

**A must-read for your first year
as an international professional**



Working **in Sweden**

The A-Z Guide



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Introduction

This A–Z glossary has been written as a handy guide for anyone new to Swedish work-culture. It contains 250 essential concepts, events and insights, one for each working day of the year.

The aim of this book is to help you navigate your Swedish workplace by providing a snapshot of how the system works and what you need to know. From bureaucracy through to values, this is a practical guide to everyday professional life in Sweden and the Swedish psyche. It also covers important aspects of business planning, communication and work practices.

Based on personal experience of working in Sweden as a foreigner and reflections from a wide range of international professionals who have relocated here, the guide highlights the aspects of working life which delighted, surprised or took some time to get used to. Some cultural differences and adjustments can be difficult to pinpoint at first and can take even longer to fully comprehend. This book helps to fast-forward your acclimatisation process.

The guide uses a mixture of English and Swedish words to explain important concepts and essential vocabulary that you will regularly come across while working in Sweden. It also covers Swedish words that sound like English but have a very different meaning in Sweden. Please note that Swedish words are written in italics.

Writing about national culture and work practises always requires a certain level of generalisation which may not always mirror your own experiences, but we hope you find these insights helpful.

Finally, legislation and practices change over time and although all information is up to date at the time of going to print (2018), we recommend you double check your rights and responsibilities with your employer, trade union or relevant public authority as applicable.

This is a first edition and a work in progress. If you feel something is missing and should be added to the guide, please don't hesitate to contact us with your suggestions at redaktion@lysforlag.com.

Typical meetings

<i>måndagsmöte</i>	Monday meeting
<i>veckomöte</i>	weekly meeting
<i>säljmöte</i>	sales meeting
<i>avstämningsmöte</i>	status update meeting
<i>projektmöte</i>	project meeting
<i>kundmöte</i>	customer meeting
<i>frukostmöte</i>	breakfast meeting
<i>lunchmöte</i>	lunch meeting
<i>promenadmöte</i>	walking meeting
<i>ledningsmöte</i>	management meeting
<i>arbetsplatsträff (APT)</i>	general meeting for all workplace staff
<i>krismöte</i>	crisis meeting
<i>uppstartsmöte</i>	start-up meeting
<i>joggingmöte</i>	jogging meeting
<i>videomöte</i>	video meeting
<i>fackmöte</i>	union meeting

the common perception is that summer has started. Expect a more relaxed attitude to work and business. See also ► *emails, halvdag, holidays (calendar)*

mil The Swedish *mil* (mile) is the equivalent of 10 kilometres. Distances are often described this way. Beware: a 600 km journey, for example, is described as 60 *mil*. If you use a car for work and report your mileage,

this is normally done in *mil*. See also ► conversation topics

miljöbov ‘Environment bandit’; considered to be something very negative. Regional versions include *miljösvin* (environment swine). Someone who doesn’t have ecological sustainability in mind. Can apply to corporations as well as individuals. See also ► environment, recycling, *pant*

milk Be careful which carton you choose as they all look similar. These types of milk are suitable to put in your coffee or tea:

<i>mjölk/standardmjölk</i>	(3% fat)
<i>mellannmjölk</i>	(1.5% fat)
<i>lättmjölk</i>	(0.5% fat)
<i>minimjölk</i>	(0.1% fat)
<i>laktosfri mjölk</i>	(lactose free)

This type of milk is not suitable for pouring into your coffee or tea:

filmjölk

Filmjölk, or *fil*, is a fermented milk product, with a consistency between milk and yoghurt, slightly grainy in texture, and tangy in flavour. Popularly consumed with cereal for ► breakfast, ► lunch or as a snack.

minimum wage There is no such thing as a minimum wage in Sweden. Salaries are negotiated locally according to a contract between the employer and the ► trade union, that is, ► *kollektivavtal*. See also ► unsocial working hours

N

names Everyone is addressed by their first name, and the informal pronoun *du* (singular you). In general, the use of names is kept to a minimum, and only a ► **greeting** is used. This applies also in written form. ► Titles are rarely referred to and may even be ridiculed if stated. See also ► **emails, equality, hej**

national image Despite conviction that the ► **Swedish way** (the) is the best, it is often very difficult for a Swede to grasp that anyone would voluntarily relocate here. See also ► **cold weather**

