

Statement of Government Policy

September 2015



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

What should our blue and yellow flag symbolise?

In the face of increasing polarisation and widening unease, we need to rally around what kind of Sweden we want to be.

What do we want to tell our children and grandchildren about the society they are growing up in?

What do we want to say when we are abroad and are asked about our country?

What do we want Sweden to stand for?

I believe in a Sweden that we build together, that is more than just a gathering of people in a geographic area – a community where we feel responsible for each other.

Where people's engagement and desire to work is what makes our society strong. Where we welcome people fleeing from war and oppression.

Where no one is left behind and no one is held back.

An open Sweden, where we strive to have the most advanced high-tech companies, world-leading cutting-edge research and environmental technologies, as well as to be the most gender equal and egalitarian country in the world.

Because a cohesive and solidarity-based society is a prerequisite for a rich and prosperous country.

Sweden should be a country busy at work. Investments are now being made in new housing and infrastructure, in entrepreneurship and in educating and training people for employment. This is what will drive down unemployment.

The significant needs of Swedish schools are now being met through investment in the teaching profession, more staff,

smaller classes and an equitable education system. This is how learning outcomes can be improved.

Climate change adaptation is now being accelerated because it is essential for the future of the planet and because it enhances our competitiveness and quality of life. This is how we are taking the lead on climate action.

This is our common project for the future.
This is how we are building a Sweden to be proud of.

Over the last parliamentary year, the parties in the Riksdag have entered into a number of important agreements. We now have broad consensus on the budget process, defence, arms exports, school grades, press subsidies, home loan amortisation requirements, military operations in Mali and Iraq, and ongoing effective collaboration on the pension system. This is a strength for our country. The cooperation Government would like to thank all those who have played a constructive role in these agreements.

Mr Speaker,

The security situation in our part of the world has deteriorated.

Russian aggression and the destabilisation of Ukraine pose the most serious challenge to the European security order since the end of the Cold War. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea is a violation of international law. Borders must not be changed by force. Our support to Ukraine, both political and economic, will continue.

A modern total defence is being developed to respond to the challenges presented by the changing security policy situation. The cross-party agreement lays the foundation for the future direction of defence. Defence appropriations will be increased. Sweden's military capability will steadily increase. At the same time, our international cooperation is deepening. Swedish-Finnish cooperation is of particular priority. Sweden's non-participation in military alliances continues to serve our country well.

A broad initiative is under way to shape a policy for Sweden's security. The threats to our security are evolving and complex. Contemporary threats include terrorism, cyber vulnerability, epidemics and climate change. A number of parties are invited to take part in this work.

Sweden's candidacy for the UN Security Council is a concrete expression of the Government's desire to take on greater responsibility for peace and security. Sweden will promote active conflict prevention and early responses. Efforts to end ongoing wars and conflicts must be intensified. To achieve a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine, direct negotiations must begin.

Humanitarian operations must also be reinforced and made more effective. Sweden continues to be one of the world's largest humanitarian donors. We must be a strong voice in the world for freedom, peace, human rights and solidarity.

The war in Syria continues to cause immense human suffering. The Government condemns the Assad regime's far-reaching attacks against civilians and the barbaric acts committed by ISIL. The systematic violence perpetrated against women and children is particularly horrifying. More than 250 000 people

have lost their lives. To reach a political solution, more pressure must be brought to bear on the Assad regime and the states that support it.

Sweden wants the EU to focus on playing a greater and more active role, in dialogue with countries in the region, and to constructively support the UN Special Envoy for Syria. Sweden wants to see an international contact group formed, comprising the United States, Russia, regional partners and the EU, to support UN efforts. And time is of the essence. The Security Council and its major powers must shoulder responsibility if this blood bath is to end.

Millions of people are fleeing from the war. More countries must do more to offer people protection. Sweden is increasing its support to the UNHCR relief operations on the ground. Rescue operations in the Mediterranean continue. Legal routes for people to seek asylum must be available.

Sweden stands up for the right of asylum. In times of crisis, this is more important than ever. Those fleeing war and oppression must be able to obtain protection in Sweden. Those without grounds for remaining must leave. Immigration in Sweden is regulated.

Responsibility for asylum seekers must be shared. In the EU, between the EU Member States. No country must be allowed to shirk its responsibility. And in Sweden, between the municipalities. No municipality must be allowed to shirk its responsibility.

