

Action programme to combat antisemitism



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Racism has no place in our society. Racism leads to discrimination, inequality and 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 and the EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish life 2021–2030.

The action programme to combat antisemitism 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 antisemitism.

The terms “racism” and “antisemitism”

The terms “racism” and “antisemitism” 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 “antisemitism” is used in the plan in the sense of ideologies, beliefs or values that express hostility towards Jews. Sweden also endorses the IHRA’s (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism and the list of examples that can serve as a guide, depending on the context. According to this definition, antisemitism is “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

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

Knowledge about antisemitism and of its various expressions, from the most undisguised to the more subtle or encoded, needs to improve. Representatives of Jewish organisations have highlighted that knowledge concerning antisemitism and of the various ways in which it is manifested is inadequate among government agencies and in society at large. It is also stressed that more research is needed regarding antisemitism and its history, as well as knowledge and understanding of its distinguishing characteristics, such as elements of beliefs that Jews are a dangerous group with a great deal of power. Although the IHRA’s working definition of antisemitism is not legally binding, it can serve as an important tool in identifying and highlighting various manifestations of antisemitism.

The Living History Forum has a central role to play in raising awareness of antisemitism. By reason of the Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism (the Malmö Forum), the agency has implemented a national initiative with specific educational measures concerning aspects such as the Holocaust and antisemitism. The initiative has been directed particularly at target groups that are seldom reached by the agency’s activities, through initiatives targeting different parts of the school system, non-formal and liberal adult education, and in the context of social orientation for newly arrived immigrants.

The Living History Forum has also presented the study “Antisemitiska attityder och föreställningar i Sverige” (*Antisemitic attitudes and ideas in Sweden*) (2021) which examines the prevalence and extent of antisemitic attitudes and ideas in the Swedish population and compares the results with a similar study from 2005. The study shows that support for both traditional and Holocaust-related antisemitic conceptions, and Israel-related antisemitic conceptions, has declined among the population. At the same time, a non-negligible proportion – 5 per cent – of respondents, harbour strong antisemitic attitudes (6 per cent in 2005).

Jewish organisations have testified to meetings with Holocaust deniers, and studies of antisemitism online show that the prevalence of Holocaust-denial terminology is vast.

On July 1, 2022, the Swedish Holocaust Museum is being established to preserve and pass on remembrance of the Holocaust.

Antisemitism can take hold more easily in a context where there is a lack of knowledge about Swedish Jews and Jewish life. Jews have a special status as one of Sweden's five national minorities.

The Government and public authorities are implementing several different initiatives to improve conditions for Jewish culture and language in Sweden, including within the national minority policy. The Government has commissioned a special investigator to submit proposals for a national strategy for empowering Jewish life.

Special research initiative on the Holocaust and antisemitism

- 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, aimed at reinforcing the relevant field of research in the long term.

Remembrance excursions to Holocaust memorial sites

- In 2022, the Living History Forum, the Swedish Committee Against Antisemitism and Voksenåsen will strengthen the conditions for and organise excursions to Holocaust memorial sites. The aim of the initiatives is to enhance knowledge and entrench remembrance of the Holocaust, but also to improve knowledge and understanding of antisemitism and racism, past and present, among Swedish youths and teachers.

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 antisemitism and antigypsyism is an important element of the presidency's priorities.

Greater knowledge of discrimination relating to religion

- The Equality Ombudsman will improve knowledge of the prevalence of discrimination related to religion or other belief and how it interacts with discrimination linked to ethnicity. The remit includes developing a knowledge base on the challenges and obstacles that people face when practising their religion or are visible in their religion, for example through their clothing. Within the remit, discrimination against Jews and Muslims will be illuminated.

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 antisemitism, in 2022–2024. The remit includes producing or developing supporting materials on different forms of racism, and conducting further training initiatives.

Discrimination on multiple grounds

- The Equality Ombudsman will, based on 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 antisemitism

The City of Malmö’s report “Skolgårdsrasism, konspirationsteorier och utanförskap” (*School playground racism, conspiracy theories and exclusion*) (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 antisemitism and other forms of racism form part of the daily lives of children and youths, especially at school and online. The study of Malmö’s schools shows that Jewish youths are subjected to verbal and physical abuse and feel unsafe at school. The report by the Ombudsman for Children shows that children and youths seek the support of teachers in their subjection to racism. In the report from Malmö’s schools, teachers express that they lack knowledge and tools to combat antisemitism in schools.

In dialogues representatives of Jewish organisations have confirmed this picture of the vulnerability of children and youths in schools and have specified that limited availability in schools of images or stories depicting different ways of being Jewish and Jewish life adds to a stereotypical perception of Jews.

Through schools, children and youths are educated in fundamental democratic values and human rights. It is important that tools are available to combat antisemitism 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.

Greater knowledge about how antisemitism can be combated in education

- The Living History Forum will implement knowledge-enhancing initiatives against antisemitism during 2022–2024. The remit includes ensuring that an initiative

targeting higher education is implemented, aimed at improving knowledge of the history and development of antisemitism, contemporary antisemitism and its consequences.

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 antisemitism and other forms of racism.

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

In the report “Antisemitism in Social Media – Conspiracies, Stereotypes, and Holocaust Denial” (2021) the Swedish Defence Research Agency has studied various aspects of antisemitism on open social media platforms. In the data analysed, negativity towards Jews is expressed in almost 35 per cent of all posts that mentioned Jews or Jewishness. The report notes that discussions about a global Jewish conspiracy have increased since 2017 and that the covid-19 pandemic has given rise to new antisemitic conspiracy theories. The results show that antisemitic content exists on all studied platforms and that the volume of such content varies in reverse proportion to the degree of moderation of the platforms.

Besides the reports of the Swedish Defence Research Agency, 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 to devise tools and initiatives to prevent antisemitism 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 antisemitism 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

The National Council for Crime Prevention's report "Antisemitiska hatbrott" (*Antisemitic hate crime*) (2019:4) describes how experiences of hate crime and other expressions of antisemitism are a recurring feature in the lives of many Jews and occur in places such as schools, workplaces, in public places and online. According to the National Council for Crime Prevention, such criminal activity makes people feel genuinely worried and unsafe and prevents them from participating in society on equal terms with others.

The report of the National Council for Crime Prevention shows that antisemitism is prevalent across broad layers of the population, and that far from all people who subject others to antisemitism belong to an organised group.

However, the National Council for Crime Prevention describes how radical nationalistic and violent Jihadi environments pose a threat both to individual people and to Jewish communities and associations.

In various dialogues, representatives of Jewish organisations have emphasised the risk that the lack of knowledge and understanding among law enforcement agencies concerning antisemitic rhetoric will render hate crimes invisible.

There is a need for initiatives that lay down conditions for further efforts to combat antisemitic 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).

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.

Criminalisation of Holocaust denial

- The Government has appointed a parliamentary committee (dir. 2021:87) that will decide on whether specific criminal liability should be introduced for Holocaust denial.

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.

The need for measures to improve security for faith communities and other civil society organisations has risen, mainly due to heightened threats against religious buildings and hatred directed at religious functionaries and practitioners. Calls for state aid to meet the protection needs of Jewish communities and associations have thus increased.

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

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.

Government grant for measures to improve security

- The government grant for measures to improve security has been increased. For 2022, the amount is SEK 44 million. Applications for the grant can be submitted to the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency by faith communities, non-profit organisations and foundations that fear violence, intimidation or harassment associated with the association's premises.

Dialogue with civil society

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