

Gender equality policy in Sweden

A Government for Gender Equality



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A Government for Gender Equality

Sweden's Government promotes gender equality in all areas of society. In practice, this means a commitment to building a society in which women and men, girls and boys can live their lives to their full potential. This is a human right and a matter of democracy and justice. Gender equality is also part of the solution to society's challenges and a given part of a modern welfare state - for justice and economic development.

Gender equality has been recognised as a separate policy area in Sweden since the early 1970s, and the progress made towards gender equality started even before that. Since then, Sweden has shown clear results in terms of high levels of employment and growth. These developments did not happen by themselves. They have come about because of political will and dialogue, together with hard work from a strong civil society and the women's movement. Despite several important achievements made towards gender equality, challenges remain and there is still work to do for the Government.

Sweden's Government ensures that a gender equality perspective is brought into policymaking on a broad front, both nationally and internationally. The overall objective of the Swedish gender equality policy is that women and men shall have the same power to shape society and their own lives. The Government is committed to achieving this objective through a policy agenda that reduces inequality and stereotypical gender roles and structures.

Gender equality is not only a goal, but also a prerequisite for sustainable development, and an essential part of the solution to many of the challenges we face in our time, nationally as well as globally.

This brochure provides an overview of main areas of the Swedish gender equality policy. It describes current political objectives and strategies and gives a brief historical background to important reforms. It also identifies further remaining challenges and explains how the Government is addressing these and what measures are taken to initiate change.



Paulina Brandberg, Minister for Gender Equality and Deputy Minister for Employment

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paulina Brandberg".

Swedish gender equality policy

The overall policy objective for the Swedish gender equality policy is that women and men must have the same power to shape society and their own lives. With this as its starting point, the Government is working towards six sub-goals.

1. Equal distribution of power and influence

Women and men must have the same rights and opportunities to be active citizens and to shape the conditions for decision-making in all sectors of society.

3. Gender equality in education

Women and men, girls and boys must have the same opportunities and conditions regarding education, study options and personal development.

5. Gender equality in health, care and social services

Women and men, girls and boys must have the same conditions for a good health and be offered care and social services on equal terms.

2. Economic gender equality

Women and men must have the same opportunities and conditions for paid work that provide economic independence throughout life.

4. An equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care work

Women and men must have the same responsibility for unpaid housework and the opportunity to give and receive care on equal terms.

6. Men's violence against women must stop

Women and men, girls and boys must have the same rights and opportunities to physical integrity.

Gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting

Gender mainstreaming has been the Swedish Government's overarching strategy to implement the national objectives on gender equality since 1994. It is an important strategy for reaching the gender equality objectives.

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy used to implement the national objectives on gender equality. This approach is combined with measures designed to specifically target gender inequalities in different policy areas (i.e. in the form of extra funding, extra focus, action plans, etc.). This dual approach is necessary for moving forward on gender equality.

As part of the gender mainstreaming efforts, Sweden also runs a programme for gender mainstreaming in government agencies (GMGA) – to ensure that the activities and services provided by participating government agencies contribute to achieving the national objectives on gender equality. In addition, the Swedish gender equality policy is implemented through gender-responsive budgeting.

The Swedish Government Offices define gender mainstreaming as the incorporation of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas, at all levels and at all stages, by the stakeholders normally involved in the policy-making process.

Responsibility for the entire Government

To ensure full and effective implementation of the Swedish gender equality policy, all ministers are responsible for promoting a gender equality perspective in decisions and actions in their respective policy area. The Minister for Gender Equality is responsible for the overall coordination, development, and follow-up of gender mainstreaming. Yet, the everyday practical implementation is managed at the level of Heads of Division in all ministries.

All gender mainstreaming actions are guided by the objectives set out in the policy on gender equality as well as of policy specific objectives that have been formulated based on the gender needs assessment of each Ministry.

Gender-responsive budgeting - a strategic tool for realising policy objectives

Gender-responsive budgeting is a strategic tool to ensure a gender equality perspective in the budgetary process. The aim is that revenues and expenditures should be restructured and reformed to

realise the national objectives on gender equality. The approach is based on the understanding that there is no gender-neutral budget allocation.

The budget process and the Budget Bill are of key importance in realizing the Government's policy agenda and it is, therefore, important that budget work is preceded by a gender impact assessment which can inform the direction and distribution of resources towards gender equality.

The Government has taken several steps to strengthen the sustainability and effectiveness of the gender-responsive budget work. For instance, the Ministry of Finance has introduced a formalised requirement in the budget circular. The requirement demands that all ministries include a gender impact assessment as part of the proposals they put forward to the Ministry of Finance. The Government has also reinforced support and capacity building measures to improve practices on conducting gender impact assessments.