nature If the French have the Champs-Élysée, the Triumphal Arch, the Eiffel Tower, and Egypt the Pyramids and the Sphinx, Sweden has a narrow path in the forest, scented of conifers and leading up to a small and deep lake with silky black water. If an excuse can be found, your whole office will readily relocate — on a temporary or permanent basis — to such a location, where the air is fresher, reality more real, and life more alive. Mosquito bites, or the lack of sanitary facilities, pubs and restaurants may all be off-putting, but don't despair, there will still be excellent and free Wi-Fi. See also ► **environment, personal space, walking**

negotiation Swedes have a strong preference for calm and factual negotiations, where ► **compromise** is the ultimate goal. Threats, blackmail or unclear messages will halt or end the negotiation process. At the same time, Swedes tend to be direct rather than diplomatic and focus on business goals rather than relationships. See also ► **pros and cons**

nja A hybrid between *nej* and *ja*, 'no' and 'yes', *nja* is an indirect (read,

polite) way of saying ► no. See also ► *absolut*

no There are many ways of saying no in Swedish. *Nej* is sometimes regarded as too direct. Generally speaking, anything other than a resounding or enthusiastic yes, (e.g. *ja absolut*) can be treated as a probable no. See also ► confrontation/conflict, feedback & criticism

How to say no in Swedish

Swedish	direct translation	meaning
<i>nja</i>	no-yes	no
<i>ja</i>	yes	no
<i>kanske</i>	maybe	no
<i>jag vet inte</i>	I don't know	no
<i>jag ska tänka på det</i>	I will think about it	no

närståendepenning Should someone close to you (who is registered with ► *Försäkringskassan*) fall ill with a life-threatening condition, you can take leave from work to provide care and receive 80% of your income, paid by ► *Försäkringskassan*, for a maximum of 100 days (Note: the usual income ceilings apply). You will need a doctor's certificate to claim this benefit.

O

office duties Depending on the size of your company, you might be allocated responsibility for certain practical matters in the office. For example, you might be put in charge of the coffee machines,

airing the radiators, receiving deliveries or watering the plants. Any such duties should be taken as seriously as your 'real' work tasks, but not prioritised when there is a ► deadline coming up. See also ► equality, kitchen

Oj! The Swedish equivalent of 'Oops!' and used instead of an apology. See also ► politeness

orka An auxiliary verb with no English equivalent, meaning to have the energy or (physical or mental) strength for something. A negation — *orkar inte* — is most often used as a euphemism for not feeling like doing something and is met with disdain. A newer use as an interjection, *Orka!* is ironic, saying you don't have the energy, strength or will to do something. See also ► *hinna*, stairs, walking

osvensk *Osvensk* ('un-Swedish') is an adjective used to describe behaviour that some people believe is not typical in Sweden, such as spontaneity, generosity, and imaginative solutions. Crucially, it is meant as a really good compliment. Not to be confused with 'this is not how we do it in Sweden', which is the response usually reserved for anything dangerous, illegal or risky. See also ► self-awareness (cultural), small-talk, Swedish way (the)

overtime It is relatively uncommon to be financially compensated for working overtime. Instead, you are encouraged to trade overtime worked for time in lieu, at some other later stage. For example, If you work 42 hours one week when your contract stipulates 40 hours, you should work only 38 hours the next. You are unlikely to impress anyone by staying late in the office on a regular basis. See also ► deadlines, excellence, *flextid*, planning, working hours

P

pant Also exists as a verb, *panta*, and refers specifically to the ► recycling of bottles and cans, for which you are reimbursed a small sum. There will probably be a container in your office kitchen designated for this purpose. Please use it or you will be regarded as a ► *miljöbov*. See also ► environment, kitchen

parental leave For each child, there is a pot of 480 days parental leave. For 390 of these days, you are entitled to 80% of your salary. For the remaining 90 days you will receive 180 SEK per day. 90 days are reserved for each parent (or caregiver), and the remaining 300 days can be distributed between both parents/caregivers as you see fit. Two parents/caregivers can take a maximum of 30 days parental leave at the same time. Different systems apply for multiple births (twins, triplets).

You need to inform your employer at least two months in advance if you intend to take parental leave. You are entitled to take all your parental leave in one go or to divide it up into a maximum of three different periods of leave per year. Any alternative arrangements must be negotiated and approved by your manager.

You and your partner should bear in mind that your reduced income during parental leave will also affect your pension. See also ► childcare, *Försäkringskassan*, pregnancy, *VAB*

part time Dependent on your sector, part-time jobs can be more or less common and are usually agreed upon as part of your employment contract.

