

Supplementary information to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

**Regarding the 24th/25th
State Party review
procedure of Sweden,
2025**



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Introduction

The Swedish Institute for Human Rights was established in 2022 as Sweden’s national human rights institution. As a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), we have a statutory mandate and central role in actively monitoring Sweden’s compliance with its international human rights obligations. In line with the Paris Principles, NHRIs may submit alternative reports and supplementary information, as well as engage in dialogue with international treaty monitoring bodies.

This alternative report has been prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Its purpose is to support the Committee in its upcoming review of Sweden’s compliance with the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In 2023, the Swedish Government submitted its twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth periodic reports on national implementation of the Convention.

In preparation for this report, we consulted with organisations, activists, researchers and rights-holders from seven groups exposed to racism in Sweden: Afro-Swedes, Jews, Muslims, Roma, Swedish Asians, Sweden Finns, Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset, as well as the Indigenous Sámi people. We also held a dedicated session with children and youth organisations to explore young people’s experiences of racism. In total, we engaged with over 90 individuals. There is no general consensus in Sweden on what terminology to use to describe ethnicity and racism. We have sought to be as specific and descriptive as possible. However, we recognise that the terms used in this report may not always be precise or fully representative of the experiences and identities of all groups concerned.¹

From the meetings we have conducted, a consistent picture emerges: the situation regarding racism in Sweden has worsened since the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination last reviewed the country in 2018. Many participants reported an increase in hate crimes and described the difficulty of obtaining redress after being subjected to racism. Several also expressed concern that racist undertones in political discourse have normalised racism, both online and in society more broadly.

The impact of racism and discrimination on individuals’ access to their economic, social, and cultural rights was a recurring theme in our consultations. Those we spoke with reported experiences of discrimination and racism in interactions with public institutions, including schools, social services, and healthcare. Racism in schools, in particular, was highlighted as increasingly present in children’s everyday lives.

As appendices to this alternative report, we are also submitting two in-depth studies based on qualitative interviews. These reports examine the exposure of Muslim and Jewish associations and congregations in Sweden to racism, hatred, and threats.

¹ In the “List of themes” we explain the concepts used throughout the report.

In summary, we find that there are several areas where Sweden must step up its efforts to counter negative trends and actively work to meet its obligations under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

This report does not address all relevant human rights challenges relating to racial discrimination in Sweden. Accordingly, submissions from civil society organisations will remain crucial sources of information for the Committee's review.

1. The State's Efforts to Combat Racism – Articles 2 and 5 (a)–(d)

1.1. Sweden's Report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Sweden's twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth periodic reports to the UN Committee were published in 2023 and some of the information provided requires updating. The government's report focuses primarily on commissioned inquiries and knowledge production related to racism.¹ While we welcome efforts to generate more knowledge about racism and its effects, our follow-up of the initiatives mentioned reveals that many have not, in practice, resulted in concrete measures. In several of our meetings, stakeholders pointed out that there is already plenty of research highlighting inequalities based on ethnicity and country of birth. Yet this information is not consistently used by duty-bearers to develop and implement actions to address such inequalities.

The pace of legislative change in recent years has been high, particularly in the areas of criminal justice and migration policy, making it difficult to gain an overview of the overall impact on human rights. Several government inquiries in these fields have lacked sufficient analysis of whether the proposed limitations on human rights are proportionate. Moreover, there is often no assessment of the potential risk that such proposals could contribute to increased discrimination, including on ethnic grounds.²

We welcome the development of a new Action Plan against Racism and Hate Crime.³ However, several concerns have been raised regarding its content and process. Stakeholders have pointed to a lack of meaningful inclusion and consultation with civil society in the plan's development. Many have also emphasised that the action plan must serve as more than a symbolic document, and that it must also form the basis for policy implementation and political communication. Another recurring concern is that the action plan largely treats racism as an issue of individual attitudes or interpersonal conflict, and therefore fails to address structural racism effectively. Additionally, during our meetings, criticism was raised over the omission of racism against persons of Asian

origin from the action plan. A report from the Swedish Women's Organisations also notes that the action plan lacks a thorough intersectional analysis and that the gender equality perspective is significantly weaker than in the previous plan.⁴

Our Recommendation to the Swedish Government

→ Ensure that ongoing legislative reforms in migration and law enforcement are implemented in line with Sweden's international human rights obligations, including the prohibition of discrimination.

