



Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in Sweden

INTRODUCTION

The legal systems in Sweden and other Nordic countries are very similar, providing a comprehensive system of subsidized legal services. As a result, there has historically been little need for lawyers to provide free legal services in Sweden. However, funding cuts within the state welfare system in recent years have created greater need for legal services among the poor, leading to the emergence of new bar- and ngo-sponsored pro bono programs and the slow development of pro bono legal culture in Sweden.

OVERVIEW OF THE LEGAL SYSTEM

The Justice System

The Constitution and Governing Laws

The Swedish Constitution is comprised of four fundamental laws: the Instrument of Government, the Act of Succession, the Freedom of the Press Act and the Fundamental Law of Freedom of Expression.¹ Judicial review is guaranteed by a constitutional provision under Article 11 of the Swedish Constitution.

In Sweden, the most important sources of law are statutes, which are divided into acts, ordinances and regulations. Case law also plays an important role in the application of Swedish law throughout the court system.² The Ministry of Justice is primarily concerned with legislation concerning the judiciary, whereas the National Courts Administration (*Domstolsverket*) is responsible for the actual day-to-day administration of the courts.³

Under the Swedish Code of Judicial Procedure (*Rättegångsbalken*), a lawyer is required to perform any assignment with professionalism and due care and in general to act honestly and in accordance with the rules governing good professional conduct (*Vägledande regler om god advokatsed*; hereinafter the “**Rules of Professional Conduct**” or the “**Rules**”). The Rules of Professional Conduct are a codification of the practices established by the Board of the Swedish Bar Association (*Sveriges Advokatsamfund*) and the precedents of the Bar Association’s disciplinary committees (*Advokatsamfundets disciplinnämnd*). The goal of the Rules is to promote a “free and independent legal profession” as part of a “society governed by the rule of law . . . for the protection of individual freedoms and rights.”⁴ Although the Rules were originally intended to protect the public from unqualified and dishonest attorneys, over time they have become very important guides for practicing attorneys. Compensation to attorneys in Sweden is regulated by law and by the Rules of Professional Conduct. Under Section 4 of the Rules, the fee charged by an attorney “must be reasonable” for the work performed.⁵ The reasonableness of the fee is determined by the amount and quality of the work required and the attorney’s expertise, as well as the difficulty of the assignment and the type of claim involved. The main purpose of Section 4 is to avoid overcharging a client, not to prevent attorneys from working for free by providing pro bono services.

¹ The Swedish System of Government, available at <https://sweden.se/society/the-swedish-system-of-government/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

² European Judicial Network, “Legal order – Sweden”, available at http://ec.europa.eu/civiljustice/legal_order/legal_order_swe_en.htm (last visited on September 4, 2015).

³ Government Offices of Sweden, “Ministry of Justice”, available at <http://www.government.se/government-of-sweden/ministry-of-justice/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

⁴ Code of Professional Conduct for Members of the Swedish Bar Association, § 1 (2008), available at http://www.advokatsamfundet.se/Documents/Advokatsamfundet_eng/Code_of_Professional_Conduct_with_Commentary.pdf (last visited on September 4, 2015).

⁵ Id. at § 4.



The Swedish Bar Association (together with all of the national Bars and law societies of the European Union (the “EU”) and the European Economic Area) is also a member of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (the “CCBE”). The CCBE adopted the European Code of Conduct in 1988, which was last amended in 2006 and is applicable to all cross-border activities of lawyers in the EU and European Economic Area.⁶ According to the European Code of Conduct, a lawyer shall not enter into a *pactum de quota litis*, an arrangement in which the lawyer’s fee is a share of whatever is to be recovered.⁷ Consequently, payments for legal services rendered pursuant to *de quota litis* and “no cure no pay” or contingency fee arrangements are prohibited in the cross-border activities of Swedish attorneys, except for special cause.⁸

