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# Equal rights for women in Sweden

## Introduction

The paper focusses on gender equality in Sweden in two spheres of life: the labour market and the family.

Throughout the post-war period, Sweden took measures aimed at incorporating the issue of gender equality into social policy. The professional activity of women was supported and the reconciliation of housework with work outside the home was rendered possible among other things through the creation of paternity leaves, which greatly facilitated the women's career development. In 1980, 95 percent of women wanted maternity benefits to be transformed into parental benefits, that would be available to men as well [Sainsbury 2003:94]. The 1980s saw the adoption of the Act on Equality between Women and Men at the Workplace, which imposed a ban on discrimination and established an office of Equality Ombudsmen.

Religious and cultural considerations contributed positively to the implementation of equality between women and men in the family and the labour market. The paper aims to present these considerations along with Sweden's policy in favour of actual equality. Information used in the paper comes from scientific publications and articles available on-line, as well as data published by Eurostat and the European Commission.

## **The Swedish model of *Welfare state* and the position of women in the labour market and the family**

In 1995, the United Nations recognised Sweden as the country representing the highest degree of

equality in the world. According to the definition of the Swedish government, equality means creating the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life for women and men [Frączek 2009]. However, the measures taken by Sweden in favour of equality do not only focus on the position of women. Swedish law and practise prohibit discrimination and unequal treatment based on race, disability or sexual orientation. In accordance with the study carried out by the European Institute for Gender Equality in 2014 in order to assess the level of gender equality in six areas (work, financial situation, time devoted to childcare and housework, participation in political life, health), Sweden has the most developed equality mechanisms in the European Union. In the study, Sweden scored 74 points out of 100, which is much higher than the EU average of merely 54 points<sup>1</sup>. Other Swedish initiatives of institutional nature, such as the Non-Discrimination Act of 2008 and the Equality Office, are also noteworthy.

The Swedish model, referred to as the welfare state, had a significant impact on the issue of women and men equality. It is assumed that there exists a specific “Nordic” model of the welfare state, characterised by high taxes, smaller than in other countries differences in the standard of living, greater income equality, more generous social benefits, lower unemployment and poverty rates, higher degree of gender equality [Anioł 2013:29]. The essence of the Swedish welfare state model can be brought closer by reference to a tripartite typology of Gosta Esping-Anersen, which covers three social policy regimes: the social-democratic regime (Scandinavian countries), the liberal regime (North America, England) and the conservative regime (Germany, Italy)

[Anioł 2013:32]. In the social-democratic model, the emphasis is placed on the state responsibility and collective solving of social problems, including the performance of welfare functions, while in the conservative and the liberal models, responsibility lies with the market, the families and the local communities. It is dominated by the principle of the universalism of many benefits, as well as the principle of decommodification extended to the middle classes (degree to which income of those employed is independent of their work) [Saxonberg 2010], designed to protect people against the risks associated with the operation of market forces. The social-democratic model is characterised by “defamiliarisation” of care tasks, whose purpose, on the one hand, is to strengthen the family by relieving it of certain obligations, on the other hand, to ensure greater individual independence to each and every of its members. Therefore, attention is given to the development of services that satisfy various needs of children, elderly people and people with disabilities. In consequence, the model is conducive to developing the potential association with the new role of women in the labour market and the family [Anioł 2013: 32]. In addition, this model is also characterised by the following properties: universality of principles as regards the award of numerous cash benefits, taking care of the citizens from birth until death, high level of educational services intended for children, as well as developed benefits and services intended for the disabled and the elderly. Another feature observed are highly active trade unions and state support for middle class development.

Intense professional activity applies not only to men but also to women and the disabled, while long-term unemployment rates are at a very low level here thanks to the promotion of the full employment policy. A decent standard of living of the citizens is guaranteed by the society and public authorities, rather than by market mechanisms or social background. High taxes guarantee the financing of benefits and public services for all those in need, while rights thereto are based on the citizenship. Thus, the scale of poverty and social inequality is low in the Scandinavian countries [Anioł 2013:35]. Popularisation by the state of women’s professional activity and their presence on the political scene and in public life is embedded in the Scandinavian state feminism. Finland, Sweden and Denmark are at the top of the list in the European Union countries’ rankings in terms of women’s participation in politics [Czapiewska 2012].

