



The role of workers' organisations in preventing and addressing contemporary forms of slavery - Sweden

1. Are trade union rights, as protected by ILO Conventions Nos. 87 (Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise) and 98 (Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining), recognized in domestic legislative frameworks in your country? If so, please provide details including provision for remedies in case of breaches.

The freedom of association, the right to organize and collective bargaining are recognized in the constitution (as a general freedom of association and a general right to organize) and in national law (all three of them are included in the Employment (Co-Determination in the Workplace) Act). If breached, there are rules on how to remedy in the Act. It is basically that an employer, an employee, or an organization in breach of the Act or a collective bargaining agreement shall pay compensation for any loss that is incurred. Consideration shall also be given to factors other than those of purely economic significance.

Employment (Co-Determination in the Workplace) Act: [Employment \(Co-Determination in the Workplace\) Act \(Lag om medbestämmande i arbetslivet\) - Government.se](#)

See also the pamphlet on the Swedish model [The Swedish model and collective agreements \(mi.se\)](#)

2. Have workers' organisations in your country played a role in preventing workers from being subjected to contemporary forms of slavery, or helping victims to move out of exploitative situations? If so, please provide details, which may include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Promotion of trade union rights for workers who may face a heightened risk of being exploited in contemporary forms of slavery, including women, young people, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, minorities, migrants, older persons, informal workers and LGBTQI+ individuals, who may or may not be unionised.

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Landsorganisationen i Sverige

- b. Promotion of ratification and national implementation of relevant ILO standards by Member States, including Conventions No. 29 (Forced Labour) and its Protocol of 2014, 87 (Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise), 98 (Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining), 105 (Abolition of Forced Labour), 138 (Minimum Age), 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour) and 189 (Domestic Workers);

All the above-mentioned conventions and protocol have been ratified by Sweden and implemented nationally. All the ratifications were supported by workers' organisations.

- c. Adoption and implementation of specific strategies/guidance on contemporary forms of slavery within their organisations;

The Government has organised a cooperation between nine authorities to inspect employers and work sites where exploitation is suspected. A phone number is provided where employees can, anonymously, report suspicion of exploitation.

Seven centres have opened in the cities of Umeå, Stockholm, Malmö, Göteborg, Örebro, Uppsala and Norrköping. Their purpose is to facilitate planning, implementation and follow-up of inter-agency controls and other joint activities.

The authorities that participate in inter-agency co-operation against crime in working life are the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Swedish Work Environment Authority, the Swedish Economic Crime Authority, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the Swedish Gender Equality Authority, the Swedish Migration Agency, the Swedish Police Authority, the Swedish Prosecution Authority and the Swedish Tax Agency. The Swedish Work Environment Authority is the coordinating authority.

[Joint Authority Control - Arbetsmiljöverket \(av.se\)](https://www.arbetsmiljoverket.se/)

Trade unions can get funding from the state to detect and prevent exploitation in their branches.

- d. Inspection of workplace and accommodations where these are provided by employers;
Same as in 2.c.
- e. Facilitation of access to education, vocational skills training, as well as financial and essential public services;

Education and vocational training are both free of charge in Sweden. There is a difference between citizens of EU states and others with a permit to stay in the EU on the one hand and citizens from outside the EU on the other hand. But all have a right to basic and urgent health care and social services.

- f. Facilitation of access to justice and remedies (including legal, financial, immigration, subsistence or other forms of assistance) for workers exploited in contemporary forms of slavery.

All members of a trade union in Sweden get information and legal assistance. Some trade unions have established a trade union centre for the undocumented where help (information, legal advice) is provided free of charge to workers being exploited in different sectors (construction etc). [Trade union center for the undocumented \(fcfp.se\)](http://www.fcfp.se)

3. Please provide any positive examples of collaboration or coordination with the following entities in preventing contemporary forms of slavery and protecting vulnerable workers and victims:

- a. Public authorities

[Joint Authority Control - Arbetsmiljöverket \(av.se\)](http://www.av.se)

[Swedish Gender Equality Agency Prostitution and human trafficking | Swedish Gender Equality Agency](#)

[The Swedish Institute for Human Rights Other languages – Institutet för mänskliga rättigheter \(mrinstitutet.se\)](#)

- b. Businesses/employers' organisations

[Business against trafficking RealStars » Realstars. Business against trafficking.](#)

- c. Anti-slavery actors, human rights defenders and/or other civil society organisations

[Swedish Platform Civil Society against Human Trafficking English – PLATTFORMEN \(manniskohandel.se\)](#)

- d. Other actors such as financial institutions, service providers, academia, media and regional/international organisations (e.g. ILO)

4. Are there workers' organisations dedicated to organizing and defending the rights of workers in certain sectors with higher risks of labour and/or sexual exploitation (e.g. agriculture, fishing, construction, services including hospitality, manufacturing, domestic work, and non-standard forms of employment) or at-risk populations (e.g. indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees, minorities, older workers, workers with disabilities and informal workers) in your country? If so, please provide details, including tailored prevention or protection activities.

