



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

“New Swedish ambassador to combat trafficking in human beings”

Published 04 May 2016 Updated 09 May 2016

Opinion article, Dagens Nyheter (DN Debatt), 4 May 2016 Sweden is intensifying its efforts to combat the exploitation of women, children and poor people in the world. As the world’s first feminist government, we are creating a new position for an ambassador to combat trafficking in human beings. The position may serve as an important instrument in international cooperation, write Minister for Gender Equality Åsa Regnér and Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström.

Trafficking in human beings is one of the most serious forms of organised crime and a modern form of slavery. It is a violation of human rights and has a very strong gender equality and child rights perspective. This is why, as the world's first feminist government, we are now creating a new position for an ambassador to combat trafficking in human beings.

It is estimated that more than two million people are trafficked into slavery each year. Almost four fifths of the victims – mostly women and underage girls – are sold into the sex industry. Human trafficking does not affect individuals alone; it impacts the very structure of a democratic society by stripping individuals of their integrity and human dignity. It is a consequence of poverty and corruption, but also of a lack of gender equality. In many parts of the world, women and children are in an extremely vulnerable situation.

The offence of trafficking in human beings is a supply chain offence, consisting of many different stages, including the recruitment and transportation of victims, prostitution, trafficking in human organs or exploitation on the labour market. This criminal activity most often crosses national borders and involves serious violations of human rights.

The Government wants Sweden to be a strong voice in the world for gender equality and human rights. Women and men must have the same power to shape society and their own lives; children's rights must be strengthened. This means that the particular vulnerability of women and girls to human trafficking must be combated with the best possible measures. Sweden's efforts must contribute to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda on gender equality and children's rights. The transnational nature of the crime also demands effective international cooperation and increased coordination alongside national measures.

This is why the Government is creating a new position as Sweden's ambassador to combat trafficking in human beings. It will send an important political signal to the international community that Sweden is intensifying its efforts to combat human trafficking and the exploitation of women and children and of poor and desperate people throughout the world. Ongoing wars and conflicts, and the ensuing migration, have further aggravated the situation for many women and girls at risk of being exploited and abused.

The ambassador will strengthen Sweden's international profile as a leading human rights defender. At the same time, the position may serve as an important instrument for concrete measures to improve the effectiveness of international efforts and cooperation. Through the ambassador's work, Sweden will also help to ensure that particular attention is paid to the gender equality perspective in international efforts to combat trafficking in human beings. Sweden has much to contribute, and as a nation it can serve as a good example through the Swedish Sexual Purchases Act.

The ambassador will facilitate dialogue between various governments, national agencies and international organisations on issues focusing on the prevention of and protection against trafficking in human beings, and on the prosecution of perpetrators. The position will contribute to increased knowledge and quality in the work of relevant Swedish government agencies.

Sweden's ambassador to combat trafficking in human beings will work to:

- identify and encourage the interest of other countries in cooperating to combat trafficking in human beings, possibly through concluding bilateral agreements with Sweden, focusing on combating human trafficking and other serious crime, and actively contributing to this work;
- help share Swedish experiences of discovering and prosecuting the perpetrators of human trafficking, and protecting and supporting its victims internationally;
- advance and strengthen the gender perspective in international efforts to combat trafficking in human beings by influencing other countries to adopt legislation that criminalises the demand for sexual services, similar to Swedish legislation;
- ensure that abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children come to an end;
- identify success factors and positive experiences in efforts to combat trafficking in human beings, and make them known both internationally and among relevant Swedish government agencies;
- represent Sweden at various international events focused on issues related to trafficking in human beings;
- contribute, through international advocacy work, to a more uniform interpretation of the Palermo Protocol's definition of trafficking in human beings in the countries that have acceded to the Protocol to increase, in the long run, the chances of prosecuting involved perpetrators;
- create/resume an international network of actors (international NGOs, religious leaders, companies, professional associations, media and other opinion-makers) who through their actions can contribute to both combating human trafficking and its social and economic root causes;
- generate interest in, spread knowledge about and increase expertise on trafficking in human beings among employees at Swedish missions abroad and other Swedish actors stationed abroad, as well as at Swedish companies and organisations that have representatives who work abroad;
- conduct a dialogue at home with the Swedish government agencies and NGOs that work on human trafficking issues;
- report to the Government on the progress of international efforts to combat

trafficking in human beings, and contribute to Sweden's periodic reports to international convention committees or to other international reviews of Sweden's human rights commitments;

- strengthen the image of Sweden as a driving force in efforts to combat human trafficking and its causes, through contacts with other governments and through identifying future partners; and
- consult and cooperate with specialised structures in the UN, the EU, the Council of Europe, the Council of the Baltic Sea States and other relevant intergovernmental organisations in their work to combat human trafficking, and actively push to coordinate their action.

International cooperation on these issues involves a number of actors. At global level, the UN has a coordinating role concerning the efforts of relevant UN organisations. At EU level, there is an Anti-Trafficking Coordinator. INTERPOL and Europol are also dealing with the issue.

The Government and relevant government agencies are working constantly to combat human trafficking. Sweden is associated with human rights and democracy. Human rights are women's rights. Trafficking in human beings must be stopped.

Åsa Regnér
Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality

Margot Wallström
Minister for Foreign Affairs



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

“We must teach more countries about our Sexual Purchases Act”

Published 23 April 2016 Updated 29 April 2016

Opinion article, Expressen, 23 April 2016 France is the fourth European country to criminalise sexual purchases. We hope that more countries will take decisions in this direction, writes Sweden’s Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström and Minister for Gender Equality Åsa Regnér.

The French National Assembly recently voted to criminalise sexual purchases in accordance with the Swedish model. With this new law, the French government also wants to combat trafficking in human beings and trafficking networks – the modern slave trade.

France's position is a major success for all of us who are fighting for women's rights and the equal value of all people. It goes without saying that it should never be possible to buy another person or conduct trade in people's bodies. Prostitution is the exploitation of people and consolidates a sense of social superiority and inferiority that is harmful to individuals and to society as a whole. Everyone who is exploited is a victim, regardless of their gender, but we know that it is mainly women and girls who are exploited in prostitution and that it is often men who purchase sexual services.

Taking a stand for those who are exploited in prostitution and at the same time criminalising those who buy sex is the only right thing for a civilised society to do. People selling sex are often in a vulnerable situation and there must be no barriers to them seeking support to change their situation. This is why it is so important that selling sex is not a criminal act.

Sweden was the first country in the world to introduce a ban on purchasing sexual services. We are proud of this. In January 1999, it became a criminal offence to buy sexual services but not to sell them. France has become the fourth country, after Sweden, Norway and Iceland, to criminalise sexual purchases. We now hope that more countries will take decisions in this direction.

It is unworthy of a gender-equal society that men claim the right to have temporary sexual liaisons with women in exchange for payment, which is taking on increasingly organised forms in international criminal networks, where women's bodies are regarded as commodities.

When Sweden introduced the law against sexual purchases, it was thought that it could have a deterrent effect on potential sex buyers and reduce the interest from various groups or individuals abroad in establishing a more organised prostitution business in Sweden. This has proved to be true. Sweden is not as attractive a 'market'.