In the late 1990s, Sweden designated 15 percent of the European Social Fund co-financing to the gender equality policy, while the other EU countries spent for this purpose approx. 7-8 percent of the resources. In the mid 1900s, this country was a leader when it comes to the indicators reflecting the social status of women (professional activity, participation in political life and differences in pay) [Wiśniewski 2005:102].

One of the fundamental assumptions of the welfare state in Sweden is the fact that public social services (child and elderly care), transfers within the maternal and parental leave, family benefits, as well as housing benefits are associated with the citizen status. Thanks to the universal benefits of subsistence character, the men and women find it easier to perform both the function of carers and employees. The desire to improve the situation of women were among important factors contributing to the creation of the Swedish prosperous society. Child and elderly care, for which women were responsible, was partly taken over by the state. In consequence, Sweden notes the highest women’s employment rate among all the European Union countries, amounting to 74 percent (men’s employment rate is approx. 79 percent) [Frączek 2009]. The term gender equality means equal rights in the labour market, as well as equal burden of the household tasks [Bakalarczyk 2010:207–208].

It is worthwhile to note how the Swedish society perceives prostitution – because it has a direct impact on attitudes towards gender equality. The Act introduced in 1999 to prohibit the purchase of sexual services, has contributed to a dramatic decline in street prostitution, as well as the decline in approval for the purchase of services of a sexual nature. Three Swedish political parties (the Centre Party, the Liberal People’s Party and the Christian-Democrats) are in favour of penalising the paid sex abroad. Special procedures apply in Sweden to some criminal offences, e.g., female genital mutilation. Swedish legislation treats female genital mutilation as a criminal offence, even when it takes place in Somalia. A man travelling to Afghanistan in order to marry a ten-year old girl is considered as an offender. Measures taken within Swedish policy in this field have inspired the other countries<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to numerous measures taken by Sweden, what deserves attention, is the attitude of the church to equal rights of women. Swedish church is the world’s largest Evangelical Lutheran Church

and at the same time the largest denomination in Sweden. Nearly 7 million out of 9 million inhabitants are protestants. Church plays an important role in shaping the society – in accordance with (the 19<sup>th</sup> c.) church law the nation was obliged, under severe penalties, to learn to read and write by studying the Bible (this ability was enforced through an examination procedure administered to Swedes by a priest who visited each household every year) [Bakalarczyk 2010:215]. As a result, in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., Sweden had the lowest illiteracy rate in Europe (only 10 percent of adult population). The content of the Bible also impacted social attitudes of Swedes, among other things their attitude to work. Every work was respected and those who did not work (regardless of their gender) were socially stigmatised. This is connected with the Lutheran religious and moral work ethics, which implies that all adults are traditionally ordered to undertake paid work [Bakalarczyk 2010:80]. Women from the Protestant areas were more likely to be liberal, because girls and boys were taught together. Protestantism is said to be an early driving force behind the emancipation movement<sup>3</sup>.

A ground-breaking event, which very clearly shows the attitude of the Swedish church to the equality issue, was permission to ordain women to perform the functions of a priest (1958). According to a Swedish theologian Marit Norén, “Christ recognises the spiritual maturity of women for example when He encourages Mary and her sister Martha to become his disciples and tells them that they should not limit themselves to the role of mere servants” [Tubylewicz 2015]. In contrast to the Catholic ethos of the South European countries, the purpose of the Protestant ethos was not to develop the housewife culture. Protestantism played a role in developing the attitudes of Swedes towards equality (for years women have served as pastors, managed the community of the faithful), which also impacted the women’s involvement in social matters, including politics (the proportion of women in the Polish Parliament is 23 percent, in the Swedish one 43 percent) [Oryńska 2009].

In Sweden, women constitute most of the clergy and, according to social scientists, within 20 years the priestly office will become a totally female profession. In 2013, Antje Jackelén, as the first female in history, became the head (archbishop) of the Church of Sweden. The Protestant Church in Sweden recognises a woman’s right to abortion as her personal right.<sup>4</sup>

The welfare state model, the influence of the Protestant Church and the liberal model of society are the main determinants of gender equality in Sweden.

