

Action programme to combat antigypsyism



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Racism has no place in our society. Racism leads to discrimination, inequality, segregation and puts people at risk of social exclusion. In recent years, there have been numerous initiatives to prevent and combat racism, for example within the framework of the National plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime, adopted in 2016. The plan is the Government's tool for preventing and combating racism and polarisation in society. The plan addresses racism in general as well as different types of racism; that is, Afrophobia, antisemitism, antigypsyism, Islamophobia and racism against Sami.

In the autumn of 2021, work was initiated on specific action programmes to combat different forms of racism as one of several commitments by Sweden, in connection with Remember – ReAct, the Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating antisemitism.

The action programmes intend to complement the National plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime, and include both measures aimed at bringing to light and combating each form of racism, and measures aimed at combating racism at large. The action programmes are based on four of the strategic areas set out in the plan: More knowledge, education and research, Strengthening preventive measures online, A more active legal system and Civil society: greater support and more in-depth dialogue. The work will be monitored within the present structures of the plan in accordance with the fifth strategic area of the plan, Improved coordination and monitoring.

The action programmes have been developed based on dialogues with representatives of civil society, reports on the prevalence of racism and hate crimes in Sweden and recommendations from regional and international human rights bodies. They also raise the level of ambition in the effort to combat different forms of racism, in line with the EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020–2025.

The action programme to combat antigypsyism contains measures for the period 2022–2024. A comprehensive presentation of the Government's work in the area cannot be accommodated within the action programme. However, together with the National plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime, it forms a common basis for the Government's continuing efforts to combat antigypsyism.

The terms “racism” and “antigypsyism”

The terms “racism” and “antigypsyism” are subject to constant development and discussion. In the action programme, the Government proceeds based on the definitions set out in the National plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime. By “racism”, the Government means views that people – due to assumptions concerning race, national, cultural or ethnic origin, religion, skin colour or other similar circumstance – are essentially different from each other and that they therefore can or

should be treated in different ways. The plan also uses the term “structural racism” in the sense that racist actions are not always based on an individual’s political convictions but can occur unconsciously. This means that racism, in various forms, exists as part of the structures of society.

The term “antigypsyism” is used in the plan in the sense of ideologies, beliefs or values that express hostility towards Roma. Sweden also endorses the IHRA’s (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) non-legally binding working definition of antigypsyism and the list of examples that can serve as a guide, depending on the context. According to this definition, antigypsyism is “a manifestation of individual expressions and acts as well as institutional policies and practices of marginalisation, exclusion, physical violence, devaluation of Roma cultures and lifestyles, and hate speech directed at Roma as well as other individuals and groups perceived, stigmatised, or persecuted during the Nazi era, and still today, as “Gypsies”. This leads to the treatment of Roma as an alleged alien group and associates them with a series of pejorative stereotypes and distorted images that represent a specific form of racism”.

Strategic area More knowledge, education and research – needs and actions

Knowledge of antigypsyism in history and today, and how systematic discrimination has caused unequal living conditions for Roma still today, needs to improve. Roma have a special status as one of Sweden’s five national minorities. According to the Living History Forum’s report “Minoritet i historien” (*Minority through history*) (2021), public awareness of Roma and other national minorities is still low, despite their longstanding historical presence in Sweden. Although the IHRA’s working definition of antigypsyism is not legally binding, it can serve as an important tool in identifying and highlighting various manifestations of antigypsyism.

Being visible in their Roma identity, for example through dress or name, can entail particular vulnerability. Representatives of Roma organisations have pointed out that they feel that structural racism can occur in contacts with various public-sector operations and call for efforts to combat this.

The Living History Forum has a central role to play in raising awareness of antigypsyism in society. The agency is conducting a major educational initiative on various forms of racism in history and today. An important part of this work is to provide training aimed at school staff and other public sector employees with a focus on quality-assuring how the public sector treats the public through anti-racism efforts.

In the framework of minority policy and the work on Roma inclusion, the Stockholm County Administrative Board and other authorities are implementing initiatives to combat antigypsyism, by measures such as improving knowledge of Roma history, the current living conditions of Roma and their status as a national minority.

By reason of the Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating antisemitism (the Malmö Forum), the Living History Forum has implemented a national initiative with specific educational measures concerning the Holocaust, antisemitism, antigypsyism and other forms of racism. The genocide of the Roma will also be commemorated in the Swedish Holocaust Museum, which opens on July 1, 2022.

Special research initiative on the Holocaust

- The Swedish Research Council will carry out a special research initiative, with the findings of its previous remit as a starting point to identify and produce recommendations concerning research into the Holocaust and antisemitism, and the vulnerability of other groups in connection with the Holocaust, including Roma and antigypsyism. The aim is to reinforce the relevant field of research in the long term.