Many people today are making important contributions. Teachers who are doing their utmost to give children a new start in Sweden. Football and bandy coaches who welcome new players to join the team. Volunteers who are helping with homework. This is how today's newly arrived people, just like

those who once fled the dictatorship in Chile or the war in the Balkans, can more quickly become a part of our community and help to build Sweden. These are contributions that the Government applauds.

I will be convening a national action, '*Sweden together*', to ensure more effective introduction. Municipalities, regions, civil society, the sports movement, religious communities, authorities, the business community, trade unions and others will be invited to develop the best solutions for successful Swedish reception.

The situation in many municipalities is strained. A major initiative is therefore being taken to ensure swifter introduction. Municipalities will be given increased resources to improve the teaching of Swedish for adults and education for children and young people. Central government compensation for reception of newly arrived immigrants will be significantly increased. Compensation for unaccompanied children and young people will be adjusted to make it more predictable and cost-effective.

All adults coming to Sweden must be able to find work and do their share. Swedish language instruction will begin at asylum centres. More will be invested in validation to more quickly identify people's skills. A fast track to the labour market is being developed.

This will enable people who have fled war and persecution to start a new life. This will make Sweden better prepared for demographic change. This will transform present-day challenges into an asset for Sweden.

Anna Lindh once reminded us of why the EU was originally created:

“Through economic cooperation and casual interaction, states that for generations had fought against each other were to prevent armed conflict in Europe. War is unlikely between countries that are interdependent – economically, socially and politically.”

The refugee crisis, the economic crisis in Greece and the upcoming referendum in the UK pose a range of challenges to the European Union. Sweden is working for a strong and cohesive Europe that creates more jobs, increases gender equality and adopts an ambitious climate policy. Equal pay for work of equal value in accordance with laws and agreements in the country of employment is a principle that must apply throughout the EU. As a result of a Swedish initiative, several countries are now pushing to ensure that freedom of movement cannot be used to circumvent national laws and collective agreements. This is how a citizens’ Europe can be created – a Europe that shows its worth in everyday life.

Mr Speaker,

Hard work lies ahead of us.

For several years, Sweden’s productivity and competitiveness have fallen. The deficits in central government finances have grown. Unemployment has risen. Gaps have widened. School performance has declined. Environmental efforts have been accorded lower priority.

But efforts to reverse these trends have now begun. Our goals are ambitious. Employment and hours worked will increase to make Sweden’s unemployment rate the lowest in the EU by 2020.

Responsible economic policy is the foundation. Keeping public finances in good order is a prerequisite for more jobs and

sustainable welfare financing. Short-term tax cuts must take a back seat to long-term investments. The deficits will be tackled.

Step by step, the employment target will be achieved through Sweden's new job agenda. The agenda has three parts.

The first consists of future investments.

A major housing policy initiative will be carried out. Investment support targeting small and energy-efficient apartments will be introduced. A special stimulus will be introduced for rapid construction of more student housing. A construction bonus will be given to municipalities where new housing is built.

Railway and road maintenance will be increased throughout the country, from north to south. Infrastructure investments leading to more housing, better freight transport and reliable commuting will be given priority. Investments will increase by more than 40 per cent by 2019.

Sweden will be one of the world's leading research countries. During the year, a new research bill with a ten-year perspective will be prepared.

Climate adaptation will accelerate. Environment and climate technology investments to strengthen companies' innovative capacity will be expanded. *The 'Climate leap'* investment support will target actions that have the greatest effect on climate emissions.

The second part of Sweden's new job agenda is an active business policy for more and growing companies.

A reindustrialisation strategy will be drawn up. Industry-related research will be developed. Sweden will become a more

attractive country for investments in modern industrial enterprise.

Government venture capital will be reformed to support innovative companies throughout the country. Companies in start-up and growth phases of development will be given priority. The National Innovation Council has so far identified three collaborative programmes in life sciences, environmental and climate technology, and digitisation.

A modern business policy will create jobs throughout the country. The forest – ‘green gold’ – will contribute to more jobs and be used sustainably. Work on a national forestry programme will continue. Sweden’s potential as a destination for ecotourism and nature-based tourism will be used to advantage. A food strategy will be drawn up to increase production throughout the food chain and meet the demand for organic food. A regional reform will be prepared. Major investments will be made in broadband expansion. Support to basic commercial services in rural areas will be increased.

An export drive will be launched. Exports will be facilitated for small and medium-sized enterprises. Sweden’s presence in growth markets will be strengthened. A coordination function, Team Sweden, will streamline and strengthen the State’s export promotion. An export strategy will be presented during the year.

