because a residence permit and personal identification number are needed for registration with the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. Many shelters thus struggle to house undocumented survivors; the exact number of undocumented migrants in Sweden is not known.

The Swedish government-commissioned inquiry "to explore the incidence of violence, threats and violations affecting foreign women and their children who have been granted residence permits on the grounds of ties with a person resident in Sweden".<sup>38</sup> Even for documented migrants the seeking of support from abuse can be difficult when they rely on a partner for their legal status in the country. In the inquiry it was concluded that the probationary period exacerbates unequal power relationships in intimate relationships:

"The legislation means that it is the foreigner, and most often a woman, who alone bears the risk if the relationship ends during the first years, and moreover alone, or together with her child, must bear the consequences of violence. The person with whom an immigrant has ties, usually a man, is, on the other hand, able to make use of the legislation through his superior situation. Our investigations indicate that the number of men who systematically exploit the legislation is by no means small."<sup>39</sup>

The fear of deportation often traps undocumented women (along with those who are dependent upon their spouse's visa), and clearly it is not uncommon for abusers to take advantage of their position.

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.socialstyrelsen.se/statistics/statisticaldatabase/help/causeofdeath>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2014-0068&language=EN&ring=A7-2014-0001>

<sup>37</sup> <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2009.00586.x>

<sup>38</sup> <https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/CA9103CF-60BE-43F2-8941-3C88EA87C839>

<sup>39</sup> Idem.

## 7.2 Transgender Women

Transgender persons are especially exposed to different types of violence, including domestic violence and violence in close relationships. In the experience coming from the coalition of NGOs, it has been shown that transgender women face serious difficulties in accessing shelters or support centres due to their gender identity and/or expression. This further exposes them to violence, discrimination and exclusion.<sup>40</sup>

In Sweden, the Government has presented proposals to strengthen the protection of transgender people under criminal law. The legislative amendments would mean that transgender people would be afforded full protection under the hate crime legislation. In addition, if a motive for an offence was to violate a person or group of people based on gender identity or gender expression, this would constitute an aggravating circumstance.

The Government has also proposed that 'transgender identity or expression' a basis for discrimination in the Discrimination Act be replaced with 'gender identity or gender expression'. Under the proposal, all individuals will be protected against discrimination regardless of how their gender identity or gender expression relates to what is perceived to be the norm.

The legislative amendments should enter into force on 1 July 2018, except for the amendments to the provisions on agitation against a national or ethnic group in the Freedom of the Press Act and the Penal Code, which will enter into force on 1 January 2019.<sup>41</sup>

Also, a number of women's emergency shelters have embarked on training programmes that will enable them to deal with the special needs of LGBT women exposed to violence. The activities of the women's shelters need to be expanded so that LGBT women can receive the help and assistance they require.<sup>42</sup>

## 7.3 Islamic Women

Men's violence against women in the context of Muslims is particularly difficult given the religious connotations of severing their faith while challenging gender-based violence. Muslim women felt a need to register a formal organization that acknowledged their experiences of linguistic and cultural misunderstandings as well as prejudicial treatment at "conventional" women's centres. Thus, the **Sisters Shelter Somaya shelter**<sup>43</sup> was established in 1998 in Stockholm by a group of women living in a suburb that had many inhabitants with Muslim and foreign backgrounds.

The founders were themselves Muslims: some immigrants, some converts to Islam. Many resented being met with the presumption that they needed to leave their religion and assimilate with the non-Muslim majority. One support worker said "A woman who comes to us does not want to get rid of God; she wants to get rid of her husband". Somaya publicly declared itself to contribute with competence in the Swedish legal and welfare system as well as in various languages, including Swedish. Moreover, the organization affirmed that it offered a shelter where violence against women was not presented as a particularly "Muslim problem" rooted in Islam.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> [https://www.rfsl.se/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/RFSL-RFSU-Handikappforbunden-submission-for-session\\_Response-to-Sweden-LoI-response1.pdf](https://www.rfsl.se/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/RFSL-RFSU-Handikappforbunden-submission-for-session_Response-to-Sweden-LoI-response1.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.government.se/press-releases/2017/07/increased-protection-for-transgender-people/>

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/07ef84b6218046d4aedcb4080e830ccf/action-plan-for-combating-mens-violence-against-women-violence-and-oppression-in-the-name-of-honour-and-violence-in-same-sex-relationships>.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.somaya.se/>

<sup>44</sup> [https://www.su.se/polopoly\\_fs/1.309615.1480494971!/menu/standard/file/Karlsson%20Minganti%20Muslim%20Womens%27%20Shelters.pdf](https://www.su.se/polopoly_fs/1.309615.1480494971!/menu/standard/file/Karlsson%20Minganti%20Muslim%20Womens%27%20Shelters.pdf)

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

Sweden is a model country when it comes to women's rights and in fighting men's violence against women. The country has a strong history in upholding women's rights exemplified by their feministic government, strong representation of women parliamentarians and developing legislation enhancing women's rights.

The national strategy to prevent and combat men's violence against women is a priority for the Swedish government, thus the strategy itself is far reaching and inclusive. Prevention as a priority, rather than consequential action has required male participation to be necessary, a key aid in this gender based problem. By ensuring the strategy is well funded, and approaches root problems, Sweden has hopefully tackled this issue effectively.

Shelters in Sweden are found up and down the country catering to different groups of women, and sometimes running on their own model. The importance of this lies in their effectiveness; they are capable of offering different services in terms of support, and also different funding models allowing for more inclusive services. While traditionally these shelters were only voluntary based, a positive shift in government involvement signals continued professional development. Based on Sweden's history and the development of women's shelters in Sweden it is likely while this trend continues, these organisations will nevertheless play a distinct role in both shaping policy and aiding victims. It could be said that the diversity observable in the shelters and organisations, in terms of structure and focal groups, is noteworthy.

The challenges experienced by vulnerable persons are familiar with all nations. These groups present themselves to be practically difficult to manage due to either their status in law or the social context their group exists in. Importantly, Sweden appears to be aware of the issues raised in this analysis and has embarked upon training initiatives. The services available to women in these groups is observable both in the form of government action, and non-governmental organisations. Moreover, the fact that these services are free is instrumental, and often confidential in combatting men's violence against women.





This paper was produced by the Policy Department on Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) for the purpose of a FEMM mission to Sweden from 7 to 9 May 2018. The paper examines the status of women in Sweden, a country known for its proven track record on gender equality: it delves into the issue of preventing violence against women and protecting victims of violence. Gender equality is a cornerstone of Swedish society, thus violence against women is a priority for the Swedish Government. Various vulnerable groups might still require greater legislative protection and government response.

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