The Courts

Sweden has a dual court system, comprised of the general courts and administrative courts. The general courts are courts of general jurisdiction that preside over civil and criminal disputes between private parties. They are composed of three tiers: 48 district courts (*tingsrätt*), six courts of appeal (*hovrätt*), and the Supreme Court (*Högsta Domstolen*).⁹ The general administrative courts preside over issues between individuals and the State. This administrative system also has three levels: 12 administrative courts, four administrative courts of appeal, and the Supreme Administrative Court (*Högsta förvaltningsdomstolen*).¹⁰ In addition, there are several specialized tribunals in Sweden, such as the Market Court, Labor Court and Court of Patent Appeals.¹¹

Under Chapter 11 of the Swedish Constitution, members of the Supreme Court or Supreme Administrative Court must be appointed only if that person has been appointed as a permanent justice of that court.¹² In addition, only a Swedish citizen may hold or exercise the functions of a judicial office.

The Practice of Law

Any person may practice law in Sweden, but only members of the Swedish Bar Association (the “Bar”) are entitled to use the professional title of advocate (*advokat*). There are approximately 5,000 advocates registered with the Bar Association as of December, 2011,¹³ which is roughly 50 advocates per 100,000

⁶ SWEDISH BAR ASSOCIATION, available at <http://www.advokatsamfundet.se/Advokatsamfundet-engelska/Rules-and-regulations/Code-of-Conduct/> (last visited on September 4, 2015) see also Code of Conduct for Lawyers in the European Union, Introduction, available at http://www.ccbe.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/NTCdocument/EN_Code_of_conductp1_1306748215.pdf (last visited on September 4, 2015).

⁷ Code of Conduct for Lawyers in the European Union, § 3.3.

⁸ See, e.g., *id.*; Rules of Professional Conduct, § 4.2. Special cause includes situations where an advocate represents the interests of a collective action, is engaged in a cross-border mandate that requires handling outside of Sweden, or when a client without a quota agreement finds it difficult to get access to justice. See commentary to Rule 4.2.

⁹ See SVERIGES DOMSTOLAR, Courts of Sweden (Feb. 18, 2014), available at <http://www.domstol.se/Om-Sveriges-Domstolar/Domstolarna/> (last visited on September 4, 2015); Court Statistics 2014: Official Statistics of Sweden, Domstolsverket (2014), available at http://www.domstol.se/Publikationer/Statistik/domstolsstatistik_2014.pdf (last visited on September 4, 2015).

¹⁰ *Id.* at 19.

¹¹ SVERIGES DOMSTOLAR, *supra* n.9.

¹² Sweden – Constitution, available at http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/sw00000_.html (last visited on September 4, 2015).

¹³ Available at <http://www.advokatsamfundet.se/Pressrum/Fakta-om-Advokatsamfundet/> (last visited on September 4, 2015); see also CCBE, CCBE Lawyers’ Statistics (2010), available at http://www.ccbe.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/NTCdocument/2010_table_of_lawyer1_1337839511.pdf (last visited on September 4, 2015).



residents of Sweden.¹⁴ In order to ensure the professional independence of Swedish lawyers, in-house counsel are not permitted to join the Bar, nor may members of the Bar be employed by someone outside the Bar or form a company with a non-member. More than half of Bar members are engaged in business law as a main practice area, less than 40% are engaged in criminal law practice, and the number specializing in family law is increasingly sparse.¹⁵ Approximately 25% of Bar members are women.¹⁶ In addition, approximately 1,900 associates not yet members of the Bar are employed in law firms.¹⁷ The two largest law firms in Sweden employ over 300 lawyers each.¹⁸

LEGAL RESOURCES FOR INDIGENT PERSONS AND ENTITIES

The Right to Legal Assistance

It is a fundamental right in Sweden to have one's case heard by a legal representative, either in or outside of court.¹⁹ Legal aid is a type of social legislation that aims to help those who cannot afford legal support through other avenues.²⁰ For civil matters in Sweden, there are two types of legal assistance available: legal advice and legal aid. Both types of assistance are provided by the State and are regulated by the Legal Aid Authority (*Rättshjälpsmyndigheten*) under the Legal Aid Act of 1996 (*Rättshjälpslagen*; hereinafter, the "**Act**").²¹

Up to two hours of legal advice is available to everyone in all legal matters and is subject to a set hourly fee.²² The fee may be reduced if the person seeking the advice has insufficient resources or is a minor. In such cases, the State funds the balance of the advocate's fee. Advice is typically sought regarding the rules applicable to marriage or other forms of cohabitation; statutory rules in connection with divorce; inheritance and testamentary issues; and tenancy issues. While such advice is usually provided by lawyers at firms, the Act does not require such advocates to provide these services nor does it limit which advocates may provide these services.

