

Media Pluralism in Sweden

A Test Implementation of the Media Pluralism Monitor 2015



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About the project

The Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) is a research tool that was designed to identify potential risks to media pluralism in the Member States of the European Union. This narrative report has been produced within the framework of the second pilot test implementation of the MPM, which was carried out in 2015. The implementation was conducted in 19 EU Member States with the support of a grant awarded by the European Union to the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom ([CMPF](#)) at the European University Institute.

The Monitor's methodology is based on research carried out by national country teams in the 19 countries, except for Malta where data collection was carried out centrally by the CMPF team. The research is based on a standardised questionnaire and apposite guidelines that were developed by the CMPF. Moreover, to ensure accurate and reliable findings, a group of national experts in each country reviewed the answers to particularly sensitive questions (see Annexe I for the list of experts).

Risks to media pluralism are examined in four main thematic domains, which are considered to capture the main areas of risk for media pluralism and media freedom: Basic Protection, Market Plurality, Political Independence and Social Inclusiveness. The results are based on the assessment of a number of indicators for each thematic area. The Basic Protection domain consists of four indicators; Market Plurality has three, while Political Independence and Social Inclusiveness each contain six indicators.

| Basic Protection | Market Plurality | Political Independence | Social Inclusiveness |
|---|--|--|---|
| Protection of freedom of expression | Transparency of media ownership | Political bias in the media | Access to media for different social and cultural groups, and local communities |
| Protection of right to information | Concentration of media ownership | Politicisation of control over media outlets | Availability of media platforms for community media |
| Journalistic profession, standards and protection | Concentration of cross-media ownership | Politicisation of control over media distribution networks | Access to media for the physically challenged people |
| Independence of national authority(ies) | | State advertising | Centralisation of the media system |
| | | Independence of PSM governance and funding | Universal coverage of the PSM and the Internet |
| | | Independence of news agencies | Media literacy |

The results for each domain and indicator are presented on a scale from negligible to 100%, a negligible risk being the lowest, and 100% risk being the highest score. Scores between negligible and 33% are considered low risk, 34 to 66% are medium risk, while those between 67 and 100% are high risk.

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Disclaimer: The content of the report does not necessarily reflect the views of the CMPF or the EC, but represents the views of the national country team that carried out the data collection.

1. Introduction

The Swedish media system is dominated by public service broadcasters. Public service radio and TV both have a solid reputation as being trustworthy and reliable news providers. The Swedish public service television company (SVT) has the widest range of programming of all of the TV companies in Sweden.¹ SVT and Sveriges Radio (Radio of Sweden) are the most trusted outlets, along with TV4, the largest private channel. Sweden is also characterised by a high newspaper penetration. The level of press circulation is amongst the highest in the world, the overall consumption of broadcast media, however, has decreased slightly recently (Nord 2011). At the same time, Sweden has an excellent ICT infrastructure, affordable ICT access, and very high Internet usage (The World Economic Forum 2015; Eurostat 2014).

The implementation of the MPM2015 in Sweden shows a generally low risk for media pluralism in the country: 80% (16) of the indicators demonstrate low risk. However, there are important exceptions. Sweden scores high risk on two of the 'Market Plurality' indicators, 'Concentration in media ownership' and 'Concentration of cross-media ownership'. In sum, media pluralism as a whole can be perceived as being both entrenched and secured. However, the alternative conclusion is that certain aspects of media pluralism may be endangered in Sweden in the near future.