1.2. Sweden's Work with the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

Awareness of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination remains low in Sweden. In a survey we conducted, 40 per cent of respondents reported that they were not aware of the Convention at all.⁵ Moreover, it is uncommon for courts and public authorities to apply the Convention or refer to its provisions in their work.

A comprehensive and strategic approach to human rights requires a systematic and transparent process for managing recommendations from UN treaty bodies. The government's follow-up of such recommendations should be undertaken in collaboration with public authorities, municipalities and regions, civil society, and the Swedish Institute for Human Rights. Currently, this cooperation is insufficient, making it difficult to monitor the implementation of recommendations. There is also no centralised, publicly accessible system that collates all recommendations received from UN treaty bodies or tracks their implementation status.

1.3. Population Statistics and the Need for Equality Data

Sweden lacks sufficient equality data, which significantly hampers the ability to design and evaluate measures to combat racism and discrimination.⁶ When questioned, the government has stated that it does not intend to strengthen the collection of such data, citing concerns about potential conflicts with the principle of equal treatment.⁷ However, this position overlooks the fact that different groups have diverse attitudes towards data collection based on discrimination grounds or other categorisations. For example, in our meetings with Afro-Swedes, many expressed a clear need for equality

data as a tool to visualise and articulate the racism and discrimination they face. Similarly, Swedish Asians highlighted a lack of awareness about the racism experienced by their communities.

Many of those we consulted emphasised that equality data is essential for identifying structural and institutional racism, something that is not currently captured by Sweden's existing data collection practices. Much of the available statistics are based solely on whether an individual or their parents are foreign-born, a method that excludes several groups with lived experiences of racism.

Given the diversity of historical experiences and perspectives on data collection, it is crucial that any work to develop equality data is undertaken in close dialogue with, and with due sensitivity to, the groups concerned.

Our Recommendation to the Swedish Government

→ Ensure that equality data can be collected, analysed, and used in a rights-based manner, in close consultation with and with respect for affected groups.

1.4. Deteriorating Conditions for Civil Society

In recent years, the conditions for large parts of civil society have deteriorated. Public funding has decreased, project-based funding has replaced core operational grants, and reporting requirements have become more demanding.⁸ This has led to concerns among civil society actors that political priorities increasingly influence funding decisions, thereby constraining their work. In 2024, the state subsidy for ethnically based organisations was abolished.⁹

In our meetings, civil society representatives expressed disappointment with the government's consultation practices, noting that these engagements have become more like information sessions than genuine consultations. The development of the Action Plan against Racism and Hate Crime was frequently cited as an example of inadequate participation by civil society. In particular, Roma participants voiced frustration at being excluded from decision-making processes that affect their communities and from the implementation of related measures.

A recent report also highlights growing threats, hate speech, and stigmatisation faced by civil society actors, especially those working with or on behalf of Muslim communities, other minority groups, and with anti-racism efforts.¹⁰

Our interviews with Muslim and Jewish congregations and associations further confirm that hate, threats, and vandalism directed at their premises remain common.¹¹

Our Recommendations to the Swedish Government

- Establish a transparent and inclusive system for monitoring the implementation of recommendations from international treaty bodies, including those from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.
- Strengthen consultation and cooperation with civil society organisations working on anti-racism and groups affected by racism, ensuring meaningful participation in policy processes, particularly in the development and implementation of the Action Plan against Racism and Hate Crime.

1.5. Non-Compliance with the Principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent

The Sámi people are both an indigenous people and a designated national minority in Sweden. Their rights are protected under several international instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, ILO Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (not yet ratified by Sweden), and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In March 2022, Sweden introduced the Act on Consultation in Matters Relating to the Sami People¹², requiring the government and state administrative authorities to consult with Sami representatives on issues of particular importance to them. As of March 2024, this obligation also applies to municipalities and regions. However, the Act is limited in scope and falls short of fully upholding the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). For instance, it does not apply to civil law matters, and there is no mechanism for appealing inadequate or missing consultations.

