



# MOVING AHEAD: The Organisation of Gender Equality Work in Sweden



REGERINGSKANSLIET



# Gender policy objectives and gender mainstreaming

The principal aim of the Swedish Government's gender equality policy is for women and men to have the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities in all areas of life. Achievement of this aim requires both a strategy for how gender equality efforts are to be pursued and an organisational structure that meets the requirements of a society capable of guaranteeing equal opportunity. An active gender policy must also be knowledge-based and proceed from an analysis of the causes of gender inequality.

## *Formal and real gender equality*

Originally, efforts to promote gender equality in Sweden focused on achieving it in the formal sense – ensuring that women and men should be equal before the law. For many years, gender equality work largely involved specific individual measures, such as information campaigns and efforts to influence attitudes. This, however, did not bring about real equality between women and men. The lessons learned during this period led to the conclusion that a different approach was needed and that gender equality policy initiatives must focus on the imbalance of power between women and men. In 1994, the Swedish Government adopted the strategy of gender mainstreaming. The decision to apply new working methods and to clearly base gender equality efforts on a specific approach signalled the start of a wide-ranging, long-term process of change.

## Policy goals

The overall aim of Sweden's gender equality policy is for women and men to have the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities in all areas of life. This implies things like:

- equal distribution of power and influence between women and men
- the same opportunities for women and men to achieve economic independence
- equal conditions and opportunities in respect of entrepreneurship, jobs, terms of work, employment, and advancement prospects at work
- equal access to education and training and equal opportunities for developing personal ambitions, interests and talents
- shared responsibility for children and the home
- freedom from sexual (gender-related) violence.

# Gender mainstreaming

*Definition of gender mainstreaming:* “The (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making.”

*(Council of Europe definition)*

In the case of the *Swedish Government*, applying gender mainstreaming means that each minister is responsible for fulfilment of the gender equality goals in his or her specific policy area. The Minister for Gender Equality coordinates this government policy.

In the case of the *Swedish Government Offices*, applying gender mainstreaming means that a gender equality perspective is to be incorporated at all levels and in all stages in the decision-making process and that responsibility for this lies within each respective policy area.

The word ‘sex’ refers to biological origin, while ‘gender’ refers to how girls and boys, women and men are formed by society.

# The gender-based power structure

The gender-based power structure could be said to explain why our society lacks gender equality and why this imbalance persists despite moves to remedy it. The presence of a gender-based power structure means, for instance, that society has the following characteristics:

- The sexes are kept apart
- Men are considered superior and women inferior
- Men are considered the norm

Separation of the sexes may be illustrated by the sex segregated labour market and the unequal division of unpaid work in the home. Male superiority is expressed in such things as men’s violence against women or men being paid more, having more power over their own lives and wielding more influence in public life. The male norm may be illustrated by the fact that new medicines (even for women) are usually tested only on men. It is also evident in such mundane things as our tendency to say ‘women’s football’ but not ‘men’s football’.

If we do not succeed in breaking down the present gender-based power structure we will fail to achieve a gender equal society.

*The gender-based power structure is about the structural differences in society, and is not used to describe differences between individuals.*

### *New ways of working – new starting points*

Gender mainstreaming is now the principal model for gender equality work in Sweden, which means that all policy processes are to be integrated from a gender perspective. A common misconception is that applying gender mainstreaming precludes further use of individual priority initiatives in order to improve the situation of women or men. This is not the case. On the contrary, applying gender mainstreaming to public activities and policy-making brings to light the areas where special initiatives are needed most.

Today, gender equality policy in Sweden proceeds from an understanding that the unequal distribution of power between women and men is sustained by what is known as the gender-based power structure in society. The theory concerning this structure helps to explain the lack of gender equality. If awareness of the gender-based power structure is not present when policy decisions are analysed, there is a risk that the measures taken will not have the desired effect, or, worse still, that they will preserve the prevailing order.

## Policy areas

Swedish Government policy is divided into 48 different areas. These include foreign and security policy, working life policy, trade policy, education and research policy, transport policy and economic family policy. Gender equality is a policy area of its own, the prime task of which is to coordinate the Government's efforts in this sphere.