## **Equal rights for women in the Swedish labour market**

In the first chapter of the Swedish Constitution of 28 February 1974 entitled “Fundamentals of the Political System”, there are references to an obligation to ensure that all the citizens “are able to exercise the right to work, housing and education as well as are ensured the health and social care along with safety”<sup>5</sup>. The same paragraph mentions measures to be taken by public institutions with the purpose of combating discrimination of citizens “on the grounds of gender, colour, national or ethnic background, linguistic or religious affiliation, disability, sexual orientation, age, or any other feature of an individual”. In the second chapter entitled “Fundamental rights and freedoms”, attention is drawn to preventing discrimination on the grounds of gender: “Neither the law or any other legislative instrument may lead to discrimination against a citizen on the grounds of gender, unless the provision pertains to the promotion of equality between men and women, the military service obligation or any other relevant official duties”.

Unlike Poland’s, Sweden’s legislation does not have a unified labour code. Labour law is based on collective agreements between the employers and trade unions. Key legal regulations pertaining to the labour law in the context of equal rights for women include the law on non-discrimination on the grounds of gender, transgenderism, religion and belief, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability or age. In order to achieve the objectives set by law, e.g., equal treatment of women and men, the person in question may be, if necessary, given special treatment by an employer. However, an employer may not give special treatment to anyone when it comes to issues relating to working conditions or employment. Discrimination covers also sexual harassment, defined as behaviour that violates human dignity. An employer is required to take appropriate actions if an employee has been exposed to sexual harassment in connection with the work. The humiliated employee, in the case of whom a breach of the Non-Discrimination Act has been committed, has the right to be compensated by the employer.

In Swedish legislation there is the Child Care Leave Act which covers women that are pregnant or have given birth to a child. They “are entitled to the leave in connection with giving birth to a child”<sup>6</sup> for a period of at least seven weeks before the expected date of birth and seven weeks after giving birth. No employee or a person looking for a job may be treated unfairly for reasons associated with the child care leave. Unfair treatment is also prohibited when it comes to working conditions, a division of work, decisions on the promotion, termination or dismissal. A woman who has given birth to a child or is breast-feeding is entitled to request from her employer a transfer to another job without losing any employment-related privileges. Reasons associated with the transfer include impossibility to carry out ordinary tasks at work (physically demanding character of work or the handling of hazardous substances). If an employer is unable to organise another work, the woman has the right to leave that is needed to ensure protection for her health and safety.

The main instrument aimed at improving the situation of women in the labour market was the Act on Equality between Women and Men at the Workplace adopted in 1991 (on 1 January 2009, it was replaced with the Non-Discrimination Act). Its main purpose is to “improve the conditions of women’s participation in the labour market” [Alfredsson i Ranveig 1995:30]. The first part includes rules which impose on the employers an obligation to take actions aimed at the promotion of equality at the workplace, that is:

- to endeavour to ensure for women and men sustainable quantitative access to various jobs in various employee categories,
- to take special efforts aimed at rendering it possible for representatives of minority gender in a given employing establishment to pursue employment,
- to prevent sexual harassment,
- to make it easier for both men and women to reconcile work and parental responsibilities,
- to prevent any differences in pay between women and men who perform the same or equivalent work,
- to be obliged to draw up “a list of differences in pay” between women and men if at least ten staff members are employed. The list falls within the scope of an “annual action plan” drawn up by an employee and presented to the Equality Ombudsmen.

The second part of the Act introduces an obligation of non-discrimination in employment, in the choice of work-related tasks, conditions of employment, as well as on leaving the job. In addition, it prohibits direct and indirect discrimination. Disputes related to discrimination against women and men in the labour market are settled by the Employment Tribunal [Alfredsson i Ranveig 1995:30].

The Non-Discrimination Act that has been in force since 1 January 2009, also called the Equality Act, imposes on employers an obligation to take actions aimed at supporting equal rights for women at the workplace (similarly as the Act on Equality between Women and Men of 1991). Coming into force of the Act was accompanied by the establishment of an office of Ombudsmen Against Discrimination who is to oversee compliance with the provisions of the Act. This office replaced the previous offices, such as: the Equality Ombudsmen, the Ombudsmen Against Ethnic Discrimination, the Ombudsmen for the Disabled and the Ombudsmen Against Discrimination on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation<sup>7</sup>.