State-Subsidized Legal Aid

Eligibility Criteria

Legal aid is available only to natural persons or the estates of deceased individuals and can be granted in most legal matters, except where a Public Defense Counsel, Public Counsel, or Counsel for injured

¹⁴ Available at http://www.advokatsamfundet.se/Documents/Advokaten/Advokaten_9_08_lag.pdf (last visited on September 4, 2015).

¹⁵ STOCKHOLM INSTITUTE FOR SCANDINAVIAN LAW, *The Swedish Bar Association*, 326 (2004), available at <http://www.scandinavianlaw.se/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

¹⁶ Available at <http://www.advokatsamfundet.se/Pressrum/Fakta-om-Advokatsamfundet/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

¹⁷ Id.

¹⁸ STOCKHOLM INSTITUTE FOR SCANDINAVIAN LAW, *supra* n.15.

¹⁹ SVERIGES DOMSTOLAR, *Legal Aid in Sweden*, available at http://www.domstol.se/publikationer/informationsmaterial/legal_aid_in_sweden.pdf (last visited on September 4, 2015).

²⁰ See id.

²¹ The Swedish Constitution provides that foreign nationals sojourning in Sweden have the same rights as Swedish nationals to obtain legal aid. See Instrument of Government, ch. 2, art. 22.

²² EUROPEAN JUDICIAL NETWORK, *Legal aid – Sweden*, available at http://ec.europa.eu/civiljustice/legal_aid/legal_aid_swe_en.htm (last visited on September 4, 2015).



parties may be appointed.²³ In these latter cases, the legal representation is free to eligible individuals and therefore, the recipient is not entitled to legal aid.

In order for legal aid to be granted, the Legal Aid Authority, or the court hearing the dispute, must find it reasonable for the State to contribute towards the cost of legal representation. Eligibility requirements state that an applicant may not have an income exceeding approximately €29,000 per year, may not be covered by an insurance policy that covers legal representation, must have received at least one hour of legal advice from an attorney or trained lawyer, and the amount in controversy must be more than a threshold amount.²⁴ In general, the recipient is expected to contribute to the cost of his or her legal representation to the extent he or she can afford to pay, and legal aid is only available for the cost of representation up to 100 hours, except in special cases.²⁵ Once it grants an applicant's request for aid, the Legal Aid Authority has no control over subsequent proceedings, and it cannot recover any money from property retrieved in those proceedings, even where the victorious party was the recipient of legal aid funds.

Other Forms of Legal Aid

In addition to the assistance available for civil matters, other sources of legal assistance available from the State include public defense counsel, public counsel, special representatives for children and assistance for victims of crime. As in most EU member states, Public Defense Counsel is appointed by a court and must be made available at no charge if a person is suspected of committing a serious criminal offense. Conversely, Public Defense Counsel is not typically provided for less serious offenses. If the accused is acquitted of such crimes, he or she need not repay the State for the Public Defense Counsel's services but, if sentenced for the offense, may be responsible to pay all or part of the State's costs as determined by a court.²⁶

Assistance by Public Counsel is a factor in cases involving administrative courts or authorities. Under the Act Regarding Public Counsel (*Lag om offentligt biträde*), these attorneys are appointed by the agency administering the matter and paid for by the State.²⁷

The Aggrieved Party Counsel (*Målsägandebitråde*) protects the interests of victims of crime. Its task is to provide support and assistance, which may include help in establishing the victim's claim for damages related to a criminal case.²⁸ According to the Act on Aggrieved Party Counsel (*Lag om Målsägandebitråde*), these state-funded legal services are provided for victims of sexual offenses; assault; unlawful deprivation of liberty; robbery; or other offenses under the Penal Code (*Brottsbalken*) for which imprisonment may be imposed.

