



Ministry of Employment

Re: Follow-up from Sweden on the implementation of the agreed conclusions on 'Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development' (UNW/2020/005)

1. What measures have been taken to strengthen normative, legal and policy frameworks for the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

The Government presented in June 2020 a bill to the Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament) to accelerate action and delivery on the SDGs. In the bill the government is proposing an overarching goal to achieve the 2030 Agenda with an emphasis on policy coherence for sustainable development, spanning across different policy areas. The implementation is gender-responsive with a clear rights perspective with a special emphasis on ensuring that no one is left behind.

The Government has continued to focus on more women and men being employed. The labour market policy measures are gender-mainstreamed and contribute to equality between women and men.

Due to Covid-19, the Government has temporarily made the unemployment benefit system more generous and have reinforced the active labour market policies, including subsidized employment schemes and measures for youth.

2. What actions and investments have been made for financing gender equality and the empowerment of women?

For gender equality policy, during the five-year period there has been a specific appropriation for special gender equality measures in the national budget amounting to approximately SEK 200–480 million per year. The level varies each year depending on the Government's proposal and the Riksdag's budget decision. Funding for special gender equality measures is

intended to be used for specific gender equality initiatives to attain the goals of gender equality policy. During the last five years, the majority of the resources under the gender equality appropriation have been used to combat and prevent men's violence against women, including honour-related violence and oppression.

In accordance with the Government's decision to apply gender-responsive budgeting, a gender equality perspective is to be included in work on the budget bill, throughout the entire process. As a consequence of this, gender equality aspects will be analysed and taken into account in decisions on new reforms and initiatives from the start. Gender equality analyses must also be made when results are presented and when a new policy direction is presented too. There are clear guidelines within the Government Offices for how a gender equality perspective is to be included into work on the budget.

3. What steps have been taken to bolster women's leadership and women's full and equal participation in decision-making in all areas of sustainable development?

To promote a more even distribution of power and influence between women and men, the Government is working to ensure that the gender distribution on the boards of government agencies and advisory councils is equal, a goal that the Government attained in 2016. Equal gender distribution has also been attained in management positions at Swedish embassies. The proportion of women who are heads of missions abroad employed by the Government has gradually increased and gender distribution is now equal. The Government has also increased its ambitions in terms of an equal distribution of men and women among newly recruited professors and has the aim of ensuring that film policy is characterised by gender equality and diversity.

Among other actions being taken within this field, in the new Local Government Act (2017:725) which entered into force on 1 January 2018, the Government made it possible for elected municipal and county council representatives who perform their duties full-time or for a significant proportion of a full-time post to take parental leave. The proposal is expected to make it easier for women and men to combine their duties as an elected representative with family life.

4. What macroeconomic, labour and social policies have been put in place that promote full and productive employment and decent work for women, in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's employment and economic rights and independence?

Sweden is one of the few countries that decided to keep pre-schools and primary schools open during the pandemic. This decision has contributed to help women and men to combine professional work with care responsibilities. 94% of all children aged 3-5 attend preschool.

To mitigate the economic effects on society of the COVID-19 outbreak, several measures have been taken by the Government. The measures are intended to provide greater security for those affected by the pandemic by limiting the spread of the virus, combating the effects on businesses and jobs and providing financial security and transition opportunities for those who become unemployed. According to the principle of gender mainstreaming, a gender equality perspective is integrated into all decisions made by the Government.

The economic impact of the coronavirus is hitting the business sector very hard. To support viable companies during the crisis and reduce the number of jobs lost, the Government has presented several crisis packages containing measures to reduce costs, strengthen liquidity and improve access to financing. These initiatives will contribute to both women's and men's economic situation.

Despite the extensive measures the Government has taken to support viable businesses, many people are going to lose their jobs. In view of the present economic situation several temporary changes have been made in unemployment insurance to make it easier to qualify for benefit and to ensure that this insurance provides greater financial security for people who become unemployed. More funding has been provided for Arbetsförmedlingen (the Swedish Public Employment Service) to deal with higher unemployment and ensure equivalent service levels throughout the country. Funds are also being provided to enable more people to participate in measures leading to jobs, such as employment training and support and matching services. In addition, more places have been provided at universities and other higher education institutions, higher vocational education, vocational adult education and folk high schools. Of all unemployed people, 54% are men and 46% are women.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected an already strained staffing situation for health and social care, not least in care of the elderly, where many women work. At the same time, employment has declined in many other sectors as a result of redundancy notices and job cuts. To improve the supply of staff and make it more attractive to seek jobs in care of the elderly, a boost for care of the elderly is being implemented that means that employees in care of the elderly will be offered paid education and training during working hours.

For those who require it, it will be possible to combine employment with training to become nursing assistants or auxiliary nurses during paid working hours. Central government will finance the costs for the time the employee is absent due to studies. The initiative comprises SEK 2.2 billion in 2020 and 2021. It is in line with the proposal presented by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions and the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union, which made the assessment that 10 000 people could be included.

To ensure that there are sufficient education and training places, the Government is also injecting funds so that 10 000 people can attend education and training focused on health and social care at regional vocational adult education institutions during the fourth quarter of 2020 if they study part-time. These places will be wholly funded by central government in 2020. Municipalities will fund 30 per cent of the education and training places that are sought for 2021.