The implementation of gender mainstreaming in government agencies (GMGA)

- The Government's development programme for gender mainstreaming in government agencies (GMGA) was launched in 2013. The aim of the programme is to strengthen these agencies gender mainstreaming efforts to ensure that their activities contribute even more effectively to the achievement of the national objectives on gender equality. The results provided by each agency are reported to the responsible Ministry on a yearly basis. To support these actions and to reinforce the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the government agencies, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency provides capacity building measures.
- An evaluation by the Swedish Agency for Public Management (the Government's organisation for analyses and evaluations of state and state-funded activities) found that GMGA has contributed to more agencies carrying out extensive work, changing their working methods, achieving more results, and consequently increasing gender equality among their target groups. For example, the agencies have drawn up agency specific action plans on gender mainstreaming.

Selected results from a number of agencies:

- The Swedish Migration Agency handles applications from people regarding, for example, permanent residence, requests for Swedish citizenship, and applications for visiting the country. As part of the Migration Agency's gender mainstreaming activities, the Agency is working on individualising asylum procedures and the payment of compensation to individuals. Such compensation was previously disbursed to the man in the family. However, now the routines are changed to ensure that both women and men receive individual payments. Furthermore, a gender equality perspective is integrated as part of the country specific information used by the Migration Agency's officials. This includes information regarding women's living conditions in the asylum seekers' home countries.
- The Social Insurance Agency is a government agency that is responsible for managing large parts of the Swedish social insurance system. The Agency has made great efforts to identify gender-based violence in connection with women's requests for sick leave. The

Agency works systematically to detect clients that face domestic violence and has developed a standard procedure to inform and refer victims to agencies that can provide support, legal action, and protection. In the framework of a collaboration with other agencies, the user support "improved detection of clients facing domestic violence" has been shared and implemented by the Swedish Employment Service, the National Board of Health, and the Swedish Migration Agency.

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency was established in January 2018. The Agency is commissioned to contribute to effective implementation of the Swedish gender equality policy. The establishment of the Agency has strengthened the institutional framework and promotes sustainable and strategic gender equality work. The work of the Agency requires close cooperation with other government agencies, regions, municipalities, and civil society. The main task of the Agency is to coordinate, follow up and provide various forms of support to reach the national objectives on gender equality. The work is carried out in the following domains:

Policy analysis, monitoring and reporting on the development towards the national objectives on gender equality. There is a great need for an overall assessment of the development of gender equality in relation to measures implemented and actions taken. The Agency, therefore, analyses progress against the national objectives on gender equality and assesses the measures implemented. The findings are for example used to inform Government interventions at various levels, and by other actors in society.

Supporting government agencies, county administrative boards, regions, and municipalities in the implementation of the Swedish gender equality policy. Gender mainstreaming including gender responsive budgeting is the key strategy.

Coordinating and implementing government assignments in gender equality policy. The Agency annually receives and carries out several specific government assignments in gender equality.

Allocating government grants. The Agency distributes grants to regions, municipalities and other organisations that contribute to gender equality, women's mobilisation and to the prevention of men's violence against women. The grants are distributed on behalf of the Swedish government.

Assisting the Government with expertise in international gender equality cooperation. The Agency provides advisory support to the Government Offices in relation to Sweden's international commitments on gender equality and women's rights within the European

Union, United Nations, Council of Europe, OECD, Council of Baltic Sea States and Nordic Cooperation. The Agency engages in international cooperation, exchange and learning within the field.



Three important welfare reforms to promote gender equality in Sweden

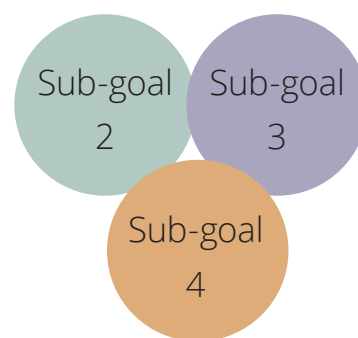
Some of the most important reforms for promoting gender equality in Sweden were imposed in the 1970s, such as the individual income taxation, the development and expansion of public childcare and the gender-neutral parental benefit.

These reforms promoted gender equality and increased women's prospects to have the same opportunities as men to enter the labour market, to remain there and for professional advancement. Parts of the unpaid household and care work, mostly performed by women, became the responsibility of the public welfare system. Consequently, women could gain access to employment and greater financial independence which increased their well-being and

bargaining power in the household. In addition, men were encouraged by the introduction of parental benefit law to use parental leave and thus also partake in household work to a greater extent. These different reforms also contributed to the development of a modern welfare state in Sweden which has proven to be essential for gender equality, as a well-functioning welfare sector enables both women and men to participate in the labour

market on equal terms.

