

Sweden 2025

Information from: Swedish Institute for Human Rights

Independence, effectiveness and establishment of NHRIs

International accreditation status and SCA recommendations

The Swedish Institute for Human Rights (SIHR, the Institute) was [accredited](#) with A-status for the first time in October 2024.

Noting that the law is silent on the procedure by which Board members are appointed by government, the SCA encouraged the SIHR to continue its engagement with government to advocate for the formalisation of a clear, transparent and participatory nomination, selection and appointment process that promotes merit-based selection in relevant legislation, regulations, or binding administrative guidelines. It further recommended the SIHR advocate for amendments clarifying the rules, process, and safeguards in place for the dismissal of Board members.

Acknowledging that in practice, the SIHR engages in both human rights promotion and protection activities and has actively addressed key human rights concerns in country, the SCA encouraged the NHRI to advocate for the inclusion of an explicit mandate for promotion and protection. Further, it encouraged the SIHR to continue its engagement with Parliament on its annual and thematic reports, as well as to advocate for amendments to its enabling legislation that would explicitly establish a process for the institution's reports to be circulated, considered, and discussed by the legislature.

The SCA encourage the SIHR to take measures to ensure broad representation in its staffing, as well as to enhance its regional cooperation and engagement with diverse parts of society in all regions of the country.

Finally, the SCA recommended that the SIHR continue to advocate for a progressive increase in funding, in line with the inquiry preceding the establishment of the SIHR, to ensure that the NHRI is enabled to carry out the full breadth of its mandate, engage with marginalized groups, and to increase its staff complement. The SCA further encouraged the SIHR to continue to engage with government on the way it processes and responds to the institution's budget requests and protects the NHRI from disproportionate budget cuts.

Follow-up to international and European actors' recommendations on NHRIs and relevant developments

The institute was established in January 2022. It submitted a formal request for accreditation and membership in GANHRI (Request for accreditation, reg.no: 1.4.1-199/2023) on 14 April 2023.

In October 2024, [SCA recommended](#) that the Swedish Institute for Human Rights be accredited with A status. This is the first time Sweden has an institution with A-status. As a result of the review, the Swedish Institute for Human Rights received several recommendations. The Institute has presented and discussed these recommendations with both the responsible minister (minister for Gender Equality and Working Life on 4 December 2024) and with the constitutional committee of the Swedish Parliament (on 11 November 2024).

It should also be noted that in addition to briefing the responsible minister and the constitutional committee of the parliament about the SCA recommendations in November and December 2024, the Institute already on 24 January 2024 (i.e. nine months before SCAs recommendation was issued) submitted a [letter](#) to the government, drawing attention to the immediate need to further enhance the regulatory framework, for example, to clarify the appointment and dismissal rules regarding the Institute's board members.

One of the recommendations received from SCA also concerned the appointment process of board members.

The government appointed two new members to the board in December 2024. While the board did not assess the qualifications of the appointed new board members, it [expressed deep concern](#) to the government over the appointment process, which failed to sufficiently safeguard the Institute's independence as required by [law](#) and international standards.

Despite nominations from both the Institute's Council for Human Rights and from universities, the government did not select any candidates nominated by the Council. One appointee was not nominated by any of the bodies mandated to nominate candidates for the board. According to the Institute, this undermines the transparency and predictability necessary for trust in the Institute's independence, as emphasized in the UN Paris Principles.

The board has repeatedly urged the government to ensure compliance with these principles, highlighting the importance of a clear and fair appointment process. The SCA recommendations also called for strengthening the Institute's independence. The board reiterated in public the need to review the law to fully uphold the Institute's autonomy.

The SCA also recommended that the Institute takes measures to ensure the broad representation of national society, including in the context of gender, ethnicity or minority status in its staffing and refers to Paris Principles B.1 and to its General Observation 1.7 on 'Ensuring pluralism of the NHRI'. On 5 December 2024, the Institute's board adopted a workforce strategy (kompetensförsörjningsstrategi) highlighting the importance of efforts to attract and reach talents with diverse backgrounds and experiences. The workforce strategy outlines the framework, goals, and approaches to enable the institute to effectively recruit, retain, and develop the necessary expertise to fulfil its mission. A goal of the strategy is to achieve a workforce composition that, as far as possible, reflects the pluralism of Swedish society in terms of factors such as age, functionality, gender, ethnicity, and minority groups.

Regulatory framework

The Swedish Institute for Human Rights notes that there was no change to its national regulatory framework since January 2024. The NHRI's regulatory framework should be strengthened in line with the [SCA recommendations](#).

NHRI enabling and safe space

Awareness about the NHRI

The awareness and knowledge of the Swedish Institute for Human Rights' mandate, independence and role among authorities is increasing annually. It should be noted that the Institute is still very young and accordingly, not as known as many other authorities. Therefore it is still common that the Institute must start meetings by introducing its role, independence and mandate.

Involvement in law- and policy-making

Compared with 2022, the Swedish Institute for Human Rights now receives a very high number of legal proposals and inquiry reports on referral and for comments. The fact that the Institute now receives such a high number of legal proposals and inquiry report on referral indicates that the Institute is more known now compared to two years ago and that the Institute during the years has provided relevant comments of high quality to legal proposals etc.

