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**Agreement between the Swedish  
Government, national idea-based  
organisations in the social sphere  
and the Swedish Association of  
Local Authorities and Regions**

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# Agreement between the Swedish Government, national idea-based organisations in the social sphere and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions

## Summary introduction for the translated version

On 23 October 2008, the Swedish Government decided on an agreement between the Government, the idea-based organisations in the social sphere and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. A number of principles have been agreed upon to develop relationships and clarify the roles of the respective parties. The six principles provide guidance for a number of undertakings and measures by the respective party. These are to be continuously monitored.

The ministries behind this process of developing the agreement were the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality as well as The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. Led by the Government's representative, Peter Örn, a dialogue with the idea-based organisations in the social sphere has been going on for a year. One hundred national organisations have participated in the dialogue as well as the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions.

The most important goal of the dialogue process has been to confirm the independence and autonomy of the idea-based organisations and their unique role in Swedish society. Another goal has been to identify the obstacles to the ability of the idea-based organisations to develop their full potential and the extent to which the state could remove these obstacles. Other important issues have concerned how these organisations, at the same time as being producers and actors on a market, can continue to articulate interests and shape public opinion – not least for people who are facing social exclusion.

The dialogue process has been characterised by participation, transparency and trust. The whole agreement has been drafted jointly during an ongoing process of gaining acceptance for it at the idea-based organisations, the Government and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. The oppositional parties – the Social Democratic Party, the Green Party and the Left Party – have been kept informed during this process. These parties have given their support to the section A Common Vision and Common Principles. Public authorities and trade union organisations have also been kept continuously informed.

The Government decision of 23 October 2008 provided authorisation for three of the ministers from the ministries mentioned above to sign the agreement. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions and the organisations involved in the dialogue were then invited to accede to the agreement [www.regeringen.se/dialogi-deellsektor](http://www.regeringen.se/dialogi-deellsektor). The acceding organisations are jointly responsible for the monitoring process which consists of annually following up the action plan of the respective party, arranging an annual conference and carrying out an annual thematic study.

This agreement in the social sphere can serve as inspiration when idea-based organisations and local authorities wish to create local agreements. The Government intends to continue with dialogue processes with idea-based organisations which operate in other areas.

This version which has been translated into English does not include the whole agreement in detail. However, all parts are summarised. The central part – A Common vision and common principles – is presented in its entirety.

### **From the Government's preface**

There were a number of reasons for the Government's invitation to this initial dialogue: In the first place, representatives of the idea-based organisations in the social sphere have expressed a wish for this dialogue for a number of years. Secondly, the Government wishes to benefit from the knowledge and commitment of the idea-based organisations. These organisations play an important part in making it possible for people to exert an influence over their everyday situation and the wider society.

For a long time, idea-based commitment has not received the recognition that it deserves. Increased knowledge about the social economy during the 1990s and the endeavour to increase diversity and freedom of choice have contributed to making this commitment visible. Through this agreement, a further important step has been taken in recognising the rule of the voluntary and non-profit sector in Swedish society.

The work on further developing relations between the public sector and the idea-based organisations has thus started with the social sphere. This dialogue has produced experiences which can be used in contacts between the Government and idea-based organisations in other areas. The Government also intends to engage in a dialogue to reinforce the ability of the idea-based organisations to contribute to the introduction of those newly arrived in Sweden.

To administer and develop the agreement, the dialogue needs to be continuous and the entire agreement to be followed up. The Government has set aside funds for this purpose in the budget for 2009–2011. Following up the agreement will consist of efforts to gain acceptance for it and implementation of measures by the respective parties. The idea-based organisations, the Government and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions are jointly responsible for the annual follow-up of the action plans. The idea-based organisations are responsible for implementation of parts of the work that will be initiated by a joint working group.

### **From the preface of the idea-based organisations**

Those who are active as volunteers, in positions of trust and/or employees of idea-based organisations with a social focus see that what they do is of value for society and individuals. This value cannot be provided by any other actor in society. Its distinctive feature is that it provides an arena for people's needs to express their values in words and actions.

