

Country report from Sweden

Sweden is one of the most equal and secular countries in the world if referring to World Value Survey. But we still have a lot to do for gender equality in Sweden as well.

Single mothers' situation in Sweden

While alternate residences have increased, it is still common that children live mostly or only with their mother. More than half of the children are doing that compared to fewer than one in ten children living mostly or only with their father.

Single mothers are living just as confined as they were doing in the 1970s. Only 17 percent of them have a high space standard, compared to 45 percent of the entire population. It is shown in the Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) carried out over the years 2006-07.

Approximately 10 percent of single mothers have been exposed to violence or threats in their own homes during the past twelve months according to data from 2004-05

Of those employed, nearly 40 percent of women and 10 percent of men work part-time. The single mothers who have children living with them, fulltime or most of the time, are at a greater risk to various forms of vulnerabilities than other parents. They are employed to a lesser extent and more often have economic problems. Many mothers describe a difficult economic situation.

Cultural relativism in Sweden

In the last decades, in Sweden as well as in other European countries, cultural relativism has had an immense impact on the life conditions for women in Europe, not least for migrant women and refugees from the third world. Many questions have been raised concerning women's rights. They are now conditioned and subordinated culture. Culture is respected even when it oppresses women. It is not questioned or criticised like before. There are several bad consequences for women. Women's activists, writers, politicians and other prolific women in society are influenced by this way of thinking and makes resistance difficult. The cultural relativists opinions dominate the debate and it is a big challenge to question and change it. But the resistance is real and existing. To highlight some controversial topics, the veil for example has become a question about culture instead of the oppression of a woman's right to her sexuality. The cultural relativists have failed to find a solution on this controversial topic in western societies. The solution has become a question about protecting culture even when it is oppressive against women's rights.

Double oppression in the suburbs

In the Swedish suburbs the grass root feminism is growing. The reason for this is a bigger impact of religious fundamentalism that oppress women in the suburbs. Especially migrant women are targeted. The criticism against political Islam which is the most common fundamentalism in the suburbs is not the same as being critical against Islam. We must all realise that religion, any religion, and fundamentalism separates people in the same way as the class system. The attitudes divide "better" people from "worse" in a rude inhuman way. Therefore, the struggle against racism and fundamentalism must maintain strong. Of course you can be critical of recruitments to Daesh in the same time as you are against the racism in general society, visible for example through attacks against asylum seekers and refugee homes. We all know that in some religious dictatorships religious laws like sharia is the ruling system in states such as Afghanistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia. In a state like Turkey political Islam is expanding. When these law systems are put into practice it has a direct negative impact on women's rights and LGBT rights in the societies. In some segregated suburbs in Sweden these laws are practiced and a big problem for the victims of this oppression. In any suburbs there is cultural diversity, each of them with their own traditions and religions. To prevent oppression and discrimination we need to use the universal human rights. In the UN convention of Human Rights, it says: All humans are born free and have the right to equal rights and equality. When it comes to religion we need secular societies, religion should be a private matter between the individual person and God. We in the suburbs must achieve a life without racism and fundamentalism.

Why it is important to protect and extend the secular state

Even if Sweden is seen as one of the most secular states in the world this is a modified reality.

It took the women's movement during peace time almost 150 years to achieve a civil law and a democracy. But we have still not reached gender equality even if it has become better. But we can see where religious laws are dominating it is undermining democracy. Most religions in particular the monotheist ones such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam have the religious laws.

The socialisation of the Swedish society ended up with a collective responsibility for the welfare system replacing charity from the church and the upper class. It has had an immense impact to the Swedish welfare system. By taxes all have to contribute to build the state. This tax system must be reformed now because over time the wealthy people of the population, some of them politicians, have increased the gaps between classes. Today it is obvious that we are quite far from a secular society. Again we must talk about religion as a political actor as long as it does not act as a private matter.

After political decisions in Sweden the school system has become privatised and private and religious schools are more common than ever before. The indoctrination of children and youth by the educational system has been approved by the Parliament. Unequal dress codes have become more frequent and now we have an ongoing debate about to approve teachers in kindergarten to wear niqab during duty and separate women and men in the swimming halls. Some schools refuse to educate about sexual and reproductive health.

Elder women in the Swedish society

By negotiations between the big political parties the pension agreement was reformed but the price is paid by the elderly women. The amount of poor female retired persons has increased and in some year we count that 50% of the older female population will live below the poverty limit. After a lifelong work they have to lean on social service and charity. If they are not healthy and depending on social security it is even worse. It is shameful for a so called equal society. A former female leftist was part of the investigation before the reform and she declared the risks already at that time, some years ago. Most women would lose in the new pension reform. In 2014 after the latest election a group of women activists on the left started an activist group fighting for better conditions for female retired persons. They have done a lot of successful actions both in front of the Parliament, on the city trains and on various congresses but also on YouTube. They will continue their actions until the politicians take their demands seriously.

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