¹ About SVT: <http://www.svt.se/aboutsvt/the-swedish-public-service-broadcaster>

2. Results from the data collection: assessment of the risks to media pluralism

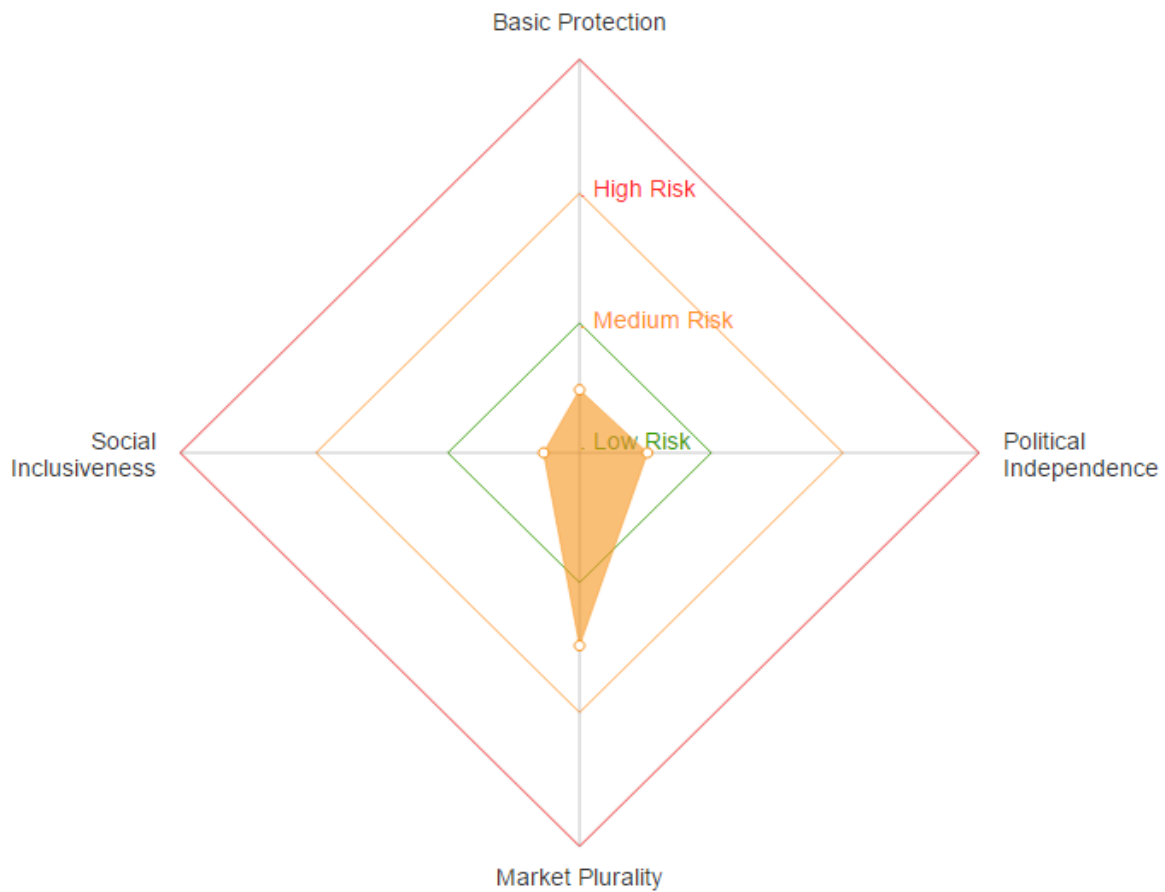


Figure 1 Media Pluralism Monitor 2015 - Sweden, Results by Risk Domain

2.1 Basic Protection (16% risk - low risk)

The Basic Protection indicators represent the regulatory backbone of the media sector in every contemporary democracy and they measure a number of potential areas of risk, including the existence and effectiveness of the implementation of regulatory safeguards for the freedom of expression and the right to information; the status of journalists in each country, including their protection and ability to work; as well as the independence and effectiveness of the national regulatory bodies, namely, media authorities, competition authorities and communications authorities.

| Indicator | Risk |
|---|----------------|
| Protection of freedom of expression | 27% risk (low) |
| Protection of right to information | 6% risk (low) |
| Journalistic profession, standards and protection | 25% risk (low) |
| Independence of national authority(ies) | 4% risk (low) |

Overall, the conclusion of the ‘Basic Protection’ domain indicators is that they pose relatively low risk. Of the total of 4 basic indicators, 4 scored a low risk.