The action plan which we, the idea-based organisations, have agreed on is mainly addressed to society as a whole, not to the state. We envisage this plan as an expression of our common desire for development. At the same time, we, the organisations that sign this agreement, demand that political decision-makers at central and local government levels contribute to facilitating and encouraging idea-borne commitment, which can, of course, take place in collaboration with the public sector.

We, the idea-borne organisations with a social approach, have a great diversity of forms of organisation and approaches and views of society. We carry out our work in

different forms from the contributions of volunteers to highly-specialised hospital care. Our funding extends from personal gifts and our own resources to public grants and contracted commissions.

Our common core is that we have voluntarily come together around ideas and our basic values. The public benefit or the benefit of members is our foremost driving force. Any surpluses are reinvested in the activity and thus benefit society in this way. It is this choice that permits us to call ourselves idea-based. There are great benefits to society if the public sector supports this choice by the agreement.

## Introduction

### From the Government's starting-point

The Government's starting-point for the agreement is to recognise, make visible and reinforce the indispensable role of the idea-based organisations in Swedish society. The fundamental values are autonomy and independence of the organisations in their role of articulating interests both with regard to the public sector and the business sector.

The following section includes a report on the Government's intentions with respect to the voluntary and non-profit sector:

#### *The Government intends to*

- recognise the important role of the voluntary organisations with respect to democracy and social welfare. Hundreds of thousands of people take part in various voluntary activities every day and make indispensable contributions through their commitment and interest.
- empower people. Idea-based organisations contribute to providing people with knowledge, self-confidence and the strength to exert an influence on society and their own lives. They create paths of influence in a way that increases people's commitment at different levels of society.
- contribute to development of the social economy. It should be possible to develop the role of the idea-based organisations on similar conditions as those of other actors. In this way, the growth of a considerably greater diversity of providers and suppliers can be supported.
- shed light on the obstacles that exist to the development of the full potential of this sector and contribute to removing them. The dialogue between the Government and the idea-based organisations has identified a number of obstacles in various areas, which has also been confirmed by other current commissions of enquiry. These include a lack of knowledge about the role of the voluntary and non-profit sector in health- and medical care and social services, on incomplete official statistics, on deficiencies in the sphere of consultation between public and voluntary organisations and distortions in the terms of competition between public, commercial and idea-based actors in care and social service.
- develop welfare. Public funding of services produced by other actors is not a threat to the welfare state but a basic part of the functioning of society. The voluntary and nonprofit sector is a resource to develop welfare – not a potential opportunity for economy cuts.

### **The problem scenario of the idea-based organisations**

An important starting-point for the Government has been the problem scenario of the ideabased organisations. During the dialogue, the idea-based organisations have drawn attention to financial obstacles such as the liquidity requirements in EU projects and the ability of non-profit-making foundations to distribute the surplus to the entire voluntary and nonprofit sector without income tax consequences. The sector also points out structural barriers for voluntary work in, for example, the social insurance and unemployment benefit systems and also to the public sector's own organisation of volunteers as problems for ideabased organisations. The idea-based organisations also state that they have experienced problems relating to, for example, health insurance and labour market issues. More efficient co-operation between authorities and idea-based organisations and between public authorities would be desirable. The tax rules are not designed in the same way for all parts of the voluntary and non-profit sector – this is raised as another issue. The obstacles mentioned by the largest number of idea-based organisations participating in the dialogue are procurement procedures of different kinds – not least the application of the Public Procurement Act (1992:1528) – LOU.

The removal of obstacles assumes, for example, research and the development of knowledge of how business sector measures and central government development funds affect the voluntary and non-profit sector. This requires measures for information and provision of knowledge to the public, central and local government authorities about the voluntary and non-profit sector and its activities.

The Government intends to strengthen the ability of the idea-based organisations, which is expressed in the agreement. This aim is also reflected in a range of other measures on the part of the Government, for example, in terms of reference to commissions of enquiry, which continuously present proposals affecting the sector's ability to operate. All in all, these initiatives constitute a programme of reform for the social economy.

