



2008 Human Rights Report: Sweden

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

[2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)

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The Kingdom of Sweden is a constitutional monarchy with a multiparty parliamentary form of government. The population is approximately 9.2 million. Legislative authority is vested in the unicameral Riksdag (parliament). In national elections in 2006, voters elected a center-right coalition government led by the Moderate Party. The elections were free and fair. The king is the largely symbolic head of state. The prime minister is the head of the government and exercises executive authority. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces.

The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, and the law and judiciary provided effective means of dealing with individual instances of abuse. Reported human rights problems included isolated incidents of excessive force by police; prison overcrowding and lengthy pretrial detention; government surveillance and interference; incidents of anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic discrimination and civil disturbances; abuse of women and children; and trafficking in persons.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits such practices; however, there were isolated reports that police used excessive force. In August two police officers were reported for assault. The investigation by the Karlstad police prosecutors unit was ongoing at year's end.

During the first six months, law enforcement authorities conducted 537 investigations of police officers, charged and convicted nine for crimes, including minor assault, theft, and sexual molestation.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions generally met international standards, although overcrowding and lengthy pretrial detention remained problems. The addition of new detention and prison cells during the year helped mitigate prison

overcrowding.

Restrictive conditions for prisoners held in pretrial custody remained a problem. According to the National Agency for Prison and Probation, approximately 40 percent of these detainees were subject to extended isolation or to restrictions on mail delivery or exercise.

The government permitted visits by independent human rights observers. A delegation from the UN Committee on Prevention of Torture (CPT) visited prisons and detention centers in March. The Justice Ombudsman, who is detached from the Ministry of Justice, performed approximately 10 inspections during the year, based either on complaints or on the Ombudsman's initiative. The Red Cross and church associations are also allowed to visit prisoners, but not to monitor or inspect the prisons.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the National Police and the Swedish Security Service, and government authorities had effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. There were no reports of impunity involving the security forces during the year.

The Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights criticized the security police for poor judgment in a number of investigations related to Somalis suspected of terrorist financing crimes. Three Somali men residing in the country were apprehended in February, and eventually released without charge at the end of September.

Arrest and Detention

The law requires warrants issued by duly authorized officials for arrests, and the government generally respected this requirement in practice. Police must file charges within six hours against persons detained for disturbing the public order or considered dangerous, and within 12 hours against those detained on other grounds. Police may hold a person for questioning for six hours, or up to 12 hours if necessary for the investigation. After questioning, the extent to which reasonable suspicion remains determines whether the individual will be arrested or released. If the suspect is arrested, the prosecutor has 24 hours (or three days in exceptional circumstances) to request continued detention. An arrested suspect must be arraigned within 48 hours, and initial prosecution must begin within two weeks, unless extenuating circumstances exist. Authorities generally respected these requirements.

Detainees may retain a lawyer of their choice; in criminal cases the government is obligated to provide an attorney if the defendant cannot afford one. Detainees are afforded prompt access to lawyers and to family members. Although there is no system of bail, courts routinely release defendants pending trial unless they are considered dangerous.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected this provision in practice.

Trial Procedures

The constitution provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There is no specific court for human rights violations. Instead, cases are tried in the general court system. As members of the European Union (EU), citizens can appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in matters related to the state.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions in practice.

Human rights organizations, including the Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, expressed concern over the growing number of government proposals to permit greater surveillance by the police. Human rights groups argued that allowing additional surveillance methods, such as wiretapping, would conflict with protection of the individual's right to privacy. During the year courts issued 966 permits for wiretapping, and denied 16. In September the parliament approved a law to give the National Defense Radio Establishment (FRA) the authority to monitor international cable traffic, provided that prior approval was obtained from a special court. Under this law, scheduled to go into effect in January 2009, government ministries and the Department of Defense will be the only agencies allowed to commission surveillance from the FRA.

An ombudsman in the prosecutor's office is responsible for protecting citizens' rights in court cases that involve use of invasive measures, such as camera surveillance or wiretapping. The ombudsman participates in the court review of all wiretapping and surveillance requests.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the government generally respected these rights in practice. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to ensure freedom of speech and of the press.

The law criminalizes certain types of expression considered to be hate speech and prohibits threats or expressions of contempt for a group or member of a group based on race, color, national or ethnic origin, religious belief, or sexual orientation. Hate speech may be punished by penalties ranging from fines up to a maximum of four years in prison. During the year, members of the National Socialist Front were prosecuted under the hate speech law.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chat rooms. Individuals and groups could engage in peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail.