Sweden benefits from a long regulatory tradition for media freedom. Media legislation in Sweden is based on a strong tradition of press freedom.² The Freedom of Expression Act ensures freedom for the content of Swedish broadcast media, and additional laws regulate organisational and technical conditions.

The basic indicators for Sweden vary between 4% and 27%.

Regarding the ‘Independence of national authority’³ and the ‘Protection of right to information’, Sweden scores a low risk. Instead, it is interesting to note that the specific dimension used to measure the ‘Protection of freedom of expression’ and the ‘standards and protection of the journalistic profession’ are the measures that rank the worst, in terms of low risk, among the basic protection domain indicators (27% and 25%).

In Sweden, freedom of expression has been included in the Swedish Constitution since 1991. Amending the Swedish Constitution involves a special procedure, requiring two consecutive parliamentary decisions with an election between them. It is important to note that these two measures indicate two different

² Press freedom is regulated in the Constitution since 1766.

³ NB: It needs to be noted that this indicator has been found to be problematic in the 2015 implementation of the Media Pluralism Monitor. The indicator aimed to combine the risks to the independence and effectiveness of media authorities, competition authorities and communication authorities, but it was found to produce unreliable findings. In particular, despite significant problems with regard to the independence and effectiveness of some of the authorities in many of the countries, the indicator failed to pick up on such risks and tended to produce an overall low level of risk for all countries. This indicator will be revised in future versions of the MPM (note by CMPF).

elements. Concerning the freedom of expression, the score reveals more about the interpretation of the indicators that are meant to capture freedom of expression violations than about actual violations. There have been relatively few cases of freedom of expression violations in Sweden in recent years. It would thus be more accurate to speak in terms of exemptions that are, first and foremost, related to the controversial Mohammed cartoons and examples of the censorship of certain cultural expressions, than about systematic violations.

However, regarding the ‘Standards and protection of the journalistic profession’, the score tells a completely different story about the threats to both the physical and digital safety of journalists. A recent report from The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention shows that more than 30% of Swedish journalists are threatened and harassed each year because of their work as journalists. These results, from the J-panel at the University of Gothenburg, also show that as many as 80 percent of the Swedish journalists who answered questions about threats and abusive comments during the last 12 months reported that email was the most common mediation of threats and abusive comments. In addition, one-third of Swedish journalists are without permanent employment. This will most likely have negative consequences for a democratic society in the long run.