Separate income taxation for wife and husband (1971)
 Separate income taxation was imposed in 1971. This created an incentive for women to take part in the labour market, as their income was no longer considered part of the husband's income which had meant being subject to a high tax discouraging them from working outside the home. Individual taxation made it



beneficial for both parties to work. In combination with the expansion of childcare services and a steady increase of the reserved parental leave months for each parent, it had an important positive impact on women's employment rate.

Development of public childcare (1974)

The broad expansion of the day-care and pre-school system began in the 1970s. Previously, women had the main responsibility for the care of children, and if they worked, they had to make childcare arrangements with the help of nannies, friends, and relatives. Women often faced impossible daily schedules balancing paid work and full responsibility for the domestic and care work. The development of affordable public childcare facilities available to all has been prerequisite for the large proportion of women in gainful employment in Sweden. Together with public elderly care, this gives both women and men an opportunity to combine professional life and family life.

First country to introduce gender-neutral paid parental benefit (1974)

In 1974, Sweden became the first country in the world to introduce a gender-neutral paid parental leave. Since then, the parental leave and parental benefit reform has been revised several times. The policy is aimed at supporting a dual earner family model, which is a cornerstone for the development of gender equality, women's empowerment, and an important part of gender equality policy. In 1995, the first reserved month of paid parental benefit for each parent was introduced. The reserved months are a non-transferable part of paid parental leave. The policy was later expanded with a second month for each parent in 2002 and a third month in 2016. Today, women and men are entitled to 240 days each of paid parental leave. Ninety days are reserved for each parent and cannot be transferred. The intention behind the increased number of reserved months for each parent has been to achieve a more even distribution of care work and unpaid household work, and gender equality in the labour market.

The employment rate of women

Promoting equal economic opportunities for women and men is a fundamental part of the Swedish gender equality policy. Parental insurance, combined with an extensive system of public childcare and elderly care, has made it possible for both parents to improve their work-life balance. In 1979 the Swedish Gender Equality Act was introduced. It had several obligations ensuring that the labour market is free from discrimination based on sex. In 2008, the Swedish Gender Equality Act was replaced by the Swedish Discrimination Act. The purpose of the act is to combat discrimination and in other ways promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation, or age. The act includes obligations ensuring that the labour market is free from discrimination based on sex.

Employment rate for men and women (20-64 years) in Sweden 1970-2021



Comment: due to changed measurement methods there are two breaks in the series.

Gender equal division of power and influence

Sub-goal

1

Power and influence must be divided equally between the sexes. It is a question of justice and democracy.

One of the sub-goals of the Swedish national objectives on gender equality is that women and men must have equal access to power and influence. This should be reflected on all levels but utterly through an equal representation in decision making assemblies and in leading positions. An equal division of power and influence between women and men in all sectors of society is of course no guarantee that real power will be distributed equally between the sexes, but it is a decisive factor for ensuring that

the qualitative aspects of the exercise of power can also be nudged in a gender-equal direction.

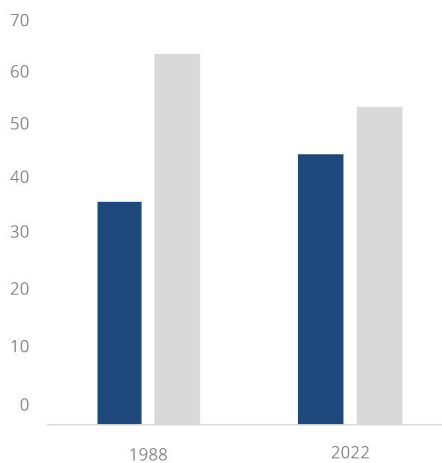
Women and men have since the mid-1990s been equally represented in the Swedish Parliament and the Government (within the interval 40-60). In the political assemblies at the regional and municipal levels, the gender distribution is within the range of 40-60. The proportion of women among Swedish members of the European Parliament has exceeded 40 percent since Sweden became a

member of the EU in 1995. Also, at the executive levels of Government it has been a norm since the 1990s that half of the cabinet ministers are women.

The situation is better in company boards wholly or partly owned by the State, where the proportion of women was 48 percent and men 52 percent in 2022. The proportion of women chairing state-owned companies was 49 percent while men accounted for 51 percent in 2022.