According to Statistics Sweden, 83 percent of the population between the ages of 16 and 74 had Internet access.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respected this right in practice.

The Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities, a government body under the authority of the Ministry of Culture, provides financial aid to religious groups. In reviewing applications from religious groups, the only criteria the commission considers are the number of members in the group and how long the group has been established. In 2007, 50,232,000 SEK (approximately \$6,375,000) was distributed to 22 religious communities in the country. The government promotes interfaith understanding and meets annually with representatives of various religious groups.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The Jewish community numbered an estimated 18,500 to 20,000 persons; approximately half are estimated to be practicing members. In 2007 there were 118 reported cases of anti-Semitic crime, according to the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. Most of the incidents were characterized as "agitation against an ethnic group" or "unlawful threat or molestation." Twenty-one of the reported cases resulted in convictions.

During the year the media reported that individuals associated with the openly Nazi organization National Socialist Front Party committed numerous discriminatory acts involving violence and harassment aimed at immigrants, minorities, and people of Jewish faith. The reports included cases of assault and hate speech, unauthorized demonstrations, illegal distribution of posters, illegal possession of weapons, and disorderly conduct.

In April a 20-year-old woman was awarded damages of 24,000 SEK (more than \$3,000) for discrimination. She had been asked by a bus driver to get off the bus for wearing a veil.

In August a fire at a mosque in the city of Stromsund was determined by the police to be an act of arson and a hate crime. The Crime Prevention Agency reported 3,700 hate crimes in 2007, an increase of 9 percent from 2006.

In mid-December Muslim youths in a suburb of Malmo clashed with police over a three-week period. The youths threw Molotov cocktails and rocks at police and started fires in garbage bins. The disturbances were related to a dispute over a Malmo city official's decision not to renew the lease on a property that had been used for many years as an Islamic cultural center that also housed a mosque. The Islamic Association claimed the decision was discriminatory. Seventeen persons were detained, one police officer was injured, and two persons were prosecuted.

The Stockholm police have a hate-crime hot line to receive complaints.

For a more detailed discussion, see the 2008 International Religious Freedom Report at www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/rpt.

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The law provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the

government generally respected these rights in practice. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

The constitution and law prohibit forced exile, and the government did not employ it.

Protection of Refugees

The laws provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. In practice the government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened. The government granted refugee status or asylum.

The government also provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 protocol, and provided it to 38 persons during the first six months of the year.

During his March visit, UNHCR Commissioner Antonio Guterres discussed asylum issues with Migration Minister Billstrom, including repatriation of Iraqis seeking asylum. The commissioner criticized the country's February agreement with the government of Iraq to repatriate Iraqis denied asylum. His criticism was based on repatriating Iraqis to southern and central Iraq, areas where the government maintained that the security situation had improved; but some media sources and human rights organizations did not agree that it was safe for Iraqis to return to those areas. By June, 45 Iraqis had been repatriated.

The Migration Board (the entity that handles asylum applications) was granted 27 million SEK (\$3.4 million) to hire more staff to deal with the increased number of Iraqi refugees. Amnesty International criticized a low level of knowledge of lawyers assigned to refugees by the Migration Board.

In September the Migration Board denied asylum to Adil Hakimjan, an ethnic Uighur from China, despite a direct appeal to the government from the European Parliament to accept him. Hakimjan had been a detainee in Guantanamo who, upon release, was transported to Albania (the only country that agreed to receive him). He could not return to China because his life would be threatened there. Hakimjan applied for asylum in Sweden where he has a sister. According to the Migration Board, Hakimjan's application was turned down because he already had asylum in Albania. The case was appealed to the Migration Appeals Board and received some media attention.

The government returned asylum seekers who arrived from EU countries or from countries with which it maintained reciprocal return agreements. In most cases persons returned had passed through or had asylum determinations pending in other EU countries. In many cases authorities deported asylum seekers within 72 hours of their arrival. The government authorized financial repatriation support for asylum seekers who had been denied residence in the country in the amount of 20,000 SEK (\$2,534) per adult and 12,000 SEK (\$1,520) per child, with a maximum of 50,000 SEK (\$6,337) per family, but very few rejected asylum seekers applied for this support.

Asylum seekers can appeal Migration Board rulings to two special migration appeals courts.

The UN Committee for the Prevention of Torture received complaints against the government during the year, most concerning repatriation of refugees.