Free and fair world trade will be promoted. Negotiations between the EU and the US on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) will continue. The most ambitious outcome possible must be achieved, without jeopardising workers’ interests, environmental protection, or human and animal health. The agreement must respect democratic decisions.

The third part of Sweden's new job agenda involves investments in job matching and skills.

There are 375 000 unemployed people in Sweden. At the same time, there are more than 80 000 vacant positions.

This is an enormous waste. Efforts to improve job matching and make use of all skills will now begin. No one's desire to gain an education, improve their skills or progress in their career should be squandered.

A new adult education initiative will be launched, offering 50 000 new educational opportunities in 2016. More people will be given access to vocational higher education, folk high schools, higher education, and municipal vocational and adult education. In 2017, all adults will have the right to municipal adult education to complete upper secondary school and qualify for higher education studies.

No young person should be condemned to long-term unemployment. Young people should study or work. Sweden's municipalities are now set to provide young people under the age of 25 with education, work or work experience within 90 days. Trainee jobs and education contracts will be expanded.

Phase 3 will be wound down. Labour market policy should not lead people into an occupational dead end. 'Extra jobs' will be introduced. Long-term unemployed people will be given the opportunity to study while retaining activity support.

Procurement must be used strategically. It should be a requirement that long-term unemployed people be given a job or work experience. The Swedish Transport Administration is the first government agency to be given this task.

Participation and employment opportunities should be available to everyone, regardless of functional capacity. Subsidised wages will

be expanded. New jobs at Samhall will be opened up. Support to disability interest groups will be increased.

Through Sweden's new job agenda, the Government will invest in housing, infrastructure, research and climate. Cooperation will increase for more and growing companies. Steps will be taken to ensure effective labour market matching in Sweden. Everyone can – and must – contribute their strengths.

In a Sweden to be proud of, everyone who is able to work will do so.

Mr Speaker,

Many of us remember a special teacher.

A teacher who explained things that were hard to understand and challenged you when you were ready.

A teacher who expected great things of you and helped you achieve them.

A teacher who noticed you.

Teachers are key to reversing the trend in schools. But they cannot do it on their own. It will require hard work – from us as a society, and from all pupils and parents. The Government will focus on three areas: boosting learning outcomes, increasing equity and enhancing the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

Early action will be given priority. Preschool groups will be made smaller. More staff will be employed in compulsory school to give teachers more time for pupils and to make primary school classes smaller. After-school care will be strengthened. More special needs teachers will be employed. A school development project will be developed to give teachers basic special needs tools. This is important, not least for children with

neuropsychiatric impairment. A reading-writing-arithmetic guarantee for the early years will be drawn up.

Resources to schools will be allocated according to need. Homework support and holiday school will be given to those who need it – not just those who can pay for it. Special initiatives will be undertaken in schools where conditions are difficult. Resources will be increased to municipalities that receive children seeking asylum. Head teachers will be bolstered in their role as educational leaders.

The quality of teacher training will be improved. SEK 3 billion will be provided on an annual basis to increase teacher salaries. The national action for the teaching profession will continue. Digitisation of national tests and fewer administrative duties will give teachers more time for pupils.

Mental ill health will be combated. No one should have to suffer discrimination, bullying, or other abusive treatment. This applies both at school and on the internet. Pupils must feel well to perform well. Racism and sexism must be combated. School health and welfare services will be augmented. Swedish schools must be safe and secure.

In a Sweden to be proud of, every child will flourish.

Mr Speaker,

More than 1.1 million square kilometres of Arctic sea ice have vanished. This is equivalent to the combined area of Sweden, Finland and Norway. Climate change is upon us. It is serious and it affects everyone – those of us living now and future generations.

Climate change can be curbed if we want to do so. Global warming must be kept as far below two degrees as possible. The

threat of climate change is the critical issue of our time. Global greenhouse gas emissions must be halved by 2050.

The Government wants to take a climate leap that accelerates the transition to a more sustainable society.

By taking responsibility for our climate impact in Sweden, we will demonstrate leadership in the global arena. Investing in climate change adaptation will create new Swedish jobs.

Sweden will become one of the world's first fossil-free welfare countries. Emissions will be reduced at the rate necessary for globally sustainable development. The transition must be effective and provide long-term rules. Trains should be faster than cars and cheaper than air travel. A climate policy framework will be prepared.

Climate efforts require global leadership.

“We are the first generation that can put an end to poverty. And the last that can put an end to climate change.”