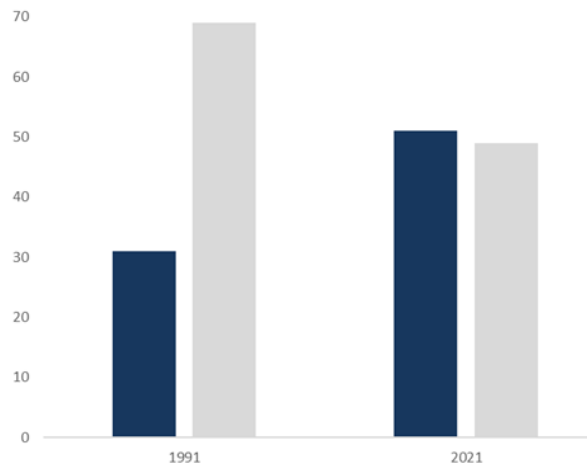


Parliament's composition after elections 1988 and 2022



■ Women ■ Men

Composition of members of state Government boards 1991 and 2021



Gender equal representation also applies to members of state authority boards where the gender distribution is equal.

Still, male dominance remains in the management of Swedish listed companies. In the boards of listed companies, there were 35 percent women and 65 percent men in 2022. The proportion of women chairs in listed companies was only 8 percent while men accounted for 92 percent in 2022.

The situation is better in company boards wholly or partly owned by the State, where the proportion of women was 48 percent and men 52 percent in 2022. The proportion of women chairing state-owned companies was 49 percent while men accounted for 51 percent in 2022.

The Government has developed goals for equal gender distribution in the boards of companies that are totally or partly owned by the state. These goals state that at least 40 percent women and men respectively should be represented in the boards.

Since 2020, the Swedish Corporate Governance Board, which is responsible for the Swedish Code of Corporate Governance, has stated that each gender must have at least 40 percent share.

The sub-goal of ensuring an equal division of power and influence also includes the distribution of power and influence in other parts of society such as higher education, culture, media, and the communication sector, and within social media.

Preventing and counteracting gendered and sexist violence, threats and hatred against elected officials and journalists online and offline is a priority issue for Sweden.

Economic gender equality

Sub-goal
2

Gender equality is important for jobs and sustainable economic growth. To safeguard jobs, all skills must be put to good use on the labour market and women's employment rate and working hours must increase.

Compared with other EU countries, women comprise a larger proportion of the paid labour in Sweden. However, it is still very common for women to work part-time, especially women with children. When children are born, it is common that women reduce their time in paid work, while men's time in paid work increases. The Swedish Government has a goal set out to reduce the differences in employment rate between women and men.

Part-time work

Almost 27 percent of women aged 20-64 years who are employed work part-time (2022), but studies show that many would prefer to work more hours. The main reasons that many more women than men are in part-time jobs are that they cannot find a suitable fulltime job or that they are taking care of children.

The Swedish Government has recently decided to make full-time work the norm, while keeping part-time work as a possibility for those who wish to work less. In 2022, there has been an increase in temporary employments in the labour market, which are occupied to a greater extent by women than men. A legislative amendment has been introduced to ensure that temporary employment will be converted into indefinite employment if the aggregated length of employment in a general fixed-term position, exceeds two years.

Gender pay gap

When weighing in factors such as education, age, profession, sector and

hours of work, the gender pay gap between men and women is 4,7 percent (2022). One key factor in explaining these income disparities is the gender segregation of the labour market. Women and men tend to work in different occupations and, on average, jobs in female-dominated sectors have lower wage levels than jobs in male-dominated sectors

The use of parental benefit days is unevenly distributed between women and men. To incentivise men to use more parental benefit days the Government subsequently increased the number of days reserved for each parent. In 1995, the first reserved month was introduced, and in 2002 it was increased to two months. Since these changes, men's share of parental benefit has increased. In 2016, the Government added a third month with the same effect.

Education and labour market authorities have an important task of challenging students and work applicants to consider studies and employment that do not follow traditional gender roles. The Swedish Public Employment Service has, therefore, been assigned the task of tailoring its activities to promote gender equality and combat gender divisions in the labour market. A Commission for gender equal lifetime earnings has submitted proposals aimed at increasing economic equality between women and men in the long term. The proposals aim to promote equal wages, equal living incomes, an equal distribution of public support measures to women and men, and equal workplaces. So far, a couple of

the Commission's proposals have been commissioned, for example:

1) The Swedish Financial Supervisory Authority will follow up authorities' compliance with the regulation on annual reports and budget documents from a gender equality perspective.

2) The Swedish Mediation Institute have made gender equality analyses of salary income and other income that affects individuals' disposable income over their lifetime.

