

Human Rights in Governance and Management

ENGLISH SUMMARY OF A SWEDISH PROJECT REPORT



Sveriges
Kommuner
och Landsting

Introduction

How to integrate human rights into the governance and management of municipalities and regions? This has been a central question in a project organised between 2015 and 2016 by The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), involving 14 municipalities and counties (regions) in Sweden.¹ The participating municipalities and regions have *inter alia* developed policies and action plans for the implementation of human rights, worked with human rights mainstreaming, education, and the integration of human rights in financial control.

The project is part of the cooperation agreement between SALAR and the Swedish government, running from 2014 to 2017, regarding strengthening the role of human rights on local and regional levels of government. After the evaluation of the first national action plan for human rights, conducted in 2005, it became evident that few municipalities and regions worked consistently with human rights.² Due to this fact, the second national action plan (2006-2009) emphasised the role of human rights in local and regional government. SALAR became central organ for coordinating the work and providing expertise to local and regional authorities.

The past ten years show significant changes in the field.³ Evaluations show that human rights play a more important role for local and regional authorities today than a decade ago. Knowledge about human rights has improved, human rights are more central to budgets and action plans and are also included in evaluations of policies to a higher degree than before. Municipalities and regions work with human rights in a broad sense. Previously, it was common to focus on rights for specific groups, in particular children. Even though this plays is still quite common, it is evident that nowadays several municipalities and regions work with the broad set of civil, political and social rights. Moreover, UN conventions and Council of Europe conventions play an explicit role in a way that was not applied before.

¹ Participants were: Alingsås municipality, Botkyrka municipality, Gävle municipality, City of Gothenburg (Göteborg), Hallstahammar municipality, Jönköping municipality, Piteå municipality, Kronoberg region, Skåne region, City of Stockholm, Stockholm county, Umeå municipality, City of Västerås and Örebro municipality.

² Thomas Hammarberg & Anna Nilsson (2005) Bra början, men bara en början. Utvärderande kommentar om den nationella handlingsplanen för de mänskliga rättigheterna: 30f.

³ See Mikael Spång (2008) Kommuners ansvar för att förverkliga mänskliga rättigheter – en kartläggning av 16 kommuner; SOU (2010) Ny struktur för skydd av mänskliga rättigheter. SOU 2010.70; SKL (2015) Mänskliga rättigheter i kommuner, regioner och landsting. Kartläggning av arbetet med mänskliga rättigheter samt önskemål om stöd i detta arbete.

However, although much has improved, evaluations also point out some remaining problems and shortcomings. Among these are lack of integration of human rights into coherent policy frameworks, follow up measures as well as a lack of mainstreaming and integration of human rights in the governance and management of municipalities and regions.

These evaluations provide the basis for the latest project organised by SALAR. Below follows some examples of how the participating municipalities and regions have worked with integration of human rights into governance and management.⁴ The presentation of the work undertaken by the participating municipalities and regions builds on dimensions usually thought to be important to human rights based approaches.⁵

Policy formulation

Formulating goals based on human rights is central to human rights based approaches and several participating municipalities and regions have focused on the formulation of policy and action plans. In working out new policies and revising existing policies, several participants have focused on convention obligations; examples include the municipalities of Alingsås and Örebro and the Region of Kronoberg. In Örebro municipality, an inventory was made to investigate how existing policies relate to human rights. The aim was to clarify how the municipality already works with human rights and also to establish a coherent framework for human rights. The municipality of Alingsås developed a new policy for social sustainability. Convention obligations and the global development goals of Agenda 2030 were the basis for this work. Convention obligations were also central for the work undertaken in the region of Kronoberg. The region has developed an ambitious plan, including health care, public transport and regional development. Overall, the relationship between social sustainability and human rights is central for several municipalities and regions. Beside the above-mentioned examples, also the municipalities of Botkyrka, Piteå and Stockholm integrate human rights and sustainability in their policies and so does the Skåne region.

⁴ The presentation builds on interviews and material given by the municipalities and regions.

⁵ See *inter alia* SOU (2010) Ny struktur för skydd av mänskliga rättigheter. SOU 2010:70; SKL (2017) Human Rights at the Local and Regional Level – External Monitoring Study with a focus on Governance and Management; Elisabeth Abiri et al (2008) Mänskliga rättigheter? ”Jag vet att dom finns och jag tror att Sverige är bra på dom” – En handbok i mänskliga rättigheter på kommunal nivå. Stockholm: Fritzes. More generally, see Human Rights Council (2015) Role of local government in the promotion and protection of human rights – Final report of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, A/HRC/30/49, 7 August 2015. See also the work in the Council of Europe, in particular The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, http://www.coe.int/t/Congress/default_en.asp

Making convention obligations explicit is an example of using human rights for developing coherent policy frameworks. Moreover, the work undertaken by several municipalities and regions shows how to utilise human rights for specifying sustainability goals. Several participants argue that human rights help them in combining different perspectives. Human rights also help to bring together policies, for example advancing urban development, sustainability, diversity, etc.

Mainstreaming

Several of the participating municipalities and regions engage in mainstreaming⁶, which is closely related to policy formulation. Since the early 1990s, mainstreaming is standard approach in Swedish gender equity work and increasingly, it is also used in human rights work. Evaluations and research often stress the importance of mainstreaming. An example of mainstreaming is from the region of Kronoberg. During development of the new overall policy for the region, it has been central to assess how this policy corresponds with the daily activities in, for instance, health care and public transport. In several municipalities and regions, the central agencies responsible for human rights provide help to specific sector administrations, for example in the cities of Gothenburg and Stockholm. In Stockholm, the central human rights agency provides knowledge, through workshops and hands-on guidance, to specific sector administrations, such as schools, health care clinics etc. Another example is Umeå municipality. The central administration has developed guidelines for working with human rights in particular sectors.