The Institute has never been requested to provide input to the development and drafting of the terms of reference for inquiries.

In some cases, the Institute has been involved during the inquiry process and met with the responsible experts and provided comments and recommendations before the inquiry report was finalised. In most cases such meetings have taken place upon request from the Institute, but it has also happened that the inquiry experts have contacted the Institute for feedback

before the finalisation of the inquiry report.

The government has tasked the Swedish National Financial Management Authority (ESV) with developing a framework to guide [impact assessments](#) and providing targeted guidance to selected committees and investigators. In developing the framework ESV is instructed to gather and consider expertise and methodological support from various authorities, including the Institute regarding the implications for Sweden's international human rights obligations. The [assignment](#) should be completed and reported in April 2027.

Resources

The Institute was allocated an appropriation of SEK 50 000 thousand for the first year of operation in 2022, SEK 50 518 thousand for 2023 and SEK 51 795 thousand for 2024. During the establishment of operations, the level of the appropriation for both 2022 and 2023 has exceeded the actual need. However, the Institute has requested in the budget documents that the appropriation be increased after the initial years' establishment of operations. The [preparatory work](#) to the enabling law show that the assessment was that the Institute needs at least 60 full-time equivalent employees. Today the Institute has approximately 31 full-time equivalent employees.

In an official letter and in the [Institute's annual report](#) the Institute recommends that the Government, in its handling of the Institute's budget documentation, needs to ensure that the Institute receives the funds it needs. The Institute's summarised assessment is that funding has been more than adequate during the initial years and the establishment of its activities, but that the appropriation needs to be increased for the further development of its statutory activities.

Responses to NHRI's recommendations

There have been no state measures put in place to ensure timely and reasoned responses to the NHRI's recommendations.

According to the enabling [law](#), the Institute shall prepare an annual report which, in accordance with the content of the Paris Principles, shall cover human rights developments and the main activities of the Institute. However, in terms of recipients, the law is structured differently from the Paris Principles, as it requires that the annual reports are submitted to the government. At the same time, this does not prevent, either from a legal perspective or in practice, the Institute's annual reports from being submitted to, presented to and debated by Parliament.

The Institute has stressed the importance of Parliament receiving and considering the Institute's annual report (and other reports) in discussions with representatives of the Committee on the Constitution.

In 2023 and 2024, a procedure has been developed in this area, whereby the Committee on the Constitution receives the Institute's annual report and has the content presented to it in connection with the launch. The presentation has then been followed up with a discussion of the content in plenary, where, among other things, the hope has been expressed to receive more reports from the Institute.

Immunity and measures to protect and support the NHRI

While the enabling law is silent on the protection of members of the decision-making body and staff from criminal and civil liability for official actions and decisions undertaken in good faith, such protection is ensured through other legislation. The enabling law builds on other legislation and an important principle and starting point in the Swedish legal system is to avoid double regulation, to the effect that the enabling law may be silent on issues regulated elsewhere. This situation applies to the question of functional immunities of leadership and staff of the Institutions. This flows from several important pieces of national legislation:

- Freedom of expression is a strong general rule, protected in the Instrument of Government.
- According to the Instrument of Government and the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression, also public officials have the right to express their opinions.
- Further, according to the Freedom of the Press Act, public officials can share any kind of information, except information offered special protection by the Act on Secrecy, to the media and journalists, without repercussions from the employers. Therefore, they must not be subjected to reprisals for reporting irregularities.
- The Board, including the Director, and all staff are covered by the Act on the Protection of Persons Reporting Misconduct (2021:890), which entered into force in December 2021, also known as the Whistleblower Act., i.e. a ban on enquiries and a ban on reprisals from their employer.
- Under Chapter 20, Section 1 of the Criminal Code, criminal liability for professional misconduct can only be imposed in cases where the person wilfully or negligently disregards his or her duties.
- According to Swedish tort law, liability for financial damage may only be incurred under exceptional circumstances.

Hence, the legal framework provides all members of the Institute with a sound protection against both civil and criminal liability.

Threats faced by the NHRI

As reported in ENNHRI's [2024 Rule of law report](#) , the institute was under threat in 2023 since the government questioned the significance of a Swedish NHRI on economic grounds, a stance further supported by the coalition party for

political reasons, expressing the opinion that Sweden has no problems with racism and discrimination. Since the Minister for Gender Equality and Working Life did not confirm continued funding for the Institute in both open and closed meetings with the Institute, the Institute assessed that it could be under threat. The threat diminished after the government presented the budget proposal for 2024 in which it confirmed its commitment to fully comply with the Paris Principles and the Institute's important position in that regard, along with a budget allocation that did not imply significant changes compared to the previous year (however, the requested increase in budget was declined). For further information, see 2024 [Rule of Law report](#).

NHRI's recommendations to national authorities

The Institute highlights the importance of full implementation of all the [SCA recommendations](#). For example, the Institute recommends the following to national authorities to:

- Formalize a clear, transparent, and participatory nomination, selection, and appointment process that promotes merit-based selection in legislation, regulation, or binding guidelines;
- Ensure that the nomination of board members – by the Institute's council, the Bar Association, and universities—aligns with the Paris Principles and is supported by uniform criteria.
- Gradually increase funding, in line with the Act's preparatory work, to enable the Institute to fulfil its full mandate, collaborate with marginalized groups and communities, including in remote areas, and expand its workforce.
- Report on how it addresses and responds to the Institute's budget requests and ensure protection against disproportionate budget cuts.