The Sámi people and their traditional livelihoods are facing challenges due to, for example, climate change and industrial expansions linked to the green transition. Despite these pressures, no additional funding has been allocated to support Sami participation in consultations.¹³

Criticism has also been directed at the way the government applies the Consultation Act. For example, Sami civil society actors chose not to participate in the consultation on the dismantling of the Reindeer Husbandry Committee, citing a lack of proper consultation and the impression that decisions had already been made and publicly announced.¹⁴

Our Recommendation to the Swedish Government

→ Ensure that both legislation and practice are aligned with international standards on Indigenous rights, including the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).

1.6. The Migrant Workers Convention

Sweden has not ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (The Migrant Workers Convention). The Convention clarifies states' obligations to inform migrants of their rights and recognises migrants as rights holders under international law.

According to a situation report from several Swedish authorities, the risk of human trafficking and labour exploitation is high, with many cases going unreported. Victims include asylum seekers and people in irregular or undocumented situations. These individuals are sometimes forced to live at their workplaces, receive little or no pay, and are subjected to physical and sexual violence or the threat of deportation.¹⁵ Legal support is often unavailable, and most exploited workers are not union members, leaving them with little recourse to recover unpaid wages. Trade union assistance for undocumented workers is also limited.¹⁶

Our Recommendation to the Swedish Government

→ Take steps to ensure the protection of the rights of migrant workers and their families and investigate the possibility of ratifying the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families.

2. Hate Crimes, Political Discourse and Redress – Articles 4 and 6

2.1. Increase in Hate Crimes and Barriers to Redress

Hate crimes with racist or xenophobic motives account for 53 per cent of all reported hate crimes and represent the most common category within hate crime statistics. Afro-phobic and Islamophobic motives are the most frequently specified underlying reasons for reported hate crimes in Sweden.¹⁷ Afro-phobic hate crimes differ from other hate crimes in that violence is more commonly involved. Nearly one in five reported incidents include elements of violence.¹⁸ There has also been a sharp increase in antisemitic hate crimes since October 2023.¹⁹

In our meetings with children and youth organisations, many described widespread racism online and a lack of effective countermeasures. The young people also felt that authorities failed to grasp the extent of the problem.

In the case of digital hate crimes, the most common motives are racist or xenophobic, followed by religious hate crime motives. Among digital hate crimes specifically directed at a particular ethnicity or nationality, Afro-phobic motives are the most prevalent.²⁰

Statistics from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention show a gradual decline in hate crime-designated police reports since 2018. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention is unable to determine the cause of this decline.²¹ At the same time, all groups we consulted gave a consistent account that they perceive hate crimes to have increased in recent years.

People experience hate, threats, and violence in their everyday lives: on public transport, at school, in the workplace, and online. Several people we met testified that individuals wearing traditional clothing or religious symbols are particularly vulnerable to harassment in society. Harassment often disproportionately affects women, for example, Roma and Sámi women wearing traditional clothing, or Muslim women wearing head coverings such as the hijab. Many individuals noted an increase in hate crimes in connection with minorities asserting their rights. There are, for instance, indications that hate crimes against Sámi people increase when their rights are recognised or receive public attention.²²

Most people we spoke to expressed that obtaining redress after reporting a hate crime is extremely difficult, even in cases where clear evidence has been provided to the police. As a result, many choose not to report such crimes, while others file reports primarily to have the incident documented, with little hope of redress. Of all hate crimes registered

between 2020 and 2023, only six per cent were solved. Just under half were closed after an investigation, and roughly the same number were dismissed before an investigation had even begun.²³

2.2. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaïset submitted its final report at the end of 2023.²⁴ The Truth Commission for the Sámi People is still ongoing, collecting and analysing individual testimonies regarding the experiences and consequences of state policies toward the Sámi. During 2024, the Delegation of Sweden Finns called for a truth commission to document and recognise the abuses and forced assimilation to which the minority has been subjected.²⁵

Our Recommendations to the Swedish Government

- Expand and prioritise police crime prevention and trust-building measures to encourage more people to report racist hate crimes, and prioritise hate crime cases across the justice system to improve the clearance rate.
- Fully implement the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaïset.
- Ensure the Truth Commission for the Sámi People has the necessary conditions to carry out its work effectively.

