

# Sweden 2024 Human Rights Report

## Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Sweden during the year.

There were no credible reports of significant human rights abuses.

The government took credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

## Section 1. Life

### a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

There were widespread killings by criminal groups. The government continued its offensive against organized crime by allocating extensive resources to the judiciary and law enforcement. On May 30, the Security Service reported the Iranian regime used criminal groups in Sweden to target members of the Iranian diaspora and Jewish and Israeli targets.

## **b. Coercion in Population Control**

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

## **Section 2. Liberty**

### **a. Freedom of the Press**

The constitution provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected this right. An independent media, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for media members.

The law criminalized expression considered to be “hate speech” and prohibited threats or statements of contempt for a group or member of a group based on race, color, national or ethnic origin, religious belief, or sexual orientation. Penalties for hate speech ranged from fines to a maximum of four years in prison. The country’s courts held it was illegal to wear xenophobic symbols or racist paraphernalia or to display signs and banners with inflammatory symbols at rallies.

In 2024, authorities prosecuted two individuals for “offenses of agitation against an ethnic or national group” related to the burning of a Quran in

2023. Prosecutors stated the “men [were] prosecuted for having on these four occasions made statements and treated the Quran in a manner intended to express contempt for Muslims because of their faith.”

### **Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups**

On May 27, the Psychological Defense Agency (MPF) reported the investigative television program *Kalla Fakta* to the Broadcasting Commission, claiming it had used agency quotes out of context. The agency faced significant criticism for doing so, leading its director general to acknowledge that the action “could be perceived as an intervention in media freedom.” Media reports claimed the government knew about the MPF’s plans before the agency took action.

In 2023, the international nongovernmental organization Reporters Without Borders (RWB) reported authoritarian regimes monitored and threatened exiled journalists in the country who criticized their governments. RWB noted that journalists who covered issues such as the climate or the conflict between Israel and Hamas experienced politically motivated threats. For example, on July 25, also according to media, individuals threatened a reporter outside their home after they reported that demonstrators had expressed support for terrorism during pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

## **Efforts to Preserve the Independence of the Media**

A new law on media support, aimed at strengthening democracy by promoting public access to independent media, particularly at the local level, came into effect January 1.

## **b. Worker Rights**

### **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

The law provided for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and provided for protection of workers from being fired because of union activity. If a court found a dismissal to be unlawful, the employee had the right to reinstatement. Foreign companies could be exempted from collective bargaining provided they met minimum working conditions and levels of pay. Public sector employees enjoyed the right to strike, subject to limitations in the collective agreements protecting the public's immediate health and security. The government mediation service could also intervene to postpone a strike for up to 14 days for mediation.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) claimed the law restricted the rights of the country's trade unions to take industrial action on behalf of foreign workers in foreign companies operating in the country.

The law allowed unions to conduct their activities largely without interference.

The government effectively enforced laws protecting freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right for workers to strike. The Labor Court settled any dispute that affected the relationship between employers and employees. An employer organization, an employee organization, or an employer who had entered into a collective agreement on an individual basis could lodge claims. The Labor Court could impose penalties for violations commensurate with those under other laws involving denials of civil rights. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

Workers and employers exercised all legal collective bargaining rights that were protected by the government. The government and employers respected freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. The ITUC reported no serious violations of worker rights.

## **Forced or Compulsory Labor**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Acceptable Work Conditions**

### **Wage and Hour Laws**

There was no national minimum wage law. Annual collective bargaining agreements set wages within industries, which were greater than the poverty income level. By regulation, both foreign and domestic employers

were required to offer conditions of employment on par with the country's collective agreements. Nonunion establishments generally observed these contracts as well.

The law required a minimum period of 36 consecutive hours of rest, preferably on weekends, over a seven-day period.

### **Occupational Safety and Health**

Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries. Responsibility for identifying unsafe situations remained with OSH experts at the Work Environment Authority and not the worker.

If an employee found that the work involved an immediate and serious danger to life or health, the employee had to immediately notify the employer or safety ombudsperson. Workers had the right to remove themselves from unsafe conditions without jeopardy to their employment. Safety ombudspersons had the authority to stop unsafe activity immediately and to call an inspector. An employer could be fined for violating OSH regulations.

Foreign seasonal workers, including berry pickers, faced poor living and working conditions and were at risk of labor trafficking. Guidelines of the Swedish Retail and Food Federation covered EU citizens who picked berries in the country but not workers from outside the EU. Under the guidelines, berry pickers had to be informed they had the right to sell their berries to all

buyers and that no one had the right to control how, when, and where they picked wild berries. A foreign company providing berry pickers to a local company also was required to demonstrate how it expected to pay workers in case of limited work or a bad harvest. The guidelines tasked food and retail organizations and brokers with ensuring their implementation.