Sweden 2025

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Human rights defenders and civil society space

Laws and measures negatively impacting civil society and Human Rights Defenders

Freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression

In 2023 the government tasked a special investigator to review whether

national security should be considered when granting permits for public gatherings in accordance with the Public Order Act. The [inquiry](#) was more specifically tasked with for example, analysing and describing the legal possibilities offered in the Instrument of Government to consider circumstances threatening Sweden's security during the permit examination process for public gatherings and for the right to cancel and disband public gatherings. The inquiry was also tasked with making proposals that allow Sweden's security to be taken into account when assessing whether there are grounds to refuse permits for, issue conditions for, cancel or disband public gatherings.

The inquiry concluded that “the interest of the security of the country” may be used as the basis for restrictions where the purpose is to protect interests of fundamental importance to Sweden's external and internal security. The Inquiry's assessment was that Sweden's security is, to some extent, an overriding interest that could form the basis for far-reaching restrictions of the freedoms of expression, assembly and demonstration. The inquiry highlights that regulations that allow restrictions of the freedoms of expression, assembly and demonstration must be formulated in a way that does not allow Sweden's security to be given disproportionate consideration. The inquiry concludes that the Swedish Police Authority should be allowed to refuse permission for a public gathering if it is necessary to do so because it is clear that the gathering is likely to cause a substantial danger of criminal offences that could threaten Sweden's security being committed in Sweden or against Sweden's interests abroad, or of Sweden's security being threatened in some other way.

In its [referral response](#) the Institute rejected the proposal to introduce “Sweden's security” in the law as a new ground for refusing permission for a public gathering since the Swedish legal system may already have the capacity to handle the issues. The Institute also highlighted that the bill did not meet the requirements for clarity and necessity, which risks leading to an arbitrary application of the ground for refusal.

Funding for civil society organizations from the public sector

During 2024, several civil society organizations have been negatively impacted by funding decisions. Study associations point out in a [report](#) that their continued reductions in allocations have significantly affected several activities, particularly those aimed at persons with disabilities or the elderly.

The National Body for Dialogue and Consultation (NOD) reports in a [study](#) that several organisations are experiencing an increased focus on project funds and a more targeted direction set up for the funding they are applying for. They outline several potential reasons for this. As an example, 48 percent of the respondents state that they experience an increase in project grants compared to core funding and organizational grants. Almost half of the respondents experience that funding is coupled with an increased requirement that the

activities shall contribute to certain set aims. NOD also points out that organizations may experience increased demands on having to measure and demonstrate results, both in the application process and in the reporting of public grants, which can affect the activities they can carry out.

According to the [Conditions Report](#) (Villkorsrapporten) published by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society in May 2024, nineteen percent of the reviewed organizations report that the reduced funding from the public sector has been a challenge. Some organizations highlight that the requirements on how activities should be conducted within the framework of project grants limit their ability to run efficient and high-quality operations.

Involvement of civil society in law- and policy-making

A new and updated proposal regulating the so-called “democracy conditions” was presented to, and adopted by, the Parliament in April 2024. Civil society has [expressed](#) that it is important that the government engages in a dialogue with them on the implementation and follow-up of the “democracy conditions”.

Moreover, a new [strategy](#) for Sweden's development cooperation with civil society has been adopted. Civil society voiced strong [criticism](#) against the restructuring of aid, both in terms of its content and the process preceding the strategy.

Several civil society organizations also [criticize](#) the government for deviating from established practices related to preparation of new laws. They point out that some government inquiries are conducted in shorter timeframes, agreed-upon dialogue processes are disregarded, and fewer civil society organizations are included on consultation lists for referrals of inquiries.

Practices negatively impacting civil society and human rights defenders

In a [study](#) carried out by the magazine Expo on the vulnerability of civil society to threats and hate, the majority of the surveyed CSOs report that they perceive an increase in threats or a growing concern about being subjected to them. Some organisations noted an escalation and intensification of threats and hate, while others described it as a constant flow that varies in scale but is always present and impactful. Several organizations expressed that they have been under constant pressure and targeted by systematic campaigns of threats and hate.

A [survey](#) presented during the year highlights the vulnerability many CSOs experience today. In the survey, 150 leaders from CSOs responded to questions about negative labelling and so-called stigmatization. Many of the respondents had been labelled as extremists, Islamists, terrorists, or traitors.

Most vulnerable, according to the survey, are those CSOs working for and with Muslims, feminism, and climate action.

In terms of safety of the civic space, an [attack](#) on an anti-fascist event in April 2024 should be mentioned. The attack was condemned broadly by politicians and the minister of justice invited all parties in the parliament to a [meeting](#) to discuss the way forward to better counter attacks, harassment, sabotage etc. on the democracy.

Moreover, the institute co-hosted a parliamentary [seminar](#) 2023 focusing on the rise of hate, threats, and polarizing rhetoric in Sweden and the potential consequences of these developments. The discussion highlighted that these issues have intensified in recent years and that certain groups are more affected than others. These include civil society, politicians, journalists, and researchers, as well as certain minorities. It was also noted that women are often impacted more severely than men.