Sweden's presidency of the IHRA

- Sweden has assumed the presidency of the IHRA for one year from March 1, 2022, to February 28, 2023. A priority during the presidency is to follow up on the commitments presented at the Malmö Forum in the autumn of 2021. Combating antigypsyism and antisemitism is an important part of the presidency's priorities. Several activities on the theme of antigypsyism will be carried out, including an international conference on research into the genocide of Roma and antigypsyism in history.

Initiatives to enhance knowledge on different forms of racism

- The Living History Forum will intensify its work on implementing knowledge-enhancing initiatives on different forms of racism, including antigypsyism, in 2022–2024. The remit includes producing or developing supporting materials on different forms of racism, and conducting further training initiatives.

Develop and disseminate methodology support in efforts to combat racism

- In 2022–2024, the Living History Forum will develop and disseminate methodology materials on efforts to combat racism to quality-assure how the public sector treats the general public. The agency will also offer opportunities to exchange knowledge and experience for these target groups to provide long-term and effective support in the effort to combat racism and similar forms of hostility in the public sector.

Produce, develop and disseminate knowledge-enhancing support to combat racism in the healthcare system

- The National Board of Health and Welfare will produce, develop and disseminate knowledge-enhancing support to combat the occurrence of racism and promote equal rights and opportunities for everyone in the healthcare system and contribute towards equal care. The knowledge-enhancing support will be disseminated among professionals in the healthcare sector to provide support in their treatment of patients and relatives. The knowledge-enhancing support will be tailored to target groups and designed so that it can be assimilated and engrained into the everyday work of healthcare professionals.

Discrimination on multiple grounds

- The Equality Ombudsman will, on the basis of reports of discrimination, deepen knowledge concerning discrimination on multiple grounds and illuminate issues relating to intersectionality; that is, how different power structures and grounds for discrimination affect and sometimes aggravate each other.

Work-related stress among certain vulnerable groups

- The Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise will collect and compile insights concerning the relationship between the vulnerability of certain groups and work-related stress. A particular focus area will be work environment-related knowledge and the potential implications of vulnerability – due to ethnicity, skin colour and religion or other belief – for the individual’s health. The compilation of insights will be disseminated so that it can serve to support employers, safety representatives and other elected representatives in workplaces.

Continued funding for a national research programme on racism

- The Swedish Research Council, in consultation with the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte), will continue to earmark funding for a national research programme on racism, consisting of SEK 20 million annually.

The subjection of children and youths to antigypsyism

Many Roma children and youths suffer from the prejudices that exist concerning Roma in society. The report of the Stockholm County Administrative Board “Stolt men ofta otrygg. En undersökning om unga romers upplevelser av trygghet och tillgång till sina rättigheter” (*Proud yet often feeling unsafe. A survey of young Roma’s sense of safety and access to their rights*) (2021) and the report of the Ombudsman for Children “Om barns och ungas utsatthet för rasism” (*Report on the subjection of children and youths to racism*) (2021) show that antigypsyism and other forms of racism form part of the daily lives of children and youths, especially at school and online. While young Roma often express pride in their Roma identity, many feel unsafe because of it and avoid talking about being Roma.

Representatives of Roma organisations have highlighted the risk of children taking on or adopting degrading expressions concerning Roma because they rarely meet Roma who are open about their Roma identity. The organisations have highlighted the need for efforts to raise awareness of antigypsyism in schools and to counteract Roma stereotyping through role models, for example.

Through schools, children and youths are educated in fundamental democratic values and human rights. A revision of the curriculum, which will start to apply in the autumn of 2022, illuminates the concept of racism and sets out that racism must be prevented and countered with knowledge and active initiatives. It is important that tools are available to combat antigypsyism and other forms of racism throughout schooling and that the initiatives carried out optimally meet the needs of teachers and pupils. Central to these efforts are both the Living History Forum and the work of the National Agency for Education.

Efforts to combat antigypsyism in schools

- The Living History Forum will survey knowledge about and proposing measures to combat antigypsyism in primary and secondary schools. The remit includes studying the knowledge that pupils and teachers have about Roma history in Sweden and about Roma's subjection to antigypsyism, the sources from which pupils and teachers retrieve knowledge about the historical and contemporary situation of the Roma, and propose measures on how the knowledge level can be raised in the school system to combat antigypsyism. The agency will also examine whether the school materials "Antiziganismen i Sverige" (*Antigypsyism in Sweden*) should be revised.

Remit to involve young Roma in efforts to prevent and combat antigypsyism

- The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society will implement measures to help prevent and combat antigypsyism. The work will include better enabling young Roma to implement measures themselves that could improve visibility and knowledge of young Roma and their subjection to antigypsyism.

Initiatives to bolster democracy to combat racism in schools

- In 2022 and 2023, the National Agency for Education, together with the Living History Forum, will develop a tool for systematic work on initiatives to bolster democracy in the school system and beyond, to combat different forms of racism, including antigypsyism.