2.3. Political and Public Discourse

In all our consultations, we heard extensive criticism of the current political discourse, which is widely perceived as racist. In addition to individual statements by politicians, many of those we met believe that recent legislative proposals and legal amendments relating to crime prevention and migration have racist and xenophobic undertones. Examples include new laws on security zones.²⁶

A report from the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) investigates expressions of racism in digital environments. It found that the most common stereotype in the reviewed posts was that certain groups cause unrest and disorder. This prejudice was most often directed at Muslims, followed by the broader category of “immigrants.” The study shows that Muslims and individuals with backgrounds in the Middle East and North Africa are particularly vulnerable to prejudice. The posts are often based on ignorance and a conflation of various ethnic and religious minorities.²⁷

In our meetings with representatives of Muslim associations and congregations, participants described a heightened sense of exposure to racist political discourse. They highlighted several examples of critical remarks by high-level politicians.²⁸ Muslim congregations reported that negative political statements about Muslims and generalisations about Islam contribute to an increase in hate, threats and actual attacks against religious communities.²⁹

Sámi representatives and organisations expressed concern that the current public debate contributes to polarisation by reinforcing prejudices and undermining Sámi rights.³⁰

Representatives of Jewish associations and congregations raised concerns that politicians tend to pit minority groups against one another, for example, by highlighting antisemitism while avoiding discussion of other groups' exposure to hatred, harassment and discrimination. This one-sidedness is seen as counterproductive and perceived as negative in that several groups in Sweden are in need of government support. It also risks setting vulnerable communities against one another, fuelling further antisemitism and reducing the overall legitimacy of anti-racism efforts.³¹

A report indicates that civil society actors are being subjected to hostile rhetoric, delegitimisation and threatening accusations, particularly organisations working on anti-racism and minority rights.³²

A study commissioned by the Swedish Institute for Human Rights found that thousands of print and online editorial articles during the 2022 election campaign included polarising and xenophobic language.³³

Our Recommendation to the Swedish Government

→ Take immediate action to counteract and take a clear stand against racist hate speech and xenophobic statements, not least ahead of the Swedish parliamentary elections in 2026.

3. Civil and Political Rights

– Article 5 (a)–(d)

3.1. New Requirements for Citizenship

Swedish legislation on citizenship is undergoing reform. Among other measures, the government has commissioned an inquiry that proposes stricter requirements for acquiring Swedish citizenship. A separate constitutional inquiry has proposed a significant expansion of the grounds on which citizenship can be revoked.³⁴

The proposals for tightened citizenship requirements would mean that applicants must reside in Sweden for a longer period than currently required and must be able to support themselves financially. Stricter rules are also proposed for individuals who have received income support.³⁵ These conditions risk disproportionately affecting people with disabilities and women who are far from the labour market.³⁶

The Constitutional Inquiry proposes introducing broader possibilities for revoking Swedish citizenship, currently permitted only in very limited cases. Under the new proposals, citizenship could be revoked for individuals with dual nationality, which would primarily impact those born abroad. This would result in unequal protections depending on whether a Swedish citizen holds another nationality, thereby undermining the principle of equal treatment.³⁷

3.2. Restrictions on Freedom of Expression

A government inquiry has proposed expanding the grounds on which residence permits may be denied or revoked, to include deficiencies in an individual's "way of life". At present, such actions are only possible if the individual has been convicted of a criminal offence. The proposed changes could allow for arbitrary assessments of what constitutes unacceptable behaviour. The inquiry suggests that such deficiencies may include statements perceived as seriously threatening Sweden's democratic values, the political system, or public institutions' legitimacy.³⁸

This proposal would effectively make freedom of expression conditional for non-citizens. Restricting freedom of expression based on an individual's origin is discriminatory and risks eroding the principles of the rule of law. There is also a serious risk that individuals who are not Swedish citizens may feel compelled to self-censor for fear that their residence status could be jeopardised.

Our Recommendation to the Swedish Government:

- Ensure that proposed amendments to citizenship legislation are consistent with the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and other binding international human rights instruments.

3.3. Religious Freedom

A national survey on the vulnerability of religious communities shows that many congregations in Sweden have experienced threats in connection with religious services.³⁹

In our consultations with Muslim associations and congregations, all described negative developments in relation to the realisation of Muslims' human rights in Sweden.