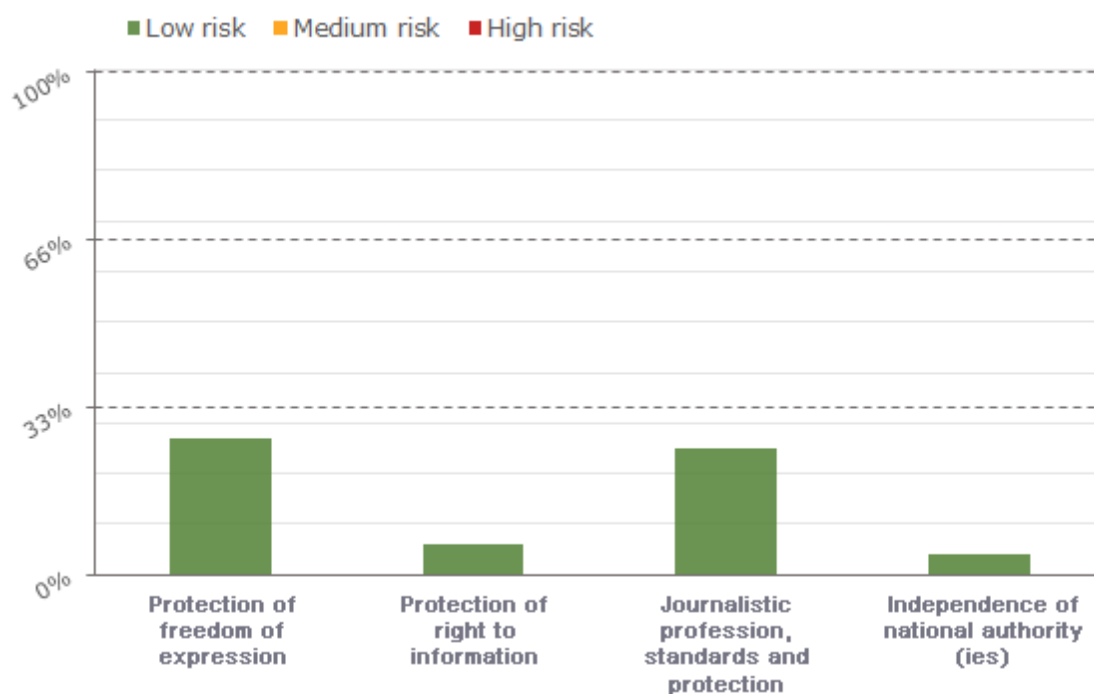


Figure 2 Media Pluralism Monitor 2015 - Sweden, Basic Protection Domain, Results by Indicators

2.2 Market Plurality (49% risk – medium risk)

The Market Plurality indicators examine the existence and effectiveness of the implementation of transparency and disclosure provisions with regard to media ownership. In addition, they assess the regulatory safeguards against high concentration of media ownership and control in the different media, within a media market as well as cross-ownership concentration within the media sector.

| Indicator | Risk |
|--|-----------------|
| Transparency of media ownership | negligible |
| Concentration of media ownership | 70% risk (high) |
| Concentration of cross-media ownership | 77% risk (high) |

Overall, the conclusion of the Market Plurality domain indicators is that they pose a high risk. Of three indicators, two indicators scored a high risk, while one scores a negligible risk. Sweden scores high risk on the indicators concerning ‘Concentration of media ownership’ (70%) and in ‘Cross-media ownership’ (77%),. The limits to prevent a high level of horizontal concentration of ownership in the media sector in Sweden are regulated by the Radio and Television Act and also in the broadcasting licenses. In addition, the media sector is regulated on the basis of the more general Competition Act. However, the Radio and Television Act contains no clearer criteria than the wording: "ownership may not change more than to a limited extent". It is thus up to each control authority to assess what is really meant by "more than to a limited extent". It is also remarkable that this formulation has absolutely no constitutional support.

Cross-media ownership is also regulated by the Swedish Competition Act through two main provisions: (1) Prohibition of anti-competitive co-operation; (2) Prohibition of the abuse of a dominant position. The Competition Act also contains rules for: (1) Anti-competitive sales activities by public entities; (2) Control of concentrations between undertakings. However, there is no specification about cross-ownership in terms of media companies.

Moreover, the digitalisation of the Swedish media system has now lasted for more than a decade. Just as in other European countries, the Swedish media market is in the midst of an extensive transformation. Newspapers are losing readers, especially young readers of printed editions. In addition, the broadcasting media are being forced to revise their old business models in order to adjust to new and changing conditions in the wake of technological change. Five large actors dominate the Swedish TV market. Among the Swedish newspapers, there is a trend toward cutbacks, stripped-down newsrooms, and increased co-ordination of editorial work. This has consequences for the ownership structure and ownership concentration in the Swedish media system.

Regarding ‘Transparency in media ownership’, Sweden scores a negligible risk. Sweden does not have any specific rules on transparency for media companies. Instead, they follow the general rules stated in the Law of Financial Relations, also called the Transparency Act. Everyone can access the annual reports of media companies, including information about the ownership. Most companies also have the reports available for download on their websites.

