

Combating Structural Discrimination in Sweden

Comments on Current Strategies and Tactics Used to Combat Structural Discrimination in Sweden

Abstract

This report is the result of observations by an NGO whose base is in a small Swedish town in the south of the country. It looks at the strategies and results of activities taken a by local government (Lund), a major State institution (Lund University) and NGOs based in Lund over a two year period in response to the National Action Plan to Combat racism. It is not comprehensive, but is intended as an introduction to the subject for those who do not read Swedish sufficiently to conduct research on their own. If nothing else, it clearly demonstrates that there is a need to conduct a larger and more in-depth study of this subject.

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1. INTROCUCTION: THE SWEDISH NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO COMBAT RACISM

In 1997 the Swedish Parliament approved the Government's Integration Policy Bill (Prop. 1997/98:16) which called upon all levels of society to take account of ethnic and cultural diversity in planning and implementing their functions. The new policy also addressed the important role that NGOs and voluntary organisations had in developing an effective dialogue to realise the goals of the policy, and called for the creation of "anti-discrimination bureaus" throughout the country. The new policy also called upon the National Integration Office and the offices of the Ombudsmen against discrimination (DO, HomO, and others) to be in consultation with local authorities (cities and countys), industry and NGOs. County governments were called upon to implement local development agreements and to examine the usefulness of anti-discrimination clauses in public procurement contracts. It furthermore called for a new minorities policy to address the rights of Sweden's national minorities (Sami, Swedish Finns, Tornedaler, Roma and Jewish People). The overall result of the new Integration Policy Bill was that within three years, laws were adopted to create anti-discrimination bureaus, to identify and offer protection to five ethnic minorities, and a comprehensive law prohibiting discrimination was adopted. But there was no law to enhance integration or to allow for a quota system to be adopted to resolve discrimination in housing and on the labour market.

Although Sweden had adopted earlier laws prohibiting various types of discrimination, the more recent government policy and Statutes are the result of EU Directive 2000:43. The latest Statute prohibiting direct and indirect discrimination (see Statute No. SFS 2003:307) applies to situations where persons are searching for employment, seeking public services, social security benefits, unemployment insurance and health care.

2. THE CREATION OF ANTIDISCRIMINATION BUREAUS IN SWEDEN (ADBS)

In January, 2005, the Anti-discrimination Bureau of Lund opened the first office of its kind in Lund. This is the result of State-sponsored support administered through the Swedish Board of Integration. The law supporting these ADBs in Sweden, SFS 2002:989, was adopted due to influence from EU Directive 43, recommendations to Sweden in the 2nd and 3rd ECRI reports, recommendations from CERD Committee reports (See CERD/C/64/CO/8, 10 May, 2004). In spite of such recommendations, Swedish county and city governments have show little or no interest in maintaining such bureaus, hence, State support is vital to the struggle against structural discrimination within Swedish cities.

There are now several Anti-discrimination Bureaus (known as ADBs) in Sweden. They are located in Malmö, Lund, Helsingborg, Karlskrona, Gothenburg,

Vänernsberg, Trollhättan, Lysekil, Norrköping, Stockholm (3), Örebro, Sundsvall and Umeå. All are financed with State support, and some, such as ADB-Lund, are directly affiliated with a research institute or researchers on anti-discrimination issues and human rights law. Most of the ADBs are members of the recently created Network of Anti-discrimination Bureaus of Sweden, which is constitutionally mandated to be a network of support for member organisations.

ADB Lund has distributed the UNESCO plan for cities to all the politicians in Lund and to many of the local NGOs. The city of Lund will take up the issue at a meeting later this year. Much lobbying work needs to be done but this requires some funding from outside sources (perhaps UNESCO itself), as there is no legal mandate to support the UNESCO document under Swedish law.

3. Lund County Government Strategy

Lund is the name of a small town in southern Sweden that gave its name to Scandinavia's largest university. The population of the town is slightly more than 101 thousand persons and the city's statisticians (December 31, 2004) claim that 15% of the total population is of foreign origin.

In February, 2002, Lund's County Government changed the name of the Board of Immigration and created the Integration Board. The new Board adopted a "Diversity Plan" and in 2003 employed a "Diversity Director". Five projects to ensure "diversity" were then launched: a *God-father* and *Mentor* project, a *Network* project, an *Integration Day* project and an "*Integration prize*" project. New "non-traditional" methods of recruiting persons to work within the county government were to be adopted, vacant jobs were to be announced in languages other than Swedish, and contact with immigrant associations was to be improved so that they could contribute insights into the employment question.

So far, however, there is little public evidence of how many of these promised improvements have been fulfilled. The most publicised event has been the "Integration Day" and the awarding of the Prize. A survey at a school in the northern section of the town claims that integration amongst mid-level school children is successful, largely because the children talk about how many Swedish and foreign school-age friends they have.

The Chairman of the new Integration Board, Mr. Lennart Prytz, told English International in a brief interview recently that a number of new projects to promote city workplace integration have been started. One job calling for a person with foreign language skills had been announced but no outright affirmative action or quota stapes had been taken to increase ethnic diversity. He reported that the major hindrance to applying such measures to employment is the very same Swedish laws prohibiting ethnic and other forms of discrimination (SFS 2003:307). Hence, little

real or open progress had been made in any affirmative action employment of ethnic minorities, even though there are other milder forms of affirmative action through the Swedish state labour office (Arbetsförmedling).