The Swedish Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority (*Brottsoffermyndigheten*) has an overall goal of looking after the rights of all victims of crime and drawing public attention to their needs and interests. The authority is nationally responsible for three areas of activities: dealing with matters

²³ See id.

²⁴ LEGAL AID IN SWEDEN, available at http://www.domstol.se/Publikationer/Informationsmaterial/Legal_aid_in_Sweden.pdf (last visited on September 4, 2015). This amount was roughly €2,665 in 2015.

²⁵ SVERIGES DOMSTOLAR, Legal aid, available at <http://www.domstol.se/Funktioner/English/Legal-assistance/Legal-aid/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

²⁶ SVERIGES DOMSTOLAR, Defence advokat, available at <http://www.domstol.se/Funktioner/English/Legal-assistance/If-you-need-advice/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

²⁷ SVERIGES DOMSTOLAR, Myndighetsbeslut, available at <http://www.domstol.se/Myndighetsbeslut/Sa-avgors-mal-i-forvaltningsratten/Offentligt-bitrade/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

²⁸ SVERIGES DOMSTOLAR, To the aggrieved party (victim of crime), available at <http://www.domstol.se/Funktioner/English/Legal-proceedings/To-the-victim-of-crime/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).



concerning criminal injuries compensation, administering the Crime Victims Fund and serving as a Centre of Competence for matters regarding victims of crime issues.²⁹

In cases where a guardian, or someone with whom the guardian has a close relationship, is suspected of an offense against a child, a Guardian ad Litem may be appointed by the court to protect the child's interests during the preliminary investigation and court proceedings.³⁰ In accordance with the Act Regarding a Guardian ad Litem for a Child (*Lag om särskild företrädare för barn*) an attorney acting as *Guardian ad Litem* is paid by the State, and the protected child does not bear any of the costs associated with the attorney's assistance.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

The Swedish government has established various Ombudsman offices where individuals can bring complaints against both private companies and state agencies. As with other government agencies, each Ombudsman office is independent and usually established to ensure compliance with specific laws or a general legal practice area.³¹ For example, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman (*Jämställdhetsombudsmannen*) was established to ensure compliance with the Equal Opportunities Act (*Jämställdhetslagen*). In January 2009 the Equality Ombudsman (*Diskrimineringsombudsmannen*) was formed by four previously separate ombudsmen: the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination, the Ombudsman against Discrimination on grounds of Sexual Orientation and the Disability Ombudsman. The Children's Ombudsman (*Barnombudsmannen*) was established to monitor Sweden's implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and to protect children's rights in general. The Ombudsman institution has also been adopted by some nongovernmental organizations such as the Tenants' Association, where an aggrieved party may resolve its complaint against a landlord.

In addition to the various Ombudsman offices, the Swedish government has also established the National Board for Consumer Disputes (*Allmänna reklamationsnämnden*), which is empowered to settle disputes between consumers and vendors free of charge.³² This agency is divided into 13 different departments that hear disputes, including those arising from travel, purchases of household appliances and services provided by banks and financial institutions, where the dispute exceeds certain value thresholds.³³ The agency does not have the authority of a court, but its nonbinding recommendations are usually followed. This dispute remedy is an inexpensive option for aggrieved consumers. The agency's recommendations are considered important guidelines for vendors in their business conduct, and the agency also provides guidance to the courts as they interpret consumer protection laws.

PRO BONO ASSISTANCE

Pro Bono Opportunities

Private Attorneys

Lawyers in Sweden are not required by law to perform pro bono work and there are no explicit legal restrictions of a lawyer's practice of pro bono work. In 1998, a group of Swedish lawyers founded the non-profit organization Lawyers Without Borders (*Advokater utan Gränser*), which administers several human

²⁹ BROTTSOFFERMYNDIGHETEN, Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority, About us, available at <http://www.brottsoffermyndigheten.se/eng/about-us> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

³⁰ SVERIGES DOMSTOLAR, *supra* n.29.