Undocumented workers and asylum seekers can receive information about their rights in the labour market and receive advice on wages, working conditions and occupational health and safety. Through the Trade Union Center for the Undocumented, the undocumented, whose rights in the labour market have been violated, can get assistance, provided by the trade union that knows the industry best.

One common problem is concerning the situation for seasonal berry pickers from outside EU. The Swedish Municipal Workers' Union (Kommunal) organizes workers within this field. Labor migrants who work in Sweden for a shorter time have the opportunity to become temporary members of Kommunal, which gives Kommunal the opportunity to represent them in disputes with employers. However, it is very unusual for berry pickers

to become members of Kommunal. In 2022, nearly 6,600 people were granted a work permit for work as berry pickers and planters, and half of them had a work permit for the previous year (same occupational category). Despite the fact that many return to Sweden, and know the risks of the trip, only 30 people chose to become temporary members of Kommunal last year.

The Swedish Transport Workers' Union (Transport) is a trade union for workers in the following branches: lorries and trucking, warehouses, security, flight maintenance, newspaper distribution, waste and recycling, taxi, gas stations, petrol handling, tire shops and more. Transport has entered into a collective agreement for Foodora bicycle and moped couriers that covers around 1500 employees. [Other languages | Transport](#)

Swedish Building Maintenance Workers Union (Fastighets) has organised a network with serious employers in the cleaning industry to tackle workplace crime and human trafficking.

Employers are offered training in how to detect workplace crime.

[Network against workplace crime - Fastighetsanstaldas Förbund \(www-fastighets-se.translate.google.se\)](http://www-fastighets-se.translate.google.se)

The Swedish Building Workers Union (Byggnads) is also part of a project to tackle the exploitation within the construction sector:

[Swedish Building Control - stop cheating and workplace crime - Construction \(www-byggnads-se.translate.google.se\)](http://www-byggnads-se.translate.google.se)

5. If any, please describe challenges or limitations experienced by workers' organisations in your country to prevent contemporary forms of slavery and protect victims, which may include:
 - a. Non-recognition of trade unions/workers' organizations or trade union rights in law and in practice;
 - b. Limitations on the rights to organize and take collective actions, including bargaining;
 - c. Union-busting and other forms of harassment and anti-union discrimination;
 - d. Lack of cooperation/coordination from various State/non-State actors;
 - e. Limitations/challenges specific to certain employment sectors or groups of workers, including lack of representation for collective bargaining;
 - f. Limited access to workplaces and accommodations provided by employers;
 - g. Other practical difficulties such as lack of resources, expertise and membership, or reluctance/fear among workers to engage.

All the above-mentioned challenges and limitations exist in Sweden, to some extent. The existing legislation recognise trade union rights, but in practice there are employers who don't. The problem has increased since the 1990s, with the

system for labour immigration and the wave of privatisation since the 1990s that in some ways opened up for unserious business.

The wide disparities in working and living conditions across the EU have resulted in many workers from poorer areas travelling to Sweden for work, often being exploited by rogue and criminal operators.

Where trade unions are not able to engage with immigrant workers/undocumented workers due to lack of resources, or fear from workers (lack of trust in trade unions from their home countries), our possibilities to help are reduced. Lately we have translated information in several languages, such as Arabic, Spanish, Polish, and English, to be able to reach more workers and inform them of their rights.

6. What practical recommendations would you make to concerned stakeholders (including Governments, businesses/employers' organisations, anti-slavery and civil society actors, international organisations and others) to enable workers' organizations (including centres and federations) to more effectively prevent and address contemporary forms of slavery?

Labour crime knows no borders. Therefore, strengthen international cooperation between enforcement and control authorities in other countries to combat labour crime is one way to prevent and address this issue. Here, EU-legislation such as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive and the Regulation on prohibiting products made with forced labour can serve as important tools and examples.

Other recommendations include the enforcement of social dialogue to enable stronger cooperation between social partner within serious companies. Employers that exploit workers through poor working conditions, such as substandard health and safety conditions, leading to greater risks of occupational accidents and the out-competition of legitimate companies should be outlawed.