

# Summary

This report surveys the development of gender equality within work and education, with a special emphasis on more influential positions in working life. The focus is on the public sector and on managers and specialists, such as doctors and lawyers, who have responsibility for the functioning of welfare and security in people's everyday lives.

More and more women have taken up previously male-dominated posts in recent decades. In almost all the professions studied in the report, the proportion of women has grown. There are now more women than men who are managers and specialists in the public sector. The gender pay gap is also shrinking. Sweden achieves top rankings in international comparisons of women's power and influence.

Our report shows that these changes are linked to the fact that education offers opportunities for taking on positions of power and influence. The education gap between women and men continues to grow and it is those who are well educated who have a head-start in the knowledge society.

## **Swedish gender equality policy**

The overarching official objective of Swedish gender equality policy is that women and men are to have equal power to shape society and their own lives. The Government has set out six interim objectives. Our report concerns three of the interim objectives – *An even division of power and influence*, *Economic gender equality* and *Gender-equal education*.

The report provides an overall description of the policy pursued, with the aim of giving women and men more equal conditions.

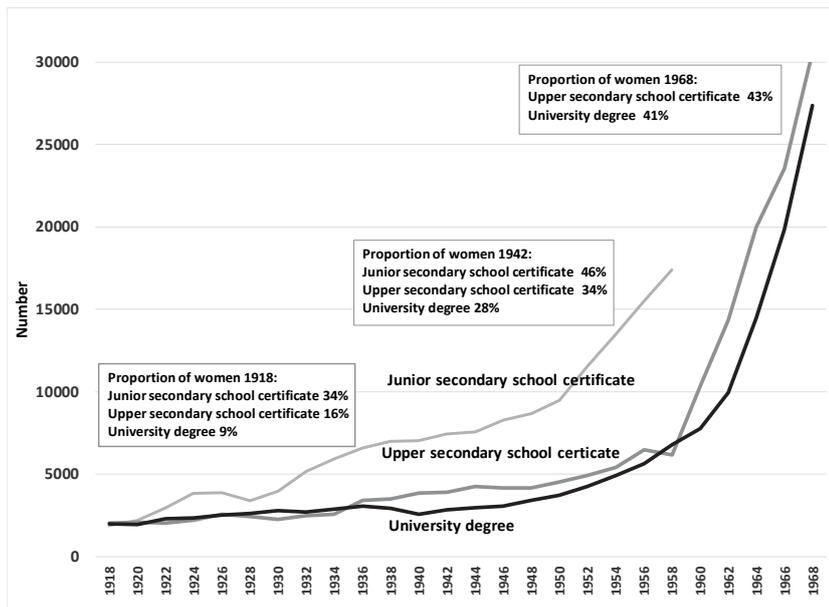
Following the reform of voting rights in 1919, a number of political decisions were taken to give women better opportunities for both education and work. But it was men who had a higher level of education and therefore dominated in professions of power and influence.

Over a period of twenty years, from the 1960s to the 1980s, major changes occurred in society and working life. The Swedish economy blossomed and unemployment fell. It then became important to get more people into work, and women were seen as a potential labour force. More political reforms helped women to get into the labour market. Important examples included education reforms, individual taxation, the expansion of childcare and parental insurance. Several professions that had previously been closed to women were opened up, such as that of priest or police officer. New aspects of policy carried the 'gender equality' element: the Equal Opportunities Act, the Minister for Gender Equality, the Gender equality delegation and the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman. It was also a time when the women's movement made its appearance and pushed for political decisions.

## Education

Between the years 1918 and 1958, there was a gradual doubling of the number of students who achieved an upper secondary school certificate and a university degree. In the ten years that followed up to 1968, the number of students achieving an upper secondary school certificate grew fivefold and the number achieving a university degree grew fourfold. During the entire period, the proportion of women increased compared with that of men (see the graph below).

**Figure 1** Number of students achieving an upper secondary school certificate or university degree and proportion of women at junior secondary school, upper secondary school and university during the period 1918-1968



Source: Statistics Sweden. Statistical Yearbooks of Sweden 1918–1969.