The concerns raised include limited access to premises and public funding, as well as increased exposure to threats and hatred. Many also reported that children are prevented from praying or practising other aspects of their religion and traditions in schools.⁴⁰

Jewish associations and congregations have similarly reported that rising antisemitism is not only harming individuals, but also seriously impeding the ability of Jewish communities and organisations to operate freely in Sweden. These challenges are emerging at a time when many people rely more than ever on the support and community provided by religious groups.⁴¹

Our Recommendations to the Swedish Government:

- Ensure that the right to freedom of religion is fully respected and protected in practice, including for religious congregations and associations, by countering hate crimes, discrimination and intolerance.
- Guarantee everyone's right to manifest their religion or belief in all areas of society, including in schools, in accordance with international human rights standards.

3.4. Increased Risk of Ethnic Profiling

In our meetings with young people, concerns were raised about the risk of visible minorities being subjected to ethnic profiling and racism by law enforcement authorities. Since April 2024, new legislation has granted police the authority to carry out searches on individuals in designated areas known as security zones, even in the absence

of any suspicion of criminal activity. These provisions also apply to children. Within these zones, the police are additionally permitted to search vehicles without any specific grounds for suspicion.⁴²

There is a significant risk that these expanded powers may result in both actual and perceived discrimination.⁴³ Several of the young people we spoke to identified the establishment of security zones as a source of concern, noting that such measures risk reinforcing prejudice and deepening mistrust of the police among youth. This, in turn, may contribute to greater social exclusion.

The government has also introduced measures, and is considering further proposals, aimed at expanding the police's authority to stop individuals and verify their legal right to remain in Sweden.⁴⁴ A study conducted by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention has highlighted that the implementation of these measures carries a risk of discriminatory ethnic profiling. For example, the report revealed that the methods employed by the police have led to more frequent errors, with individuals of African and Southwest Asian backgrounds being disproportionately and wrongly suspected in relation to drug offences.⁴⁵

Furthermore, the Special Investigations Department, which is responsible for preventing, detecting and investigating offences committed by police officers and others, is currently part of the Police Authority. The UN has previously recommended that this unit be placed outside the Police Authority in order to guarantee both actual and perceived independence.⁴⁶

We also see risks of discrimination and ethnic profiling in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) by public authorities. This includes, for example, the use of AI in police camera surveillance⁴⁷, as well as the application of AI algorithms by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency to detect potential benefit fraud.⁴⁸ An audit has shown that the Agency employed AI systems that disproportionately flagged certain groups, particularly women and individuals with foreign backgrounds, for further investigation, raising serious concerns about bias and fairness.⁴⁹

Our Recommendations to the Swedish Government

- Take effective measures to prevent and counteract discriminatory ethnic profiling, particularly within law enforcement agencies.
- Strengthen requirements for the use of AI tools by public authorities, ensuring that they include adequate procedural safeguards to protect human rights, including the prohibition of racial discrimination.

4. Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – Articles 3 and 5 (e)–(f)

4.1. Discrimination in the Labour Market

Multiple studies have documented widespread discrimination in Sweden's labour market on the basis of ethnic origin. Discrimination occurs during recruitment, promotion, and the allocation of work tasks.⁵⁰ Individuals born abroad also experience their working environment as being worse than people born in Sweden.⁵¹

Among members of the Kommunal trade union, individuals born in Africa are 300 per cent more likely to be employed on fixed-term contracts compared to those born in Sweden or other Nordic countries.⁵² Afro-Swedes earn lower wages, face longer periods of unemployment, and encounter greater barriers to advancing into higher positions with salaries matching their educational level. These disparities are most pronounced among individuals with higher education.⁵³

A survey of Roma and Travellers revealed that only 42 per cent of women and 52 per cent of men were in paid employment. Furthermore, one in three young Roma or Travellers aged 16–24 were neither working nor studying at the time of the survey.⁵⁴ Research by the Equality Ombudsman shows that men with Arabic or Muslim names face widespread discrimination in recruitment processes.⁵⁵

4.2. Discrimination in the Housing Market

According to the Equality Ombudsman, most reported cases of discrimination in the housing market concern ethnicity or disability.⁵⁶ Roma, in particular, face significant discrimination. Around 60 per cent of Roma and Travellers in Sweden live in overcrowded conditions, compared to 15 per cent of the general population.⁵⁷ Overcrowded living conditions are also more common among individuals born outside Europe.⁵⁸