Support for the Sexual Purchases Act has remained constantly high in population studies going back several surveys. In the latest survey from 2014, 72 per cent took a positive view of the act (85 per cent among women and 60 per cent among men).

It is clear that the ban on purchasing sexual services has had a normative effect on potential buyers and has thus influenced the scope of prostitution in Sweden.

The Government has commissioned an inquiry into whether the ban on purchasing sexual services should also apply to Swedish citizens abroad. The inquiry has been tasked with investigating whether there is a need for measures aimed at ensuring greater protection in criminal law against trafficking in human beings, the purchase of sexual services and the purchase of sexual acts from children. The inquiry has received supplementary terms of reference to also look into the exploitation of vulnerable people for forced labour and begging, and it will present its report in June 2016.

The Government is now pushing for other countries to follow suit on the issue of criminalising sexual purchases, on the basis of both Article 6 (on prostitution and trade in women) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the EU Directive against trafficking in human beings. We are therefore pleased that France has now

taken this step. As Minister for Gender Equality and Minister for Foreign Affairs, we will prioritise this issue this year so that more girls and women can get the legislation on their side, against exploitation and oppression based on gender.

Sweden's feminist government feels a great responsibility to keep knowledge about the Swedish Sexual Purchases Act alive, both nationally and internationally.

Åsa Regnér
Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality

Margot Wallström
Minister for Foreign Affairs



Opinion piece from Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

Challenging Cyber Harassment for Women and Girls Worldwide

Published 20 April 2016 Updated 20 April 2016

Blog text in the Huffington Post, 8 March 2016 Gender equality issues are a high priority for Sweden's feminist government. An important aspect in this context is women's right to internet safety, writes Åsa Regnér, Sweden's Minister for Gender Equality.

Gender equality issues are a high priority for Sweden's feminist government. An important aspect in this context is women's right to internet safety.

Cyber harassment takes different forms based on gender. Girls are often exposed using photos with sexual undertones and disparaging remarks about their sexual habits. For women it often involves disparaging remarks or offensive name-calling, online and via text message, telephone calls or face-to-face meetings.

Men often experience harassment in which they are presented as criminal, whereas boys are often subjected to threats of violence. Another gender difference is that women are much more likely to be threatened or harassed by a partner or a former partner.

Changing norms

Developing early prevention measures is a high priority for the Swedish Government. Part of this involves changing norms linking masculinity and violence. Being a boy or a man is often about being strong, having power and, if necessary, using violence. Men's violence is normalised and it is also mostly boys and men who use violence in our society. To reduce violence we need to focus on the causes and on preventive measures. The causes are

complex but some are definitely linked to destructive masculinity.

Efforts to change gender norms need to cover all levels and are part of the Government's broader gender equality work. They need to target children from an early age, as early as pre-school and primary school age.

It is important that the methods used are based on knowledge about what yields positive results. A Swedish government agency responsible for youth issues has the task of preventing and combating boys' and young men's use of violence. It has reviewed the research and identified a number of violence prevention programmes with successful outcomes in other countries.

Involving more men in gender equality efforts

More men need to get involved in gender equality efforts. All too often, harassment and violence committed by boys and men against girls and women are met with silence and tolerance by other boys and men who stand by without reacting. This means that such actions are easily normalised. But as friends, citizens, fathers and decision-makers, boys and men have an important role to play in this work. Men who take a stand against sexualisation, harassment and abuse show that there are different male ideals and serve therefore as role models for other men.

Sweden's Prime Minister, Stefan Löfven, is deeply involved in this issue and is an ambassador for the United Nation's 'HeForShe' campaign to get men to break the silence and raise their voices against violence.

Strengthening the role of young people online

Another crucial issue is strengthening the role of young people online and improving their knowledge about what is not permitted on the internet. We want to give young people tools to be better able to stop not only hate but also harassment and bullying on the internet.

During the CSW session in New York, I will be participating in a seminar about internet hate. It will focus on the importance of combating destructive masculine norms, sexism and internet hate against girls and women.



Opinion piece from Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

Speech on Olof Palme by Minister Åsa Regnér, given at the Swedish Consulate in Peru

Published 28 February 2016 Updated 28 February 2016

Speech given at the Swedish Consulate on 22 February 2016 Check against delivery.

'From Vietnam to Nicaragua, from El Salvador to Palestine, from Sahara to South Africa, across the face of the globe, the flags hang limp and half-mast in loving memory of this giant of justice who had become a citizen of the world, a brother and a comrade to all who are downtrodden.'

- Oliver Tambo (President of the African National Congress, 1986)

Few Swedish politicians are as widely known and renowned throughout the world as Olof Palme. His anti-colonialist and pro-democracy views and actions attracted admiration and support across much of the world.

However, those same views made Olof Palme a controversial figure, both in Sweden and on the international stage.

His style of politics was characterised, above all, by the championing of pacifism and respect for human rights. At global level, Palme was an ally to developing countries. He condemned the abuses of dictatorships on the right and the left, criticising the United States for its bombing of civilians in the Vietnam War, as well as the Communist dictatorships of the Soviet sphere. He supported the government of Salvador Allende, the cause of the Palestinian people and the Czechoslovak uprising of 1968. He spoke out for the boycott of the South African Government during apartheid.

In short, Palme was the founder of Sweden's activist foreign policy. For him,

its position as a neutral country between opposing Cold War blocs was no reason to keep quiet. On the contrary, he recognised the opportunity to play the role of mediator. His views and actions in the international arena prompted admiration and debate. He gave legitimacy to and generated international respect for the social democratic model.

At home, Olof Palme worked to strengthen the Swedish welfare system, which had come into being at the beginning of the 20th century. The success of the Swedish model continues to be measured by falling income inequality between the different social classes. Palme enabled those who had previously been excluded, vulnerable sections of the population and minorities, to participate in various areas of society.

During his time as Prime Minister, he carried out reforms to improve working conditions, including employee involvement in decision-making and a 40-hour working week, and introduced state pensions from the age of 65.

He brought in separate taxation of husbands and wives and a new abortion law, and expanded state childcare provision, through both public day nurseries and paternity leave. These reforms created the conditions for women to be able to enter the job market, which was crucial to the improvement of their status in Swedish society.

Olof Palme's legacy is still evident in Swedish politics today. Support for a welfare state, the rule of law, global solidarity and gender equality remain fundamental pillars of our society.

Since the World Conference on Women in Beijing, now 20 years ago, the gender equality agenda has been gaining ground all over the planet. However, progress has been too slow and lack of political will has seen insufficient funding granted for the implementation of a gender equality policy in every country.

The present Swedish Government is the first feminist government in the world. We are working to change this situation, in Sweden and in many countries around the world, as well as within the European Union and the United Nations.

Thirty years ago, on 28 February 1986, the Prime Minister, Olof Palme, was assassinated by an unknown killer while walking around central Stockholm with his wife after leaving a cinema.

