

Statement of Government Policy

14 September 2021



Statement of Government Policy delivered by
Prime Minister Stefan Löfven

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Mr Speaker, Honourable
Members of the Riksdag,

Swedish democracy is just one hundred years old.

In the late 1910s, poverty was severe and inequality glaring. But despite the troubled times, 1918 has become known as the year when “Sweden became Sweden”.

Political parties that had previously struggled to cooperate pulled together, putting their differences aside. In the years that followed, universal and equal suffrage was granted. ‘Poor auctions’ were replaced with social responsibility for vulnerable people. The eight-hour working day was introduced. The seeds of the welfare society were planted.

Thanks to cooperation, Sweden was able to move forward in spite of the turmoil that rocked Europe. But it was never self-evident that this would be the case.

Let this serve as a reminder that democracy cannot be taken for granted. It begins and ends with us citizens. The work of building a society is never done or immune to those who want to destroy it and assign differential value to people according to their sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, skin colour, religion or class.

* * *

Mr Speaker,

In a book called Historien om Bodri [“The Story of Bodri”], a little girl describes her best friend: “Marika and I were almost the same height and we were just as good as each other at whistling. [...] We both had grazed knees and new front teeth. The only difference was that the prayers we said were different.”

The little girl's name is Hédi Fried. She's afraid, but most of all she doesn't understand. Why isn't she allowed to play with her friend anymore? Why do people hate her when she hasn't done anything? Dressed in prisoners clothes and hard shoes, she longs for her mum and dad, and for her dog Bodri.

In one month's time, I will host REMEMBER – REACT, the Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism. The Forum will gather leaders and researchers. Concrete pledges to promote Holocaust remembrance and combat antisemitism and racism in our societies will be made by the political leaders attending the Forum.

In March, Sweden will assume the Presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Sweden's Holocaust museum will welcome its first visitors in July next year.

* * *

There is no place for racism in Sweden. We will intensify our efforts to combat antisemitism, Islamophobia, Afrophobia, antigypsyism and racism against the Sami. Our efforts will be based on the national plan against racism.

The culture and language rights of the indigenous Sami and other national minorities will be strengthened. The Government wants a stricter Discrimination Act that provides for more comprehensive protection against discrimination. Before the end of this electoral period, it should be possible for the Riksdag to adopt new modern legislation concerning gender recognition.

On 1 January, an institute tasked with promoting human rights in Sweden will be established in Lund.

* * *

Mr Speaker,

EU cooperation makes Sweden stronger and more secure. Threats such as the climate crisis, pandemics, terrorism and organised crime cannot be tackled by one country alone. Together we will strengthen our crisis management and preparedness. The EU will continue to take the lead in

the climate transition and in pushing for strengthened competitiveness and a faster digital transformation. Migration also needs to be managed jointly in the EU.

The Government is working to bring about a more equal Europe, with better working conditions and greater gender equality. The EU must be open to the world and protect human rights. The trends we see of academic, media and civil society freedoms being curtailed and judicial independence being questioned must be countered.

Effective European cooperation is based on a clear division of responsibilities between the EU and its Member States. This division remains unchanged. Sweden will continue to make its own tax decisions. The social partners are responsible for agreements on pay and conditions. Forestry will not be subject to exhaustive rules from Brussels.

In an era of rising protectionism, Sweden is a driving force for free, sustainable and fair international trade and a strong single market. The Government promotes new free trade agreements and stands up for the environment and human rights in these contexts. This means that trade can contribute to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

* * *

Sweden's security policy remains firmly in place. Our non-participation in military alliances serves our country well and contributes to stability and security in northern Europe. Sweden will not take a passive stance if another Nordic country or EU Member State suffers a disaster or an attack. We expect these countries to act in the same way if Sweden is affected.

We are living in a time when geographic, economic and technological power is shifting. Current global developments underscore the EU's position as Sweden's most important foreign and security policy arena. Through EU membership, we can contribute to a secure, democratic and prosperous Europe, at the same time as our values and foreign policy positions have a greater impact. The transatlantic relationship is essential to the security and prosperity of Sweden and Europe.

Our ongoing term as Chair of the OSCE gives Sweden further opportunity to defend the European security order based on international

law and the United Nations Charter. Security can only be guaranteed in cooperation with others and with respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Swedish migration policy must be legally certain, effective and humane. New legislation that upholds the right of asylum and establishes a balance between rights and obligations has entered into force.

The possibility of establishing State-run reception centres where asylum seekers will live and take part in an introduction to Swedish society during their initial period in Sweden will be investigated.