Greater knowledge of racism and rights among children

- The Ombudsman for Children will implement awareness-raising initiatives on racism based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to bolster the ability of children and youths to exercise their own rights. The remit includes enhancing the Mina Rättigheter (My Rights) website.

Support and information materials on talking to children about racism

- The Family Law and Parental Support Authority will review, collect and compile knowledge into support and information materials on how adults can talk to children and youths about racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime. The compilation of insights will be disseminated so that it can be used in practice and can serve as support primarily for guardians, but also for the staff of government agencies, municipalities and regions.

Greater knowledge on where pupils and guardians can turn to when someone has been discriminated against or subjected to victimisation

- The Equality Ombudsman will, in cooperation with the Child and School Student Representative (BEO) at the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, implement specific information initiatives on where children, school students and guardians can turn to when someone has been discriminated against or subjected to victimisation at school.

Strategic area Strengthening preventive measures online – needs and actions

According to the report “Om barns och ungas utsatthet för rasism” (*Report on the subjection of children and youths to racism*) (2021) by the Ombudsman for Children, the internet is one of the most common arenas in which children are subjected to or experience racism.

According to the report “Utsatt på internet” (*Online victimisation*) (Swedish Media Council, 2020), research shows that certain groups are at greater risk of falling victim to online bullying than others, such as youths with a different ethnicity than the majority of people where they live.

The Swedish Media Council and civil society organisations have contributed knowledge and educational materials to raise awareness of how online texts, images and symbols can entrench racist ideas. Further mapping processes and analyses need to be performed in order to devise tools and initiatives to prevent antigypsyism and other forms of racism with better precision.

Surveying violent extremism and racism in digital environments

- The Swedish Defence Research Agency will survey the prevalence of different forms of racism in digital environments. The remit includes measuring the prevalence of racism and analysing how it manifests itself in different digital environments connected to Sweden. In particular, the agency will examine the prevalence of antigypsyism and other forms of racism.
- As of 2022, the Swedish Defence Research Agency will conduct a permanent survey and analysis of violent extremism and racism in digital environments.

Methods to combat racism online

- The Swedish Media Council has been commissioned to compile methods for combating racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime online among children and youths. The task entails to identify methods capable of combating the occurrence of such expressions online, for instance based on the different roles that children and youths may have in online bullying situations. It also includes disseminating methods that have proven to work.

Strategic area A more active legal system – needs and actions

According to the hate crime statistics from the National Council for Crime Prevention, 55 offences were reported to the police and identified as antigypsy hate crimes in 2020. These could for example be incidents in which Roma have been denied access to public transport or been threatened by security guards in supermarkets. Representatives of Roma organisations have expressed that Roma are subjected to hate crime both in their private and professional lives, yet rarely report incidents.

There is a need for initiatives to lay down conditions for further efforts to combat antigypsy hate crimes. In recent years, the Swedish Police Authority and the Swedish Prosecution Authority have raised the level of ambition with regard to hate crimes and other crimes that threaten democracy. An objective formulated by the Swedish Police Authority in an interim report on its work is that all hate crimes shall be investigated by a special resource with in-depth knowledge in the field, and that it should feel meaningful for citizens to report crimes and contact the police irrespective of the outcome in the individual case (Swedish Police Authority, 2022).

The current ban on discrimination is, for some operations, limited to how employees treat the general public. The inquiry on certain issues in the Discrimination Act has, in its final report “Ett utökat skydd mot diskriminering” (*Extended protection against discrimination*) (SOU 2021:94) proposed aspects such as an extended ban for certain public-sector operations, such as law enforcement agencies.

The inquiry proposes that the provision be amended to also include the exercise of public authority in relation to individuals and decisions. The proposals have been referred for consultation.

Advanced and improved efforts to combat hate crime

- In 2022 and 2023, the Swedish Police Authority will continue to advance and improve efforts to combat hate crimes and other crimes that threaten democracy. The Swedish Police Authority will for example implement knowledge-boosting initiatives at the agency and present the results of the work conducted to improve investigative capacity and clearing of such crimes. Within the remit, the Swedish Police Authority will cooperate with other agencies and organisations.

Strategic area Civil society: greater support and more in-depth dialogue – needs and measures

Since 2008, The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society has allocated funds to support activities that combat or prevent racism or similar forms of intolerance.

An important part of efforts to combat antigypsyism is to involve in different ways the Roma minority in matters concerning them, such as regular consultations in the framework of minority policy. As part of the work on the National plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime and the action programme to combat antigypsyism, special dialogues have been organised with, for example, Roma civil society and other organisations combating antigypsyism.

Support for civil society’s work to combat different forms of racism

- The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society will allocate more than SEK 14 million in 2022 to operations that combat or prevent racism or similar forms of intolerance.

Dialogue with civil society

- The Government intends to continue the dialogue with Roma civil society through ongoing meetings on the topic of antigypsyism and the work within the framework of the action programme.