Following his death, Anna Lindh, later Foreign Minister, said: 'A person can be killed, but ideas cannot. Your ideas will live on through us.' Thank you.



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

Opening statement by State Secretary Pernilla Baraltat at the sixty-third session in Geneva of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Published 26 February 2016 Updated 26 February 2016

Geneva 19 februari 2016 Check against delivery

Madam Chair,

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me and for the Swedish delegation to present Sweden's combined eighth and ninth report on the implementation of the CEDAW Convention.

This dialogue is of great importance to my Government, not least because we are a feminist Government. With this clear statement come high expectations both from us and from society at large.

The composition of our delegation reflects the broad mandate and scope of Sweden's policy for promoting gender equality in all areas of governance. I am joined by representatives from seven ministries who are all actively involved in the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Gender equality is a fundamental matter of human rights, democracy and social justice. It is also a precondition and a driver for sustainable growth and

for sustainable welfare.

To combat the discrimination against women and girls is also crucial to reach the goals of the new 2030 Agenda.

To fight discrimination against women and girls and to reach gender equality is a means to ensure that every girl and boy, every woman and man, can reach their full potential.

We are committed to take decisions and to allocate resources to promote real change, in the daily life of women and men.

Sweden was among the first countries to ratify the Cedaw Convention in 1980. Since then a large number of important laws and transformative policies have laid the foundation for the level of gender equality we have today. This progress has to a large extent been driven by the women's movement.

The Swedish Government is proud of our record on gender equality. However, we acknowledge that women and girls are still at a disadvantage relative to men and boys. We therefore welcome this opportunity to be reviewed and to engage in today's dialogue on how to fulfil the obligations of the Convention.

We as a government will also - together with NGOs - step up our efforts to make the convention more known. As a first step we will translate and distribute the concluding observations.

Madam Chair,

Distinguished experts,

Since Sweden presented its combined eighth and ninth CEDAW report in 2014, a new Government has taken office.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of our priorities and initiatives.

Gender mainstreaming is the main strategy to implement gender equality and achieve the national gender equality objectives.

Vital for the success of gender mainstreaming is strong leadership. It has therefore been crucial that the Prime Minister, Mr Stefan Löfvén, is

committed and outspoken on the importance of gender equality. Each minister has the task to deliver on gender equality. It is everyone's responsibility. Training on gender mainstreaming has been provided to all ministers and state secretaries as well as to key government officials.

Engagement is important but so is competence and knowledge on gender mainstreaming. Our feminist government has initiated extensive work to ensure that gender equality has a broad impact in all policy areas. Objectives and indicators to monitor progress have been set in all key policy areas. This is also important when it comes to communication and in order to med accountable as a Government.

Another initiative is the Government's programme to strengthen gender mainstreaming of government agencies. Since we took office the number of agencies has increased from 18 to 60.

The national budget is a key tool to reach gender equality.

Ahead of the 2017 budget Bill the Ministry of Finance has stated that all measures provided by the various ministries must include a gender equality analysis.

In 2014 the Government commissioned an inquiry to review the gender equality policy objectives and assess gender equality progress over the last ten years. A government communication is now being prepared to be presented to the Swedish Parliament in September 2016. The aim is to have a systematic approach and to move from projects to sustainable programmes.

Madam Chair,

Most of the decisions that impact the daily lives of girls and boys, women and men are taken at the local level: in school, social services and health care. The Government has taken an active role in supporting municipalities and regions in their efforts to mainstream gender into their public services. One example is an agreement between the Government and Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions to implement measures that involve men and boys in gender equality activities at local level.

The fight against all forms of discrimination is one of the key human rights objectives of my Government. This includes all forms of discrimination based on sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age. Persons exposed to discrimination

on multiple grounds are particularly vulnerable.

An effective legal framework is important in combating discrimination. An inquiry has been appointed and they will propose ways of better streamlining anti-discrimination efforts.

To combat discrimination will also be an important part of the new Government policy on disabilities. As well as to make the Cedaw Convention more well known.

As part of Sweden's efforts to strengthen the protection of national minorities, the national strategy for Roma inclusion has a gender equality perspective. In addition, the Sami Parliament is preparing a new action plan on gender mainstreaming. It is intended for both staff, members of the Parliament and the Sami public at large.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Madam Chair,

I now turn to a few of our policy priorities.

Let me start by underlining that gender equality is not just a 'women's issue'. It is a responsibility of and a benefit to the society as whole. It requires the active contribution and input from women and men, girls and boys.

For instance we have recently introduced a third month of parental leave reserved for each parent. It has a positive impact on men's role as fathers and on women's employment. It also enables the access of the child to both parents.

A top priority is to combat men's violence against women. Despite extensive work, crime data show that men's violence against women is still a very serious societal problem.

The Government is presently preparing a new holistic strategy to end men's violence against women. It will be guided by a set of objectives and indicators to enable improved evaluation and follow up results.

In order to stop men's violence against women, the Government is investing in violence prevention measures involving schools, counselling centres for perpetrators and rehabilitation programmes for male offenders, provided by the Prison and Probation Service.

Furthermore, the Government has allocated more than EUR 10 million per year to women's shelter organisations, including shelters for women with substance abuse, women with disabilities and women trapped in prostitution or human trafficking for sexual purposes.

Women with disabilities are an integrated part of all general programmes targeting violence against women.

The Swedish Agency for Participation has also recently been commissioned to prepare a specific action plan targeting this group.

Strong legal protection against men's violence against women, including sexual offences, is of the outmost importance. The Government has appointed an inquiry to review the Penal Code's provisions on rape and is considering introducing a consent-based regulation and a negligence offence regarding rape.

I would also like to mention our efforts to combat human trafficking and prostitution. Street prostitution in Sweden has decreased by 50 percent since 1995 as a result of the sexual offenses legislation.

In addition a recent survey indicates that the number of individuals in prostitution has not increased. An important part of our work is to focus on preventive and protective interventions and to discourage the demand for sexual services.

In September 2014 an inquiry was commissioned to analyze the possible removal of the requirement for dual criminality for purchase of a sexual service, and thereby making possible a legal trial also when the purchase of a sexual service has been made abroad.

According to the Government, purchases of sexual services are unacceptable regardless of where in the world they take place.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

In the area of health and medical care, unacceptable differences between women and men persist and seem to increase in certain areas.

Illnesses that affect women more often than men tend to be less prioritised in the health care system.

Mental illness and stress problems are common causes of sick leave, which is

increasing both for women and men; however, the increase is greater among women. In light of this, the Government has appointed a National Commission for Equity in Health, which includes a gender perspective in its work.

The Government has also provided additional funding for health services for school pupils, in response to findings in national studies that a growing number of girls and young women are experiencing mental health problems. Investments in parental support is also done on in order to promote the psychological health of young boys and girls.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Promoting equal economic opportunities between women and men is a fundamental part of the gender equality policy.

Parental insurance, combined with an extensive system of public child care and elderly care, has made it possible for parents to combine work and family life.

The Government has commissioned the Swedish Public Employment Service to tailor activities to promote gender equality in the labour market.