Requirement to conduct annual pay surveys

It is important to eliminate unjustified gender pay differences between women and men. Therefore, employers in Sweden have been tasked to conduct an annual survey and analyse pay differences between women and men who perform work that is equal or of equal value. The social partners', including the trade unions' responsibility for wage formation, is a cornerstone of the Swedish model. They can play an important role in addressing the persistent pay discrimination in certain sectors.



Gender equal education

Sub-goal
3

The Government objective to ensure gender equal education aims at safeguarding that boys and girls, men and women have the same opportunities and conditions regarding education.

The curriculum for compulsory school states that all schools should actively and consciously further equal rights and opportunities for women and men and counteract traditional gender norms. It also specifies that education and teaching should not divide children and students based on gender. Similar requirements are included in the curricula for upper secondary school, upper secondary school for students with learning disabilities and adult education.

In recent years, statistics on education results and student welfare show a clear gender divide. For instance, girls receive higher education results than boys throughout the compulsory education system. Hence, the Government is engaging in actions to improve reading skills and extracurricular education during school holidays.

When it comes to students' welfare, statistics show that girls aged 15 have a higher prevalence of mental health issues (62 percent) compared to boys at the same age (35 percent). Increased resources have therefore been allocated to strengthen and improve school-based health services.

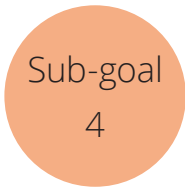
Higher education institutions (HEI) should always promote and take account of gender equality in their activities. The Swedish Government has assigned over 30 HEIs to work with gender mainstreaming to contribute to achieving the national objectives on gender equality.

While more women than men attend and graduate from higher education in Sweden, only 32 percent of the professors are women (2022). Therefore, the Government has set a goal of

ensuring that half of all newly appointed professors shall be women by 2030.

Gender equality is a matter that is relevant for the quality assurance of the entire research system. The five major research funding agencies in Sweden have been assigned to gender mainstream their activities and to promote gender equality in the allocation of research funding. Statistics on funding from the Swedish Research Councils show that the degree of funding in various subject areas is fairly gender balanced and has been so over the past five years.

An equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care work



Women and men must have the same responsibility for unpaid housework and the opportunity to give and receive care on equal terms.

The fourth sub-goal includes the distribution of unpaid work in a household, as well as the distribution of unpaid work between women and men at societal level. The sub-goal also includes unpaid domestic work, and care of children, older people, and other close relatives. Both those who provide care and those who receive it are included. Domestic work refers to domestic and maintenance work carried out at home.

An unequal distribution between women and men, boys and girls

Women in Sweden are, on average, more involved in household work than men. Although time-use surveys show that the unequal division of unpaid housework between women and men has slightly decreased, a significant gap remains. A similar pattern is also evident between girls and boys. Compared to boys, girls are more likely to clean their room at least once a week. Also, compared to boys, girls spend more time cooking. On the other hand, boys are more likely to spend time helping with outdoor tasks.

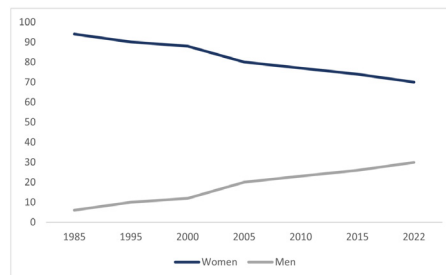
Active responsibility and participation by men and boys benefits all

Time-use surveys show that men in Sweden between ages 20 and 64 do 5 hours less of domestic work each week compared with women of

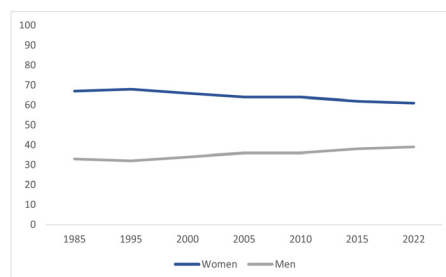
the same age. While it is true that trends show that men have picked up some of the household labour, a significant gap remains. Therefore, the Government has introduced reconciliation policies such as a third reserved month of parental benefit for each parent in 2016. Men's increased use of parental benefit has a positive impact on men's relationships with their children, as well as a positive effect on the development of women's wages. But women still use 70 percent of parental benefit and 60 percent of the temporary parental leave paid out when a child is sick or ill.