Discrimination in the housing market contributes to growing residential segregation, which has become increasingly ethnically defined in recent decades.⁵⁹ Disadvantaged neighbourhoods tend to have a high proportion of foreign-born residents. Research indicates that growing up in these areas can have a negative impact on future prospects in relation to school performance, labour market opportunities and health.⁶⁰

As of 1 March 2025, asylum seekers will, as a general rule, only be entitled to a daily allowance if they reside in the asylum accommodation to which they have been assigned. The law also restricts asylum seekers' freedom of movement by requiring them to remain within designated geographic areas.⁶¹ Several studies have identified serious problems in

asylum accommodation, including overcrowding, isolation, poor accessibility, insecurity, and the lack of private spaces for children to rest, study or play.⁶² In our consultations, participants expressed concern that mandatory residence in asylum accommodation will hinder the realisation of rights for persons with disabilities, due to the lack of personalised, accessible solutions.

4.3. Unequal Access to Social Protection

Sweden exhibits the highest disparity in material and social poverty⁶³ between native-born and foreign-born residents in the EU. In 2023, 14 per cent of foreign-born individuals lived in material and social poverty, the highest rate since records began. This compares with just 3 per cent of native-born individuals.⁶⁴ The difference between Roma and the rest of the population is also significant: 51 per cent of Roma and travellers in Sweden have difficulty making ends meet, compared with 4 per cent of the rest of the population.⁶⁵

The daily allowance for asylum seekers has remained unchanged since 1994, despite recommendations by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The current level is so low that it undermines the right to social security and adequate standard of living. Moreover, families with more than two children only receive full daily benefits for the two oldest children; younger children receive only half the amount.⁶⁶

Newly arrived persons with disabilities face particular challenges in accessing social security and an adequate standard of living. Many have difficulties entering the labour market, and Swedish language instruction is often not adapted to their needs. Many also describe difficulties in navigating the support system and understanding their rights.

Additionally, individuals with temporary residence permits from Ukraine are excluded from residence-based benefits such as child allowance, housing allowance and elderly support, unlike other refugees with residence permits. They are also excluded from benefits under the Act on Support and Services to Persons with Certain Functional Disabilities (LSS).⁶⁷

Our Recommendations to the Swedish Government

- Implement special measures to address structural discrimination in the labour and housing markets.
- Address the high levels of poverty among foreign-born individuals and ensure full use of available resources to uphold economic, social and cultural rights for all, without discrimination.
- Guarantee the right to adequate housing, particularly in light of new requirements for asylum seekers to reside in asylum accommodation, ensuring this does not disadvantage persons with disabilities, LGBTI individuals, women or children.
- Raise the daily allowance for asylum seekers to secure their right to an adequate standard of living.

4.4. Inequalities in Health Care

Many of the individuals we consulted reported unequal treatment and discrimination in their interactions with the healthcare system. Other sources corroborate these experiences. For example, ethnicity-related stereotypes in healthcare contribute to insufficient or inappropriate treatment, which can result in inadequate care.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Afro-Swedes report structural racism, prejudice, and patronising or stigmatising treatment in obstetric and maternal healthcare. They perceive their care as being inferior to that of others.⁶⁹

Sami and Swedish Finns report higher levels of chronic illness compared to the rest of the population. They also report significantly higher rates of serious suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts.⁷⁰ In 2019, life expectancy was 80.6 years for men and 84.1 years for women in Sweden generally, but only 69 years for Roma and Traveller men and 74 years for Roma and Traveller women.⁷¹

Under Swedish law, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants are only entitled to “treatment that cannot be deferred”. This is a vague term which is interpreted inconsistently across healthcare providers.⁷² A study by the Swedish Red Cross found deficiencies in the healthcare system’s treatment, communication, and provision of information to undocumented individuals, leading to routine denial of care.⁷³

Our Recommendations to the Swedish Government

- Ensure the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health for all, including equitable healthcare. This includes addressing prejudice, discriminatory practices, and abusive treatment within the health system.
- Clarify the definition of “treatment that cannot be deferred” and ensure that asylum seekers and undocumented individuals have access to healthcare on equal terms with the rest of the population.