The Government has also commissioned an inquiry to investigate how the parental insurance scheme can be tailored to contribute to gender-equal parenting. The Government has also raised the temporary parental benefits, which are more often used by women.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in temporary employment in the labour market, which affects women to a greater extent than men. A legislative amendment has been introduced. It ensures that general fixed-term employment will be converted into indefinite-term employment if the aggregate length of employment in a general fixed-term position exceeds two years.

Another important issue is the right to full-time employment for women. Full-time should be standard and part-time a possibility. This is a question to be handled by the social partner on the labour market.

Increased employment levels are particularly important for women born outside Sweden as well as among women with disabilities. The Government is working on relevant initiatives.

To prevent gender-based wage discrimination by employers, the Government has put forward a bill on reintroducing mandatory annual pay surveys.

Another expression of inequality in working life concerns women's representation. While the Government has attained gender-balanced boards and management teams in state-owned companies, the private sector is lagging behind in making use of women's talents. The Government has emphasised that the proportion of women on boards should be at least 40 per cent by 2016. If this objective is not achieved by voluntary measures, the Government will propose legislation on quotas.

Gender equality is also a prerequisite for sustainable regional growth. Women in rural areas have the same access to basic services, such as health care and education, as their urban peers, but women leave rural areas for job opportunities in cities to a greater extent than men. This problem also exists in some suburban areas.

The need for further efforts to promote gender equality linked employment and the labour market becomes evident when you look at the pension gap between men and women. Women have low pensions and, on average, women also live longer than men.

Measures have therefore been taken to increase women's pensions as part of the reform to increase the income tax allowance for pensioners.

Madam Chair,

Distinguished experts,

Education is crucial to enable all girls and boys to claim and defend their rights and achieve their full potential.

The Education Act and the school curricula emphasise that gender equality should permeate and guide all levels of the school system.

Sadly, there is strong gender segregation in education. A particularly prominent feature is the existence of 'typically female' fields of study and 'typically male' fields of study.

In order to change this pattern, measures have been taken to improve educational and vocational guidance to pupils in compulsory, upper secondary and adult education, so as to provide support for pupils to ensure their study and career choices are not limited by their gender.

More women than men choose to go on to higher education and there has been a steady increase in the number of women in academic positions, except among professors. The proportion of female professors is now about 25 per cent. This is not good enough. We are currently reviewing recruitment objectives in order to further increase the number of female professors. The Government has appointed an inquiry to propose measures to create more attractive conditions for both women's and men's research careers.

Madam Chair,

Distinguished experts,

Recently the Government presented its action plan for a feminist foreign policy. The aim is to achieve concrete results that enhance both gender equality and the full enjoyment of human rights by all women and girls

In 2016 particular attention will be devoted to:

To promote the inclusion and meaningful participation of women in peace processes, and thereby making women visible as agents of change for peace.

Other priorities will be:

to strengthen the human rights of women and girls in humanitarian settings, to combat gender-based and sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, and to enhance the economic empowerment of women as a human right and a means for inclusive and sustainable development.

The Swedish Foreign Service will also continue to be a driving force for women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. In 2016 it will devote special attention to the rights of girls and young people in this context.

Sweden welcomes the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda is of the utmost importance, and Sweden recently initiated the implementation process.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Sweden and Europe are providing security and safety to women and men fleeing war, persecution and oppression.

The number of people seeking asylum, particularly unaccompanied minors,

has increased dramatically in Sweden. In 2015 Sweden received 160 000 asylum applicants of which about 35 000 were unaccompanied minors. This is of course a great challenge for Sweden and also an opportunity. The reception system and responsible social services are however under a lot of pressure.

In relation to this situation the government has taken several decision and new initiatives, including large financial support to the local and regional level. Initiatives are also taken in order to improve education and entrance on the labour market.

We also recognise the challenges related to gender and women's rights in this new situation and are in the process of preparing relevant measures including increased knowledge on women's rights.

Madam Chair,

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and gentlemen,

During the preparatory work, women's organisations and other non-governmental organisations were given the opportunity to comment on the periodic report. These organisations have played and continue to play a critical role in pushing for gender equality and women's rights.

On behalf of the Swedish Government, I would like to commend the Committee on its important work. The discussion today and the comments on our periodic reports are a vital and inspiring input for us as we continue the challenge of creating a gender-equal society. My colleagues and I welcome this opportunity to have a dialogue with the Members of the Committee.

The Government will organise a press conference in Sweden after the Committee has issued its recommendations.

Madame Chair, Members of the Committee, thank you for your attention.

We are now prepared to answer any questions you may have to the best of our ability.



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice

Strengthen the right of LGBTQ people to be themselves

Published 12 February 2016 Updated 12 February 2016

Opinion article, Newspaper Expressen, 8 february 2016
Legislation must keep pace with developments in society. The Government therefore plans to implement changes that aim to offer the same conditions for everyone, regardless of their choice of partner and type of family, write five government ministers.

People have the right to be themselves in all areas of life. This includes the right to live with the person you love and to have your family formation treated with respect. Efforts to break old norms that limit people from fully living their lives must continue. This applies particularly to policies for the rights of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ people).

Proactive organisations in civil society and courageous politicians before us have helped to move the situation of LGBTQ issues in the right direction. Society is constantly evolving, and perceptions of parenthood, family, gender and the rights of the child in the family evolve with it. Today, there are numerous family constellations other than the traditional nuclear families: single, friends with children, step-families or families with several mothers or fathers. Our social systems must also meet the needs of these families.

Legislation and its application must keep pace with developments in society. It must accommodate various ways of forming a family and ensure the right of all people to good health. The Government is therefore planning to implement changes that aim to offer the same conditions for everyone, regardless of the choice of partner and type of family that each of us chooses

to live with:

- Parental support and family law issues in social services need to be more modern, equitable and gender equal. Family constellations vary and have different needs. In light of this, the Government has concentrated responsibility for these issues at the Family Law and Parental Support Authority. An important task for the Authority is producing knowledge support for relevant actors so that these, in turn, can provide better support and guidance to parents and children.
- Families can take many different forms, but when the parental insurance system was designed, it was still based on the idea of a nuclear family with two co-habiting parents. The living conditions of families with children have changed over time.

More than one in five children grows up in a family constellation other than one including both their biological parents. The inquiry on parental insurance that is now to be conducted has therefore been tasked with identifying problems and investigating possibilities for facilitating the use of parental insurance by different family constellations.

- There are currently large health disparities between different groups in society. To close the avoidable health gaps within a generation, the Government has appointed a commission for equitable health. We know that LGBTQ people in general have poorer health and young LGBTQ people are particularly vulnerable with regard to mental health. In its work, the commission will therefore take into account health disparities between LGBTQ people and the rest of the population.
- The treatment of LGBTQ people in health and medical care is unequal across the country. Unfortunately, in their contacts with different authorities, individuals are sometimes doubted and treated ignorantly. This leads to LGBTQ people in some cases refraining from seeking care.