These are the words of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. World leaders will meet in Paris at the end of the year to adopt a new climate agreement. Sweden is pushing for the most ambitious agreement possible. Development cooperation must contribute to a transition from fossil-dependent economies. At the same time, poor countries' resilience must be supported through climate change adaptation. Sweden will continue to be one of the main donors to the UN Green Climate Fund.

Sweden will also take a leading role in implementing the new UN Sustainable Development Goals. Poverty reduction, environmental and climate action, and peacebuilding go hand-in-hand. Sweden will lead the way with a coherent policy that takes into account the perspective of poor people, human rights and

planetary boundaries. Work to meet the new Sustainable Development Goals in Sweden will commence.

Sweden will have a fossil-free vehicle fleet.

Conditions for green cars will improve. New support will be introduced for electric buses. Investments in charging infrastructure and biogas will be enabled. The super green car rebate will be strengthened. The effect of environmental taxes will increase. New public transport will be enabled through urban environment agreements. Initiatives will be introduced to encourage more people to cycle.

The energy transition will continue and climate-smart housing will be encouraged. Cross-party cooperation in the Commission on Energy is crucial to creating a long-term energy policy.

Investments for 100 per cent renewable energy will lead the way. Ambitions will be raised. This will create impetus for technological development, economic development and jobs throughout Sweden. Electricity certificate system goals will be raised. Support to marine-based wind power will continue. The million home programmes will be upgraded and made energy-efficient.

Sweden will lead the way in environment action. The planetary boundaries must be respected. The environmental objectives must be met. Biodiversity, a toxin-free everyday environment and a healthy marine environment will be priorities.

The bar will be raised for biodiversity and ecosystem services. Initiatives for the protection and management of valuable natural habitats will increase. More natural forests will be protected. More marine reserves will be established. Opportunities for people to engage in outdoor activities and spend time in nature

will improve. The appropriation for outdoor activity organisations will be increased.

Children should grow up in an environment free from toxic substances. The precautionary principle, the substitution of hazardous substances and the polluter pays principle are the basic premises. Phasing out chemicals that are harmful to people and the environment creates incentives for better alternatives. When EU regulatory frameworks are insufficient, Sweden will lead the way.

The foundation will be laid for a circular, bio-based economy that contributes to the achievement of the environmental objectives. What is waste today will become a resource, inspiring new business opportunities. Hazardous toxins will be phased out of ecocycles. Materials will be reused to a greater extent.

The Government's Future Groups will provide long-term idea and policy development, combining competitiveness and job creation with ecological sustainability and social development.

In a Sweden to be proud of, we will take climate responsibility for future generations.

Mr Speaker,
Honourable Members of this assembly,

Do you know the story of Bridget? That fantastic picture book by Pija Lindenbaum about the girl who gets lost in the woods and comes across a pack of grey wolves? It is a tale about a little girl who finds great courage.

Few things are as important or as simple as reading to children. It can open up whole new worlds. The role of the school library in fostering young people's ability and desire to

read will be promoted. Resources will be provided to increase staffing in school libraries.

Society is reflected in its arts and culture, which offer us a deeper understanding of ourselves and the age in which we live. Arts and culture should be available to people in their neighbourhood. Children's artistic creativity will be given priority. Free admission to state museums will be introduced. Resources will be given to cinemas in rural areas.

Additional resources will be injected into the sports movement to provide greater opportunity to engage in sport. Special measures will be taken to strengthen the sports movement's role in the introduction of new arrivals.

The Sami have special status as Sweden's indigenous people. The Government intends to increase Sami influence and participation, and will reinforce the role of the Sami Parliament.

Sweden must be a secure country in which we stand united. The insecurity and barriers caused by violence, hatred and crime must be forcefully combated.

The fight against serious organised crime is intensifying. Swedish Customs has been instructed to give priority to combating arms smuggling. Attempt, preparation or conspiracy to commit gross firearms offences will be criminalised. Targeted initiatives will be carried out in the most affected areas. The local police presence will increase. Recruitment to criminal gangs will be reduced through preventive measures. Defector support will be reinforced.

Preventive action to combat domestic violence will be strengthened. Government grants for activities supporting victims

of violence will be increased. Sexual offences legislation will be reviewed to strengthen the position of crime victims in the legal process.

Terrorism will be prevented, thwarted and preempted. Travel to participate in terrorist wars will be criminalised. Passport abuse will be stopped. More effective tools will be put in the hands of law enforcement authorities. New resources will be injected into the Swedish Security Service. Collaboration will be enhanced between the police, customs and coast guard. Civil society preparedness must increase to meet new security threats.