Between 1968 and 2018, the proportion of women who achieved an upper secondary school certificate trebled and the proportion who completed a university degree grew fourfold. For men, the increase was lower. Within universities, women dominated in five of eight main degree areas in 2018. In 45 out of a total of 55 degree areas, women are in the majority.

Women do better than men at all levels of education. This applies to eligibility from compulsory school to upper secondary school, and also those who complete leaving certificates from upper secondary school and higher vocational education. Almost twice as many women complete university degrees. Similar gender differences can also be noted in terms of numerical grades and drop-outs from upper secondary school, as well as the feed-in to academic education.

Since 1975, there has been a complete shift in how the population of Sweden is educated. At that time, more than half of the population had elementary school, junior secondary school or compulsory school as their highest level of education. A little over one in ten had

a degree from a university or other higher education institution. In 2017, four in ten women and three in ten men had a post-secondary education.

In the mid-1980s, women surpassed men as having the highest level of education in society. The level of education continues to increase and the gender difference continues to grow. If this trend continues in the same way, it is estimated that 54 per cent of women and 39 per cent of men will have a post-secondary education in 15 years' time.

## Work

During the 1950s, life for many women consisted of looking after children and the household. In the 1970s, increasing numbers of women went out to work, both 'housewives' and the younger generation of women who had completed upper secondary school or an academic education. Between 1970 and 1990, the proportion of women in the labour force increased from 60 per cent to 85 per cent. This meant almost 700 000 more women in gainful employment, the equivalent of 90 per cent of the entire increase in the labour force during this period.

Of all of the approximately 4.4 million people currently employed in Sweden, half are women. One third of all employees work in the public sector. Women are in the majority as managers and specialists in the public sector, but in the minority in the private sector. The proportion of women managers has steadily increased.

In total, 43 per cent of employees in the public sector have a post-secondary education of three years or longer; in the private sector the figure is 22 per cent. Within the regions, the proportion of men with a higher education is highest; in central government and the municipalities, the proportion of women with a higher education is highest.

The need for staff with a higher education continues to increase. At the top of the list of professions in need of staff are several professions with a high proportion of women and that require accreditation or authorisation. Examples include midwives, psychologists, doctors, dentists, nurses and teachers. But there is also a

growing need for civil engineers and IT specialists, which are professions with a high proportion of men.

## Power and influence

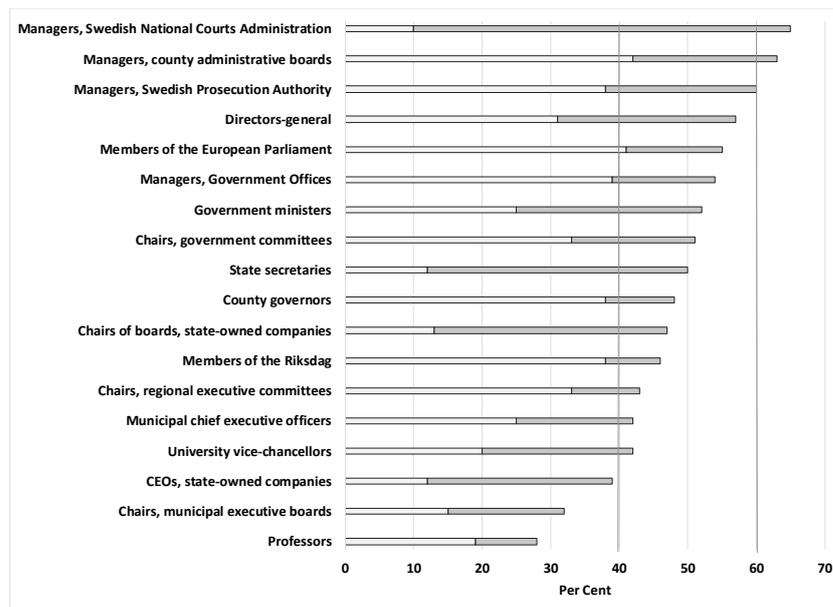
The main chapter of the report provides a survey of gender equality within the areas where power and influence can be said to be concentrated in society, such as politics, central government, regions, municipalities, the private sector and opinion building.