4.5. Racism in Schools and Unequal Access to Support from Social Services

Racism, discrimination, and hate crimes in schools were recurring themes in our consultations. Representatives of Muslim associations and congregations reported that children are subjected to hate and harassment in school, both from peers and staff. They described negative treatment from teachers linked to prejudices about Islam and Muslims.⁷⁴ Similarly, Jewish associations reported that schools are particularly vulnerable environments for anti-Semitic expression, including hate speech, threats, and violence.⁷⁵ Many of the complaints submitted to the Equality Ombudsman in the education sector involve harassment by pupils or teachers based on religion or belief. Muslim girls, for instance, are harassed for wearing head coverings, such as the hijab, and some students are targeted based on their real or perceived Jewish identity.⁷⁶

Reports in recent years have highlighted how racism affects children in schools and how teachers and school management lack the ability or willingness to respond adequately.⁷⁷ According to a survey by Save the Children, half of all Year 5 pupils (10–11 year-olds) had witnessed racism at school. One in five children with foreign backgrounds reported concerns about being bullied due to their skin colour, name, Swedish language skills or dietary preferences.⁷⁸ The Equality Ombudsman has specifically noted that Afro-Swedish children face harassment and that their experiences are often downplayed by educators.⁷⁹

A survey by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) showed that 16 per cent of Roma parents in Sweden reported experiencing discrimination in their contact with schools in the previous year.⁸⁰

Afro-Swedes that we met described how schools sometimes use threats of reporting notifications of concern to the social services, or filing actual reports, as a retaliatory measure against parents who raise concerns about racism or harassment. This is corroborated by the Equality Ombudsman.⁸¹ The Equality Ombudsman has also reported that schools are more likely to refer Afro-Swedish families to social services than other families.⁸²

Some of the groups we spoke with, including Afro-Swedes, told us that they felt that their ethnicity or skin colour led to less favourable treatment in interactions with social services. This includes unequal access to supportive measures. Many felt that social workers lacked adequate knowledge about racism and discrimination. A report by the Equality Ombudsman found that perceptions of ethnicity influence both who receives support and the nature of the support provided.⁸³ These disparities create risks of discrimination and undermine equal access to services.

Our Recommendations to the Swedish Government

- Ensure every child's right to education by effectively combatting racism and discrimination in schools.
- Ensure that raising concerns about racism in schools does not result in reprisals against children or their parents.

5. Extension of Anti-Discrimination Legislation – Article 6

5.1. Different Rules for Different Public Institutions

Discrimination legislation governing public sector activities in Sweden varies depending on the area of society. In our meetings with representatives of civil society organisations and rights holders, a particular concern raised was that the activities of the police are not currently covered by the Discrimination Act. Following a government inquiry, the Swedish government pledged to extend the Act to include police conduct.⁸⁴ However, no concrete measures have been taken since the inquiry's report was published in 2021, despite the government's 2024 announcement of its intention to draft the necessary legislative amendment.

5.2. Language as a Ground for Discrimination

Language is not currently recognised as a ground for discrimination under the Discrimination Act. However, this issue has been raised repeatedly in our consultations. National minorities, in particular, report experiencing discrimination in areas not addressed by the existing legislation. This includes a failure to respect their linguistic and cultural rights and the lack of legal remedies when such rights are violated.⁸⁵

While some instances of language-related discrimination may fall under the existing ground of ethnicity, recognising language as a separate ground could offer stronger and more precise protection. The Council of Europe, in a review of Sweden's minority rights compliance, has recommended that Sweden include language as an explicit ground for discrimination.⁸⁶ Similarly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaïset has proposed that the government investigate the inclusion of language as a protected ground.⁸⁷

In recent years, the issue of language has also gained attention in other contexts. A forthcoming government inquiry will examine the possibility of restricting access to publicly funded interpretation services in interactions with public authorities.⁸⁸ Simultaneously, funding for the promotion of minority languages has been reduced.⁸⁹

Our Recommendations to the Swedish Government

- Ensure that all public authorities, including the police and other publicly funded bodies, are fully subject to the provisions of the Discrimination Act.
- Examine the potential for including language as an explicit ground for discrimination in the Discrimination Act.

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