Temporary parental benefit is a benefit you can receive for example if you need to stay home from work to take care of a sick child. The distribution of temporary parental benefit days between women and men (60-40 percent) is more equal than the distribution of parental benefit (70-30 percent). In 2022, men used 40 percent of the temporary parental benefit days, compared to women who used 60 percent. For example, economic incentives and gender stereotypical norms have an impact when couples decide which parent should stay home to take care of a sick child. Overall, women are absent from the labour market longer due to child care than men. Women use most of the parental benefit, take longer unpaid parental leave and use more of the temporary parental benefit days. One of the main reasons that significantly more women than men work part-time is the that they are taking care of children.

Men's and women's use of parental benefit days 1989-2022



Men's and women's use of temporary parental benefit days 1989-2022



Unpaid care work of older or sick people

Nearly a fifth of Sweden's population regularly gives care to a relative. The unpaid care work of elderly and sick relatives is relatively equally distributed between women and men. The distribution between women and men varies depending on the type of care work. It is more common that women take responsibility for social interactions and supervision, while men more commonly take responsibility for practical tasks. The women who do a large amount of care work also report a general sense of poor well-being as it affects their social life, economics, and health.



Gender equal health

Women and men, girls and boys must have the same conditions for a good health and be offered care on equal terms.

Sub-goal
5

Special effort to enhance women's health

In the budget bill of 2023, the Government increased the funding by proposing an allocation of SEK 1.7 billion to maternity care and women's health during 2023, as well as an estimated yearly allocation of SEK 1.5 billion for the period 2024-2025. From 2021, regions who are granted funds from the special effort must also ensure work is done in the region to improve care for those affected by sexual violence or female genital mutilation. To safeguard young women's right to reproductive and sexual health, the Government has made contraception free of charge to people under the age of 21.

Women's control over their lives and bodies

Gender equality can never be achieved without the realisation of sexual and reproductive health

and rights. At this very moment, these rights are being challenged around the world.

Women and girls must have the right to decide and exercise control over their own body, sexuality, reproductive health, and childbearing. When women have these choices, it increases their prospects of participating on a more equal footing with men in society. Sexual and reproductive health and rights is a matter of women's self-determination and the right to decide freely over their own bodies.

Pursuant to the Swedish Abortion Act, women have the legal right to have an abortion until eighteenth week of pregnancy, without specifying a reason for the decision. After the eighteenth week of pregnancy, an abortion may be performed only if it is approved by the National Board of Health and Welfare. Swedish

legislation on abortion derives from the woman's right to decide over her own body and the right to choose whether or not to become a parent.

In 2023, the Government has commissioned an inquiry to evaluate how the legislation on abortion can be adjusted in relation to the medical progress and pregnant women's needs.

Preventing and combating men's violence against women

Sub-goal
6

Gender-based violence is one of the ultimate expressions of inequality between women and men. This violence must stop. Women and men, girls, and boys, must have the same right and access to physical integrity.

Women and girls are disproportionately exposed to gender-based violence and honour-based violence and oppression. The Swedish Government aims to make concerted efforts to eradicate gender-based violence and honour-based violence and oppression. The development of effective violence prevention measures is of utmost importance for the Swedish Government along with the support to anyone subjected to gender-based violence and honour-based violence and oppression.

A national strategy to end men's violence against women. In November 2016, the Swedish Government introduced a national 10-year strategy on preventing and combating men's violence against women, honour-based violence and oppression, prostitution, and trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The strategy was drafted with the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (a.k.a. the Istanbul Convention) as an important point of reference. It consists of four objectives and a clear organisation for implementation. In addition, the Swedish Govern-

ment has an action plan consisting of 99 measures for the years 2021–2023. The Swedish Government has permanented the funding for the implementation of the strategy. The Government has started working on a new action plan for 2024–2026 and is also planning for a new strategy.

A top priority in the current strategy is enhanced and effective violence prevention, including interventions to reduce relapse in offending. Unequal gender power relations and traditional gender stereotypes can shape the likelihood of men and boys experiencing or perpetrating violence which seriously hinder the empowerment of women and girls, and gender equality. Therefore, more focus must be placed on challenging traditional gender stereotypes that link masculinity with violence as a root cause of violence. The Government has, therefore, introduced measures that bring about more effective prosecution of perpetrators and taken steps to lowering the threshold for men to seek help to change violent behaviour. Mandatory training on gender-based violence and domestic violence has been introduced for students of Law, Medicine, Nursing, Physiotherapy, Dental Care,

Psychology, and Social Work. A regulation has been introduced in the Swedish Social Services Act stipulating that social welfare committees must work to help people who have subjected close relatives to violence or other forms of abuse to change their behaviour. A pilot hotline for adults at risk of using violence against intimate partners was established in 2019. The hotline motivates actual perpetrators of gender-based violence to seek professional treatment and has already managed to reach a significant number of callers who had never previously contacted any service about their violent behaviour.