*The division of policy areas is used in the Budget Bill. The 48 policy areas are listed in an appendix on page 18.*

# The organisation of gender equality work in Sweden

The Swedish public sector is divided into several different parts. The Government rules the country, and the government agencies implement its decisions and the decisions of the Swedish Parliament. Public administration and services are to a great extent the responsibility of municipalities and county councils. If gender equality work is to make progress and yield results, it must be properly organised and the principle of gender mainstreaming in public activities must be formally acknowledged. Below is an account of how gender equality work in the Swedish public sector is organised at present.

## **The Government**

The Government sets the political agenda and defines the direction in which it wants society to move. The Government comprises a number of ministers, each responsible for specific policy issues. Ever since Sweden adopted the strategy of gender mainstreaming, each minister has been responsible for the gender equality issues in his or her policy area. In addition, one of the ministers, the Minister for Gender Equality, is responsible for coordinating and following up the Government's gender equality policies.

## **The Swedish Government Offices**

In Sweden, the Government Offices are a single unified public authority comprising the Prime Minister's Office, nine ministries and the Office for Administrative Affairs. The staff of the Government

In 1994, the Prime Minister of the day, Mr Ingvar Carlsson, presented the first Swedish government to comprise as many women as men. The principle of sex balance in the cabinet has been upheld ever since.

Offices (approx. 4,600 civil servants and 190 political appointees) inquire into a wide range of issues and prepare background reports as a basis for decision. As of 1994, they are required to incorporate a gender perspective into all such supporting material. In April 2004, the Government adopted a gender mainstreaming plan for the Government Offices that will apply for six years and provide a common framework for gender equality efforts in the various ministries.

### *The Division for Gender Equality*

This is a special division at the Government Offices responsible among other things for coordinating and following up the Government's gender equality policies. Since the adoption of gender mainstreaming as a strategy, the role and tasks of the division have changed. Today, it is principally involved in coordinating and following up gender equality policy matters and actively helping to develop the strategy of gender mainstreaming. It still performs the important task of scrutinising the data supplied to the Government as a basis for policy decisions, but nowadays confines itself to studying a few selected reports of strategic importance for gender equality.

The Division for Gender Equality also scrutinises appointments to government committees, agency boards and the like, with a view to maintaining a balanced sex distribution.

### *Gender equality work at the ministries*

It is within the ministries that the work of producing background material for government decisions takes place. Since October 2003, greater priority has been given to the task of coordinating and encouraging gender equality work. Each ministry has its own organisational structure and its own internal work plan for the promotion of gender mainstreaming. In addition, each ministry has one or two

As all policy decisions are taken collectively by the Government, all background data is distributed throughout the Government Offices for scrutiny. This approach enables the Division for Gender Equality to study the data and state its views on a given issue before a decision is taken.

coordinators for gender equality whose task is to coordinate and carry forward gender mainstreaming efforts and to assist the ministry in its work with gender equality-related issues.

### *Government inquiries*

Certain matters that come before the Government are more difficult to deal with than others and therefore require closer examination before a basis for decision can be formulated. In such cases, the Government may choose to appoint a committee (or commission) of inquiry to review the matter and recommend whatever action may be needed. In Sweden, there are usually about 200 such inquiries under way at any given time, and their conclusions provide the basis for many of the bills that the Government brings before the Swedish Parliament. Since 1994, all committees of inquiry are required to analyse their proposals from a gender perspective (*Committees Ordinance*). These gender analyses are essential if the Government is to properly assess what its planned reforms or other changes will mean for the situation of women and men respectively.

Since the gender analysis requirement was introduced, two studies have been carried out to evaluate compliance with it. The latest evaluation

shows that far too many committees are not fulfilling this requirement. Accordingly, steps will shortly be taken to ensure that the committees attach greater importance to the gender equality issue.