During the year, the court awarded damages in the amount of 3 million SEK (\$380,000) each to Egyptian nationals Ahmed Agiza and Mohammed Alzery, in connection with their 2001 forced repatriation. The judgment followed from

a finding by the CPT that the country violated the UN Convention against Torture. However, their new asylum applications were turned down by the Migration Board, and their appeals were pending at year's end. Both men were in Egypt; Agiza reportedly was incarcerated there.

Stateless Persons

By the end of the year, there were estimated to be more than 8,000 stateless persons in the country. The large number relates to the influx of immigrants and the birth of children to stateless parents--who remain stateless until one parent has acquired citizenship, as citizenship is derived from one's parents. The majority of the stateless population originated from the Middle East (Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq).

Once stateless persons have been granted permanent residence, they can obtain citizenship through the same naturalization process as other permanent residents. The time frame is normally four to eight years, depending on the individual's grounds for residency and ability to establish his/her identity and lack of a criminal record.

There is no legal discrimination against stateless persons in employment, education, housing, or health services, and the government does not contribute to or deliberately prolong a person's statelessness.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The constitution provides citizens the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections based on universal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

In the 2006 parliamentary elections citizens voted out the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which had dominated the political system for 70 years. The new government was a center-right coalition led by the Moderate Party.

Political parties operate without restrictions or outside interference.

There were 165 women in the 349-seat parliament and 10 women in the 22 member cabinet.

No official statistics on minority representation were available because the law prohibits the government from holding information about the racial or ethnic background of its citizens. However, media reports stated that there was one ethnic minority member in the cabinet, and 6.5 percent of parliament members were born in other countries.

Government Corruption and Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, and the government generally implemented these laws effectively. The Prosecutor's Office has a special unit working on cases involving corruption. The unit initiated 65 investigations during the year, resulting in 27 prosecutions. Public officials and political parties are subject to financial disclosure laws.

The constitution and law provide for public access to government information, and the government generally respected this provision in practice. The public has the right of access to government documents unless they are subject to secrecy laws, according to which information may be withheld if its release poses a threat to national security or to individual or corporate privacy.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restrictions, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were generally cooperative and responsive to their views.

Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, or social status. Although the government effectively enforced these laws, violence against women and children, trafficking in persons, and discrimination against resident foreigners, Roma, and homosexuals remained problems.

Women

Rape, including spousal rape, is illegal, and the government enforced the law effectively. The law stipulates more severe penalties for repeated crimes and if the perpetrator had a close relationship to the victim. The National Council for Crime Prevention (NCCP) reported 3,880 rapes of persons over age 14, compared with 3,535 in 2007.

The NCCP reported 19,318 cases of assault against women. Approximately 50 homicide deaths of women and girls were reported during the year, most of them committed by men closely related to the victim. Authorities apprehended and prosecuted abusers.

The law provides victims with protection from contact with their abusers. When necessary, authorities helped women protect their identities or obtain new identities and homes; according to official statistics, some one thousand individuals--mostly women--received such services. Both national and local governments helped fund volunteer groups that provided shelter and other assistance for abused women, and both private and public organizations ran shelters and operated hot lines.

The government launched an 800 million SEK (\$101 million), four-year action plan to combat violence against women, including honor-related violence. The plan focuses on improving victim protection, the quality of legal investigations, and rehabilitation services for abusers.

At year's end authorities estimated that 1,500–2,000 women had been subjected to honor-related violence (patriarchal violence often linked to cultural and religious convictions about female chastity and marriage). Honor-related violence exclusively involved immigrants from Muslim countries; the police have concentrated on educating law enforcement officers and prosecutors to increase awareness and improve detection and prevention. A survey by Swedish Radio indicated that nearly 60 percent of the country's local social service offices had helped victims of honor violence.

Selling sexual services is legal but the purchase of sexual services and procurement are illegal. In recent years the government has sought to curb prostitution by focusing on the demand rather than the supply, by arresting clients and not prostitutes. There were 33 reported cases of individuals buying sexual services during the year, a decrease from the previous year.

The law prohibits sexual harassment, and the government generally enforced this law in practice. Employers who do not investigate and intervene against harassment at work may be liable for damages to the victim.

Women enjoy the same legal rights as men, including rights under family law, property law, and in the judicial

system, but some sectors of the labor market still showed significant gender disparities in terms of salaries, especially in male-dominated occupations. Women's salaries averaged 85 percent of men's, adjusting for age, education, and occupational differences.

The equal opportunity ombudsman (EEO), a public official, investigates complaints of gender discrimination in the labor market. Complaints may also be filed with the courts or with the employer. Labor unions generally mediated in cases filed with the employer. During the year the EEO's office registered 290 cases. Women filed approximately 75 percent of the cases; 25 percent of those cases concerned salaries. The number of discrimination complaints related to pregnancy rose to 46, compared with 30 in 2007.