The above-mentioned Expo study concludes that most of what is perceived as threats and hatred comes digitally via email or posts on social media. Several of the interviewed organizations state that increased media visibility and an increased presence in various public debates have generated an increased amount of hateful and unpleasant comments. In some cases, direct threats as well.

Initiatives, frameworks or policies for the protection of human rights defenders

As far as the Swedish Institute for Human Rights is aware, the internationally protected concept of human rights defenders is neither recognized, nor mentioned in Swedish legislation. There is, however, legal protection for a framework of actions or activities that human rights defenders typically use or rely on in their work, such as political rights, whistleblowing, raising concerns about children, the possibility of reporting to the Parliamentary Ombudsman on behalf of others, etc.

Some 20 Swedish cities, municipalities, regions or counties participate in the [ICORN city of refuge program](#), i.e. a safe haven program for writers, journalists and artists who are at risk due to their work and defence of human rights at their home countries, supported by the Swedish Arts Council and partially funded by EU.

Further, some civil society organizations and social movements have established their own protection mechanisms for HRDs, the specific designs of which vary slightly depending on the initiator and the funding.

However, according to the Institute's knowledge, there is no publicly sanctioned in-country protection system for HRDs in Sweden. For example,

compared to elected officials and journalists, offences against HRDs are not subject to a specific penalty-enhancing provision in the Criminal Code ([chapter 29, paragraph 2](#)). In line with this and again in comparison with elected officials and journalists, HRDs are also not among the specifically identified and prioritized target groups in the police's fight against what are summarized as crimes against democracy, or democratic functions. This does of course not exclude that politically elected HRDs and journalist HRDs may benefit from this scheme. Indeed, the [Crime Prevention Council safety survey](#) among politicians indicated that human rights-related tasks or missions such as within the fields of migration, integration, gender equality and LGBTQ+, strongly contributed to vulnerability.

In its [strategy](#) for national human rights work, adopted in 2016, the government states that civil society '... actively monitors that human rights are respected by the public sector, document and address violations of rights, and represent individuals, groups and interests, both nationally and internationally.' This recognition is followed up by an objective to create well-functioning communication through consultations between the government and civil society organizations on the human rights situation in Sweden. However, the strategy lacks an assessment of the vulnerability of civil society organizations defending human rights and does not set any corresponding protection goals.

However, in 2021, the County administrative boards, entrusted with an important mandate within the strategy, conducted a [survey on the human rights profession](#), relative to the background, activities and challenges among some 100 human rights specialists, i.e. civil servants promoting and coordinating human rights programs within State authorities and municipalities in Sweden. The survey pointed to the existence of an emerging, pre-profession in human rights, as well as a need to increase knowledge about the purposes and needs of this profession among employers and academic institutions.

A recognition of the role of civil society in addressing violations and defending human rights is also expressed in the Government's recently updated [action plan](#) against racism. This plan further recognizes the existence of anti-racist threats and hatred against various CSOs, including faith communities. It also points out a possibility of channelling state funding in this area to support particularly vulnerable communities. In the subsequent action section, the government points to a newly given task to the Agency for Support to Faith Communities to strengthen and disseminate knowledge about the security situation of faith communities.

In 2025, the Institute will investigate the conditions for human rights defenders in Sweden, in which it will examine their current functions, activities and protection needs, drawing on the 1998 UN Declaration and other international policy and guidance in this area.

In relation to the upcoming survey on human rights defenders in Sweden, there are several interesting gendered starting points. For example, an overwhelming majority of members of the Institute's information network are women. The lack of recognition for the role of human rights defenders can therefore, according to the Institute, likely be highlighted as a gender issue.

Activities of NHRIs to support civil society space and Human Rights Defenders

The Institute's campaign for Human Rights 75 carried clear messages on the right to defend human rights. The campaign continued well into 2024, including on social media and the Institute's webpage.

In the [Annual Report 2024](#), the Institute raised the role and challenges for HRDs in general, as well as for environmental defenders in particular.

Further, like during 2023, the Institute again raised issues related to the conditions of HRDs in its National Network of Human Rights Specialists (NNHRS). Specifically, some 200 members, a majority of whom would identify themselves as HRDs, were offered an introduction to the concept of HRDs in the Swedish context and in different organisational settings (NGOs, public institutions, businesses). This was followed by three testimonies from human rights defenders who represented three different categories, i.e. one male human rights defender with vast experience of civil disobedience actions for the climate and their legal repercussions, one black woman HRD with vast experience of anti-racist work in the trade unions and one woman HRD who has worked as a human rights specialist in several Swedish municipalities.

NHRI's activities to protect civil society space and human rights defenders

In 2024, the Institute undertook several preparatory actions as regards the above-mentioned survey and forthcoming investigation into HRDs in Sweden, planned for 2025. These preparations included a desk-study and other means of orientation in international policies and activities for HRDs, e.g. participation at a seminar on HRDs organized by ENNHRI on 3 May 2024 in Geneva and the OHCHR spot-light event on Human Rights Defenders organized on 9 December 2024 in Brussels.