### **From the starting-point of the idea-based organisations**

The starting-point of the idea-based organisations for this agreement is to clarify their independent role in society, their wish to develop their distinctive character and their assignments – for their members and the population of Sweden or other countries with the ambition of working together with other players without reducing their own independence.

*The organisations wish to:*

- contribute to developing democracy and welfare – at the same time as the central and local government are responsible for welfare policy undertakings. They want to contribute to increasing the ability of citizens to participate and understand the democratic processes from the European to the national and local level.
- underline that the central and local government must be responsive in a structured and regular way to the non-profit organisations' experiences of welfare and its deficiencies as well as to actively obtain their knowledge and experience before statements and decisions.
- stress that the agreement requires the actual involvement of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions in all phases, but in particular with regard to the parts where municipalities, county councils and idea-based organisations have to work together to realise the vision, principle and undertakings in the document.

## **From the starting-point of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions**

Civil society is a force for democratic anchoring and vitalisation, for local and regional development and for the renewal of welfare. Interaction between the public sector and civil society is of key importance for development of society.

The idea-based organisations can be said to function as social meeting places where interaction and collaboration between people develop and democratic schooling takes place, which in turn provides a ground for a trusting relationship among human beings and a feeling of belonging to the local community.

The Swedish combination of well-based confidence in the institutions of society and a vigorous civil society has been and is a factor of success for social cohesion and economic development.

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions takes a positive view of the ongoing dialogue between the Government and civil society in the social sphere. In light of this, officials from the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions have participated in the dialogue at the invitation of the Government.

The dialogue and the view of the idea-borne sector expressed in the national agreement accords well with the development work of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, which aims at supporting municipalities, county councils and regions which wish to develop the collaboration between the public sector and civil society.

It is important that civil society is and remains an independent force in the life of the community which mobilises, activates, organises, challenges and debates but which also a geographical and social presence.

The national agreement can contribute to the growth of local and regional initiatives to dialogue and agreements, which take into consideration the shifting relationships in municipalities and county councils.

## **From a common starting-point**

This agreement formulates visions and principles for future interaction between the parties. The basis for the agreement is that it is the county councils and municipalities which bear the main responsibility for welfare. The parties find a common starting-point in the conviction that good interaction between the public sector and civil society is of key importance for a favourable development of society. The Swedish combination of well-based confidence in the institutions of society and a vigorous civil society has been and is a factor of success for social cohesion and economic development.

- The idea-based organisations contribute to developing democracy and welfare – at the same time as the central and local government are responsible for welfare policy undertakings.
- Idea-based organisations in the social sphere often carry out their activities alongside the public sector and often have common aims as the public sector.
- The voluntary and non-profit sector is accordingly a resource to develop welfare – not a potential for economy cuts.
- The agreement clarifies the role of voluntary players in the social sphere. Municipalities and county councils decide within the framework of current legislation whether and to what extent they wish to expose their activities to competition. This agreement enables the idea-based organisations to compete on equal terms with other actors active in this sphere.

The common principles have been drawn up taking into consideration the problems and obstacles that have been identified during the dialogue between the Government and the idea-based organisations. The proposed principles shall contribute to a long-term approach and predictability in the relations between the different players.

The principles provide guidance for a number of general undertakings from the parties which can be followed up by concrete measures from the Government, the idea-based organisations and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. These undertakings shall be regarded in this context as goals within the frameworks of the principles. Each party is responsible for its respective action plan, while the principles are jointly owned.

### **From a common undertaking**

This agreement rests on a common undertaking to make the agreement known nationally and locally, to work to support initiatives to agreements between parties at the local level and to systematically and continuously follow up the implementation of the agreement and develop its contents.

Idea-based organisations in the social sphere and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions are invited to accede to this agreement. Idea-based organisations in the social sphere are able to accede to the agreement at any time by signing it. The organisations which have acceded to the agreement will be included in the joint follow-up of the document.