The position of women in the labour market is largely determined by external conditions associated with their educational aspirations, as well as their attitude to the issues of family and maternity. In 1988, the Swedish Parliament decided that representatives of no gender may constitute less than 40 percent of students, regardless of the curricula. Another objective was to increase the percentage of women among heads of schools. In 1993, 35 percent of school heads were women. In the period between 2010 and the present time, the number of female heads of schools has increased, currently it is no less than 40 percent in secondary schools and approx. 70 percent in elementary schools<sup>8</sup>.

In order to make it easier for both men and women to reconcile work and family responsibilities, working parents were encouraged to take up part-time jobs. In 1994, 10 percent of working men and 40 percent of working women worked in this way. Average work time for women was 33 hours a week and for men 40 hours. Any person who had small children and worked fulltime basis, regardless of gender, had the right to shorten their workday by 2 hours of work time, if they agreed to an appropriate reduction in pay [Alfredsson i Ranveig 1995:30–33]. Between 2002 and 2012, the share of women using flexible forms of employment increased by 6.3 percentage points (from 32.3 percent to 38.6 percent) [Wiśniewski 2005:106]. Since 2006, 39.9 percent of women in Sweden had used

flexible forms of employment, therefore their number did not decrease in comparison with the first half of the 1990s. [Zygmunt 2006:128].

Enacting in 1991 the Act on Equality, the Parliament promoted the slogan “equal pay for the same or equivalent work”, recognising the issue as the most important in the sphere of actions towards equality. A commission that was appointed in the same year to examine differences in pay, concluded that gender is one of the factors contributing to differences in pay between women and men [Alfredsson i Ranveig 1995:23–24].

Sweden notes the smallest difference in employment ratios of women and men among all the European Union countries. High presence of women in the labour market is a result of an attitude held in Sweden that in addition to financial benefits, work has the autotelic dimension [Alfredsson i Ranveig 1995:126]. In the case of women, work gives them satisfaction, makes it easier to find their place in the society, prevents social exclusion. Looking at the professional life, the number of women holding managerial positions, in particular in the private sector, is insignificant. According to Statistics Sweden, in 1990, the number of women holding managerial positions constituted 30 percent in the public sector and nearly 10 percent in the private sector. In order to increase the recruitment of women to managerial positions, in 1993 the government appointed a committee to analyse why such an insignificant number of women holds top managerial positions in both sectors. Conclusions drawn from the final report of the committee induced the government to provide financial support to so called private management academy. Its task was to stimulate public discussion, deepen knowledge and carry out active measures aimed at increasing the number of women at leadership positions in the private sector. In 2004, Swedish women still held nearly 30 percent of managerial positions [Zygmunt 2006:126]. There was an increase in the number of women in management boards of listed companies – from 6 percent in 2002 to 23 percent in 2014. These indicators – similarly as in the previous years – are much higher in the public sector. Women constitute a majority among managers (approx. 52%) in the central administration, provinces and municipalities, and 46 percent of members of government and members of the Swedish Parliament are also women<sup>9</sup>. According to recent surveys, the presence of women in managerial positions is 27 percent, thus it is lower than the European average of 33 percent<sup>10</sup>.

A uniform retirement age for women and men was introduced in 1999. The system for calculating the retirement pension insurance premiums was designed in such a way as to take account of the needs of women. During the period of maternity and performing household duties, women more often change jobs and more irregularly pay retirement pension insurance premiums. Currently, a flexible retirement scheme is in force in Sweden – one may retire between the age of 61 and 67. Swedes welcome the opportunity to work longer – until the age of 67<sup>11</sup>.

### Sweden towards equal rights for women in the family

In Sweden, the family policy constitutes one of the most important pillars of the Nordic welfare state and its main achievements include a high level of professional activity of women and relatively high fertility [Anioł 2013:43].