The Institute also carried out consultations with other Swedish actors active in the field. Further, within the framework of this and other ongoing activities at the Institute, the Institute has answered individuals approaching the institute with questions on point of law and process, on national and international legal remedies for HRDs under threat (such as the possibility for environmental defenders to turn their grievances to the Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders under the Aarhus Convention). Moreover, the Institute submitted

an [Amicus curiae](#) to the Supreme Court in favour of the environmental NGO Aurora's right to hold the state accountable for shortcomings in the implementation of Sweden's international environmental and human rights commitments.

The Institute has also had shorter scheduled discussions on the work for human rights defenders with the Civil society network for human rights.

The Institute has also established an Advisory Council on Human Rights. The purpose of the Council is to provide advice and support by affording the Institute with knowledge and experience from the human rights work of civil society and other actors. The council consist of 20 members, including women human rights defenders (WHRDs) or LGBTQ+ human rights defenders.

Engagement of the NHRI with international and regional mechanisms in support of human rights defenders and civil society

In 2024, the Institute familiarised itself with the mandate and relevant activities of the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs. The Institute also participated in the OHCHR's spot-light event on HRDs in the European Parliament on 9 December 2024, where the Special Rapporteur participated.

In 2023, the Institute organised a presentation with the Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders under the Aarhus Convention for the NNHRS. The meeting strengthened the Institute's contacts with the Special Rapporteur's office, which led, among other things, to an exchange of information in early 2024 relevant to the Special Rapporteur policy paper [on State repression on environmental protest and civil disobedience](#). As follow-up, the Institute has participated in panels discussing the policy paper's underlying human rights issues, at events organized by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation.

The Institute has also provided individual environmental defenders contacting the office's helpline with information about the communications procedure attached to the Special Rapporteur's mandate. The Special Rapporteur intends to visit Sweden to follow up on these and other cases and at the same time hold consultations with the Swedish environmental movement on the general conditions for environmental defenders under the Aarhus Convention, a visit that is partly prepared jointly by the Secretariat and the Institute.

Moreover, the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in the so-called case of Klimasenniorinen strongly supported the Institute's work for and analysis behind the above-mentioned Amicus Curiae to the Supreme Court in the Aurora case.

NHRI's recommendations to national and regional authorities

Recommendations to European actors

The Institute prefers not to issue any detailed recommendations before completing its forthcoming investigation into HRDs in Sweden (planned for 2025). However, on a more general level, the Institute recommends that clear and simple definitions of HRDs should be used and that cooperation between HRDs, European institutions and NHRIs should be strengthened, e.g. through information exchange and advocacy initiatives.

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Functioning of justice systems

A [report](#) from the Centrum för Rättvisa reveals that individuals lose more than 90% of cases when appealing government decisions in court. The report suggests this is not solely due to the accuracy of decisions by the authorities, but also to systemic flaws in the legal and administrative processes. According to the report, these deficiencies hinder individuals from seeking justice when the state makes a mistake. The report proposes for example that a legal right to compensation for justified legal costs in administrative cases should be established and the right to compensation for errors in public authority actions should be strengthened.

The Swedish Parliament passed [legislation](#) during the year allowing anonymous witnesses in courts. The new rules took effect on January 1, 2025. The law aims to fight gang violence, break the “culture of silence”, and strengthen and streamline legal proceedings. The Institute has [opposed](#) the legislation, arguing that it is unlikely to achieve the intended effects. Instead, it may have the opposite effect, undermining the right to a fair trial. The use of anonymous witnesses will according to the law be restricted to very specific situations and the value of the evidence will be low. However, the mere fact that anonymous witnesses are permitted in Swedish courts risks eroding public trust in the judicial system. Critical factors will include when and how anonymous witnesses are used by the courts. For instance, if courts give more weight to anonymous testimony than it merits, this could not only damage trust in the judiciary as a whole but also potentially violate the right to a fair trial.

The Swedish system with lay judges, where lay judges are nominated by political parties, raises concerns about the independence and impartiality of courts. Lay judges hold equal voting rights to professional judges. It is crucial that lay judges act, and are perceived to act, independently of political

influence. See [ENNHRI's 2024 rule of law report](#) for a more in-depth description about the system.

Just like last year, there has also this year been court cases raising questions regarding political influence of courts. One example is a Migration Court [ruling](#) where three lay judges from the same political party overruled a professional judge and decided to deport a man. Another example is a [case](#) involving civil disobedience during a Stockholm roadblock, where two of the lay judges citing climate emergency overruled the other judges resulting in the defendant being acquitted.

During the year the institute [called](#) on the government to review the system with lay judges, recommending a recruitment process free from involvement of political parties and stronger protections for judicial impartiality.

Civil society has long [reported](#) shortcomings in legal safeguards in migration cases. A government-commissioned [analysis](#) found significant inconsistencies and weaknesses in the Swedish Migration Agency's handling of asylum cases. For instance, approval and rejection rates vary by region, indicating challenges in maintaining uniformity and legal certainty. The reports also highlight flaws in the legal quality of decisions, particularly in cases involving LGBTQI+ individuals and converts.

