

April 26 2023

# Women and IP: accelerating innovation and creativity in Sweden

Westerberg & Partners Advokatbyrå AB | Intellectual Property - Sweden



WENDELA  
HÄRDEBERG

## > Introduction

## > Education and awareness programmes

## > Mentorship and networking opportunities

## > Financial incentives and grants

## > Gender equality policies and diversity initiatives

## > Comment

### Introduction

The global IP landscape has long been dominated by men, and Sweden is no exception. Discouraging research shows that Sweden, one of the highest-ranking innovation countries in the world, has a women inventor rate that is among the lowest in Europe.<sup>(1)</sup> This is despite the fact that Sweden has a high representation of women in the labour force, a relatively good representation of women among PhD graduates in science, maths, computing and engineering and a high level of women in management.

Sweden is proud to be an inclusive and diverse society but there is still much to be done to empower and encourage women to participate in the realm of intellectual property. One of the major issues identified is the ability to refine research from universities and institutions to patentable innovations and commercial applications. This article discusses some of the initiatives implemented by the government and industry to accelerate innovation and creativity among women in Sweden.

### Education and awareness programmes

One of the primary barriers to women's involvement in intellectual property is a lack of awareness and understanding of IP rights. To combat this, the Swedish government has long offered various educational and awareness programmes targeting young women and girls.<sup>(2)</sup> These initiatives include workshops and seminars in schools and universities, providing an overview of IP rights, and showcasing [female role models](#) who have achieved success in the field of intellectual property.

Today, the awareness and knowledge of intellectual property among Swedish citizens, including women, is relatively high thanks to the efforts of the Swedish Intellectual Property Office, among others.

### Mentorship and networking opportunities

To foster an environment of support and collaboration, mentorship and networking opportunities for women play an essential role. The importance of such venues for sharing knowledge and experience has also been recognised by IP organisations and the Swedish government. As a result, several organisations have been established to connect women in the field of intellectual property. For example, the Swedish Inventor Organisation has presented a new initiative that, together with the inventor organisations in Norway, Iceland, Finland, Denmark and Estonia, has applied for funding from the Nordic Council to establish a [mentorship programme](#) for new female innovators in the Nordic countries.

Moreover, initiatives to foster women entrepreneurship can be found at the Confederation of Swedish Enterprises, a non-profit organisation consisting of 48 industry and employer organisations.<sup>(3)</sup>

### Financial incentives and grants

In an effort to encourage more women to participate in the IP system, the Swedish government has introduced financial incentives and grants specifically designed for female inventors and entrepreneurs.<sup>(4)</sup> These grants aim to provide women with the financial resources needed to protect their intellectual property and bring their innovations to market. By alleviating some of the financial burdens associated with intellectual property, women are more likely to pursue and protect their creative ideas.

Moreover, [Vinnova](#), Sweden's innovation agency, has acknowledged the [sex and gender dimension](#) in the evaluation process for the grant of funding: its mission is to strengthen Sweden's innovative capacity and contribute to sustainable growth. Such bias, in relation to both what innovation is considered interesting and the gender of the applicants, is apparent from industry reports. These show that, of the 44 billion kronor invested in Swedish companies within the tech industry, less than 1% goes to female entrepreneurs.<sup>(5)</sup> Needless to say, this is one possible cause for the lack of female entrepreneurs and innovators in Sweden.

Therefore, more can still be done. Initiatives such as [Position 99](#) – where female entrepreneurs can seek specific funding – are welcome, as is continuing to shed light on inequality and possible bias in the funding process.

### Gender equality policies and diversity initiatives

The Swedish government and the industry have also shown their dedication to foster an environment that empowers gender equality and removes the barriers for women to participate in the innovative process and be acknowledged for their creativity and contributions. This has resulted in several initiatives to create gender-sensitive IP policies that include:

- setting targets for gender balance in leadership positions;
- promoting equal opportunities for career advancement; and

- conducting regular reviews of hiring and promotion practices to ensure fairness.

By creating a more inclusive work environment, women are encouraged to pursue and excel in IP-related roles and are offered equal opportunities in accessing and benefiting from the IP system.<sup>(6)</sup>

#### Comment

The efforts by Swedish industry, non-profit organisations and the Swedish government to promote the inclusion of women in its IP system and empower female entrepreneurship are commendable. However, it may be questioned whether they are enough in view of the still apparent discrepancies between men and women in the IP system. Therefore, the work must continue by:

- implementing education and training programmes;
- providing mentorship and networking opportunities;
- enacting gender equality policies;
- collaborating with external organisations; and
- celebrating female innovators.

The success of these initiatives will not only benefit individual companies but also contribute to the overall growth and prosperity of Sweden's innovation ecosystem. Moreover, continuing to prioritise gender equality and inclusion, among other things, will result in more diverse and creative solutions to assist in everyone's daily lives.

*For further information on this topic please contact [Wendela Hårdemark](#) at [Westerberg & Partners Advokatbyrå Ab](#) by telephone (+46 8 5784 03 00) or email ([wendela.hardemark@westerberg.com](mailto:wendela.hardemark@westerberg.com)). The [Westerberg & Partners Advokatbyrå Ab](#) website can be accessed at [www.westerberg.com](http://www.westerberg.com).*

#### Endnotes

(1) See:

- "[Women's participation in inventive activity; Evidence from EPO data](#)", EPO, November 2022; and
- "[Alarm report: No women behind the patents - Sweden could be the worst in the EU](#)", Näringsliv, published on 15 November 2022.

(2) See also the initiatives by the [Swedish Gender Equality Agency](#).

(3) See "[Why are so few women running businesses?](#)", an event held by the Confederation of Swedish Enterprises on 21 March 2023.

(4) See, for example, innovation funding at Swedish universities: "[KTH Innovation gets more women to invest in their idea](#)", Stockholm Science City Foundation.

(5) See:

- "[Investors aren't betting on women-owned tech companies](#)", Företagarna, published on 1 July 2021; and
- "[The billions continue to roll in to men - deadlock for women's companies](#)", Dagens Industri, published on 30 June 2021 and updated on 24 July 2021.

(6) See "[Women's careers in science and technology are examined in a new Nordic research project](#)", Louise Larsson, 21 October 2021, an article published on the University of Lund's website regarding research conducted at the university to understand the barriers for women in science and technology.