Children

The government was strongly committed to children's rights and welfare, but child abuse was a problem. At year's end the National Child Protection Council reported 5,954 cases (January - September) of abuse of children under the age of 15 compared to 9,520 a year earlier. Police reported 944 cases of child rape and 955 cases of sexual abuse of children, compared with 1,271 reported cases of rape and 851 reported cases of child sexual abuse in 2007.

There were reports of trafficking of children; the largest case during the year involved 15-20 Vietnamese children working in a Vietnamese-run restaurant. The law prohibits the repatriation of trafficked children if they lack proper documents to prove their identity and national origin. Those children are turned over to social services in the municipality of residence. The Swedish Migration Board has a specific policy for children arriving alone.

The law prohibits parents or other caretakers from abusing children mentally or physically. Parents, teachers, and other adults are subject to prosecution if they physically punish a child, including slapping or spanking. Children have the right to report such abuses to the police. The usual sentence for such an offense is a fine combined with counseling and monitoring by social workers. Authorities may remove children from their homes and place them in foster care.

In March the government committed 50 million SEK (\$6.3 million) to improve municipalities' work on physical health, access to psychiatric treatment, and preventive measures for child abuse. The government continued to be active in efforts to prevent child abuse through international organizations such as the UN Children's Fund.

Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits all forms of trafficking in persons; however, there were reports that persons were trafficked to, through, and within the country. Law enforcement officials and analysts estimated the number of trafficked women at 500 per year, cautioning, however, that it was not possible to obtain precise numbers.

For certain origin countries, including Estonia, Russia, and Poland, Sweden continued to be a transit point, and to a lesser extent a destination, for trafficked women and children. The country was a destination point for trafficking victims from Asia. Traffickers typically recruited female victims in their countries of origin to work as cleaners, babysitters, or in similar employment abroad. Once in the country, traffickers isolated and intimidated victims and forced them to work as prostitutes in hotels, restaurants, massage parlors, or private apartments; some were locked up and their passports confiscated by their captors. Male victims were primarily trafficked for forced labor, and in some cases forced begging and petty theft.

The law prohibits the trafficking of persons for sexual purposes, provides for sentences of two to 10 years' imprisonment for persons convicted of trafficking, and criminalizes attempting to traffic, conspiracy to traffic, and

the failure to report such crimes. Authorities actively prosecuted trafficking cases. During the year police reported 10 cases of trafficking for sexual purposes.

To prosecute traffickers, authorities continued primarily to use laws against procurement and an offense called "placing in distress," which can apply in cases where traffickers lure women from other countries under false pretenses. The laws on procurement and trafficking complement each other; however, the antitrafficking law requires that prosecutors prove traffickers used "improper means." Judges commonly ruled that improper means were absent in cases involving victims who consented to being trafficked. Although consent is irrelevant under the antitrafficking law, in practice judicial interpretation of the improper means criterion makes it difficult to obtain convictions. Prosecutors consequently continued to rely on the procurement laws for most convictions of traffickers. During the year there were 35 cases of procurement reported, many involving trafficking victims.

The government has a special ambassador to combat human trafficking, tasked with strengthening international antitrafficking efforts. The country also actively participated in a Nordic-Baltic task force against human trafficking.

The government allocated funds to domestic and international NGOs to provide shelter and rehabilitation assistance to victims. Police and social services also provided funding. The law enables trafficking victims who cooperate with police investigations to receive at least six-month temporary residence permits, allowing access to the full range of social benefits. Victims who do not cooperate with police investigations are ineligible to receive temporary residence permits and are promptly deported.

The State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons Report can be found at www.state.gov/g/tip.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits employers from discriminating against persons with disabilities in hiring decisions, and prohibits universities from discriminating against students with disabilities in making admissions decisions. No other specific law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities. There is a disability ombudsman.

Regulations for new buildings require full accessibility. Similar requirements exist for some public facilities but not all; many buildings and some means of public transportation remained inaccessible. The legislation on discrimination does not cover accessibility.

The number of reports of discrimination against people with disabilities increased during the year. There were 896 reports of governmental discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, or in the provision of other state services; most of the cases involved lack of access to public buildings. Difficulty in accessing apartments, pubs, and bars were the most frequent reports of societal discrimination against persons with disabilities. In June the European Commission urged the country to correct the problem, and the government has presented an action plan running from 2006-10 to increase accessibility.