When prejudices spread and hatred grows, when refugee centres are attacked, when Roma are assaulted and camps set on fire, when Jews, Muslims and Christians are attacked for their faith, and when LGBTQ people are met with hatred – this is when we must stand up for the equal rights and dignity of all people. The battle for democracy must be won and won anew. Each one of us shares this responsibility in everyday life.

A national plan to combat racism and hate crime will be drawn up. Preventive action to counter violent extremism will intensify. A national research programme on racism will be set up. Information security will be enhanced, and work to combat internet-based crime, abuse and threats will be intensified.

In Sweden, everyone must have the right to be exactly who they are. This must be a place that is safe for everyone, regardless of gender, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.

Europe cannot accept anti-Roma sentiment. It is the responsibility of each Member State to ensure that its citizens are not discriminated against and to safeguard their social rights. Charity is not the way out of poverty. No one should have to beg on the streets. The solution is education and jobs.

An agreement to promote job opportunities and social security in the country of origin has been concluded with Romania. Talks with Bulgaria are under way to achieve the same goal. Law and order in Sweden will be upheld. Illegal settlements on public or private land will not be permitted. Hate crime must never be accepted.

Mr Speaker,

The gaps in Swedish society today are too large.

There is a five-year difference in life expectancy between those with relatively limited education and those with higher education. Elderly people are at risk in understaffed elderly care. This is not how our country should be. Insecurity and gaps are holding Sweden back.

The universal welfare system is unsurpassed at levelling out living conditions and creating security. Cutbacks will now be replaced with new investments. Our public funds must be used for their intended purposes. Staff knowledge and skills must be utilised. Let the professionals be professionals.

A commission for equitable health has been appointed. People's health must not be determined by their socioeconomic status. The goal is to end avoidable health inequalities within a generation.

More resources will be injected into health care to ensure higher quality. Initiatives will be implemented to improve cancer care.

Mammography screening will be free. Maternity care will be improved. Resources will be provided to reduce mental ill health in young people. A women's health initiative will be launched.

The financial position of pensioners will be improved. Tax on pensions will be reduced as a step towards equalising the taxation of pensions and wages. The tax gap will be closed entirely for pensioners with the lowest incomes. The housing supplement has been raised. Investment support for more housing for older people will be introduced. Staffing in elderly care will be increased. Work on a national quality plan will be launched.

Gender mainstreaming of all our policies is under way. Women and men must have equal power to shape society and their own lives. The world's first feminist government is now implementing policies that increase equality between men and women.

Family policy will be strengthened so that all children are given equal opportunities in life. The basic level of parental insurance will be raised. A modern parental insurance system will be designed that is adapted to today's labour market and serves the diversity of family forms, including non-nuclear families. A third month will be reserved for each parent.

An initiative will be launched to improve social care services for children and young people. Society's protection of its most vulnerable is provided by a network of people, often social workers, who have long laboured in obscurity.

Fraud in welfare systems will be combated. Work will begin to tackle the abuse of personal assistance services and subsidised employment. The welfare system must be protected from economic crime. A new anti-fraud delegation will be appointed.

A powerful package of measures will be drawn up to curb the rise in sickness absence rates. No one's work should make them sick. A new work environment strategy will be presented. The maximum time limit for sickness insurance will be removed. Sickness insurance must lead people back to work, not into poverty.

Unemployment insurance will be improved. The ceiling has been raised. Work is being initiated to ensure that more people are able to qualify and sign up for such insurance. A legislative proposal will be presented to stop the abuse of fixed-term employment contracts. Financial security leads to people having a positive outlook on change in the workplace. This is good for both the individual and for Sweden's businesses.

Mr Speaker,

We have begun our journey towards a society that stands united and where people are there for each other.

Step by step we are laying the foundation for a Sweden where more jobs are created and unemployment declines. No one will be left behind. Nor will anyone be held back. Because a society based on solidarity is also a successful society.

Step by step we are creating a school system in which our children are learning more. Each child is being challenged and is receiving the support they need. Because we know that an equitable school system leads to better learning outcomes.

Step by step we are raising our ambitions in climate policy. Because there is no other way forward if we are to curb climate change. And we know that this will prepare Sweden for the future.

This is what our blue and yellow flag should symbolise.
Together we are creating a Sweden to be even more proud of.

Government of Sweden

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