The Sweden’s family policy aims at materialising the “model of a working family with dual breadwinner and protector” [Anioł 2013:43]. It is possible to point out numerous conditions that shaped this policy at the turn of the centuries. One of them is a change in the family structure and new form of relationships: common-law marriage, mixed families (a biological parent and his/her new partner living in the same household together with children from prior marriages), living-apart-together (LAT) relationships, gay and lesbian couples bringing up children. The noticeable thing is a postponement of decisions on entering into marriage and having children, as well as a higher separation and divorce rate. Marriage is no longer an economic necessity, more and more often it is a consequence of individual choice. The importance of men’s earnings is diminished by the mass employment of women, while fathers are expected to be more involved in the family life. Lesser tendency to enter into marriage, and therefore, a larger number of people outside the traditional family leads to the previously mentioned deinstitutionalisation of the family – the process which is most advanced in the Scandinavian countries. Nevertheless, a high level of fertility among women is noted. Unlike Poland, parenthood-related decisions usually do not result in a reduced number of women in the labour market. Professional activity of women in Sweden is an answer to the problem of decrease in the labour force.

Sweden's social policy is referred to as family-, woman- and child-friendly. Scandinavia distinguishes itself with one of the most generous paid parental leaves in the European Union, with a long paternity leave which keeps being extended, but which is lost if not used.

The economic recession in the early 1990s, tax reform and the emergence of an unpredictable baby boom (fertility rate at 2.14 in 1990 was the highest in Europe), blocked the development of family policy instruments. After the tax reform carried out in 1991, the need arose to compensate incomes of many families, which led to an increase in the number of social beneficiaries and forced legislative changes in the area of parental leaves. In 1994, a "month for the father" was introduced as a part of the already existing 12-month leave. In the same year, after elections won by the Social Democrats, the additional three months to the parental leave, abolished earlier by the Conservatives, were brought back. The Social-Democrats also declared general cuts in the family policy, as they seen it as the source of serious burden on the state budget. Despite reduced spendings within the family policy (lower level of monthly benefits for a child or reduced benefits for subsequent children in the family), the "month for the father" was not abolished. What is more, this solution was widely promoted. Extensive financial support was offered to non-governmental organisations and government institutions in exchange for conducting the appropriate educational activity. Changes that affected the present shape of family policy were introduced as late as in 1998. One of them was increasing the parental benefit from 75 percent to 80 percent of the salary [Szelewa 2004:13].

The family policy of Sweden is composed of several basic elements:

- individual taxation of spouses/partners,
- various benefits for people having a family,
- parental leaves,
- high quality and availability of institutional child-care [Szelewa 2004:13].

The most recognisable elements of family legislation in Sweden are benefits and leave for both parents, falling immediately after the birth of a child. In contrast to solutions applied in Poland, there is no division into maternity and child care leaves. In Sweden, there is a uniform parental leave, which is divided into several phases, which differ in terms of an amount of the possible income compensation. Each parent is entitled to 240 days of paid leave, of

which 60 days falls both to the mother and the father. Thus, one of the parents may take care of the child for a year and a half. If one of the parents does not use two months, the benefit is lost. In addition, a 10-day leave is reserved for the father directly after childbirth. The leave, calculated in days, may be taken in a variety of ways until the child's eighth birthday. Even when the leave has already been taken, parents may decrease work time by 2 hours if they need to take care of the child under the age of eight, with a corresponding decrease in salary [Szelewa 2004:12–13]. In 2002, an addition of 2 months was introduced for each parent to supplement the annual leave. Therefore, the total amount of the benefit was 16 months, during which for 13 months parents receive a benefit equal to 80 percent of the salary [Anioł 2013:56]. According to Dorota Szelewa, this decision strengthens the role of men as fathers, while at the same time, it is a logical step towards the implementation of the Sweden's equality policy. Although this policy is formally neutral towards genders (a 2-month leave reserved for the mother or the father), it is mainly targeted at fathers. If gender equality is to really take place, the men themselves must be involved in the process. The "month for the father" introduced in 1994 contributed to a slight increase in the number of fathers taking the parental leave (in 1987 6 percent, in 1997 9.9 percent). Data for subsequent years suggest a more dynamic growth – from 13.8 percent in 2001 to 17 percent in 2003 [Szelewa 2004:14–15]. Recently (2015) the percentage of fathers taking the parental leave has increased to 75 percent<sup>12</sup>. As regards the dependency leave, fathers took 41 percent of the total number of dependency leave days in 2001 and 43 percent in 2002. Nearly all the fathers take the 10-day leave that they are entitled to after childbirth. The purpose of the "month for the father" is to increase women's chances for professional career and their competitiveness in the labour market. It is also worthwhile to mention the promotional campaign of 1989 initiated by the Swedish social insurance institution, which promoted the slogan "Papa Come Home" taken from the song of Evert Taube, a well-known Swedish troubadour. Since then extensive funds have been designated every year for information campaigns, conferences, seminars, etc. Programmes for parent trainings have been created and group meetings for future fathers have been organised within their framework. What matters is the fact that the role of teachers in the programmes was played by the men

