

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION IN SWEDEN

In recent years, Sweden has seen a sharp increase in derogatory statements about ethnic and religious minorities and a racist narrative among politicians in the Parliament, the Government and among opposition parties. Parties across the political scale have established a narrative that links migration to crime, and people with a migrant background to criminality.

Racial and Ethnic Profiling in Police Work

In the previous cycle of the Universal Periodic Review, Sweden received over forty recommendations concerning racial discrimination, out of which three recommendations related specifically to ethnic and racial profiling by law enforcement. Despite these recommendations to “strengthen efforts to combat” and to “prevent” ethnic and racial profiling, no effective measures have been taken by the Swedish government to do so.

The accuracy of police suspicion in drug possession controls was found to be lowest for individuals with mothers born in Africa or Southwest Asia, and highest for those with mothers from Nordic countries, according to a 2023 report by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. The report concluded that discriminatory ethnic profiling by the police could not be ruled out.

In 2024, the Parliament passed a law allowing the police to establish stop and search zones where individuals can be stopped and searched without reasonable suspicion. Despite warnings that this could increase discriminatory ethnic and racial profiling, no safeguards have been adopted to prevent such profiling.

Victims of discriminatory profiling face significant barriers to redress; legislation regulating police misconduct rarely applies to racial profiling, leading to routine dismissal of complaints. Meanwhile, the Discrimination Act does not contain a prohibition against discriminatory measures by the police.

Recommendations

- Introduce a prohibition against discriminatory measures by the police in the Discrimination Act.
- Give the Swedish Police Authority a mandate and necessary funding to prevent discriminatory ethnic and racial profiling by developing guidelines and training their staff on how to conduct non-discriminatory stop and searches and by reviewing their current practice on stop and searches.



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Discrimination on Account of Religion

Many recommendations in Sweden's previous Universal Periodic Review focused on addressing discrimination based on religion. Despite this, Islamophobia remains widespread and increasing, and people who wear religious symbols or clothing experience discrimination to a large extent. While religious freedom is stipulated in the Swedish Constitution, the scope of right the practice one's religion is narrow, covering only the right to manifest one's faith, not the right to wear religious symbols. The Equality Ombudsman's 2023 report highlights that discrimination against Muslims particularly occurs in workplaces and schools. Notably, complaints have been filed to the Equality Ombudsman regarding employers' seemingly neutral policies that prohibit the wearing of religious symbols or clothing, and which disproportionately affect Muslim women who wear hijabs.

Recommendation

Expand the scope of freedom of religion to include the right to wear and dress in religious symbols.



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