The strategy addresses violence against women and girls based on their gender. It also addresses violence to which women and girls are particularly exposed or which has a particularly severe impact on women and girls in general. Men and boys may also be exposed to violence by their relatives, including honour-based violence and oppression, as well as prostitution and trafficking for sexual purposes. Conversely, women and girls may expose their relatives to violence, for example in an honour context, and commit crimes related to prostitution and

trafficking for sexual purposes, such as soliciting. Measures in the strategy also aim to counter this. The national strategy covers all aspects of the vulnerability of lgbtiq-persons to domestic violence, honour-based violence and oppression, and prostitution and trafficking for sexual purposes. A disability perspective is also applied in the strategy, since girls and women with disabilities are at a higher risk of being exposed to all types of domestic violence.

The Swedish Government has taken various measures to increase the detection of gender-based violence as well as to strengthen victim support provided by public authorities, including municipalities, health care services and civil society organizations.

In addition to already existing financial support to victim services, the Swedish Government has allocated SEK 150 million per year to Women's Shelters and Young Women's Empowerment Centres, their national organisations, and other organisations that work with similar support for victims of violence. Furthermore, the 2022 Budget Bill announced a reform introducing sheltered housing as a new form of placement in the Social Services Act, with increased quality requirements. Victims of violence will have access to quality sheltered housing throughout the country and the rights of accompanying children will be strengthened.

Honour-based violence and oppression
Honour-based violence and oppression signifies that people, mainly girls and women, but also boys and men, among them lgbtiq-persons and persons with disabilities, are limited in their lives and are subjected to pressure

and violence with the purpose of upholding the family's honour. It is also a serious challenge to gender equality. The honour-based violence and oppression must end. Therefore, the Government has set aside permanent funding to prevent honour-based violence and oppression. The Government has also established a permanent National Centre Against Honour-Based Violence and Oppression. One of the tasks of the centre is to regularly investigate the extent of honour-based violence and oppression in Sweden to monitor the development of society's efforts in this area.

In January 2023, an inquiry submitted the report A childhood free from violence – A national strategy to prevent and combat violence against children (SOU 2022:70) to the Government. The report contains proposals for a ten-year national strategy to prevent and combat violence against children, including honour based violence and oppression.

On the 1st of June 2022, the criminal offence honour-based oppression entered into force. This offence includes the introduction of a special, stricter scale of penalties for repeatedly committing certain criminal acts against a person with an honour motive. The penalty for the offence is imprisonment for at least one year and at most six years. In June 2023, an inquiry submitted a report regarding measures against control of girls' and women's sexuality. The inquiry proposes criminalization of virginity testing and hymen reconstruction surgery. The inquiry also proposes criminalisation of failure to disclose forced marriage and child marriage offences.

Sexual offence legislation based on consent

Sub-goal
6

New sexual offences legislation that is based on consent has been introduced. Sex must be voluntary – if it is not, then it is illegal. But to prevent sexual abuse, both new legislation and changes in attitudes are required.

In 2018 the Swedish sexual offences legislation was reformed. It is now an offence to perform a sexual act with someone who is not participating voluntarily. Thus, to convict a perpetrator of rape it is no longer required to establish that violence or threats were used, or that the victim's particularly vulnerable situation was exploited.

Legislation is only one part of the solution. For every girl and woman, boy and man to be free and to decide over their own body, there must also be a culture of consent. In connection with the new sexual offence legislation, the Swedish Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority was commissioned to develop sexual offences education campaigns targeting primarily young people. The authority

produced a web-based training material and an accompanying teacher's guide describing the new sex crime legislation and implemented an internet campaign.

The campaign addressed that all victims must be aware of their rights and have the courage to report sex crimes. It also stressed the responsibility of men and boys to contribute to a culture of sexual consent.

Combating prostitution and trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation

Sub-goal
6

Trafficking in human beings is a serious crime and involves the ruthless exploitation of other human beings. It entails severe obstacles for the full enjoyment of human rights and a gender- and a child rights perspective must be applied in all counter trafficking measures. A vast majority of trafficking victims for sexual exploitation are women and girls, but men and boys, also fall victim to this crime. Among both genders lgbtiq-persons and persons with disabilities are particularly exposed.

The Swedish Government has for a long time given priority to combatting exploitation in prostitution and trafficking in human beings for the purpose

of sexual exploitation. Efforts in this field is an integral part of the Government's work to combat gender-based violence. In 2018, the Swedish Government

decided on an action plan to combat exploitation in prostitution and trafficking in human beings. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency coordinates the work

against exploitation in prostitution and trafficking in human beings for all forms of exploitation on a national level.