Within a lot of political assignments and professions, such as manager and specialist, it is possible to compare the proportion of women and men in two benchmark years. Out of 18 'top positions' in the public sector, there are two in which the proportion of women exceeds 60 per cent in the latter benchmark year: in 13 positions the proportion of women is between 40 and 60 per cent, and in three positions the proportion of women is below 40 per cent. This can be compared with the first year of measurements, when the proportion of women was below 40 per cent in 16 out of 18 positions<sup>2</sup>.

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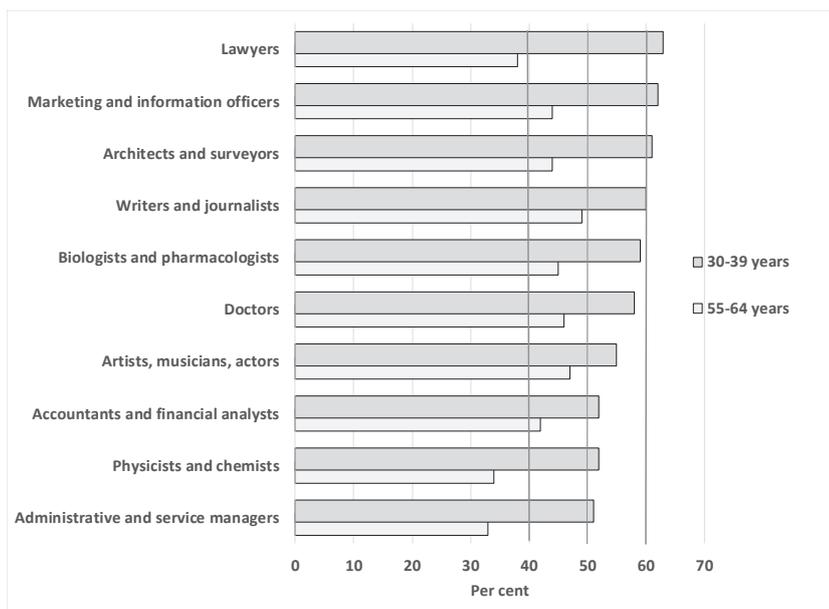
<sup>2</sup> 'Quantitative gender equality' means an even division of women and men in the range 40–60 per cent. If more than 50 per cent is of one gender, women or men are in the majority. If more than 60 per cent is of one gender in a group, it is either female- or male-dominated.

**Figure 2** Proportion of women in top positions in the public sector and the change over time (varying years of measurement, minimum ten years)



To estimate the future gender balance of managers and specialists, we have compared employees in a younger age group with those in an older age group. Several traditionally male professions have become female professions in the younger age group, such as lawyers, journalists, doctors and financial analysts (see the graph below).

**Figure 3** Proportion of women in ten managerial and specialist professions, two age groups, entire labour market in 2016



Source: Statistics Sweden.

## Wages

Women’s wages have historically been well below those of men. It was not until 1970 that the last of the special women’s wages were abolished in the collective agreements. According to the National Mediation Office, the most important cause of the gender wage gap today is that women and men work in different professions and that wage levels between these professions differ. An increased or decreased proportion of women in a profession has not affected the wage gap, either upwards or downwards.

Over the past 25 years, wages have generally increased more for women than for men. Women are well educated and are increasing their proportion in managerial and specialist positions. Over the past ten years, the wages of women with a higher education have increased more than for men with a higher education in all sectors of the labour market. In an increasing number of specialist professions, women have equal or higher wages than men.