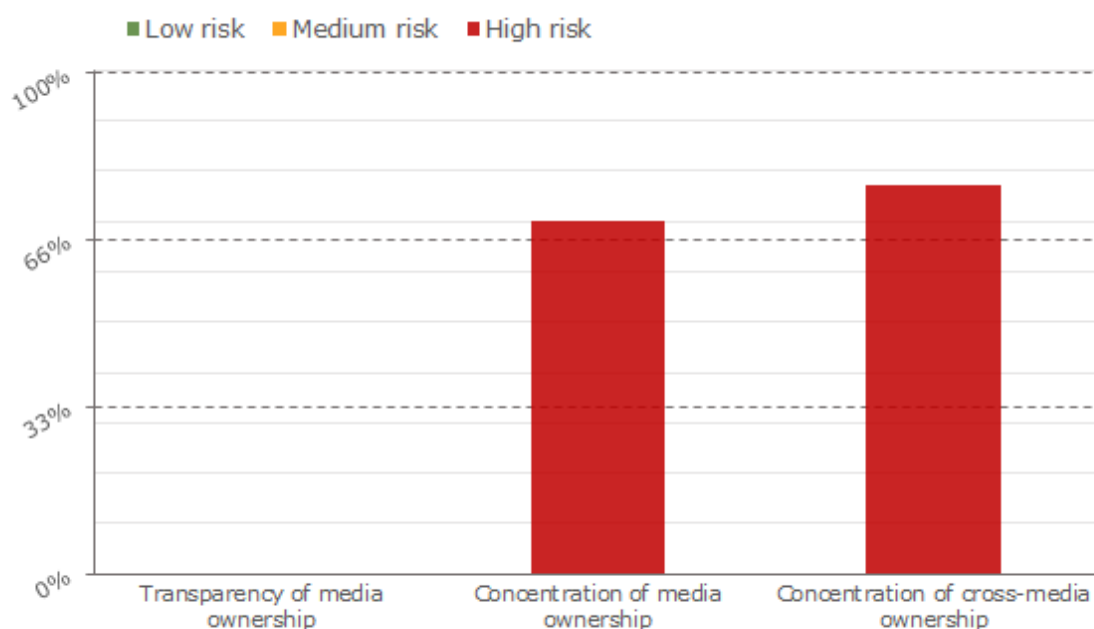


Figure 3 Media Pluralism Monitor 2015 - Sweden, Market Pluralism Domain, Results by Indicators

2.3 Political Independence (17% risk - low risk)

The Political Independence indicators assess the existence and effectiveness of the implementation of regulatory safeguards against the biased representation of the political viewpoints in the media, and also the extent of the politicisation over media outlets, media distribution networks and news agencies. Moreover, it examines the influence of the state on the functioning of the media market, with a focus on state advertisement and public service media.

| Indicator | Risk |
|--|-------------------|
| Political bias in the media | 4% risk (low) |
| Politicisation of control of media outlets | Negligible |
| Politicisation of control over media distribution networks | Negligible |
| State advertising | 50% risk (medium) |
| Independence of PSM governance and funding | 4% risk (low) |
| Independence of news agencies | 50% risk (medium) |

The conclusion of the Political Independence domain indicators is that they pose a relatively low risk. Of the total of 6 indicators, 4 score low risk and 2 indicators score a medium risk.

Concerning the risk related to ‘Political bias in the media’, Sweden scores a low risk (4%). The result also corresponds with a number of evaluations of the Swedish media content that have previously been conducted, during, after and between elections since 1998. For example, the latest report shows that the Swedish PSM channels are fair, balanced and impartial (Asp 2015). This document also reveals that plurality has increased somewhat in the PSM channels, whereas it decreased in the commercial channels between 2013 and 2014. Moreover, the results from the Swedish Media Election Survey, a detailed campaign survey of the news covering in press, radio, and television during the last four weeks before election day, which has been conducted since the Swedish parliamentary elections in 1979, show that Swedish media (both commercial and PSM) generally offers proportional and non-biased representation (Asp 2011).

It is also important to note that the Swedish laws on public service media (PSM) demand diverse programming, and that all PSM have editorial freedom. Furthermore, the general competition regulation and the broadcasting licenses are backed up by the Swedish media subsidy system for the written press, both print and online, with the stated objective of strengthening and maintaining media pluralism.