4. Lund University Strategy

In May 2000, an investigating commission headed by the then Rector of Lund University, Boel Flodgren, submitted its entitled Diversity in Swedish Education to the Ministry of Education (See *Mångfald i högskolan*, SOU 2000:47). After commenting on the need of Swedish universities to increase ethnic and social diversity, the report recommended special labour-market measures be taken “for recruiting staff in higher education in terms of ethnic diversity”, and an “action plan for social and ethnic diversity in higher education”. (see summary, page 265).

In 2002, Lund university’s Board of Directors adopted a diversity plan that included the goals to increase ethnic diversity within both within education and employment. The Plan specifically called for effective ethnic and social diversity within the University’s personnel. Responsibility for implementing the plan was under the domain of the Rector, boards of directors of faculty and institution boards within the university. Between 2002 – 2004 (extended to 2005) the plan was to create an opinion on diversity questions, provide support for students and employees to understand the issue around ethnic and social diversity, implement proposals on diversity, conduct follow-up studies on progress, and evaluate the plan, and co-operate with organisations from within and beyond the university on diversity questions.

In 2003, The Evaluation Committee at Lund University (*Utvärderingsenheten*) published a report recommending improvements in information to vulnerable students alleging discrimination. The recommendations included the education of staff and faculty members on the laws, principles and character of vulnerable students who might need protection from discrimination, and for student “nations” (co-ed student dormitories) to adopt equality policies to improve the equal treatment of vulnerable students. The report also criticised a 2002 Lund University Magazine (LUM) article that suggested applying affirmative action principles to recruit students from ethnically vulnerable populations. However, the report did not address any probable need to implement affirmative action policies to recruit more faculty members from ethnic minority groups.*

Implementing the diversity plan along ethnic lines has been resisted from top to bottom of those responsible for the diversity plan. Employment within the university’s administration, faculties and institutions remains extremely ethnically homogenic. So far, persons employing staff members at all levels show no interest in increasing the ethnic diversity of staff members or teaching personnel through

affirmative action or quotas. Instead, the strategy used to divert attention from that issue has been to focus on changing the “social diversity” of students rather than on their ethnic diversity. But even here, implementation falls short of the universities own principles, as it strives to recruit only those students who’s early academic achievements are on par with the traditional entry grading systems. Of 20 “socially disadvantaged” students recruited during the Spring of 2003, only 2 reflected any real social diversity. Hence, the social diversity measures that are used continues to maintain the extremely homogenous character of students at Lund University.

5. Public Sector Strategies

Companies and shops in Lund have not adopted a common diversity or integration plan. A proposal to introduce and adopt non-discrimination clauses in service contracts for the city of Lund was rejected by county lawyers with the excuse that it might violate some earlier non-discrimination laws that prohibiting one or another type of discrimination. The matter will be discussed again “ sometime in the future”.

6. Local NGO Strategies

None of the fifty or so NGOs known as “immigrant associations” have published a diversity plan for the County, the University or employers to use in their efforts to combat structural discrimination in Lund. Under an umbrella organisation known as LIFS (Lund Immigrant Association), a weekly radio programme is produced and there are quarterly meetings with the city’s Council on Integration.

On the other hand, because of our affiliation with a number of research organisations, this NGO (The English International Association of Lund) has published reports and statistics on discrimination in Lund, and frequently publishes a newsletter that features articles on the subject of ethnic and other types of discrimination in Lund, both on paper and on the web. During the year 2003-2004 English International was awarded a project that was funded by the Swedish Board of Integration. The projects objective was to measure complaints of ethnic and other forms of discrimination achieved by complainants who volunteered the information. A questionnaire was provided to each complainant, and the results of the survey indicate that most allegations were from foreign-born men who say they were victims of ethnic discrimination. This was followed by allegations of discrimination due to gender, sexual preferences and physical ability. Most claims were related to finding jobs. (See the results at: www.thelundian.com).

7. COMMENTS ON THE ABOVE STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Based on the surveys we conducted, and on an evaluation of the City of Lund's Diversity programme by a local Price Waterhouse Coopers office (2004), our principle conclusion is as follows:

There are very few highly-profiled effective measures being taken to eliminate the effects of structural discrimination in employment for ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups in Lund. Hence, there are only a few noticable results with the strategies used to combat structural discrimination in the city of Lund during the first quarter of 2005.

Although there is an awareness of the need to implement State policies aimed at increasing ethnic and social diversity in Lund, the initial results is that the procedure so far is bogged down by a lack of committment to the principles of non-discrimination that is so prevelant in EU Directives and the international conventions to which Sweden is a party to. This is especially noticeable within the university and other institutes of higher education. Each of the major actors in the country -- the university, the county, the labour department -- are engaged in their own research and adopt their own plans of action. This is best reflected by the fact that none of the actors within the structures are concerned with the UNESCO 10-point plan to promote non-discrimination, diversity and integration within their structures. And although there are affirmative action practices as a strategy to employ persons with a diverse, ethnic background, there is no unified political policy to employ that tactic to overcome the homogeneity that dominates the cities economic, social and cultural structures.

We share the Price Waterhouse Cooper last statement on Lund's Diversity Plan: much work remains to be done before "diversity" can be said to have reached the outer corners of the cities many structures.

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