The National Board of Health and Welfare has been tasked with analysing care and treatment of intersex people (persons whose gender cannot be determined due to biological reasons) and implementing measures in the various areas of activity of social services. The objective is to raise awareness of LGBTQ people's living conditions and the various forms discrimination can take. The National Board of Health and Welfare and the Public Health Agency of Sweden will also review how issues concerning the health of young transgender people could be highlighted within the

framework of other mental health initiatives.

- There have been several high-profile cases where information was registered in the population registration regarding a person who had changed gender in such a way that the link between individuals, such as a child and a parent, was lost. The Swedish Tax Agency has now been tasked with describing what has been done or will be done to prevent problems that may arise.
- Current regulations regarding paternity and parenthood are based on heterosexual marriage. There is reason to review whether the regulations should be updated and for this reason, the Government intends to appoint an inquiry in the spring to conduct a review of the legislation.

These are some of the initiatives the Government is now implementing. We know there is a lot left to do. Discrimination, inequitable treatment and violence are still part of daily life for many LGBTQ people all around the country. This is never acceptable. The Government will continue its efforts to strengthen the possibility for LGBTQ people to fully be themselves in all areas of life.

Gabriel Wikström
Minister for Health Care, Public Health and Sport

Åsa Regnér
Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality

Morgan Johansson
Minister for Justice and Migration

Alice Bah Kuhnke
Minister for Culture and Democracy (Green Party)

Annika Strandhäll
Minister for Social Security (Social Democratic Party)



Opinion piece from Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

New measures for housing of unaccompanied children

Published 25 November 2015 Updated 25 November 2015

Opinion article, Aftonbladet, 4 november

Every child, regardless of background, has the right to security and to have their basic needs met. It is important to remember this, and never more so than now, when Sweden is taking in a very large number of unaccompanied refugee children. Children arriving alone in Sweden are currently placed in a municipality, where they are processed by social services and placed in appropriate accommodation. Sweden's municipalities, and in particular their social care services for children and young people, have been under great pressure for a long time, and the Government is anxious to support them in this important work in a number of ways.

As part of endeavours to improve social care services for children and young people, the Government proposed SEK 1 billion over four years in its budget. This investment is based on an agreement between the Government and the Left Party. In addition, we have issued mandates to improve the working conditions of social workers throughout the country in a variety of ways. In terms of the refugee situation, it is worth pointing out that the compensation paid to municipalities for schooling is being substantially raised. The agreement between the parties allocates SEK 10 billion to the municipalities in 2015. These are much-needed resources in local efforts.

As mentioned above, all children who arrive unaccompanied are placed in some form of accommodation under the Social Services Act. This may be a foster home or a home for care or residence. No other forms of placement are available. Unaccompanied children arriving in Sweden are often highly motivated and capable. They want to study and establish themselves in this country. Many municipalities report that newly arrived children often act as inspiration to other children in school. Not all of them have a qualified need

for the care offered in the home for care or residence system. For this reason, the Government today decided to propose a new form of placement under the Social Services Act: supported accommodation. It is proposed that the legislative amendment should enter into force on 1 January 2016.

Supported accommodation should be used for the placement of children and young people aged between 16 and 20 and represents an important reform for unaccompanied children, but also for other young people deemed by social services to be in need of their own accommodation and support, but not care or treatment.

At the same time, many people in Sweden have shown very practical solidarity and engagement in the situation that has now arisen. This has manifested itself not least in the declarations of interest in becoming foster parents, legal representatives or specially appointed custodians. Foster homes are a very important form of placement, perhaps primarily for younger children but in some cases also for older children. The need is not fully met: there is plenty of room for more people to contribute to this important social function. To gather information and knowledge and to provide information on this function, the National Board of Health and Welfare has been tasked with initiating and coordinating initiatives to raise awareness of these activities. It should be easy for people to be engaged and show their solidarity.

We find ourselves in a unique situation with respect to the reception of unaccompanied children. Many municipalities have pointed to a need to receive rapid support on various points. This may include interpreting the relevant legislation, and access to tools and practical advice in this area. The National Board of Health and Welfare will therefore set up a call centre to answer questions from municipal social services and support them in their work. This is a much sought-after function, not least among smaller municipalities that do not always have resources available at local level.

These are some of the measures in the area of social services taken by the Government in recent weeks with respect to unaccompanied refugee children. I am convinced that there is more to be done to facilitate work at local level. The current high-pressure situation must not lead to regular activities being forgotten or children's needs being neglected. I and the Government will monitor developments closely and take all necessary measures.

I am in close contact with, and have visited, municipalities, homes for

unaccompanied children, and staff of social care services for children and young people, to hear and see what is needed and how central government can support them. I would like to express my great respect for the efforts being made, and my humility in the face of the challenges our society is coping with in this situation. Social workers whose work situation was already manifestly tough are doing everything they can to ensure a good reception.

Åsa Regnér

Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality



Opinion piece from Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

Åsa Regnér: Men need to be involved in fight for equality

Published 17 November 2015 Updated 17 November 2015

Opinion article, The Local, 17 november Politicians need to consider gender equality early on in their decision making and involve both women and men in the process, argues Åsa Regnér, Sweden's Minister for Gender Equality.

As Minister for Gender Equality in the world's first feminist government, I am pleased to represent a government that is demonstrating a greater resolve to achieve a gender-equal society.

The overall objective of our gender equality policy is equal power for women and men, and girls and boys, to shape society and their own lives. This is about making a difference through our choice of priorities, paths and resource allocation, so that women and men, girls and boys can live equal lives in which they can realize their full potential and use it for the good of society. Gender equality is created where resources are allocated, where standards are set and where decisions are made.

Gender equality is also a priority issue in our government's foreign policy and EU activities. All around the world we see that women have the lowest incomes; that the labour force participation of women with low levels of education is at an unsustainably low level; that child care and elderly care are still not feasible options and in many countries do not offer women a chance of economic independence; that violence against women remains widespread; that the proportion of women in parliaments is astonishingly low. The list goes on.

To date, gender equality has typically been driven by women. However, in recent years, the role of men and boys in advancing gender equality has received increasing attention, both globally and in Sweden. The involvement of men and boys is an important part of the government's gender equality strategy, as demonstrated by our commitment to the UN's HeForShe campaign. We are also allocating significant resources to efforts to preventing men's violence against women and children.

Sweden's feminist government has attracted a great deal of international attention and we receive many visitors interested in knowing more about what this means in practice. By global standards, we have come a long way in our endeavors, but we also know there are many issues that still need to be tackled.

A feminist government carries out a gender equality analysis early in the decision-making process to ensure that the gender equality perspective is present from the outset across all policy areas. This strategy – gender mainstreaming – means not only greater gender equality, but also more effective measures.

Our gender-responsive budgeting means that we evaluate the gender equality effects of budget policy. We integrate a gender perspective into all levels of the budgetary process and redistribute income and expenditure to promote gender equality and eliminate injustice based on gender.

All ministers are responsible for ensuring that a gender perspective is included in policy formulation in their areas of responsibility. The aim is better opportunities and, in the longer term, better lives and living conditions for us all.