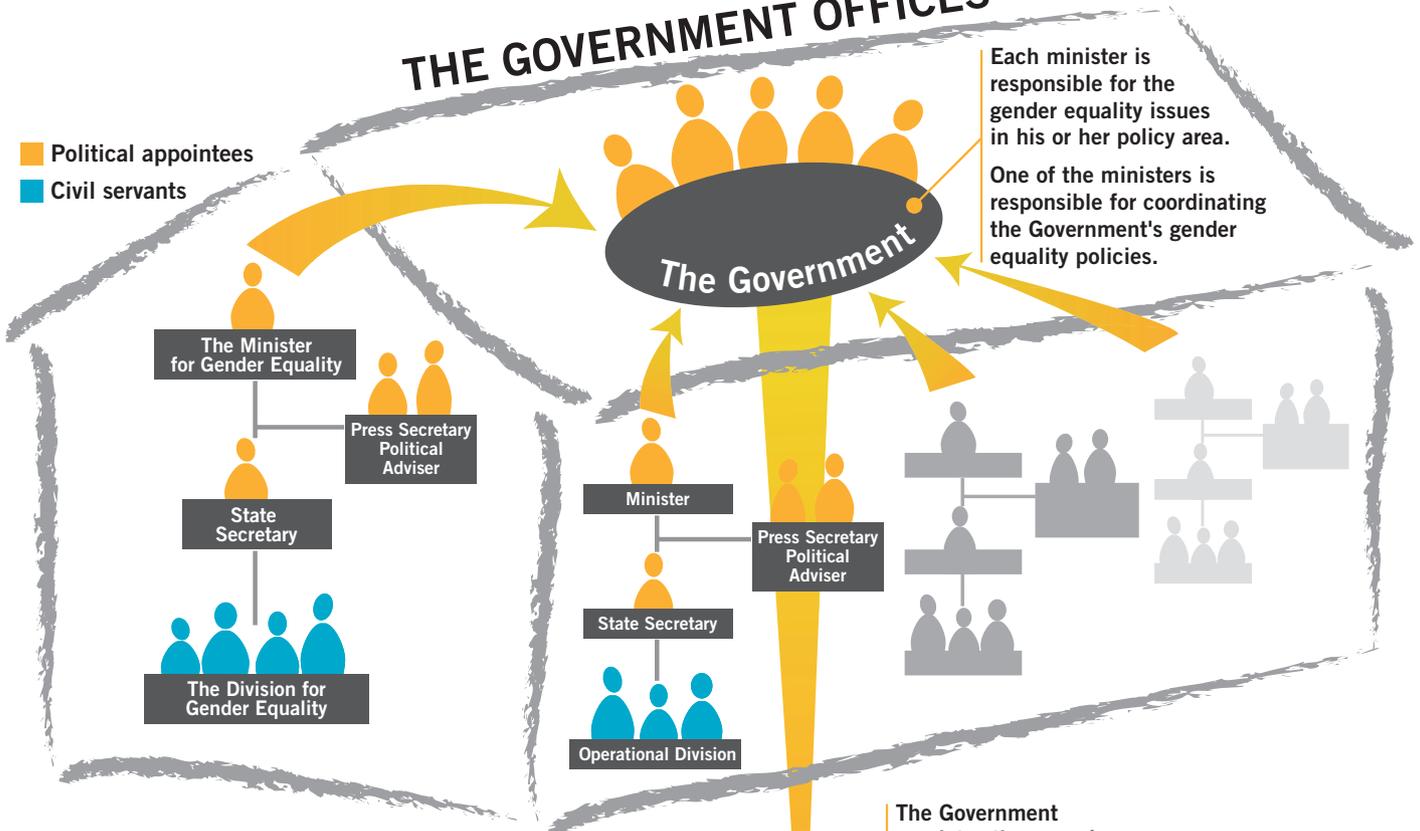
### **The government agencies**

There are approximately 270 government agencies in Sweden today. These agencies are responsible for implementing the policies decided on by the Government and the Swedish Parliament. The work of the agencies is subject to various laws, to government instructions and to the terms set out in the Government's annual appropriation directions, which include such things as the agency budget.

*The Government Agencies and Institutes Ordinance* is a binding regulation that applies to all government agencies. Under this binding regulation, each agency must satisfy the gender equality requirements imposed on its activities, i.e. it must strive for gender equality in its policy field. A new binding regulation is currently being prepared under which the agencies will be required to mainstream a gender perspective into all their activities.

# THE GOVERNMENT OFFICES

- Political appointees
- Civil servants



Each minister is responsible for the gender equality issues in his or her policy area.

One of the ministers is responsible for coordinating the Government's gender equality policies.