Labour migration to Sweden is important to many growing and developing businesses. Expulsions of skilled people will stop, and a specific visa for highly qualified workers will be introduced. It is equally important to address the problem of exploitation of foreign workers. The legitimacy of labour migration can only be maintained by preventing fraud and injustice.

* * *

Mr Speaker,

The security situation in our neighbourhood and in Europe has deteriorated over time. The threat to Sweden has broadened and become more complex. For this reason, a new, updated national security strategy is being developed.

Sweden's foreign, security and development policies are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Around the world, armed conflicts are increasing in number and becoming more protracted, and are having increasingly severe humanitarian consequences. The number of refugees is at an all-time high.

Swedish and EU development cooperation create conditions to improve the lives of people living in poverty and oppression. The commitment to allocating the equivalent of one per cent of Sweden's gross national income to official development assistance remains unchanged.

The need for common security has never been greater. Strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation, for example in the UN, benefits international peace and security.

Sweden is deepening its defence cooperation with Finland, with other Nordic neighbours, in the EU, through the transatlantic link and with NATO. The Government will continue to develop defence partnerships that strengthen Sweden's security.

A strong national military defence is being built up again. The re-establishment of five regiments and an air force wing will begin in late 2021, and these units will be fully operational in 2026. They are the Dalarna Regiment in Falun, the Västernorrland Regiment in Sollefteå with a training detachment in Östersund, the Norrland Dragoon Regiment in Arvidsjaur, the Bergslagen Artillery Regiment in Kristinehamn, the Älvsborg Amphibious Regiment in Gothenburg and the Uppland Air Force Wing in Uppsala.

Sweden also needs a strong civil defence. Society's capacity to manage a heightened state of alert, and ultimately war, will also be increased. This will also improve its crisis preparedness in peacetime.

* * *

Intractable conflicts with far-reaching humanitarian consequences are playing out in Afghanistan, Yemen and Mali. Lasting peace between Israel and Palestine requires a two-state solution. Sweden and the EU condemn Russia's military aggression towards Ukraine and its illegal annexation of Crimea. The increasing repression in Belarus is alarming. Sweden is deeply engaged in all of these issues.

The evacuation from Afghanistan is a reminder of the extraordinary efforts Swedish staff are making in the wider world, often under difficult conditions. Staff at our missions abroad, the Swedish Armed Forces, Sida and other government agencies, civil society representatives, journalists and many others are making invaluable contributions to peace, security, democracy and development. My heartfelt thanks to you all.

The threat of nuclear weapons is a critical global issue. The Stockholm Initiative offers a political agenda for nuclear disarmament. The Government is working for clear progress in the UN's non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament efforts.

* * *

Mr Speaker,

The Government has four overall priorities: jobs, the climate, welfare and security.

Jobs are the foundation of our country's prosperity. Jobs build individual freedom and younger generations' hopes of a better future. Jobs will take Sweden forward after the pandemic.

The greatest freedom and security reform in the Swedish labour market in decades is currently under way. The new career transition assistance scheme will offer support for further education and training to tens of thousands of working adults so they can be better positioned in the future labour market without suffering heavy financial losses while studying.

The Adult Education Initiative provides more education and training places throughout our country. Mälardalen University will receive official university status. Regional dimensioning of upper secondary education that better reflects labour market demands is being introduced.

* * *

Long-term unemployment afflicts families and local communities where it has become entrenched. It must be combated through active labour market policies. More extra jobs and introductory jobs, reinforced new start jobs and more opportunities for work placement schemes are important measures, particularly for older people and foreign-born women. The Government is working to introduce labour market entry agreements in accordance with the social partners' proposal.

The quality of Swedish for Immigrants education will be improved through more stringent scrutiny and the opportunity for more adults to combine Swedish language courses with vocational education and training.

Arbetsförmedlingen (the Swedish Public Employment Service) is being reinforced and the agency's reforms continue. The number of matching services is being substantially expanded so that more people can be supported into employment or education, wherever they live in the country. Arbetsförmedlingen will ensure a local presence throughout the country. Good collaboration with municipalities, the social partners and

other actors is necessary to meet the recruitment needs of employers and create more pathways to jobs.

Swedish wages and conditions must apply to everyone who works in Sweden. More controls and a more effective exchange of information by public authorities are needed to stop rogue businesses that exploit people. The Government will introduce a new national delegation to fight work-related crime.

* * *

It must be worthwhile to work in Sweden – and it must be worthwhile to have worked. The pension supplement is now being paid out to pensioners who have had a long working life with low pay. Additional steps must be taken, however. The Government therefore proposes an increased housing supplement and the introduction of a security pension so that people over the age of 60 who are physically worn out will not have to take out their old-age pension prematurely. The Government considers that payments into the pension system must increase. The issue will be laid before the Working Group on Pensions.