The risks of ‘Politicisation of control over media’ and ‘Politicisation of control over distribution networks’ is, in both cases, negligible. The Swedish media companies refer to these issues in their annual reports; moreover, the theme is regulated in the Annual Report Act. Some may argue that the main risk with, for example, Swedish newspaper distribution, is how it is co-ordinated, and this concerns logistics, rather than political affiliations.

For the indicator ‘Independence of PSM governance and funding’ (4%), in the case of the broadcast media, the license regulates the operations of the public service that are to be characterised by independence from the state and from different economic interests in society. Independence is also regulated by the Radio and Television Act and the Freedom of Speech Act. The appointment procedures also provide for the independence of PSM boards and management. However, they are not fully effective in guaranteeing their independence. The boards are appointed by the government at the proposal of the political parties in parliament. Nonetheless, to prevent the general election from having an immediate impact on the management of the board's composition, the Chairman and six other members are appointed by the government in the year that follows the general election. The authors have searched for examples of conflicts concerning the appointment and dismissal of the managers and board members of the Swedish PSM, but have found none.

The indicators on ‘State advertising and Independence of news agencies’ score medium risk (50% each). It is striking that it is impossible to say anything substantial about state advertising in Sweden due to the

lack of data. However, it is important to note that the lack of data can be problematic when it comes to competition on equal terms, or to determining whether public funds spent on advertising are at a reasonable level. Lastly, the Swedish news agency Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå (TT) is alone in having a continuous rolling news flow in text and pictures, both from Sweden and the world, covering all subject areas. However, some minor Swedish news agencies compete with TT by specialising in specific areas (economics, medicine, and engineering) and by targeting particular groups of users. In these areas, TT has a much smaller share of the market.