Budget and financial control

To include human rights work and human rights perspectives in the ordinary budget process is important to human rights based approaches. Over the past ten years, it has become more common to mention human rights, both overall and as specific goals, in the budget. An important dimension to the current SALAR project has been to engage human rights strategists to cooperate with controllers and others involved in financial control. Some of the project participants have worked more specifically with identifying human rights in financial control systems, for example, the region of Skåne. The region has identified specific human rights activities in the financial control system. This provides a better picture of

⁶ Mainstreaming is a process in which a human rights perspective is applied in both planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes.

the expenditures and also if there are any discrepancies between political priorities on the one hand and resource allocation on the other hand.

Implementation

Several of the participating municipalities and regions emphasise the importance of implementing policies in accordance with human rights principles. For example, involvement, participation, transparency and non-discrimination are key principles in implementation of a policy. This is central to the work in, for instance, the municipalities of Botkyrka and Umeå. In Västerås, the municipality has involved inhabitants in residential areas in policy developing processes, following a bottom-up approach. The idea is that rights holders have specific knowledge about their situation that is important for formulating, as well as implementing, policies.

Human rights indicators

Evaluation of policies is central for the realisation of human rights. In this work, it is common to use human rights indicators. Several of the participating municipalities and regions work actively with indicators. Both the municipality of Alingsås and the region of Kronoberg have specified new sets of indicators in their policies. Several participants have also worked with specific accounts, for instance taking stock of the situation of children. Botkyrka works on developing the collection of equality data, covering the situation of religious and ethnic minorities beside already available statistics on gender and age. This equality data build on self-identification of persons. In the city of Stockholm there is also work done on how to use already existing indicators as well as developing new ones.

Involving political leadership and administration

Several participants stress the importance of involving the political leadership in the policy process. Political will is a key factor for implementing human rights. In Alingsås, for example, politicians from all parties have been involved in developing the new social sustainability policy. Similarly, in Gävle municipality, politicians from the main parties were involved in developing policy. In the city of Stockholm, there is a specific human rights council at the central political level. The council consists of representatives from the political parties but also from NGOs and universities. Besides the involvement of the political leadership, it is also significant to involve administration in policy making. For example in the region of Kronoberg, the new policy was developed after a comprehensive review process within the administration.

Organisation

Problems in coordinating policies and activities across administrative boundaries are well-known in municipalities and regions. How to organise human rights work is therefore also a challenge. The organisational issue is closely related to questions of mainstreaming and the involvement of political leadership and administration. In some municipalities, persons responsible for human rights share office space with specialists in housing planning, sustainability, and so on. Some of the participating municipalities and regions, for example the city of Stockholm, have set up specific units or departments responsible for human rights. Another organisational method has been to gather specialists in networks. Examples include the municipalities of Jönköping, Västerås and Örebro.

Education and knowledge

All participating municipalities and regions have worked with education and dissemination of knowledge as part of their involvement in the current SALAR project. Examples include workshops and lectures for central administration and politicians, workshops for staff, and the use of internet based material in disseminating knowledge about human rights. The participating municipalities and regions point out the central role of spreading the knowledge about human rights. Without such knowledge, in particular hands-on knowledge about human rights in specific sectors and for specific professions, such as teachers, social workers, nurses and other medical staff, the mainstreaming of human rights and sustainable effects will be hard to achieve.

Conclusions

A key dimension to human rights work is the extent to which human rights are being used to formulate the goals found in policies. This may seem self-evident but it is important to underline this dimension since previous evaluations of human rights work on local and regional levels of government have shown how civil servants, as well as politicians, often think that different perspectives conflict with each other. An important message from several of the participants in this project is that human rights, instead, allow for binding together different perspectives, such as sustainability and diversity.

Another key dimension to human rights work is the political will as well as the involvement of the administration. In order to improve the governance and management of local and regional authorities through human rights, the inclusion of human rights in budgets and in financial control systems is also important. So is mainstreaming and improving the

knowledge about human rights. Among the challenges identified, participants mentioned the short duration of the project and differences in levels of knowledge about human rights in different sectors. In addition, some participants face problems relating to the vulnerability within organisations caused by the fact that human rights work is carried out only by few key persons.

In conclusion, some success factors were identified:

- Human rights as framework for integrating several perspectives
- Political and administrative involvement in the work
- Integration of policy goals and financial control

Challenges that were identified were, among others:

- Organisational vulnerability due to key role played by specific persons
- Knowledge and awareness of human rights in general and rights-based approaches in everyday work in particular among staff and fellow workers

Human Rights in Governance and Management

How to integrate human rights into the governance and management of municipalities and regions? This has been a central question in a project organised between 2015 and 2016 by The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), involving 14 municipalities and counties (regions) in Sweden. This is a shortened version of the project report in which examples of how the participating municipalities and regions have worked with integration of human rights into governance and management are presented.

Read more about SALAR's work on human rights at www.skl.se/mr

This is an English edition of *Mänskliga rättigheter i styrning och ledning* (ISBN: 978-91-7585-534-9)

Information about the content:

Björn Kullander, bjorn.kullander@skl.se

Tyra Warfvinge, tyra.warfvinge@skl.se

© Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, 2017

Order No: 5453

Text: Mikael Spång

Order no: 5453

Download at webbutik.skl.se

Mail: 118 82 Stockholm | **Visit:** Hornsgatan 20

Phone: 08-452 70 00 | www.skl.se