In Sweden, illness must never equate to poverty. For this reason, the Government proposes a comprehensive investment to increase both financial security in case of illness, and rehabilitation time so that people can return to work.

* * *

Mr Speaker,

The climate crisis is the defining issue of our time. The effects of a warmer climate – fires, drought, floods and rising sea levels – continue to impact people. Sweden will drive down climate emissions and become the world's first fossil-free welfare nation. Our future hinges on our ability to do what is necessary now.

The green industrial revolution has only just begun. The Government's proposed green credit guarantees will help reduce risks and lower thresholds for major new industrial initiatives. A regional export advisory initiative is under way to help businesses throughout the country reach international markets.

Twenty per cent of Sweden's emissions derive from the construction sector. The introduction of climate declarations will strengthen the possibility of demanding emissions reductions from the construction sector. The Government wants to accelerate the transition to more sustainable construction and more resource-efficient use of building materials.

Based on the Forests Inquiry, the Government will propose measures to strengthen ownership rights, simplify regulations and increase sustainable production in our forests.

In this transition, it is crucial that all stakeholders take responsibility and that central government sets an example. The possibility to impose climate criteria in public procurement will be improved.

In the wake of the pandemic, more and more Swedes have been exploring our natural environments. On mountain hiking trails and in nature reserves, visitor numbers are at an all-time high. This trend will be encouraged. The tourism and hospitality industry will be strengthened.

A green reindustrialisation will be enabled by increasing the electrification of our society. A national electrification strategy is being drafted to propose how electricity production can increase, paving the way for industrial transition and an electric vehicle fleet.

The Government's climate policy benefits Swedish businesses and Sweden's competitiveness, and creates new jobs in Sweden.

The European Commission has presented a comprehensive legislative package to achieve the EU climate targets. Sweden will push for the bar to be set high as this work continues.

In June next year we will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the UN's first conference on the environment, which was held in Stockholm in 1972. Sweden will host Stockholm+50, a UN conference that aims to help accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

Together we must transition our society – for the sake of the climate, for the sake of Sweden.

Mr Speaker,

For it to be possible to work throughout the country, it must be possible to live throughout the country.

Housing construction is now growing at a greater rate than the population. The rate of construction will remain high and investment support will continue to be developed. Attractive living spaces will be created in the municipalities that are now growing thanks to new jobs.

It will be easier to build close to shorelines in rural areas, local influence over shore protection areas will increase and shore protection measures will be strengthened in heavily exploited areas.

The Government is now making the biggest rail investment of modern times – in both new tracks and upgrades. New main lines for high-speed trains will be constructed. The North Botnia Line will be completed. Record investments are being made to ensure that it is safe to travel on our roads, and further investments will help improve order on the roads. Work is under way to produce a new national plan for investments in roads and railways for 2022–2033. The aim is to adopt the plan next year.

Good access to commercial and government services is necessary throughout the country. The special operational subsidies for grocery shops in vulnerable areas and remote locations will be made permanent, and support will be offered for necessary investments in filling stations in sparsely served areas. The substantial expansion of government service offices will be completed.

The Government continues to strengthen culture and support recovery in the cultural sector throughout the country. Culture will flourish after the pandemic.

Sweden needs diverse independent media throughout the country and strong public service broadcasting. Newspaper distribution will be strengthened so that everyone can have a newspaper delivered to their door every day. The media subsidy system will be modernised to better fit the modern media landscape.

* * *

Mr Speaker,

The Government will continue to prioritise resources to the welfare system.

Health care, schools and social services rest on the shoulders of those working in them. They need more colleagues, the right training and better working environments. It will therefore be possible for anyone working in care for older people to study on paid work time to become an assistant nurse. The right of all home-help service users to a dedicated contact person will be established in law. The Government continues to work on drafting new legislation on care for older people to boost the quality of care services and make them more equitable across the country.

Health care services will be strengthened. Access will be improved and primary care will be expanded. Continuity of care in general practice will be ensured for more people. The new National Health Competence Council will help ensure that staff with the right skills are available.

Investments in cancer care, maternity care and women's health, psychiatric care and emergency service care continue. Contingency planning in health care will be strengthened in the long term. The pandemic has shown that this is necessary.

The Government will continue to strengthen the right to personal assistance. This year, the Government will propose support for self-care measures, reduced parental requirements and enhanced support for supervision.

* * *

Mr Speaker,

Swedish schools must return to world-class learning outcomes. But for outcomes to continue to rise, schools must be more equitable. Preschools and out-of-school centres will be improved, an initiative to reinforce school libraries will be launched and more resources will be directed to the schools with the greatest needs.