³¹ RIKSDAGENS OMBUDSMAN, The Ombudsmen, available at <http://www.jo.se/en/About-JO/The-Ombudsmen/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

³² THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR CONSUMER DISPUTES, (ARN) available at <http://www.arn.se/other-languages/english-what-is-arn/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

³³ See *id.*



rights projects all around the world. The organization is composed of over 300 lawyers with different backgrounds, but many are from large law firms.

Law Firm Pro Bono Programs

Recently, certain commercial law firms have begun to provide pro bono legal aid. This kind of pro bono work is influenced by the practice in the United States and is typically comprised of advice relating to corporate law, intellectual property, contracts or tax law.

For example, some large firms support charitable organizations, such as Doctors Without Borders (*Médecins Sans Frontières*), UNICEF, MinaStoraDag and SOS Children's Villages, by providing free legal services and legal counseling directly to the organizations. By providing free legal services, Swedish attorneys enable charitable organizations to utilize their donations more efficiently for humanitarian efforts. In the same manner, law firms have acted as sponsors for national sports committees or for cultural events. Large law firms have also provided pro bono services directly to individuals by partnering with organizations like the Center for Justice (*Centrum för Rättvisa*), a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to protect individuals' human rights in Sweden, or the United Nations to further efforts related to international human rights.

Recent developments with respect to pro bono in Sweden might also have been encouraged as a result of the engagement of lawyers in Sweden's largest pro bono project: a cooperation of lawyers offering legal aid for the victims of the Tsunami catastrophe in 2004 in Southeast Asia that affected Sweden very strongly. Immediately after the alarming dimensions of the catastrophe became publicly known (543 Swedish citizens died or were missing), the Swedish Bar Association decided to start a legal aid project to help the disaster victims and their families. Law firms of all sizes participated in the project and spent over 22,400 hours free of charge working on cases from various fields of law, such as foundation law; corporate law; family and estate law; and, to a great extent, insurance law. The massive pro bono effort received much attention from the Swedish media and public and showed that despite a limited history of pro bono service, lawyers in Sweden are willing to provide their legal expertise free of charge.

Historic Development and Current State of Pro Bono

Historic Development

With a comprehensive system of subsidized legal services in place, there has historically been little need for lawyers to provide free legal services in Sweden. Consequently, there is no long standing tradition of pro bono services provided by commercial law firms and no legal restrictions on a lawyer's ability to provide such services.

In 1998, in response to sweeping reforms, including cutbacks to the State's legal aid system, the Swedish Bar Association initiated the so-called "lawyers jour" or Advokatjouren program, in which a person is afforded a 15 minute meeting with a local lawyer. In this meeting, the lawyer identifies the legal issue and provides guidance on how to proceed.³⁴ This service is free of charge and is intended to provide those who are ineligible for legal aid with an opportunity to discuss his or her matter with a lawyer. While the individual is able to discuss his or her matter, no legal advice is given during these meetings – only guidance on whether a legal issue exists and how the person should proceed. The program makes free advice available to individuals who otherwise would not seek help, but it also gives attorneys an opportunity to offer their services. The participation in Advokatjouren is voluntary for the lawyers. Although many practicing attorneys greeted the program with enthusiasm, participating lawyers were primarily from smaller law firms specializing in family law or related fields. Large commercial law firms have rarely made their attorneys available to this program.³⁵

³⁴ SWEDISH BAR ASSOCIATION, available at <https://www.advokatsamfundet.se/Behover-du-advokat/Advokatjouren/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

³⁵ See Advokaten 2012-3, Advokater i det godas tjänst, available at <https://www.advokatsamfundet.se/Advokaten/Tidningsnummer/2012/Nr-3-2012-Argang-78/Advokater-i-det->



Current State

Pro bono work is gaining ground in Sweden though, even among the larger commercial law firms. However, in Sweden, pro bono work is more of a matter of socio-political commitment and image building than benevolence in the form of legal aid. Hence, it is more common for Swedish law firms to provide services to the community in other ways. For example, some law firms help children with reading and studying, and some provide scholarships for talented students from immigrant families in order to promote more diversity in the field of law. Others provide education and training sessions or allow non-profit organizations to borrow office space free of charge for holding meetings, classes or conferences.³⁶

Laws and Regulations Impacting Pro Bono

In general, there are no obstacles to foreign-qualified lawyers practicing in Sweden without being established as an advocate under the Swedish system. Foreign-qualified lawyers are, however, prohibited from representing a party in a Swedish court until he or she passes an examination in order to demonstrate sufficient knowledge of the legal system.³⁷ As such, foreign-qualified lawyers may be limited in their provision of legal aid and pro bono services until such qualification is met.