Follow-up and implementation by state authorities of European Courts' judgments

On 27 September 2024, the Department for the Execution of Judgements of the European Court of Human Rights asked the Swedish government for additional information in order to enable the Committee of Ministers to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the case *Centrum för Rättvisa v. Sweden* (Application 35252/08), Judgment of 25 May 2021. On 25 November 2024, the Government submitted an [Action Report](#) explaining that it considers that all necessary individual measures in the case have been taken. As regards the general measures, the government expressed that since the proposed legislative amendments in the Signals Intelligence Act and the Act on Personal Data Processing at the National Defence Radio Establishment now have been adopted by the Parliament, and soon will enter into force, the government has fulfilled its obligations. The Government therefore asked the Committee of Ministers to close its examination of the case.

NHRI's actions to support implementation of the European Court's judgments

The Swedish Institute for Human Rights observes that there is to their knowledge only one ECtHR judgement against Sweden requires measures to be taken. In 2024, the Institute submitted a [referral response](#) to a proposal to a new law that was a reaction to the [judgment](#). The Institute has during the year

not taken further specific steps as regards the implementation of the judgments.

Measures taken by national authorities to follow-up on the recommendations concerning justice systems issued by European actors

As regards the recommendation from the European Commission's [2024 EU Rule of Law Report](#) to ensure that the nomination system of lay judges safeguards their independence, taking into account European standards on judicial independence, there has been no progress by the national authorities. However, the Institute submitted a [letter](#) to the Minister of Justice in March 2024 suggesting that the government establishes an independent inquiry into how a new recruitment system for lay judges can be designed without the involvement of the political parties. The institute has so far not received a reply (31 January 2025). In addition, the Institute also included in its [Annual Report 2024](#) the recommendation to the government to establish such an inquiry.

NHRI's recommendations to national and regional authorities

Since the recommendations put forward by the Institute within this area last year have not been implemented, the Institute repeats the same recommendations also this year. For further information and justification see [last year's report](#). The Institute recommends to:

1. Appoint a special investigator with the task to investigate how a new recruitment system for lay judges should be designed without the involvement of the political parties.
2. Amend the legislation so that the Institute for Human Rights is excluded from the Chancellor of Justice's (JK) supervisory duties.

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Media freedom, pluralism and safety of journalists

Public Service Inquiry

During the year, the so-called Public Service Inquiry submitted its [report](#) on responsibility and independence—public service in troubled times. The Institute

is positive about the proposals to legislate that activities within the public service mission should be characterized by independence and strong integrity and conducted autonomously from the state, as well as from various economic, political, and other interests and power spheres in society. The Institute believes it is essential to maintain the requirement that program operations should be conducted from a perspective of equality and diversity. In its [referral response](#), the Institute, however, expresses concern that the inquiry committee had not reached an unanimous decision. There are disagreements regarding funding allocation in the report, as shown in reservations and dissenting opinions from several members of the committee and as [reflected](#) in major Swedish newspapers.

In 2023, the government established an [inquiry](#) tasked with reviewing the constitutional protection for search services that publish personal data about for example violations of law, addresses, phone numbers, marital status etc. The aim of the inquiry was to strengthen protection of personal privacy when personal data is published by such search services. In 2024, the [inquiry report](#) was presented proposing that the constitutional protection for search services that publish such information should be limited in order to protect individuals' personal privacy. The Institute [supported](#) the proposal in general, but emphasized that delegation provisions in the Freedom of the Press Act and the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression must align with Sweden's human rights commitments. In addition the Institute called for a child impact assessment.

Establishment of the Swedish Agency for the Media

On January 1, 2024, the Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority merged with the Swedish Media Council to form a new agency - [The Swedish Agency for the Media](#). The Agency works for example to promote freedom of expression and diversity in the media market. The agency also has the task to promote the empowering of minors as conscious media users and to protect them from harmful media influences.

Incidents of attacks, threats and harassment against journalists and media outlets

In 2024, several incidents of attacks and threats targeting individual journalists and media outlets have been reported in the media. For example, in May, the broadcaster TV4 [filed a police report](#) because of threats following its publication of an investigative report on a political party using undercover journalism. Additionally, demonstrators were reported to have chanted threatening slogans outside a journalist's residence after the publication of an investigative piece on demonstrations in support of Palestine. In September, two incidents were reported in which red paint was thrown at the [Swedish public service broadcaster](#) Sveriges Television (SVT) and a [local newspaper](#),

Barometern.

Harassment, threats, and attacks against journalists and media outlets have become a pressing issue in Sweden in recent years. In September 2024, 74 journalists, researchers, and authors signed an [appeal](#) highlighting the threats and harassment they face in their professions. The appeal called on the government and parliament to address the deteriorating climate of public dialogue. The signatories emphasized that hate directed toward women in these fields often takes on a sexualized nature.

Strengthened protection of journalists against threats and hatred

Moreover, the government also [decided](#) on measures to strengthen the protection of journalists against threats and hatred. As part of this decision, the above-mentioned Swedish Agency for the Media was tasked to monitor the issue of journalists' safety in Sweden and bring relevant actors together for dialogue and the Victim Support Sweden was allocated funds to build a national contact point for journalists who need support or protection.

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Other challenges to the rule of law and human rights

Gang-related violence and its impact on society

Gang-related violence represents one of Sweden's most significant challenges today. The violence not only impacts gang members but also extends to their families, friends, and neighbours. It imposes restrictions on the daily lives of the general public, heightening insecurity and, in the worst cases, exposing individuals to the risk of direct victimization.