themselves. Assessment of the trainings shows that they were very highly valued and useful [Alfredsson i Ranveig 1995:68–69]. In 2005, the Thorwaldsson Commission was appointed to analyse the effectiveness of the parental leave in the context of gender equality. One of the proposals, put forward by the Commission, was to lengthen the basic part of the leave to 15 months, with 5 months designated for the mother and the father, and to lengthen for each woman the leave before childbirth to 30 days and the leave after childbirth for each of the spouses to 30 days. However, these proposals were not approved by politicians who justified their doubts by claiming that lengthening the parental leave may discourage women from resuming work and hinder their professional career. In particular, unintended side effects of longer leaves for women of childbearing age were pointed out as leading to their “statistical discrimination” by employers wary of long absence from work. This mainly relates to the jobs and positions at which longer absence from work is costly or otherwise severely inconvenient [Anioł 2013:56–57].

Because women take much larger part of parental leaves, they less often occupy positions that require greater responsibility or availability. That is why, it was postulated in numerous debates to assign a greater number of non-transferable months of leave to women and men in order to reduce employers’ concerns relating to potential leaves of absence taken by mothers. A special financial voucher was introduced in 2008 for couples who equally divide their leave. The aim is to encourage the parent who earns less, usually a woman, to return to work [Anioł 2013:57–58]. According to the Swedish left-wing parties, higher care benefits and longer parental leaves pose a threat to the principle of gender equality. The benefits are mostly used by women, which leads to their professional deactivation and marginalisation in the labour market. Care benefit presented as a tool that ensures the right to free choice is perceived as biased in the context of gender equality due to the fact that it encourages mothers to stay at home with her children. Thus, it is a maternity rather than a parental benefit. The left-wing party refers to this benefit as “overtly feminist” because it consolidates stereotypes [Anioł 2013:63].

In order to maintain the professional activity of women, it is necessary to develop a network of childcare facilities for children up to 6 years of age. In addition to care, these state-subsidised facilities

also provide early education for children. Most of the employees of these facilities (day care centres, kindergartens) are women. Numerous projects and social campaigns were implemented and organised to increase the recruitment of men to these positions [Alfredsson i Ranveig 1995:69]. Parents can also hire a child-minder – the service is financed by the municipality. When one of the parents decides to completely give up his or her job due to childcare, the parent may attend education and recreation centres financed by the state together with the child.

Undoubtedly, regulations of Sweden’s family policy that encourage fathers to be more involved in taking care of the children and mothers to be more professionally active have led to increased gender equality in this country [Anioł 2013:70]. Strong links between the family policy and equal rights for women and the employment policy are among the most important features of Sweden’s social policy. This approach contributed to increased fertility rate, as well as achieving the highest in Europe female employment rate. This strategy is conducive to combining work with taking care of children and involvement in the family life not only for mothers but for fathers as well [Anioł 2013:76]. Equality guarantees manifest themselves in the promotion of partnership relations in the family and are conducive to the model with two working parents. Costs associated with maintaining a family are subject to socialisation, which is reflected in a well-developed system of benefits and services for the family conducive to the reconciliation of family responsibilities and work without the need to resign from any of these spheres. However, it is worthwhile to notice a certain paradox: despite a loud discourse on equality and broad social support for the sharing of household duties between the parents, in practice the traditional family model, in which a woman is burdened with both professional and household duties, is still noticeable [Zygmunt 2006:130]. This shows the strength of cultural considerations and how much needs to be done in order to change them. As it results from the example of Sweden, the efforts and outlays made by the state in favour of the equality policy lead to a visible improvement in the situation of women. According to the studies by Göran Therborn, a professor of sociology at the University of Cambridge, Sweden is referred to as the “first country to break patriarchal rules in the modern world” [Motiejūnaitė 2008:33].