Pupils should be able to choose their school, but schools should not be able to choose their pupils. A common admissions system and fairer selection rules are therefore necessary. Municipal schools have greater

responsibilities than independent schools; this must be mirrored in their funding.

Central government needs to take greater responsibility through a regional presence and the introduction of a national professional programme for head teachers, teachers and preschool teachers.

The focus on knowledge and on order in schools continues. It should be easier to close down schools that are not up to standard. A moratorium on new confessional independent schools will be introduced, and existing ones will be monitored better. The national plan for safe and conducive study environments contains proposals to ban mobile phones and introduce clearer powers for school staff to intervene when the situation demands it.

The pandemic has taken a serious toll on our society and pupils have certainly been affected. For this reason, schools will be given extra resources for catch-up school and homework support.

Every pupil must realise that it is not past dips in form, but present willingness to work hard to learn more that is crucial. Subject grades will therefore be introduced instead of course grades in upper secondary school.

The conditions for values-based actors in the welfare sector will be improved. The activities of non-profit organisations that benefit from government grants must respect democratic principles.

* * *

Mr Speaker,

In the book *Tills alla dör* [‘Until they’re all dead’], a woman from Rinkeby in Stockholm utters these heart-rending words: “It is our children who are dying. We need help.”

Gang crime must be crushed with the full force of society. The investment in ten thousand additional police employees by 2024 continues and is enabling a stronger police presence throughout the country.

Anyone who commits multiple offences should be punished more severely. Reduced sentences for young adult offenders will be abolished for serious offences. The Youth Care Act will also be reviewed to ensure that sentences reflect the severity of the serious offences we are now seeing committed at ever younger ages.

Without witnesses, the work of police officers and prosecutors is very difficult and, ultimately, the rule of law is jeopardised. There will be tougher penalties for obstructing the course of justice and for perjury, sentence mitigation will be introduced for those who assist in the investigation of another person's offences, and better support will be offered to witnesses.

Crime prevention must be intensified. For this reason, social interventions must be possible even without parental consent. The municipalities will be given statutory responsibility for crime prevention activities.

Exclusion orders will be investigated with a view to protecting children from destructive areas and environments. More secure places are being created at National Board of Institutional Care facilities. Safety, security and staff training will be increased.

* * *

Earlier this year, five women were murdered by their husbands in the space of just three weeks. Children lost their mothers and families were left shocked and grieving. Men's violence against women must be combated vigorously and decisively.

A new ground for more severe penalties for offences motivated by hate against women will be examined and criminal law protection against psychological violence will be considered. Access to high-quality sheltered accommodation throughout the country will be ensured.

Children must also be protected from violence. An inquiry is reviewing protection for children with regard to contact with a parent who has used violence or is guilty of some other serious violation. Criminal law protection of children against sexual abuse will be strengthened. A comprehensive national strategy to prevent and combat violence against children is now being developed. Next year a Little Sweetheart's law will

be adopted, strengthening protection for children and young people in care.

No child or young person should be forced to live under oppression. The Government's efforts to end honour-based crimes continue. A national centre of expertise on honour-based violence is being established and a specific criminal classification for honour-based offences will be introduced.

* * *

Mr Speaker,

More than twenty months have now passed since the Government decided to classify COVID-19 as a dangerous threat to public health. People who have not yet been vaccinated have an important duty to do so – a duty to themselves, to others, and to ease the burden on the health care system.

So far, more than 70 per cent of all adults in Sweden have received two doses of the vaccine. This is a great success for research, for health care and for European cooperation. Thanks to increasing vaccination rates, Sweden is in a new and better position. We are all looking forward to the day when all the restrictions can be lifted. But we are not there yet.

The Government has appointed an inquiry to apply the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and enhance society's ability to manage future pandemics and epidemics.

The pandemic is still very much around, everywhere in the world. This is why the Government is taking active steps to ensure equitable global access to vaccines. No one is safe until everyone is safe.

Thanks to responsible fiscal policy, Sweden entered the pandemic with strong public finances. The Government has pursued aggressive crisis-response policies to save jobs and businesses, ensure that welfare services can cope and reduce the economic impacts of the pandemic. Sweden's economy is now making a strong recovery.

* * *

The COVID-19 pandemic is slowly loosening its grip. The pandemic is a new chapter in our country's long history.

An unwritten future lies ahead. We have reason to feel confident. Our democracy is strong. We live in peace in one of the most gender-equal countries in the world. Trust between people and a desire to contribute to our world are hallmarks of our country. We have societal challenges but we also have the tools to solve them.

We will meet our challenges together. And we will do so in the conviction that the society we bequeath to our children must be stronger and more sustainable than the society bequeathed to us.