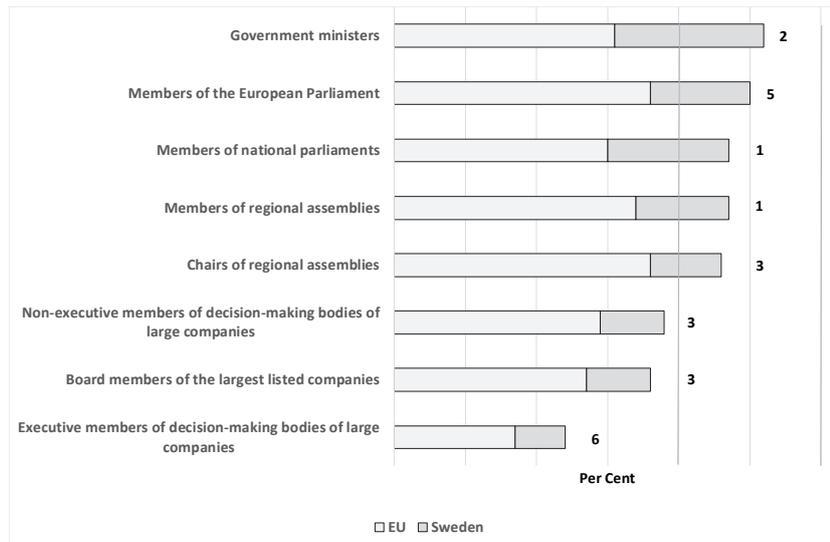
Wage statistics are complex and give rise to different interpretations. It is difficult to reach a common view of what is the most relevant and correct analysis. Many issues in the area of wages should be subject to more in-depth analysis.

### **International comparison**

Sweden ranks highly in five recent international comparisons on power and influence. Sweden is among the countries whose education levels have increased slightly more than the OECD average and ranks sixth in terms of women's education level. Sweden has the highest level of labour market participation of all EU countries, and this applies for both women and men.

A report from the European Commission ('2019 Report on equality between women and men in the EU') provides a comparison of gender equality in decision-making between the 28 EU Member States. Sweden, Finland and Spain are the three countries in which the proportion of women is higher than the EU average in all eight areas (see graph below). Sweden has the highest ranking in terms of the proportion of women in the national parliament and regional assemblies. In terms of the highest proportion of women on the boards of the largest listed companies, Sweden is in third place.

**Figure 4** Proportion of women in eight decision-making areas in 2018, average for the 28 EU Member States and for Sweden



Note: The figure on the right of the bars gives Sweden's position among the 28 EU Member States. The end of the light bar illustrates the average for the EU Member States and the end of the dark bar shows Sweden's result.  
 Source: European Commission (2020), 2019 Report on equity between women and men in the EU.

### Conclusions

The report shows that the traditional image of gender equality in society has changed; what was once male-dominated has become female-dominated. We can see an interlacing pattern between education, work, power and influence, and a reduced wage gap between women and men. Education is the key here and women currently dominate in the universities.

It is a clear trend that the proportion of women is increasing in influential positions in working life compared with men. Our calculations also show that this trend is continuing. There is a dynamic in the link between higher education and professions with power and influence.

The report also shows that the new reality offers more choices for politicians:

- Should gender equality mean the same opportunities or the same outcomes for women and men?
- If the same outcome is wanted, what are the strategies for achieving a more equal gender balance in positions as manager or specialist at workplaces such as the Government Offices and government agencies – i.e. in these cases more men?
- Does the education system need to be developed to enable young men to achieve a higher level of education so that both men and women are able to contribute to ensuring the skills supply in the knowledge society in future?
- Developing the Government's gender equality policy objectives. In our report we have used professions that can be used more broadly as indicators for monitoring power and influence.
- Showing Sweden as a role model. Sweden ranks highly in international indexes. There is an opportunity here to highlight a fact-based narrative about Sweden's profound transformation in the area of gender equality.
- Political reforms can bring about major changes. Over a period of a few decades, politicians managed to develop gender equality in a way that has never been done before. What challenges do politicians face in creating the conditions for a positive trend in gender equality?
- More research is needed. Our survey shows the need for in-depth studies. How can the wage concept be developed in official wage statistics? Will the changing gender composition in influential positions in society have an impact on the policies that are actually implemented?