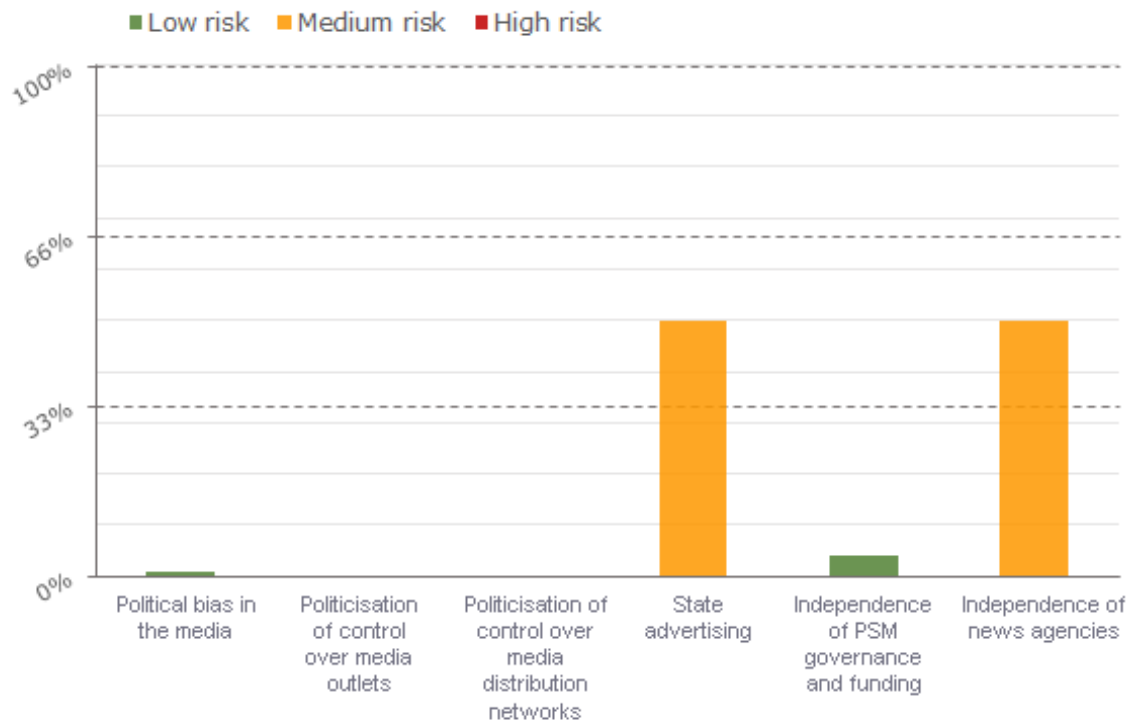


Figure 4 Media Pluralism Monitor 2015 - Sweden, Political Independence Domain, Results by Indicators

2.4 Social Inclusiveness (9% risk - low risk)

The Social Inclusiveness indicators are concerned with access to, and availability of, media for different, and particularly vulnerable, groups in the population. They assess regulatory and policy safeguards for access to media by various cultural and social groups, by local communities and by people with disabilities. Moreover, they assess the centralisation of the media system, and the quality of the country's media literacy policy, as well as the digital media skills of the population.

| Indicator | Risk |
|---|----------------|
| Access to media for different social and cultural groups, and local communities | 13% risk (low) |
| Availability of media platforms for community media | 29% risk (low) |
| Access to media for the physically challenged people | Negligible |
| Centralisation of the media system | 8% risk (low) |
| Universal coverage of the PSM and the Internet | 6% risk (low) |
| Media literacy | Negligible |

Overall, the conclusion of the Social Inclusiveness domain indicators is that they pose relatively low risks. Of the total of 6 indicators, 6 scored a low risk.

In Sweden, the 'independence of community media is part of the idea of media plurality and encompasses diversity in both media providers and media content, as the low levels of risk for the indicators 'Centralisation of the media system' (8%) and 'Universal coverage of the PSM and the Internet' (6%) attest. PSM also has a special responsibility to offer a diverse range of programmes, including programmes with both mass and more specific attraction. These should reflect the diversity of the entire country, be characterised by a high level of quality, versatility and relevance, and be accessible to all (Sveriges Television n.d.). Likewise, the Swedish broadcasters have a major responsibility to take into account the needs of both the national linguistic and ethnic minorities⁴ (indicator 'Access to media of different social and cultural groups, and local communities': 13%), as well as 'Access to media for the physically challenged people' (negligible risk). Operations such as the state support for cultural magazines and press subsidies that are aimed at linguistic minorities, must therefore be a priority; and they are expected to work actively to improve accessibility and give minority media access to media platforms. In terms of 'Media and Information Literacy' (MIL), Sweden is currently in a state of transition and development. Many MIL-related projects have recently been undertaken in Swedish schools, with many stakeholders and actors being involved (indicator Media literacy: negligible risk).

⁴ Sweden has five recognised minorities (Samer, Jews, Roma, Swedish Finns, and Tornedalians). However, according to the definition of minorities that is used by the MPM project, there is only one minority group that amounts to over 1 percent of the Swedish population (Swedish Finns, 6 percent).