Åsa Regnér
Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

Åsa Regnér: Give to organisations on the ground in the home countries

Published 28 September 2015 Updated 28 September 2015

DN Debatt 11 September “Values-based organisations, representatives of the business sector and municipalities, and politicians from Sweden, Romania and Bulgaria are meeting today to discuss the situation of vulnerable EU citizens. Our message is that the greatest difference is made when people give money to professional NGOs on the ground in the home countries. Giving to them is one way to break the cycle of vulnerability,” says Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality Åsa Regnér and Martin Valfridsson, the Government’s National Coordinator for vulnerable EU citizens.

Close to 200 people from civil society, public authorities and municipalities, as well as representatives from Romania and Bulgaria, are gathering today for a major conference in Stockholm. The aim of the conference is to promote cooperation between Swedish values-based organisations working with vulnerable EU citizens in Bulgaria and Romania.

Our message during the day deals with how we can best work together to fight the poverty that drives people to beg and forces them into vulnerable situations. It is up to each individual to decide how they want to help. Giving to professional NGOs and supporting their work on the ground in Romania and Bulgaria are good ways to contribute to sustainable change for these

people.

Extensive poverty

Over the past several years, Sweden and our neighbours have been confronted with poverty, the scope of which extends beyond that which we are accustomed to seeing. Europeans from primarily Romania and Bulgaria are coming to our country. A large number of these are Roma who, due to their social exclusion in Europe, find it particularly difficult to receive education and find work in their home countries.

We have met with vulnerable EU citizens in camps in Stockholm and discussed their situation with them. Many of them have their children back in their home country. We visited a school in a rural area of Romania where half of the pupils had parents who were absent, trying to make a living in other countries. We also met with politicians from both Romania and Bulgaria to discuss solutions.

This group is residing in the country temporarily, but it is a question of some 4000–5000 people here in Sweden. Everyone who lives in the EU has the right to move freely within the Union and temporarily reside in other Member States for three months. Free movement is an important pillar of the EU. At the same time, each EU citizen must have real opportunities to live a decent life in their own home country.

The Government's work

The Government has been working on the issue of the situation of vulnerable EU citizens since day one. Martin Valfridsson was appointed National Coordinator for vulnerable EU citizens in January. Part of his mandate is to facilitate cooperation among municipalities, public authorities, county councils and values-based organisations as regards this group.

There are three areas in need of reform to ensure that fewer people are forced to beg and to combat the problems that arise in Sweden:

1. Clearer rules and measures in Sweden to combat illegal settlements, exploitation of vulnerable people and violence against vulnerable EU citizens in Sweden.
2. Increased cooperation within the EU, with Romania and with Bulgaria for better living conditions and access to jobs, education, housing, and health and medical care. Increased efforts to combat prejudice and social exclusion.
3. Closer cooperation with civil society organisations that make a major

contribution in organising and channelling funds and commitment.

On Wednesday, Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality Åsa Regnér met Bulgarian Minister of Labour and Social Policy Ivailo Kalfin to discuss signing a cooperation agreement that focuses on welfare issues. It is similar to an agreement Sweden signed with Romania in June this year. The agreement with Romania, which concerns children's, gender equality and welfare issues, aims to improve the situation of vulnerable people in both countries. On Monday, Ms Regnér will also raise the issue of vulnerable EU citizens and EU responsibilities with relevant European Commissioners in Brussels.

Choose long-term change

Swedes in general are open and generous. This is something we want to protect and nurture. This generosity also means that we give to fellow human beings when they ask for money.

We want to emphasise that there are alternatives to giving to needy people in Sweden and instead helping to build a better situation for vulnerable people locally in Romania and Bulgaria. A number of Swedish organisations, churches and faith communities conduct activities in countries of origin. Many of them started their activities as a result of the reports we received in the 1990s on such matters as children with impairments in Romanian orphanages. Many of these organisations currently work with vulnerable minorities in the relevant countries and have long experience of practical work on the ground. Giving to them is one way to break the cycle of vulnerability.

Today's conference is therefore being arranged to spread knowledge of these organisations' work on behalf of vulnerable groups in Romania and Bulgaria. We will discuss what is important to focus on to lift these women and men out of extreme poverty. During the day, many of the country's foremost experts will gather to discuss how to support vulnerable people so that a change is actually achieved. How can organisations cooperate with one another and make their operations effective – and also cooperate with the business sector and municipalities?

It is a question of combating poverty.

By supporting long-term, sustainable efforts for better education, ways to earn a living, health and structural reforms, more people will see a meaningful future for themselves and coming generations in their home

countries. The agreement between our countries provides a framework for this and illustrates our countries' will to change, as well as the continued efforts in the EU.

Let us continue to give money and tell our children that it is important to help people in their time of need. Let us do so in a way that leads to change that is real and lasting. Combating poverty will not be accomplished in the blink of an eye. That is why we must use our will, our knowledge and our resources in a way that brings about real change.

**Åsa Regnér, Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality,
with coordination responsibilities in the Government for issues dealing
with vulnerable EU citizens**

Martin Valfridsson, National Coordinator for vulnerable EU citizens



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

We are taking a stand for women's rights

Published 01 June 2015 Updated 01 June 2015

The EU's voice on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights must be strengthened. "Ahead of today's meeting in Brussels, we have worked hard for the EU to be on the front line of the fight for gender equality", write ministers Margot Wallström, Isabella Lövin and Åsa Regnér in Swedish daily newspaper SvD.

Although the fight for gender equality is gaining ground globally, in many parts of the world we are seeing a growing resistance to women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This is why Sweden is working down to the wire to ensure that the new Council conclusions on gender equality to be adopted today take a clear stance. The EU ministers gathering in Brussels this afternoon have the opportunity to put their differences behind them and stand up for the fundamental right of all individuals to have control over their own bodies – at a time when a strong EU voice is needed more than ever.

In the vicinity of the EU, violent fundamentalist groups are emerging that want to deprive women of the opportunity to participate in political life, achieve economic empowerment and gain access to health care. The desire to control women's bodies is expressed in its most extreme forms in fundamentalist groups such as ISIL, which uses sexual abuse to instil fear and gain ground. But it is not just on the battlegrounds that the fight for women's rights is being fought. Resistance to and questioning of the rights of women and LGBTQ people are also seen in international negotiation rooms

and among conservative forces making headway in Europe. A study by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and the magazine *Expo* shows how right-wing extremist and nationalist parties that are on the rise in the EU see the rights of women and LGBTQ people as a threat to the nation state and thus to their vision of society.

We are living in a time of great change in which women's economic and political influence is being strengthened and there is a growing consensus in the international community in favour of gender equality. Current resistance can be seen as a reaction to the successes achieved and proof that the fight for women's and LGBTQ people's rights must be relentless. The most controversial issue is also the most fundamental one – the right to exercise control over one's own body, sexuality and reproduction. Women's rights activists say that they can go and vote, but they cannot decide who to marry, who to have sex with or when to have children. This oppression restricts women's and girls' lives and opportunities to fully participate in society on the same terms as men.