Over the past decade, the number of confirmed cases of fatal violence involving firearms rose from 25 in 2013 to 63 in 2022. However, firearm-related violence in Sweden has decreased for the second consecutive year, as evidenced by the Police Authority's [statistics](#) for 2024. During the year, 296 shootings were reported, reflecting a nearly 20 percent decline compared to 2023. The number of fatalities from gun violence also decreased, with 44 deaths recorded in 2024 compared to 54 in the previous year.

The Institute is deeply concerned about the gang-related violence in Sweden. It is imperative that the government implements effective measures to enhance

societal security and put an end to the violence. However, such measures must fully comply with Sweden's human rights obligations, as enshrined in its constitutional laws and international conventions.

During the year a number of new laws and legal amendments entered into force with the purpose of fighting criminal gangs and enhancing safety in society.

Security zones as preventive measure

Since April 2024, the police is mandated to establish "[security zones](#)" (also known as stop-and-search zones) as a preventive measure. This allows police to search individuals and vehicles in public areas without concrete suspicion of a crime. Zones must be clearly defined and deemed critical for preventing criminal activity. The security zones can have a duration of maximum two weeks but can be extended. The proposal faced criticism from several bodies. Concerns include insufficient legal safeguards and disproportionate restrictions on privacy rights.

In its [referral response](#), the Institute warns of risks of actual and perceived discrimination, as the police powers can be used arbitrarily and individuals can be stopped and searched without suspicion and only based on for example how they are dressed or how they behave. This could undermine trust and crime prevention efforts. It should be noted that the Police's own [evaluation](#) suggests that security zones may enhance perceived safety, but their impact on reducing violent crime appears minimal.

New law introducing preventive stay-bans

A new [law](#) introduced during the year allows prosecutors to impose preventive stay-bans, restricting individuals, not convicted or suspected of crimes, from certain areas for a period of six months. During the first half year the law was in force, [80](#) such bans were issued. The Institute [criticized](#) the law for disproportionately infringing on freedom of movement and privacy rights and in many cases denying affected individuals the right to legal representation, raising concerns about fairness and legal safeguards.

Surveillance

During the year several proposals were presented aiming to expand surveillance, for example eased regulations in relation to surveillance cameras in public places. The [Institute](#) and others have criticized these measures, citing for example that it can violate the right to privacy. The proposals often lack clarity, proportionality, and protections against misuse, risking arbitrary implementation and undermining personal integrity.

Legal amendments has also been introduced during the year which have

expanded law enforcement's ability to use covert surveillance and searches. The Council on Legislation [criticized](#) these measures for being highly intrusive and targeting a broader population, including individuals not involved in criminal activity. This could harm those subjected to such actions and erode trust in authorities. The Council also warned of risks of arbitrary decisions perceived as harassment or undue control over irrelevant individuals.

The numerous amendments to regulations on covert coercive measures in recent years have made the legal framework highly complex, complicating a comprehensive understanding of the legislation and the extent of potential privacy intrusions. The assessments of these intrusions, including their compatibility with for example Article 8 of the European Convention, are in the inquiry reports limited to the individual legislative proposals. It is then typically concluded that the intrusion is acceptable. However, the cumulative impact of all these measures on democratic society is overlooked. The Swedish Council on Legislation has noted similar issues in relation to laws on secret surveillance and has, just like the institute, emphasized the need for a comprehensive review to ensure consistency and safeguard the right to privacy.

The process of issuing citizenships

During the year the government received strong [criticism](#) from a number of legal experts for statements concerning the process of issuing citizenships. In an article in a major Swedish newspaper the government states that before new citizenship requirements take effect, measures should if possible be taken to prevent citizenships from being granted under the current legislation. The legal experts highlighted for example that authorities and courts must follow the laws in effect at the time decisions are made, not future or pending legislation and that the government should not interfere in individual decisions made by agencies and courts.

Issues with overcrowding in prisons and detention centres

There is a continued overcrowding in prisons and detention centres in Sweden. The shortage of space in prisons and detention centres poses a major challenge for the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, increasing risks for both inmates and staff. The strained situation is also clearly reflected in the Service's [forecast](#) for the coming years up to 2033. The primary cause of the high occupancy rates is not increased crime, but rather longer detention periods and extended sentences. According to statistics, the average occupancy rate continues to rise. Plans are in place to expand from the current 9,000 prison and detention spaces to 27,000 within ten years. This expansion will present significant challenges and risks, and if fully utilized, Sweden could become one of the European countries with the highest number of incarcerated individuals per capita. The Institute is concerned with the trend toward increased incarceration and the resulting overcrowding. The Institute has

expressed that there are strong reasons to place greater emphasis on alternatives to custodial measures, in line with international recommendations. It should also be noted that the Swedish National Audit Office has [found](#) that the Swedish Prison and Probation Service's treatment programs lack efficiency. The primary reason is that the programs are under-resourced due to a shortage of both qualified staff and facilities.

Crime prevention targeting children and youth

In 2024, the Institute observed both positive and concerning developments in crime prevention targeting children and youth. The government introduced a national crime prevention [strategy](#) targeting children and youth, which includes important early interventions for families through a revised Social Services Act. However, [criticism](#) arose over insufficient resources for implementation of the revised Social Service Act. The National Board of Health and Welfare [reported](#) delays in services for children, and the Crime Prevention Council [highlighted](#) weak collaboration between local and national actors in reducing recidivism. The National Audit Office [found](#) state efforts insufficient to combat juvenile crime effectively.