The Government regulates the agencies through:

- binding regulations (ordinances)
- appropriation directions
- appointments etc.

## GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

### *Regional gender equality experts*

In Sweden, there are 21 regional authorities – county administrative boards – that serve as an extension of central government authority. Their prime task is to ensure fulfilment of the various national policy objectives adopted by the Government and the Swedish Parliament. One of these is the national objective for gender equality policy. Each county administrative board, therefore, has a special gender equality expert to assist senior staff in their efforts to mainstream gender equality into board activities.

As part of a development project currently under way at regional level, Sweden's county governors have taken part in a basic training course in gender equality. In addition, the Government Offices are encouraging the gender mainstreaming effort by offering the county administrative boards' gender equality experts a professional development programme.

### *The Equal Opportunities Ombudsman*

This is a government agency charged with ensuring that employees at work and students in higher education are not discriminated against for reasons of their sex. The Ombudsman supervises *the Act on Equality between Women and Men* and *the Equal Treatment of Students at Universities Act*. Under these two laws, employers and institutes of higher education are required to actively promote equal opportunity and combat sex discrimination. The Ombudsman monitors gender-related developments in working life and in higher education on an ongoing basis, and deals with complaints alleging sex discrimination, such as wage discrimination and sexual harassment etc.

## **Municipalities and county councils**

Municipalities and county councils have long been twin pillars of the Swedish public sector. The Government and the Swedish Parliament formulate the objectives that are to guide their activities, but the municipalities and county councils largely decide the content themselves. Besides being a major employer, the municipalities are responsible for the local environment and also perform many of the tasks that affect our daily lives, in such areas as healthcare, community care, transport, education and childcare. Consequently, they are important participants in the gender equality effort as they have every opportunity to influence the services that affect the way women and men live. The responsibilities of the municipalities and county councils are laid down in law. One of the fundamental principles of the *Local Government Act*, which applies to all municipalities, is the principle of 'equal treatment'. This principle implies equal opportunity and equal treatment of the sexes in all municipal activities.

### *Development work at local level*

When the Swedish Government adopted its gender mainstreaming strategy in 1994, special resources were set aside in the form of project funding for the promotion of development efforts at local and regional level. Since then, a number of municipalities have launched development

programmes aimed at mainstreaming gender into their activities. Gender mainstreaming at local level is vital to the achievement of the national policy objectives regarding gender equality in Sweden. The county administrative boards have an important part to play in supporting municipalities and county councils in this endeavour.

## **Discussion forum**

For many years now, the Government has been cooperating with various NGOs active in the gender equality field, including a number of women's organisations. Representatives of these organisations are often invited by the Government to join the Swedish delegation at major conferences and events such as the annual meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

There is also a special body – the Gender Equality Council – that was set up to provide people with an opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss related issues. The council is intended as a forum for airing new and important concerns in the gender equality debate. Its 40-odd members represent the country's political parties, their women's branches, independent women's organisations, the labour market partners and various popular movements. The Gender Equality Council meets four times a year and is headed by the Minister for Gender Equality.

# 1994: A platform for gender mainstreaming

In 1994, Sweden adopted gender mainstreaming as its official strategy for achieving the policy goals for gender equality. At the same time, a number of measures were taken to strengthen the gender equality effort.

- A new rule was introduced requiring background data compiled as a basis for government decisions to be analysed from a gender perspective.
- The Government and the Swedish Parliament decided that efforts to promote gender equality were to be based on the need to achieve a balance in power relations between women and men.
- The overall objective of Swedish gender policy was specified more closely by a number of sub-goals.
- A binding regulation was introduced in Sweden requiring that all official statistics related to individuals should be disaggregated by sex, so that background reports and other supporting data could be properly analysed from a gender perspective.

- Government funding to gender research was increased on the grounds that gender equality policy must be knowledge-based and proceed from an analysis of the causes of inequality.
- Special resources were set aside to help the county administrative boards realise the national gender equality policy objectives. In practice, this meant that all county administrative boards were staffed with gender equality experts.
- The Government and the Swedish Parliament also set aside special resources in the form of project funding for the municipalities and county councils to develop gender equality programmes.