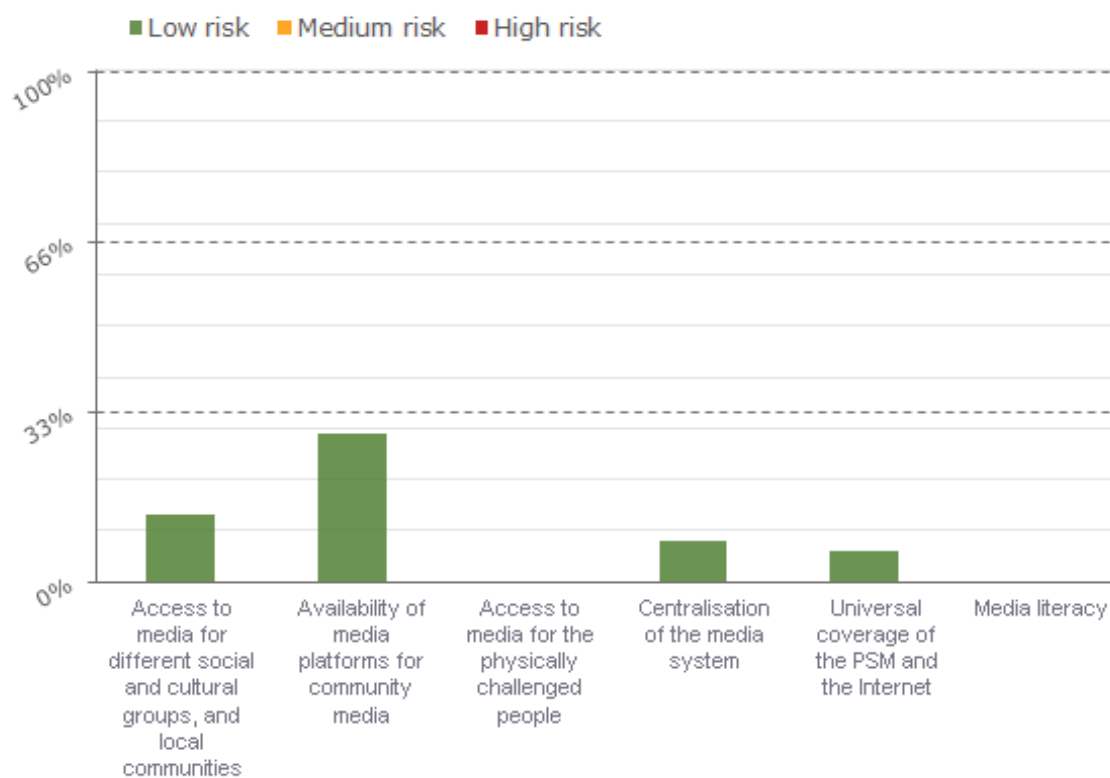


Figure 5 Media Pluralism Monitor 2015 - Sweden, Social Inclusiveness Domain, Results by Indicators

3. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the MPM2015, the following issues have been identified by the country team as being more pressing or as deserving particular attention by policy-makers in order to promote media pluralism and media freedom in the country.

The implementation of the 2015 media pluralism monitor for Sweden in general demonstrates a low risk for media pluralism in the country. However, two particular aspects stand out. The first aspect covers the standards and protection of the journalistic profession. The results of the MPM2015 show that Sweden, despite representing a highly developed democratic context, does not manage to fully guarantee journalistic safety. Intimidation and harassment are effective ways to silence journalists even in Sweden. There is a need to add a dimension of external pressure and threats to the discussion on journalistic autonomy to the media policy agenda in both Sweden and the EU; self-censorship includes more than merely the chilling effects of government mass surveillance and the adaptations to the economic and political power structures.

The other aspect is the concentration of media ownership. Media pluralism and the opportunity for people to gain unimpeded access, and to generate and share a wide range of information, are essential pillars of democracy to ensure transparency and accountability. They are also essential for the functioning, sustainability and legitimacy of a democratic regime. Moreover, the media are expected to work as a platform for free expression for all, to foster constructive public debate, to empower the citizens, to enhance government efficiency, and, last but not least, to provide the government with the information needed to govern responsively and in the interest of citizens.

The Swedish media landscape is undergoing an extensive transformation. This is characterised by a steady increase in the convergence of media services, with a visible move towards intertwining traditional media and the Internet. This transformation presents both opportunities and challenges in terms of media plurality. Although it has never been easier for people to access, generate and share information, this transformation has led to an increased concentration of media ownership, more cutbacks, and an increased conformity of information and news. It is not sufficient that the media companies, like any other company, are included in the Swedish general laws that are supposed to ensure competition – the media companies have a much wider responsibility in a democracy. A media landscape that undergoes an extensive transformation also leads to extensive outcomes, which need to be investigated further.

Annexe I. List of national experts who were consulted

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