Another element connected with equality in the family is the prevention of domestic violence. Since early 1970s, an intense legislative work has been undertaken in Sweden with the purpose of regulating the family violence offences – among other things penalties for rape, sexual harassment, sexual coercion, beating, severe beating have been toughened. In 1990, the Swedish government approved programmes aimed at taking more intense actions against violence. An important element of this programme was attracting attention to the problem of violence against women and making the society more sensitive to the mechanisms in the cycle of violence. Appeals were made to the prosecutor general, the judiciary and the police board for organising special courses devoted to violence against women. Since the early 1990s, the Police Board has received state subsidies intended for organising protection for women who have suffered domestic violence. In the most serious cases, women may rely on the protection of a free-of-charge bodyguard [Alfredsson i Ranveig 1995:85–87].

The Swedish government is well aware of the fact that the state is jointly responsible for the cruel discrimination against women taking place at the comfort zone of the home and does not underestimate this problem by using arguments concerning non-interference into the private family matters. In 1998, the Parliament adopted a separate Violence Against Women Act. It follows from the Act that such offences are prosecuted *ex officio*, thus an accusation may be brought both by a woman who suffers violence, as well as by the police or medical staff. A woman is entitled to free legal assistance during the investigation and the offender is not allowed to contact the victim. Within the territory of the country, there are shelters for women whose operation is financed by municipal authorities. Local police and social welfare institutions cooperate with the shelters. The National Council for Preventing Violence Against Women, appointed in 2000, is an advisory body to the government which consults with representatives of various non-governmental organisations, as well as scientists who study the problem. Work of the Council is coordinated by the Ministry of Equality. It is the duty of the police to intervene in each case of domestic violence, register the incident even if the women does not accuse the man [Lisowska 2010:123]. Jens Orback, the Minister for Gender Equality in the years 2004–2006, writes in one of the articles published on the government website: “Violence inflicted by men

against women is a serious obstacle to the society enjoying equal rights”<sup>13</sup>. In 2006, Swedish government increased expenditure on counteracting violence against women by 100 million kronor. Some funds were also designated to support an out-patient clinic for men who have committed violence against women. According to Orback, many men unconsciously contribute to strengthening the stereotypes associated with femininity and masculinity. The change of stereotypes is an important contribution towards equality, that is why the government decided to appoint in 2006 a working group, whose task was to examine social roles of men, in order to work out a method of changing the traditional model. As emphasised by Orback, equality is not only a matter of women but also men, boys and girls. He adds that even though Sweden is considered one of the most egalitarian states, it will be truly satisfactory when men’s violence against women is completely eradicated.

## Conclusion

Thanks to effective policies to support the family and employment, as well as promoting equality as a primary value, Sweden occupies the top position in the EU countries. The researchers from the Stockholm University, emphasise that Scandinavian countries which occupy top positions in all gender equality rankings, should show the way towards equality to the other EU countries, but should not forget, however, that they themselves still need many reforms so that full equality between women and men in the society can become a fact [Olofsson 2015].

Sweden may be an inspiration for Poland, in particular as regards the creation of media campaigns to promote active paternity and to educate parents about the rights available to them. Other actions characteristic for the Swedish family policy – increasing the length of a paternity leave or the parental leave for fathers – also deserve to be implemented in our country. These solutions encourage procreation decisions, improve the quality of relationships in the families and increase employment rate among women. It is also worthwhile to point out the division of household and childcare duties between partners in Swedish families: men are more and more often engaged in the carrying out of activities stereotypically referred to as feminine. According to the Swedish Minister, Lise Bergh, gender equality is rooted in the family<sup>14</sup>.

- <sup>1</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality – Gender Equality Index, on-line document: [www.eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/gender-equality-index/about](http://www.eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/gender-equality-index/about), access date: 7 September 2015.
- <sup>2</sup> The Swedish Institute, Równouprawnienie płci: Szwedzkie podejście do sprawiedliwości [Gender Equality: The Swedish Approach to Justice], on-line document: [http://www.swedenabroad.com/ImageVaultFiles/id\\_27130/cf\\_347/Szwedzkie\\_podejcie\\_do\\_sprawiedliwosci\\_rwnoupra.PDF](http://www.swedenabroad.com/ImageVaultFiles/id_27130/cf_347/Szwedzkie_podejcie_do_sprawiedliwosci_rwnoupra.PDF), p. 3.
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