The construction, transport, and manufacturing sectors had the greatest number of deaths caused by industrial accidents. Vehicles were often involved in the accidents.

### **Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement**

The Work Environment Authority effectively enforced wage, overtime, and OSH laws. Penalties were commensurate with those for similar crimes such as fraud or negligence. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

Inspectors had the authority to conduct unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions, but the number of labor inspectors was not sufficient to enforce International Labor Organization compliance. The Work Environment Authority issued occupational health and safety regulations and trained union stewards and safety ombudspersons whom government inspectors monitored.

The government continued to implement a national strategy to counter labor-related crime in the informal labor sector. Such crime mainly occurred in construction, restaurant, transport, and cleaning industries, as well as in

health care and social services. The Work Environment Authority worked with the EU to counteract work-related crime. There were no data on the size of the informal labor sector.

## **c. Disappearance and Abduction**

### **Disappearance**

There were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

### **Prolonged Detention without Charges**

The constitution and law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

## **d. Violations in Religious Freedom**

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

## **e. Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.



## **Section 3. Security of the Person**

### **a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

The constitution and law prohibited such practices and there were no credible reports government officials employed them.

### **b. Protection of Children**

#### **Child Labor**

The law prohibited all the worst forms of child labor. It permitted full-time employment from the age of 16 under the supervision of local authorities. Employees younger than 18 could work only during daytime and under adult supervision. Children as young as 13 could work part-time or perform light work with parental permission. The law specified the types of work in which children could or could not engage. For example, a child could not work with dangerous machinery or chemicals. A child also could not work alone or be responsible for handling cash transactions. The law considered a violation of these limits a civil rather than a criminal violation. According to the law, forcing a child to work could be treated as coercion, deprivation of liberty, or child abuse, and it carried a wide range of penalties, including fines and imprisonment.

The government effectively enforced these laws and regulations. Criminal penalties were commensurate with those for analogous crimes, such as kidnapping, and inspection was sufficient to enforce compliance. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

Some boys were subjected to forced begging and performing errands for criminal gangs, including killings. Some girls were subjected to sexual exploitation, forced begging, and child marriage. Police and social services reportedly acted promptly when these prohibited cases were reported.

## **Child Marriage**

The minimum age for marriage was 18, and it was illegal for anyone younger than 18 to marry. The government effectively enforced the law. The government legally recognized the marriage of anyone who came to the country after the age of 18 as valid, even if they were married abroad before the age of 18. The government did not recognize a foreign child marriage if either of the parties was a Swedish citizen or resident in the country at the time of marriage. Compelling or allowing a child to marry was punishable by up to two years in prison. Municipalities' social welfare services could petition administrative courts to issue travel restrictions to protect at-risk children from being taken out of the country for marriage. Such children were not to be issued passports and passports that were issued were to be rescinded. It was a crime to take a child who was subject to travel restrictions out of the country, with punishment of up to two years in prison.

for violations.

### **c. Protection to Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

#### **Provision of First Asylum**

The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees.

#### **Resettlement**

The government accepted refugees for resettlement, offered naturalization to refugees residing on the country's territory continuously for three to five years, and assisted in refugees' voluntary return to their homes with logistical and monetary support.

### **d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement**

Leaders of the Jewish community estimated there were 15,000 Jews and 6,000 registered members of Jewish congregations in the country.

Antisemitic hate crimes included threats, verbal abuse, vandalism, graffiti,

harassment in schools, and Holocaust denial. Antisemitic incidents often were perpetrated by groups associated with neo-Nazi movements or corresponded with events in the Middle East. Local Jews were often targeted for antisemitic attacks in response to the actions of the Israeli government. The government effectively enforced laws to counteract antisemitism.

On May 2, the National Council for Crime Prevention reported antisemitic hate crimes increased five-fold during the months following the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023. On May 27, according to press reports, the office of a researcher who covered the Middle East was vandalized and the assailant(s) left a message that accused the researcher of spreading “Israeli propaganda.”

The government enhanced security measures for Jewish associations and schools and provided additional funding to the Jewish Central Council. On January 3, the government tasked the National Agency for Education with conducting a national study of antisemitism in schools. On June 4, the Segerstedt Institute at the University of Gothenburg launched a project to increase knowledge of antisemitism in the country and to develop educational resources on the subject for teachers. On July 1, a new law came into effect that made it illegal to deny, excuse, or downplay the Holocaust.

For further information on incidents in the country of antisemitism, whether

or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, see the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.