The idea-based organisations in the social sphere which decide not to sign the agreement will still be covered by the undertakings and measures carried out by the Government. No distinction with respect to grants etc. will be made either between those who have signed and decided not to sign the agreement.

Monitoring and evaluation of the agreement shall take place continuously with regard to commitments, measures and resources to the voluntary and non-profit sector. These principles shall be followed up every fifth year. Similar work by the voluntary and non-profit sector in other countries shall also be monitored.

The goal is for the agreement to be a continuously developing document which inspires to further acknowledgement of the sector's competence and value as well as developing the prerequisites for the the idea-based organisations' ability to operate.

# A common vision and common principles

In the course of this work, the oppositional parties – the Social Democratic Party, the Green Party and the Left Party – have been informed about the dialogue and a discussion has taken place on the content of the agreement. In this way, the parties have had the opportunity to influence the writing of the common vision and the common principles. After this, these parties have declared that they support the section on the Common vision and common principles – broad political agreement has thus been achieved in this section. This acceptance has the strong support of the idea-based organisations.

## Methods of work

In the autumn of 2007, some ten dialogue meetings took place with representatives of about ten organisations at every meeting. From these dialogue meetings, the organisations themselves chose representatives from the meeting to participate in the Dialogue Group. This has in turn chosen a number of persons to participate in the Recommendation Group. The Recommendation Group has secured backing for its work in the Dialogue Group, which has gained acceptance for the formulations in the document through hearings. All organisations which participated in the first dialogue meetings were invited to these hearings. The Dialogue and Recommendation Group were formed for practical reasons to draft the agreement and to draw up the principles together with the Government's representative and officials from the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions.

## A common vision

The agreement is characterised by a strong conviction concerning the important role of the idea-borne organisations in the community – in the past, now and in the future.

Idea-based organisations constitute a prerequisite and an expression of every open, democratic and successful society. These organisations are an indispensable part of Swedish democracy and also contribute through international work to influencing conditions for people outside the borders of our country. The possibility of establishing and carrying out these activities is based on the fundamental rights and freedoms stated in the constitution: freedom of expression, freedom of information, freedom of assembly, freedom to demonstrate, freedom of assembly and freedom of worship.

Active defence of human value and tolerance is a common responsibility. The idea-based organisations which stem from democratic values are based on respect for the equal worth of human beings. Human commitment and willingness to make a voluntary contribution are put to good use in the voluntary and non-profit sector.

The idea-based organisations should be listened to and their services be in demand since they together serve as a strong and dynamic voice in the community.

The community wishes to make use of the strength that exists in the idea-based organisations. The prerequisites for many different players should be established and the role of these organisations as giving voice to interest and moulders of opinion should be encouraged. The possibilities of engaging in idea-based activity in care and social services should be developed.

A keystone of democracy is the trust in the willingness of human beings to contribute to the development of the community in various ways. The idea-based organisations offer many paths to this commitment which is of crucial value for the development of society.

## **The unique role of the idea-based organisations**

Every organisation formulates its role independently on the basis of its own values and assignment in the community. The idea-based organisations work independently in their role of expressing interests in collaboration with the public and private sector. The community role means that it should be possible for the idea-based organisations to critically appraise without risking loss of collaboration or financial support.

The voluntary and non-profit sector is not homogenous. Within the social economy, voluntary organisations, economic associations, some cooperatives, foundations and other forms of association operate. Some regard their role solely as a popular movement, to mould and express opinions and base their work mainly on members and volunteers. Others identify themselves as idea-based providers of social services and other activities and base their work mainly on employed staff, sometimes with elements of volunteers. Furthermore, some organisations formulate their role as both articulators of interests and providers. Regardless of the assignment and form of organisation, these organisations contribute to a sense of belonging and to the possibilities of the individual for personal development and participation in the democratic process.

The idea-based organisations contribute to the deepening and developing of democracy. The organisations offer meeting places for influence, collaboration and fellowship that strengthens civil society. Voluntary activity is based on the desire to participate and the will to change.