In Sweden, we know that measures for gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights pay off. A century ago, more women died during pregnancy and childbirth in Sweden than in Namibia today. Today, maternal mortality in Sweden is among the lowest in the world. Forty years ago, Swedish women gained the right to free, legal and safe abortions. Over the last 30 years in Sweden, no woman has died from the complications of an abortion. These are successes that have helped to build the Swedish welfare society that we all benefit from today. This year, 2015, is a year of unique opportunities to move forward on gender equality, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The ground-breaking UN Conference on Women in Beijing celebrates its 20th anniversary, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security celebrates its 15th anniversary, and the world is set to agree on new development goals to ensure sustainable development and eradicate poverty and injustice. The EU plays an important role in this work.

While there is a great deal of support for gender equality in the EU, opinions on the SRHR issue are divided. Unfortunately, a small number of countries have so far blocked a strong and united position, which has weakened the EU's voice on these issues in the world.

Ahead of today's meeting, the Government has been working hard with likeminded countries in the EU to bring about a change. During the six

months we have been in government we have managed to push through changes. At our initiative, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, recently announced that she plans to appoint a high-level representative for 1325 issues, in accordance with Sweden's proposal. This will strengthen the EU's work to combat sexual violence in conflict and to promote women's participation in peace-building efforts.

We are hopeful that our hard work will bear fruit today as well. Our feminist foreign policy is yielding results. By joining forces we will continue to push for the EU to be at the forefront of the fight for human rights, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. This requires clear leadership at all levels in the EU, strengthened accountability and greater knowledge about gender equality. Cooperation with civil society must be deepened and the action plan for the EU's international gender equality work that is currently being drawn up must cover all areas of EU external action, which is not the case today. Sweden has an important voice internationally, but if we can get the entire EU on board we will increase the impact of a feminist policy that fundamentally challenges oppression, injustice and violence.



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

We will fight in the EU for women's rights

Published 27 May 2015 Updated 27 May 2015

First published in Svenska Dagbladet 26 May 2015

Although the fight for gender equality is gaining ground globally, in many parts of the world we are seeing a growing resistance to women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This is why Sweden is working down to the wire to ensure that the new Council conclusions on gender equality to be adopted today take a clear stance. The EU ministers gathering in Brussels this afternoon have the opportunity to put their differences behind them and stand up for the fundamental right of all individuals to have control over their own bodies – at a time when a strong EU voice is needed more than ever.

In the vicinity of the EU, violent fundamentalist groups are emerging that want to deprive women of the opportunity to participate in political life, achieve economic empowerment and gain access to health care. The desire to control women's bodies is expressed in its most extreme forms in fundamentalist groups such as ISIL, which uses sexual abuse to instil fear and gain ground. But it is not just on the battlegrounds that the fight for women's rights is being fought. Resistance to and questioning of the rights of women and LGBTQ people are also seen in international negotiation rooms and among conservative forces making headway in Europe. A study by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and the magazine *Expo* shows how right-wing extremist and nationalist parties that are on the rise in the EU see the rights of women and LGBTQ people as a threat to the nation state and thus to their vision of society.

We are living in a time of great change in which women's economic and political influence is being strengthened and there is a growing consensus in

the international community in favour of gender equality. Current resistance can be seen as a reaction to the successes achieved and proof that the fight for women's and LGBTQ people's rights must be relentless.

The most controversial issue is also the most fundamental one – the right to exercise control over one's own body, sexuality and reproduction. Women's rights activists say that they can go and vote, but they cannot decide who to marry, who to have sex with or when to have children. This oppression restricts women's and girls' lives and opportunities to fully participate in society on the same terms as men. In Sweden, we know that measures for gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights pay off. A century ago, more women died during pregnancy and childbirth in Sweden than in Namibia today. Today, maternal mortality in Sweden is among the lowest in the world. Forty years ago, Swedish women gained the right to free, legal and safe abortions. Over the last 30 years in Sweden, no woman has died from the complications of an abortion. These are successes that have helped to build the Swedish welfare society that we all benefit from today.

This year, 2015, is a year of unique opportunities to move forward on gender equality, including sexual and reproductive health and rights. The groundbreaking UN Conference on Women in Beijing celebrates its 20th anniversary, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security celebrates its 15th anniversary, and the world is set to agree on new development goals to ensure sustainable development and eradicate poverty and injustice. The EU plays an important role in this work.

While there is a great deal of support for gender equality in the EU, opinions on the SRHR issue are divided. Unfortunately, a small number of countries have so far blocked a strong and united position, which has weakened the EU's voice on these issues in the world. Ahead of today's meeting, the Government has been working hard with likeminded countries in the EU to bring about a change. During the six months we have been in government we have managed to push through changes. At our initiative, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, recently announced that she plans to appoint a high-level representative for 1325 issues, in accordance with Sweden's proposal. This will strengthen the EU's work to combat sexual violence in conflict and to promote women's participation in peace-building efforts.

We are hopeful that our hard work will bear fruit today as well. Our feminist foreign policy is yielding results. By joining forces we will continue to push

for the EU to be at the forefront of the fight for human rights, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. This requires clear leadership at all levels in the EU, strengthened accountability and greater knowledge about gender equality. Cooperation with civil society must be deepened and the action plan for the EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development that is currently being drawn up must cover all areas of EU external action, which is not the case today.

Sweden has an important voice internationally, but if we can get the entire EU on board we will increase the impact of a feminist policy that fundamentally challenges oppression, injustice and violence.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development Cooperation

Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality



Opinion piece from Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

“Gender equality will be a priority in the amending budget”

Published 22 January 2015 Updated 17 May 2015

Dagens Nyheter 22 januari 2015

The World Economic Forum is currently taking place in Davos. One of the key issues Sweden will highlight there is the importance of greater gender equality between women and men. Sweden is, and must be, a leading country in the area of gender equality.

The Swedish Government is a feminist government. We place gender equality at the core of both national and international work. Gender equality is ultimately a question of democracy and social justice. Everyone should be free to be the person they are without being locked into gender norms. This is also part of the Government's idea of the modern welfare state. Gender equality contributes to economic growth.

Employment levels should therefore be equally high among women as they are among men. Women should be in gainful employment to the same extent as men, with a good working environment and career opportunities. The pay gap between the genders must be reduced. Everyone must have the right to work full-time and be financially independent.

But we have a long way to go. There is still a difference of SEK 3.5 million in lifetime earnings between women and men in Sweden. Women still account for the majority of unpaid work and men only take a quarter of parental insurance days. We are currently seeing a situation in which many women are forced to reduce their working hours because welfare provision is not up to standard, because staffing levels in elderly care are too low or because preschool opening hours are too inflexible.

In its budget, the Government planned major investments to reduce the

gender equality gap. We proposed major investments in increased staffing levels in elderly care so that people do not have to reduce their working hours to care for their elderly relatives, a responsibility that women often shoulder. We planned major investments in maternity care and women's health. We also raised maintenance support for single parents and we wanted to extend preschool opening times to cover unsocial working hours, so that single parents – often mothers – are able to accept the jobs that are offered and support their children. Unfortunately, the Alliance – together with the Sweden Democrats – voted against the Government's budget.