In June 2020, the Swedish Government appointed a committee of inquiry to evaluate the measures taken by the Government, administrative authorities and municipalities to limit the spread of COVID-19 and the effects of its spread. The committee of inquiry shall also report the consequences for gender equality as well as evaluate how relevant authorities and other actors worked during the pandemic to detect exposure to intimate partner violence and honour-related violence and oppression and to provide adequate protection and support”.

5. What response and recovery measures to the COVID-19 pandemic have been taken to improve and expand social protection for women (e.g., healthcare coverage, unemployment benefits, paid sick leave, paid parental leave, maternity benefits, pensions, income support such as cash transfers)?

The Government has taken several measures to improve and expand social protection for those who have lost their jobs or have been ill during the pandemic. The economic measures are especially important for people with low incomes, for example women working in care. The Government has temporarily discontinued the sickness benefit standard deduction. This means that sick pay is paid from the first day at home. The purpose of this change is to encourage people to stay at home even when they have mild symptoms, but it also has economic consequences for those affected.

The opportunities to receive temporary parental benefit have been temporarily expanded during the pandemic. If it should be necessary to close e.g. preschools and schools to limit the spread of the virus, parents who have

to stay home from work to care for children will be eligible for temporary parental benefit.

An increased allowance for families with children under the housing allowance has been temporarily introduced during 2020. Benefiters are to a large extent single parents.

The tax reduction for house care services have been expanded to further facilitate for families. It also intended to give job opportunities for people with a weak position in the labour market.

The coronavirus crisis threatens to exacerbate the vulnerability of children and young people at risk in their home environment. The same applies to victims of domestic violence and 'honour'-based violence and oppression, including women, children, young women, older people, LGBTI people and people with disabilities. Greater isolation can increase the incidence of violence and control. Those who are vulnerable might also find it more difficult to receive information and seek support. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has been tasked with identifying and developing effective working methods that municipalities can use to spread information about domestic violence and 'honour'-based violence and oppression, and to establish contact with victims of violence. The work will be based on the specific circumstances and conditions resulting from the outbreak of COVID-19.

6. What actions have been taken to expand the availability and affordability of care services to address the increase in unpaid care and domestic work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., care subsidies, paid leave)?

The situation in Sweden is somewhat different when it comes to the Covid-19 related increase in unpaid domestic and care work. The schools and the pre-schools (kindergarten etc) are open just as before the COVID-19. Since appr. 94 percent of the children between 3-5 years are enrolled in the children care system throughout the day, the fact that the pre-schools are open is of major importance when it comes to daily domestic and care work.

Even though the pre-schools and schools still are open there are no tolerance of sending children with the slightest symptom of sickness to pre-school or school. That means that children are at home and need care to a larger extend than before COVID -19. To ease that situation, the government has expanded the opportunities to receive temporary parental benefit temporarily during the pandemic. If it should be necessary to close e.g. preschools and schools to limit the spread of the virus, parents who have

to stay home from work to care for children will be eligible for temporary parental benefit.

The government has also decided on an expansion of the tax reduction for house care services, which can increase the availability and affordability of that kind of services. This can ease the situation due to the COVID -19 and the increase in unpaid domestic and care work.

7. What action has been taken to increase resources and support for women's and civil society organizations as they cope with the COVID-19 pandemic?

The Swedish Government has commissioned the National Board of Health and Welfare to distribute SEK 100 million in 2020 to civil society organizations that work with children in vulnerable situations, women exposed to violence, children and LGBTQ people and against violence in close relationships, including honor-related violence and oppression. The purpose of the grant is to support certain non-profit organizations that, due to the outbreak of Covid -19, need to adapt or strengthen their support activities to meet increased or changed needs.

Another important player in Sweden is the Swedish Gender Equality Agency (established in January 2018). The agency is commissioned to contribute to an effective implementation of gender equality policy. The work of the agency requires close cooperation with other government agencies and also with county councils, regions, municipalities and civil society. The main task of the Gender Equality Agency is to coordinate, follow up and provide various forms of support in order to reach the gender equality policy goals.

One of the tasks for the agency is analysis and follow-up of the development towards gender equality. Since the pandemic broke out, the Agency are monitoring and analyzing the development and consequences of the Covid-19 from a gender perspective and publish the results on their website.

In order to further strengthen the work to discover and prevent violence against women during the Covid -19 pandemic, the Swedish Government has given the Agency a mission to identify and develop effective working methods for how municipalities can disseminate information about violence in close relationships and violence and oppression in the name of honor , as well as how contact can be established with victims of violence. The implementation of the assignment shall be based on the special circumstances and conditions that prevail due to the outbreak of Covid -19.

8. What steps have been taken to improve gender-responsive data collection in the context of follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development, and to track and monitor the gender-specific impacts and response measures to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Statistics that reflect gender equality issues are compiled and published within the remit of Statistics Sweden's work on gender equality statistics. Gender equality statistics are not gathered separately and are instead compiled from existing surveys or registers. Statistics Sweden presents gender quality statistics as a theme area on its website. The theme area of gender quality has existed since 2012 and is a result of development work carried out by Statistics Sweden as commissioned by the Government. There are indicators linked to the six sub-goals of gender equality policy. Covid- 19 has not yet given rise to any changes to how sex-disaggregated data is collected and presented.