Idea-based organisations now contribute as before to investigating social problems and giving people a voice. They contribute to developing welfare, among other ways, by drawing attention, before other players, to neglected areas in, for example, social services. Members of the organisations often have direct experience of being users of social services, being relatives or having lived in a vulnerable situations, facing social exclusion. In light of this, the idea-based organisations represent people's interests to a great extent. They thus contribute to those who are affected by society's decisions and actions being able to watch over and defend their interests.

The organisations contribute to increasing diversity and people's freedom of choice by engaging in important activities in health care, social services and oth-

er areas in the community. Welfare is further developed by the creation of a large number of providers and by encouraging new thinking and alternative methods in different areas.

They also contribute to providing people with work, for example, in social companies. For many, this means an ability to move from social vulnerability to empowerment and thus an independent life, together with an expanding business sector and more jobs.

## **Common principles**

### **The Principle of Autonomy and Independence**

- Idea-based organisations and activities formulate their mission in society on the basis of their fundamental values, and are independent both in articulating interests and in collaboration with other players.
- The idea-based organisations can have a critical review role as articulators of interest and moulders of opinion. They should be able to play this role without jeopardising collaboration or their financial support in relation to the public sector.

### **The Principle of Dialogue**

- All people are dependent on public decisions and actions. From a rights perspective, it is important that those who are affected by public decisions can assert their rights and interests either individually or through interest organisations, for example, the right to accessibility, which contributes to a society where everyone participates.
- The idea-based organisations contribute to increasing democratic participation and popular influence. The relationship between the Government and the idea-based organisations shall be characterised by responsibility and mutuality, be based on the prerequisites of both parties and take into account the perspectives and competence of both parties. To provide the best conditions for this support for democracy, the forms should be open, recurrent and characterised by an inclusive approach and methods of work.
- The dialogue between the Government and the idea-based organisations aims at broadening and deepening the basis for decision-making and creating understanding and trust.
- Dialogue as a form and relationship between the parties needs to be adapted to the current local and regional conditions. The principles of this national agreement are an important starting-point for the relations at all levels.

### **The Principle of Quality**

- Activities within the social sphere are often carried out by the public sector, private companies and by the idea-based organisations with the special closeness, knowledge and quality that these provide.
- In idea-based activities, people are offered support and measures characterised by high quality and availability. The quality of these activities shall be followed up and evaluated to be able to be made visible, developed and compared to other players.

- The idea-based organisation defines the quality of its own activities. This often takes place on the basis of the user's own definition of quality. The special quality of the idea-based organisations should be taken into account in the development of methods to measure and deepen quality.
- When the idea-based organisation carries out activities that are subject to licence or activity on behalf of the public sector, the organisation shall fulfil the requirements for quality specified in legislation and which are made by the client. The activity which is performed on behalf of the public shall, in addition to complying with the quality requirements that apply to all providers, be able to present the distinguishing feature and quality of the work performed in addition.

### **The Principle of Continuity**

- Broad political acceptance is important with respect to agreements affecting the predictability and other basic conditions for the long-term planning and work of the idea-based organisations. This is the case because the existence, role in the community and development of the idea-based organisations is the concern of the community as a whole.
- Idea-based organisations should be provided with the prerequisites that make possible long-term planning based on sustainable development.

### **The Principle of Transparency**

- Mutual trust between the public and voluntary and non-profit sector is based on the willingness to be transparent.
- In order for as many as possible to be involved in existing or new activity and for trust to be at as high a level as possible, sufficient information and transparency are required both in the voluntary and the public sector.
- The principle of transparency shall be applied in such a way that the assignment of the idea-based organisation can be performed without detriment for users, volunteers, employees, third parties or the internal democracy of the organisations.