With the adoption of the 1994 strategy, a platform had been created for gender mainstreaming activities. In time, however, it became evident that this was not enough. Too little was known about how gender equality work should be conducted in practice. The Government, therefore, appointed a working group to develop methods for tackling this task. The group spent a few years working with a range of method development pro-

jects, and also initiated a study of how the Government regulated the gender equality work of its various agencies. In early 2001, the working group published a book of methods entitled 'Just Progress! Applying Gender Mainstreaming in Sweden'. Later the same year, the working group delivered its final report. The working group presented a number of proposals on how gender mainstreaming work might be intensified, but most importantly it identified the Government Offices as a key actor in this area.

In response to the working group's report, the Government appointed a high-level steering committee in 2002 to address a range of concerns. One of its tasks was to draw up a plan for the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Government Offices. Another was to formulate a special binding regulation focusing on gender mainstreaming in the activities of the government agencies. The steering committee was also assigned to recommend ways in which the organisational set-up at the Government Offices might be changed so as to better reflect the need to mainstream gender equality into operations there. The committee comprised a number of state secretaries and the Permanent Secretary of the Government Offices, and was led by the State Secretary for Gender Equality. It has now completed its assignment, and the work of mainstreaming gender into government activities has entered a new, more intensive phase.

*All official statistics related to individuals should be disaggregated by sex*

Access to basic data about the respective situations of women and men is essential if policy decisions are to be properly analysed from a gender perspective. Sweden therefore has a binding regulation requiring that all official statistics related to individuals should be disaggregated by sex. (2001:100)

# 2004: The implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Swedish Government Offices

## **A special plan for gender mainstreaming**

In the case of the Swedish Government Offices, gender mainstreaming means the integration of gender equality into all stages of the decision-making process in all policy areas, and making each policy area responsible for its own efforts in this respect. To help the ministries in this task, the Government has adopted a special six-year plan (2004–2009) that will provide a common framework for all mainstreaming work in the Government Offices. In response to the requirements of the government plan, each ministry has developed an organisational structure for its gender equality efforts and drawn up a plan of its own for its work in this field.

### *Organisation*

Each ministry has appointed one or two coordinators for gender equality and built up an organisational structure for disseminating support and information to all ministerial areas. The task of the coordinators is to coordinate gender mainstreaming efforts in their respective ministries

and offer support and guidance where needed. The coordinators are not, however, responsible for implementing, scrutinising or approving gender analyses of background material etc. Responsibility for the presence of a gender perspective lies with whoever is in charge of producing this data.

During the six years that the plan is in force, the Division for Gender Equality at the Government Offices will be responsible for following it up and evaluating it, and for developing new guidelines for subsequent work in this area on the basis of their findings. The Division for Gender Equality will also head an inter-ministerial working group for gender equality. This group will include all the gender equality coordinators and the officials of the Division for Gender Equality who works with gender mainstreaming.

### *Training*

As part of their gender mainstreaming effort, the Government Offices will be widening the scope of their internal training programmes to

incorporate a gender perspective into existing courses, for example those focusing on budget work and on the formulation of government bills. In addition, the regular course programme will be supplemented with special gender-related training (e.g. in how to perform gender analyses and how to work with gender disaggregated statistics). Besides these additions to the regular training programme, virtually all ministers, political appointees and senior officials at the Government Offices have taken part in a basic training course focusing on gender equality. The ministries' coordinators for gender equality and the staff of the Division for Gender Equality are also participating in a 12-month professional development programme.

#### *Ordinance on gender mainstreaming*

A new binding regulation is currently being prepared that will require all government agencies to apply the principle of gender mainstreaming in all spheres of activity. In its budget proposals for 2005, the Government has set aside SEK 4 million to help provide the agencies with support and training for their future work with gender mainstreaming.

#### **Gender budgeting**

##### **– mainstreaming a gender perspective into the budget process**

Gender equality is what is known as a cross-sectoral policy area, and fulfilment of the national objectives is contingent upon what is achieved in all the various policy areas. An important part of the effort to carry gender policy forward, therefore, is the establishment of gender equality goals at all levels in each policy area. In time, this will make it possible to determine under what conditions and to what extent women and men have access to the funds that are distributed in the

In the autumn of 1997, the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs launched a development programme to help it mainstream a gender perspective into all its activities. The pioneering work undertaken at the ministry has yielded valuable insights as regards management, method development, training and liaison work on gender mainstreaming. That experience has provided a basis for the efforts currently under way to mainstream gender into all the work performed at the Government Offices.

national budget, as well as the impact and results of budget decisions on different groups of women and men.