U

unemployment insurance Unemployment allowance (*arbetslöshetskassa, a-kassa*) doesn't come automatically from the state if you become unemployed. You need to actively sign up for unemployment insurance while you are working and pay a small monthly fee. This can be effectively combined with an income insurance too. Both of these insurances are typically administered through ► trade unions.

unsocial working hours Additional pay during evenings, weekends and public holidays, *OB-tillägg*, is offered through most — but not all ► *kollektivavtal*. See also ► minimum wage

utvecklingssamtal This is the closest Swedish equivalent of a performance review and is also known as a *medarbetarsamtal* (literally translated as a development or co-worker chat). Your ► *kollektivavtal* or employment contract states how often this should take place, normally on an annual basis. It covers not just your performance, but also work environment issues and any training (► *fortbildning*) needs. The main focus will be on what will happen during the coming year. You can't combine your *utvecklingssamtal* and *lönesamtal* (salary discussion). In short, your salary discussion will focus on what you have done, and your *utvecklingssamtal* on what you will do. See also ► competition (between colleagues), excellence, salary

V

VAB Stands for *vård av barn* (care of [sick] child) and refers to when you stay at home to take care of your child who is not well enough to attend day care or school (valid until your child's 12th birthday).

In contrast to ► sick leave, there is no ► *karensdag*, but you will be compensated with 80% of your salary (Note: ceilings apply) for the full time you are away from work. You can be off work on VAB for a maximum of 120 days per child every year, given they are sick for that period of time.

Legally speaking, you are not allowed to work during the time you claim VAB, as that would mean ► *Försäkringskassan* (the state) would pay for your work. If your child is asleep all day, you may consider ► working from home, but not claiming VAB.

VAB also functions as a verb: *vabba*.

vabruari According to ► *Försäkringskassan*, February is the month where parents claim the most days of ► VAB for their sick children, hence the portmanteau. In general, not only children but also adults tend to be ill this part of the year. Allow for margins if you have deadlines coming up this month. See also ► blowing your nose, *karensdag*, sick

valborg Walpurgis night on the 30th of April marks the beginning of spring. People gather at designated parks in town centres around 8 pm to listen to an outdoor choir and watch a bonfire and sometimes fireworks. This is often preceded by a dinner for family and friends and followed by heavy drinking.

As the following day, May Day, is a public holiday many take the opportunity to take a ► *halvdag* on *valborg*. Conspiracy theories claim Walpurgis night has been instigated to decrease energy levels for the May Day marches. See also ► holidays (calendar), seasons

About the authors

Anne Pihl

Originally from Ireland, Anne moved to Stockholm with her Swedish husband and newborn daughter in 1998. Having previously worked in England, Ireland & Germany, the plan was to try out Scandinavian living. She has never looked back.



Anne uses her personal experience and insights from two decades in Sweden in her role as a professional relocation consultant and workshop facilitator, mentoring clients on living & working in Sweden. Her company, **Relocate to Sweden**, helps newcomers get off to a great start by providing guidance through the Swedish system and taking care of all the practicalities of relocating.

Read more about Anne at www.relocatetosweden.com

Sofi Tegsveden Deveaux

Swedish by origin, Sofi moved to Scotland at the age of 19, where she lived, studied and worked, until she relocated to her native country seven years later. Since 2008, Sofi teaches Swedish language and culture to international professionals in Sweden and is a popular public speaker on the topic. On a personal level, she is involved in the cultural adaptation process, as her husband is French.



Sofi is the co-founder of **Bee Swedish**, a Stockholm-based company specialising in Swedishness, and **PYS validering**, with specialisation in medical Swedish and validation of Swedish language skills.

Read more about Sofi at www.beeswedish.com

250 essential Swedish concepts, events and insights, one for each working day of the year.

Are you new in Sweden or considering moving to this Nordic country? This practical guide is designed to help you smoothly navigate working life in Sweden. It is the book that has been missing to help bridge the cultural and language divide, explaining what you need to know and what you can expect at Swedish workplaces.

- Boost your professional confidence by familiarising yourself with Swedish business & social etiquette.
- Learn about Swedish holidays and traditions and the impact they have on the business calendar.
- Discover the underlying values which shape Swedish society and form the basis of unwritten codes and communication.
- Fast forward your adaptation to your new working environment by learning about local habits.
- Know your rights and responsibilities as an employee and learn what organisations and public authorities can assist you.

In a simple A–Z format, this handbook is essential reading for your first year in Sweden.

Anne Pihl, originally from Ireland, moved to Sweden in 1998 and now works as a relocation consultant, helping expats to settle in their new culture. **Sofi Tegsveden Deveaux** is Swedish by origin and teaches Swedish and Swedishness to international professionals in Stockholm.



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