Barriers To Pro Bono Work And Other Considerations

Due to Sweden's well-developed, broad system of public welfare services, including State-funded legal advice and representation, Ombudsman offices and other services, organized pro bono activities by private legal professionals in the past have been limited. However, there is an ongoing internationalization of the legal culture in Europe, and American culture with a long tradition of pro bono activities is a strong influence in this development. The EU institutions also contribute to the development, especially in matters relating to human rights. Philanthropy and charity are being re-established in Sweden, and the need for and interest in pro bono services by Swedish advocates has increased and the availability of organized pro bono opportunities is slowly growing.³⁸

A major impediment to the growth of pro bono services is the lack of a systematized pro bono clearinghouse in Sweden to facilitate pro bono relationships. Instead, advocates and law firms engage in pro bono activities on a case-by-case basis, typically either when contacted directly by individuals needing assistance or by partnering with a non-profit organization for discrete or long-term projects.

In addition, although large law firms are increasingly more supportive of pro bono activity by their attorneys, an attorney engaged in providing pro bono legal services is generally not credited for such an engagement because the billing demands for that individual are not reduced. Thus, advocates who desire to offer pro bono services must take on these opportunities in addition to their typical workload.

Pro Bono Resources

- Advokatjouren program. Further details on the program are available at the Bar Association's website: <http://www.advokatsamfundet.se/Behover-du-advokat/Advokatjouren/> (last visited on September 4, 2015)
- Lawyers Without Borders: Advokater utan Gränser. Further information, including reports on current projects, is available on the organization's website: <http://www.advokaterutangranser.se/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).
- Center for Justice: Centrum for rattvisa. Additional information is available on the organization's website: <http://www.centrumforrattvisa.se/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

[godas-tjanst/](http://www.godas-tjanst.se/) (last visited on September 4, 2015); InfoTorg Juridik, Mitt i juridiken (February 24, 2014) available at <http://www.infotorgjuridik.se/premium/mittijuridiken/article201971.ece> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

³⁶ MANNHEIMER SWARTLING, Pro Bono, available at <http://www.mannheimer.eu/en/expertise/mannheimer-swartling-and-sustainability/pro-bono/> (last visited on September 4, 2015).

³⁷ European Judicial Network, "European Judicial Network", available at http://ec.europa.eu/civiljustice/legal_prof/legal_prof_swe_en.htm (last visited on September 4, 2015).

³⁸ See Advokaten 2012-3: Fokus Pro Bono på svenska, 26, available at <http://www.advokatsamfundet.se/Advokaten/Tidningsnummer/2012/Nr-3-2012-Argang-78/Juridifiering-och-filantropi-starker-svag-pro-bono> (last visited on September 4, 2015).



CONCLUSION

In Sweden, legal advice and legal aid are largely provided by the State to its citizens as part of Sweden's entrenched and comprehensive social welfare system. However, funding cuts to the welfare system over the last two decades suggest a gap between the supply and demand for pro bono legal services that programs such as Advokatjouren, Advokater utan Gränser and the Centrum för Rättvisa have attempted to fill this gap. While attorneys at large firms have generally provided outreach and assistance to the community through non-legal avenues, there is evidence that a pro bono legal service culture in Sweden is slowly developing.

Contributing to this trend is a phenomenon wherein more Swedish law firms are discovering that pro bono services are not only matters of humanity and responsibility but might also have positive effects on their public reputation. Some law firms have already established ongoing relationships with pro bono or non-profit organizations for the purpose of providing legal services in underserved areas.

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