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Government Offices
of Sweden

FACT SHEET

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A policy for civil society

In December 2009 the Swedish Government presented a bill entitled **A policy for civil society (Govt. Bill 2009/10:55)** to the Riksdag (the Parliament). The new policy will help the Government to highlight the great importance of civil society, develop and clarify the relationship between the state and civil society and take a holistic approach to general issues concerning civil society and its conditions. The bill also addresses issues concerning civil society entrepreneurship, state support to civil society organisations, other civil society funding, and issues regarding public meeting places.

The objective of the policy for civil society is to improve the conditions for civil society as an integral part of democracy. This should occur in dialogue with civil society organisations by:

- developing civil society's ability to enable people to participate based on involvement and the will to influence their own circumstances or society as a whole,
- strengthening the conditions for civil society to contribute to the development of society and welfare, both as a collective voice and opinion-shaper and through a diversity of activities,
- deepening and sharing information about civil society.

Civil society is important for democracy

The basis for the policy for civil society is that a strong civil society is both a prerequisite for, and an expression of, a free and democratic society. Swedish democracy is deeply rooted in popular movements and in a strong tradition of involvement and organisation. By becoming involved in civil society, individuals can come together to push for an important social issue or solve a concrete problem.

Policy guided by principles

The policy for civil society is based on a number of principles formulated in dialogue between the Government and civil society organisations:

- autonomy and independence,
- dialogue,
- quality,
- continuity
- transparency, and
- diversity.

These principles serve as an important basis when the policy for civil society is monitored against its objective.

Dialogue between the Government and civil society organisations

Dialogue between the Government and civil society organisations is an important basis for the policy for civil society. A joint forum for dialogue between the Government and civil society organisations has been set up. Conferences or other consultations that are open for all civil society organisations are held regularly. The Government office is also conducting a pilot project for greater consultation to complement the normal consultative procedure.

Agreements between the Swedish Government, national idea-based organisations and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions

In September 2007 the Government invited socially oriented idea-based organisations to a dialogue on how to develop the relationships between the state and the non-profit sector. One of the aims was to clarify the role of the idea-based organisations in the social sector and make it possible for them to operate and compete on equal terms with other actors.

During the course of this dialogue, meetings and conferences were held with a total of around 90 idea-based organisations and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). In October 2008 the Government signed an agreement that was jointly formulated by the parties to the dialogue. SALAR and some fifty idea-based organisations have so far entered into the agreement. The agreement – which is a joint declaration of intent – contains common principles and commitments, as well as measures that each party is to implement. A secretariat has been set up for the joint monitoring activities.

In January 2009 the Government decided to invite idea-based organisations active in the integration area to a dialogue on how relations between the Government and idea-based organisations can be further developed in this area. The focus of this dialogue was on issues concerning the establishment of newly arrived immigrants, and in April 2010 the Government decided on an agreement between idea-based organisations, SALAR and the Government in the area of integration.

Investments in research and development

Statistics on civil society are lacking in Sweden. It is important that the policy builds on knowledge of the area and that this knowledge is disseminated in society. A research programme on civil society will run between 2010 and 2020. The largest and most important part of this initiative is a multidisciplinary basic research programme on civil society. The Government is also putting resources into developing statistics on civil society.

Civil society as an arena for participation

Civil society and its organisations play a very important role in strengthening participation in society and democracy. It is vital that everyone who wants to become involved in civil society has the opportunity to do so, regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnic origin, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.

It is also important that newly arrived immigrants who are interested in civil society are able to become involved. The Government is therefore investing in measures to encourage civil society organisations to reach out to more people and take action to combat discrimination and develop gender equality in their own organisations.

The term 'civil society' is used to mean an arena – separate from the state, the market and individual households – where people, groups and organisations act together for common interests. Civil society actors include non-profit organisations, foundations and registered faith communities as well as networks and campaigns. Civil society actors may conduct economic activities but do not distribute profits to members, owners or other people; instead profits are fed back into the operations.

Civil society in figures

- Women and men in Sweden both spend on average 16 hours a month on voluntary activities, i.e. work done on a voluntary basis, unpaid or for a symbolic fee, and in their spare time. Averaged across the entire population, volunteer efforts correspond to more than 400 000 full-time jobs. Studies conducted regularly since 1992 show that the scale of voluntary activities has increased.
- An estimated 200 000 organisations are part of Swedish civil society. Most of them are non-profit organisations, foundations or registered faith communities.
- More than 85 per cent of the population (both men and women aged 16–84) are members of an association (including cooperative societies).
- Of the total population, 43 per cent of men and 38 per cent of women are actively involved in an association. The differences between different ages is large in that older people are more often members of an association than young people, while a large proportion of the young population is engaged in other forms of voluntary activity.
- The level of self-funding in Swedish civil society is higher than the average for countries in the European Union. An estimated 29 per cent of revenues comes from the public sector, while 62 per cent comes from membership fees, sales, etc. and 9 per cent from donations.

More information: www.sweden.gov.se



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Questions about the content of this fact sheet can be addressed to the Ministry of Education, tel: +46 8 405 10 00.

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