### **The Principle of Diversity**

- In a democracy, the individual has the right to be able to influence his or her everyday situation. A growing offering of players present various solutions for overcoming social exclusion – their own or someone else's. Where many idea-based activities have room for expansion, possibilities for innovation arise.
- The concept of diversity means in this context that society welcomes idea-based organisations and providers in the social sphere with different fundamental values or methodological bases. The difference is to be regarded as an asset per se among the diversity of idea-based organisations based on democratic values.
- Needs change both regionally and locally in a developing society. The public and the voluntary and non-profit sectors therefore have a responsibility to facilitate the growth of new organisations and providers as well as different forms for collaboration and agreements.

# Summary of the respective action plans of the Government, the idea-based organisations and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions

The undertakings and measures of the respective party are followed by an action plan for each party. This is to enable the agreement to clarify roles and principles for relations between the parties not only at the general level. Concrete measures in the action plans are presented below. The total of almost 40 measures make the undertakings concrete. The Government accounts for 28 of these.

The Swedish agreement arranges the undertakings and measures under the common principles:

- Autonomy and Independence
- Dialogue
- Quality
- Continuity
- Transparency
- Diversity

## In common starting-points

“The principles in the agreement provide guidance for a number of general measures by the parties which can be followed up by concrete measures by the Government, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions and on the part of the idea-based organisations. These measures shall be regarded as goals in this context in the framework of the principles. Each party is responsible for its own action plan while the principles are jointly owned.”

## From the Government’s action plan

The Government announces measures in the agreement with idea-based organisations in the social sphere and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. Examples of measures are:

*To*

- work for forms to be developed for more systematic exchange of experiences between the Government and idea-based organisations
- promote national meeting places with idea-based organisations for joint discussions of their prerequisites and conditions

- work for there being clear conditions for the long-term conditions of the voluntary and non-profit sector to carry out its activities
- work for free competition to enable the idea-based organisations to compete on equal terms with other players in the social sphere and in health and medical care
- continue to promote diversity among providers in health care and social services for the elderly and disabled
- make use of experiences and endeavour to enable different players to spread knowledge about the development of methods taking place in the voluntary and non-profit sector.

Examples of the Government's measures are

*To*

- pay attention to the importance of listening to the voluntary and non-profit sector during, for example, the work of commissions of enquiry and to state in relevant terms of reference the importance of the commission obtaining points of view from the voluntary and non-profit sector.
- commission the county administrative boards to pay attention in their supervisory activity to how the municipalities comply with the provisions of the Social Services Act on collaboration with organisations and associations.
- endeavour to develop quality indicators which measure the performance of the voluntary and non-profit sector in the health sector.
- benefit from experiences and facilitate the spread of knowledge by different actors on the development of method in the voluntary and non-profit sector.
- better inform on current commissions of enquiry relating to idea-based organisations to enable more to participate in the consultation procedure.
- prepare proposals based on Nutek's programme proposals for more expanding social companies.
- invite the voluntary and non-profit sector to put forward its points of view in the project on developing entrepreneurship and procurement in the health and social services sectors.
- stimulate the development of methods for diversity work through and within idea-based organisations.

## **From the idea-based organisations' action plan**

The idea-based organisations in the social sphere make a number of undertakings and notify measures in the Agreement. Examples of these are:

*To*

- increase collaboration on common development issues
- try to develop a common approach to concepts in the idea-based sector
- develop methods to measure quality that reflects the role, distinct character and added value of the idea-based organisations.
- take initiative together with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions to support the development of agreements at the local level.

- dare to enter into conflict on the limits of diversity, for example, when anti-democratic organisations or xenophobic movements are created or when these appear within their own organisations.
- stimulate diversity in the idea-based sector in different ways
- define the conditions for voluntary measures which are close to or within the public commission.

## **From the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions' action plan**

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions supports the common undertakings and also announces a number of measures in the Swedish agreement. These are:

- that support will be given to municipalities, county councils and regions to develop a strategic collaboration with civil society.
- that The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions will contribute to the agreement becoming known and discussed within municipalities, county councils and regions.
- that local examples and international experiences of agreements will be spread to members.
- that development work will be pursued to support municipalities and county councils which intend to develop agreements and collaboration documents.