In 2002, a special project, 'An equal share' was launched to start the gender budgeting work in the Government Offices. The project focused on method development, identifying training requirements and collecting information about what is needed to ensure that a gender perspective is successfully mainstreamed into budget work. A pilot project has also been carried out as part of the project, in which a number of operational divisions performed gender analyses in three policy areas (regional development, transport and social services). Via this project, the ground has been laid for starting the gender budgeting process on a wide front.

#### *From project to regular work*

The task of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the budget process has now moved on from the project stage and become an integral part of the Government's regular work via two different decisions. In an action plan for gender equality presented to the Swedish Parliament in May

2003, the Government has undertaken to conduct gender equality analysis in all policy areas, and where it is possible, identify gender equality objectives and outcome indicators. This work started in the autumn of 2004 and the results will be presented to the Parliament in 2006. Together with the Government's plan for gender mainstreaming – with its special focus on the budgeting process – this means that gender budgeting is no longer a project, but part of the regular work.

#### *Training*

While the analyses are under way, special training programmes will be provided at the ministries. Administrative officers working with the analyses will take part in courses and receive expert guidance during the process. The professional development programmes being provided to the ministries' gender equality coordinators and to the administrative officers at the Division for Gender Equality have focused specifically on developing these officers' consultative role in this process.

# Future gender policy

The Government has appointed a committee of inquiry to review the goals, direction, organisation and efficacy of Swedish gender equality policy. The committee is to consider the future course of gender equality policy and submit proposals on appropriate objectives and outcome indicators. It will also analyse the current organisation of gender policy work and propose ways of improving it and making it more efficient. The committee is to present its report in the summer of 2005.

# Appendix

## **Official Statistics Ordinance**

Section 14. "Official statistics related to individuals should be disaggregated by sex, unless there are special reasons for not doing so."

(2001:100)

## **Committees Ordinance**

Section 15. "If proposals presented in a committee report have an impact on local self-government, their consequences in this respect must be described in the report. The same applies to proposals that have an impact on (...) gender equality (...)."

(1998:1474)

## **Government Agencies and Institutes Ordinance**

Section 7. "The head of the agency is to ensure that activities are conducted efficiently and in compliance with the statutes. The head is to (points 1-7): (...)

4. take into account the demands placed on activities with regard to (...) gender equality (...)."

(1995:1322)

## **Policy areas**

1. Efficient state administration
2. Financial systems and supervision
3. Taxes, customs and enforcement
4. Justice
5. Foreign and security policy
6. Total defence
7. Contingency measures, accidents and emergencies
8. International development cooperation
9. Cooperation with Central and Eastern Europe
10. Integration policy
11. Metropolitan policy
12. Migration and asylum policy

13. Health and medical care policy
14. Public health
15. Child policy
16. Disability policy
17. Elderly policy
18. Social services policy
19. Compensation for work incapacity
20. Financial policy for the elderly
21. Financial policy for families
22. Labour market policy
23. Working life policy
24. Gender equality policy
25. Education policy
26. Research policy
27. Media policy
28. Culture policy
29. Youth policy
30. Popular movements policy
31. Housing policy
32. Regional public administration
33. Regional development policy
34. Environment policy
35. Energy policy
36. Transport policy
37. IT, electronic communications and postal services
38. Industry policy
39. Foreign trade, export and investment promotion
40. Consumer policy
41. Forestry policy
42. Animal welfare policy
43. Food policy
44. Rural policy
45. Sami policy
46. Democracy
47. Minorities policy
48. General grants to local government



**This publication** is about the organisation of the Swedish Government's efforts to promote gender equality. It describes how the work is currently organised at different levels of public administration. It also includes a summary of how the practice of gender mainstreaming has developed in Sweden over the past ten years, and how work in this area is organised at present.

**An electronic version** of this publication is available at the Swedish Government's Internet website. Further copies can be ordered via the website.

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The Government Offices in Sweden