During the year an inquiry report proposed to introduce Youth Crime Boards to identify at-risk children, including those without criminal involvement. The institute [rejected](#) the proposal since several risks from a legal certainty perspective were identified. Stricter measures for detained youth also drew concern. The institute [rejected](#) a proposal concerning isolation during rest periods at special residential homes for young people.

Dissolution of the Committee on Reindeer Lands

During the year the government [decided](#) to dissolve the Committee on Reindeer Lands, the purpose of which was to propose a revised reindeer husbandry legislation, following the Supreme Court decision in the so called Girja's case. The government's intention to dissolve the Committee was announced prior to consultation with Sami representatives which is not in line with the new Sami Consultation Act (2022), which requires early and good-faith engagement. The government intends to appoint a new inquiry with revised directives.

Changes in the regulatory framework enabling enhanced protection of personal integrity

In a [referral response](#) to a proposal regarding enhanced protection of personal integrity the Institute welcomed measures to stop the practice of virginity checks and supports the investigation's proposal to criminalize so-called virginity checks. However, unlike the investigation, the Institute expressed that there are strong reasons to criminalize conversion attempts. The Institute expressed that to question and, through pressure, threats, or coercion, attempt

to make someone deny or change their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression—especially during a stage in life when identity and self-esteem are developing—can cause lifelong psychological harm. The Institute argued that the consequences of conversion attempts are so serious that, for the sake of education and clarity, there are strong reasons to criminalize the practice.

Measures taken to follow up on the recommendations in other areas of the rule of law

As regards the recommendation to ensure the appropriate follow-up to the evaluation of the rules on revolving doors, the Institute notes that, in 2022, the government initiated an inquiry of the [Act concerning restrictions when ministers and state secretaries transition to non-state operation](#) (“the Restrictions Act”). On 28 August 2023, the results of the inquiry were presented in a [report on transition restrictions](#) (see also 2024 Rule of Law report). In 2024 the inquiry report was sent out on referral to 120 institutions. The purpose of the inquiry was in general to strengthen the trust in the public by preventing conflicts of interest from arising. In this context the Institute also notes that the Government in July 2024 adopted a new [Action Plan against corruption and unauthorised influence 2024-2027](#). In its [referral response](#) to the report on transition restrictions, the Institute expressed that it welcomed the proposals in general, but highlighted that the inquiry should also look at elected officials within municipalities since there are also risks of conflicts of interest at municipal and regional level. The Institute also agreed with the inquiry that there is no reason to exempt the Institute's director from the rules on transition restrictions.

Moreover, as regards to the recommendation to strengthen the fight against foreign bribery, by amending the existing legal definitions to improve on the prosecution of, and final judgments in foreign bribery cases, the Institute notes that a committee of [inquiry](#) was established on 1 February 2024 with a broad mandate to review criminal law legislation on corruption and misconduct. The purpose of the inquiry is to ensure that the legislation is effective, suitable and adapted to Sweden's international commitments, including in relation to foreign bribery. The result of the inquiry will be presented at the latest on 25 July 2025.

Additionally, as regards to the recommendation to continue efforts to ensure that the reforms to the legal framework for the funding and operation of civil society organisations do not unduly affect civil society engagement, the Swedish Parliament adopted the so-called “democracy conditions” in 2024 to ensure that no state funds go to organisations or religious communities that do not respect human rights and democratic governance. Such conditions have been applied before in the various regulations/ordinance outlining government funding to civil society organisations, but with the new conditions a more

uniform approach is taken. A set of “democracy conditions” were proposed in 2022 by the previous government but this resulted in strong criticism by a number of civil society organisations. A new government took office during the second half of 2022 and withdrew the previous legislative proposal at the end of 2022. The new and updated proposal was presented to, and adopted by, the Parliament in April 2024. Civil society has [expressed](#) that it is important that the government engages in dialogue with them on the implementation and follow-up of the ‘democracy conditions’.

Persisting structural human rights issues impacting on national rule of law environment

The legislative process is a cornerstone of the rule of law, ensuring broad input and thorough consideration. According to Sweden’s Instrument of Government, the government must gather necessary information from relevant authorities and municipalities and allow organizations to provide their opinions.

Recently, there has been a growing trend of government-appointed investigators being tasked with presenting predetermined measures, regardless of whether the special investigator deems them effective or suitable. This practice undermines the investigatory system’s role in finding comprehensive solutions to the issues the government aims to address and limits the materials available to the government and parliament.

NHRI’s recommendations to national and regional authorities

The Swedish Institute for Human Rights issues the following recommendations to national actors:

1. In its important work to increase security in society and stop the gang-related violence, the government must ensure that proposed measures comply with Sweden’s human rights obligations as regulated in the Swedish constitutional laws and the international conventions that Sweden has ratified.
2. There is an urgent need for lawmakers to thoroughly evaluate the overall cumulative human rights implications of the measures taken to combat crime, including in relation to the highly complex regulatory framework concerning covert coercive measures.