The underlying reasons for people being involved in prostitution vary, but Sweden recognises that the primary factor that sustains prostitution, as well as trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes, is the demand. Efforts to undermine the market and to counteract the demand for sexual services in combination with support measures to people in prostitution are therefore fundamental in combatting exploitation in prostitution and trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children as well as the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and the Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse underlines the obligation of Members States to address the demand that fosters all forms of trafficking in human beings.

Swedish Ambassador to combat trafficking in human beings
The Swedish Government has taken a number of steps to enhance its work against trafficking in human beings on the international level and has appointed an ambassador at Large for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. A fundamental purpose of the function is to create synergies with relevant actors and to strengthen international efforts to defend human rights, including sexual and reproductive health

and rights, and to strengthen Sweden's role as a driving force in the work against trafficking in human beings and its causes. The assignment includes all forms of trafficking in human beings with a focus on trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, the particularly vulnerable situation of women and children, and efforts against the demand.

The Equality model: Purchasing sexual services is illegal
On 1 January 1999, Sweden became the first country in the world to introduce legislation criminalising the purchase, but not the selling, of sexual services. The purchase of sexual services is a sexual offence and following the Swedish Criminal Code Chapter 6, Section 11 "A person who, in cases other than those previously referred to in this Chapter, obtains casual sexual relations in return for a payment, is guilty of purchase of sexual services and is sentenced to imprisonment for at most one year. The provision [in the first paragraph] also applies if the payment was promised or made by another person". In most cases, the seller is in a vulnerable situation and is exploited by the buyer. Further, the majority of people paying for sexual services are men and the majority of people in prostitution are women. This is unacceptable.

Criminalisation can never be the only element in the efforts to reduce the demand for prostitution and cannot be a substitute for broader social interventions to protect and assist people in prostitution. Active involvement of social services in prevention efforts, as well as to ensure proper and targeted assistance and support measures to people in prostitution, are key.

Prevention is also about changing norms and attitudes. To counteract the long-term demand for the purchase of sexual services, there is a need for universal prevention measures aimed at boys and young men, as well as efforts to change harmful norms and stereotypes that justify violence and restrict women's and girls' scope for action and life choices. Effects of the criminalisation of purchase of sexual services
The legislation prohibiting the purchase of sexual services has been evaluated. According to the assessment, the prohibition has had the intended effect and is an important instrument in preventing and combatting exploitation in prostitution and trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Statistics show that street prostitution has decreased significantly, indicating that this has been an important tool to counteract trafficking in human beings as it has made Sweden a less attractive market for traffickers. It has further worked as a deterrent for traffickers and is an important tool for the law enforcement and the prosecutors in trafficking cases.

Also, it can be noted that the legislation has had a normative effect and has contributed to a reduced demand. Overall, there is strong support for the legislation amongst the population.

In its overarching mission to promote the development of preventive efforts, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has an ongoing task of continuing to strengthen the work against sexual exploitation of children, exploitation in prostitution, and

trafficking in human beings. A very important measure to protect adults and children from being exposed to sexual exploitation is for the relevant authorities to work together to spread information to risk groups. Inquiry regarding an Exit programme for people exposed to prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes. The Government has appointed an inquiry with the purpose to develop an Exit program for people exposed to prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes, as well as a program for children exposed to sexual exploitation and human trafficking for sexual purposes. It was appointed on 7 July 2022.

Gender Equality in Sweden's Foreign Policy

Gender equality is an important priority within Sweden's foreign policy as the equal value of every individual – regardless of sex, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, age, or other status – is ultimately a matter of freedom. Sweden's work on gender equality in foreign policy is led by an ambassador for Gender Equality and mainstreamed into our work in a number of areas, not least development cooperation. The following areas related to gender equality is particular important in guiding Sweden's foreign policy:

Gender equality is a prerequisite for democracy. Women's economic empowerment and independence is crucial for women's and girl's ability to shape their own lives, as well as for the development of society as a whole. Every individual should have the right to enjoy sexual- and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

without discrimination of any kind. This means that every individual should have the power to decide over their own body and sexuality, and through that the power to shape their own lives and ability to contribute to the shaping of our society. Likewise, the fight against all forms of sexual and gender-based violence both offline and online is an important goal in Sweden's development cooperation. The Agenda for Women, Peace and Security (WPS), based on UN Security Council Resolution 1325, is crucial when handling the particular challenges faced by women and girls in conflict situations. Women's participation as actors in peace processes is also a prerequisite for sustainable peacebuilding and peace.

Government offices

Ministry of Employment

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