Approximately half of the cases submitted to the disability ombudsman under the Disability Act were handled under mediation procedures rather than through formal court hearings.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Over a million persons in the country are foreign born, with the largest groups originating from Finland, the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Iran. According to figures from Statistics Sweden, approximately 90,000 persons immigrated to the country during the year. The largest single group came from Iraq.

The ombudsman for ethnic discrimination received 737 reports during the year compared to 817 in 2007. Workplace related discrimination cases also decreased by 10 percent from 2007.

Police registered reports of xenophobic crimes (numbers not available), some of which were related to neo-Nazi/white power ideology. The government investigated and prosecuted race-related crimes. Official estimates placed the number of active neo-Nazis, or white supremacists, at approximately 1,500. Neo-Nazi groups operated legally, but courts have held that it is illegal to wear xenophobic symbols or racist paraphernalia or to display signs and banners with inflammatory symbols at rallies, since the law prohibits incitement of hatred against ethnic groups.

During the year the media reported that individuals associated with the openly Nazi organization National Socialist Front Party perpetrated numerous discriminatory acts involving violence and harassment aimed at immigrants and minorities. The media also reported an increase in Nazi-related threats and harassment at schools against both teachers and pupils with immigrant backgrounds.

The law recognizes Sami (formerly known as Lapps), Swedish Finns, Tornedal Finns, Roma, and Jews as national minorities. The government supported and protected minority languages.

The government estimated the population of Roma to be 40-60,000.

There is a Special Delegation for Romani Issues consisting of representatives of Romani origin, experts on Romani issues, and representatives from Romani associations. The delegation worked to improve the situation of Roma in society and addressed such discrimination issues as social, political, and economic exclusion.

Indigenous People

There were approximately 20,000 Sami in the country, represented by a 31-member Sami-elected administrative authority called the Sami Parliament; the Sami were not represented in the national parliament. The Sami parliament acts as an advisory body to the government and has decision-making powers in matters related to Sami culture, language, and schools. Parliament and government regulations govern its operations.

Longstanding tensions between Sami and the government over land and natural resources persisted, as did tensions between Sami and private landowners over reindeer grazing rights.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were isolated incidents of societal violence and discrimination against homosexual persons. There were reports that individuals associated with the National Socialist Front Party made threats against the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights. The ombudsman against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation registered 47 reported cases during the year, the same number as in 2007. Additionally, the ombudsman's office initiated six new discrimination investigations, compared to eight in 2007. A government working group promotes equal rights for homosexual, bisexual, and transsexual persons.

There were no reports of discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law entitles workers to form and join independent unions of their choice, without previous authorization or

excessive requirements, and workers exercised this right in practice. The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference, and the government protected this right in practice. The law provides for the right to strike, as well as for employers to organize and conduct lockouts; workers and employers exercised these rights in practice. Public sector employees also enjoy the right to strike, subject to limitations in the collective agreements protecting the public's immediate health and security.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law provides for collective bargaining, and workers exercised this right in practice. Approximately 80 percent of the workforce was under collective bargaining agreements. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and there were no reports that it occurred during the year.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children. There were reports that boys and young men were trafficked to and through the country for the purpose of forced labor, many of them on construction sites. Children were also trafficked for forced begging and petty theft.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law and policies (including those on acceptable working conditions) protect children from exploitation in the workplace, and the government effectively implemented these laws and policies in practice. The law permits full-time employment at age 16 under the supervision of local authorities. Employees under age 18 may work only during the daytime and under supervision. Children as young as 13 may work part time or in light work with parental permission. Union representatives, police, and public prosecutors effectively enforced these restrictions.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no national minimum wage law. Wages are set by annual collective bargaining contracts. Nonunion establishments generally observed these contracts as well. Substantial benefits (e.g., housing, childcare) provided by social welfare entitlement programs assured even the lowest-paid workers and their families a decent standard of living.

The legal standard workweek is 40 hours or less. Both the law and collective bargaining agreements regulate overtime and rest periods. The maximum allowable overtime per year is 200 hours. The law requires a minimum period of 36 consecutive hours of rest, preferably on weekends, during a period of seven days. The law also provides employees with a minimum of five weeks' paid annual leave. The government effectively enforced these standards.

The Work Environment Authority, a government appointed board, issued occupational health and safety regulations, and trained union stewards and safety ombudsmen. Government inspectors monitored them. Safety ombudsmen have the authority to stop unsafe activity immediately and to call in an inspector. These rules were effectively enforced. Workplaces were generally safe and healthy. In law and practice, workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardizing their employment.