We now want to make parental insurance more gender-equal by introducing a third insurance month that is reserved for the other parent. The centre-right parties and the Sweden Democrats have so far chosen instead to continue supporting the strongly criticised child-raising allowance, despite the fact that evaluations have shown that this allowance keeps the most financially vulnerable women out of the labour market. This is a reactionary policy that is leading Sweden in completely the wrong direction.

Sweden's new Government is now moving forward in building up the world's first gender-equal central government administration, and we are attaching much greater weight to gender equality policy in the Government Offices as well. It is already clear that the new Government Offices is completely gender-equal in terms of women and men in politically appointed positions. Thanks to a conscious appointment and recruitment process, we have an equal number of women and men as ministers, state secretaries and political advisers.

A feminist government is not content merely having analysed the consequences of its political decisions; it also ensures that they lead to greater gender equality. Feminism must be a central theme running through all of the Government's policies, through all of its priorities and decisions. For this reason, we have taken the initiative to create a steering group within the Government Offices to provide all ministers with tools to ensure that a gender equality focus is reflected in all of the Government's work. We are also starting work on gender equality budgeting.

In addition, all ministries will be instructed to work on gender mainstreaming in all of their activities. This means that decisions in all policy areas must have a clear gender perspective.

A development programme for gender mainstreaming is currently under way in 18 government agencies. The lessons from this programme will now be

shared with more agencies. The Government will therefore expand this initiative to cover 41 agencies, including the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and the Swedish Tax Agency. In their appropriation directions, the agencies will report on how they plan to work on gender mainstreaming during the period 2015–2018 to help achieve the gender equality policy objectives. Each agency will describe how gender equality can be embedded in the mainstream of its regular activities, such as the agency's management processes.

Swedish gender equality efforts have served our country well. Besides being morally right, gender equality has contributed to Sweden's high levels of employment and growth. But it has not happened by itself; it is largely the result of political decisions, such as reserving the first and second months of parental benefit for fathers, and removing joint taxation.

A feminist government's ambitions for greater gender equality apply both nationally and in terms of our international cooperation. Developments in the world are moving forward. Today, we have as many girls as boys starting primary school throughout the world, the proportion of women in the world's parliaments has grown, and more women are working in sectors other than agriculture in a global perspective. This is a positive trend, but much remains to be done.

Swedish aid is to help combat the systematic subordination of women and girls in society. The absence of all forms of violence against women and girls is key to this. The Government is prioritising work to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights.

So far, it has been mainly women pursuing gender equality efforts. In recent years, however, there has been a growing awareness, both globally and in Sweden, of the role of men and boys in gender equality work. The participation of men and boys is an important part of the Government's strategic gender equality work. This is clear, for example, through our commitment to the UN campaign HeForShe.

It is our strongly held conviction that politics must continue to advance gender equality work. We want a gender equality policy that reflects the Sweden of today and everyone who lives in our country. This is not an issue that will resolve itself. The Government will therefore prioritise reforms that lead to greater gender equality in the coming Budget Bill and in the amending budget we will be presenting this spring.

Current and future generations must be met by a gender-equal society in which every individual can reach their full potential. Gender equality is not just right; it is a smart policy that creates growth and development. Half of the world's talent must have the opportunity to blossom.

Stefan Löfven, Prime Minister

Åsa Regnér, Minister for Gender Equality



Opinion piece from Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

Children come first - in Sweden and around the world

Published 20 November 2014 Updated 17 May 2015

Aftonbladet 20 november 2014 Today we are in New York, attending the 25th anniversary celebrations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. A quarter of a century has passed since the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Since then, almost every country in the world has signed the CRC and it has become the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history.

Our new cooperation Government declared in the Statement of Government Policy that we want to make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child law in Sweden. The rights and living conditions of children in Sweden must satisfy the requirements of the CRC and other international agreements. We are not there yet. While Swedish legislation is generally adequate, much still needs to be done to guarantee the rights enshrined in the Convention.

The new cooperation Government has therefore begun the detailed work to incorporate the CRC into Swedish law. The Convention will thereby act as a safety net for the decisions and activities affecting children. Work is already under way and we are very hopeful that there will be broad collaboration between many positive forces. Most of the parliamentary parties are very interested in being involved in the work and engagement among civil society actors is strong. It goes without saying that the work will also require the voice of children to be heard.

Children's rights are high on the agenda of the new cooperation Government. We intend to protect children's rights at local, national and global level. As children cannot choose their parents, we have a shared responsibility for all children. This gives children's rights issues a moral dimension that is far stronger than for many other issues.

This is why the Government's Budget Bill contains investments to improve conditions for the most vulnerable children. We are raising maintenance support for single parents with children, the standard for income support for parents with children between 7 and 18 years of age, and the basic level of parental insurance. Medicines for children will also be free of charge. No parent should need to choose between buying food or buying medicine.

To give every child a better childhood, we are investing heavily in preschools and schools. We are investing in more staff and smaller groups in preschools. In schools we are investing in smaller primary school classes, more special needs teachers and remedial teachers, and more resources for the schools with the greatest needs.

Children are also a priority on Sweden's international agenda. Our country is one of the largest core donors to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and reducing child mortality is an important priority in our development assistance. In the context of the negotiations on the new global sustainable development goals, the post-2015 development agenda, Sweden is pushing to ensure it will contain a child and young people's perspective.

Olof Palme once said: "As I see it, the only tangible link that we really have with the future is our children. Because it is through them that we see the future take shape. This is where our shared responsibility for the children in our society comes from. It's not a matter of my children and your children, but our children – all children. And that's why children have to come first."

If we look at children's rights through his eyes, we can see that it is not just about having a duty here and now to ensure that all children have a good upbringing. It is also about securing our common future.



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Convention on the Rights of the Child to become law

Published 20 October 2014 Updated 17 May 2015

Svenska Dagbladet 20 oktober 2014 Children have rights – the right to life, play and learning. This means all children: regardless of whether your name is Maria or Mariam and whether you live in Borlänge or Bamako.

This November marks 25 years since the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. So far, 193 countries have undertaken to respect, protect and promote the rights of the child. Much has improved since the Convention was adopted. But unfortunately, huge challenges still remain.

Developments in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, South Sudan and Liberia are brutal reminders of how children's rights are violated on a daily basis. Minors are cynically used as child soldiers, children are subjected to violence and exploitation, and girls are prevented from attending school, forced into marriage and subjected to life-threatening pregnancies.

A few days ago, Anna Hägg-Sjöquist and Pia Stavås Meier from the children's charity Plan Sverige urged the Government to prioritise children's rights in foreign policy and international development cooperation.

Our new cooperation government will do so, with great force and determination. Sweden must be a leading global force for the rights of the child and for gender equality. In the Statement of Government Policy, we said that Sweden's voice must always be clear and unambiguous when human dignity is violated, and that we will pursue a feminist foreign policy. Poverty reduction, sexual and reproductive health and rights and the fight against discrimination will be given high priority in the years ahead.

The UN has an important role to play in this, and the new Government will

give higher priority to UN cooperation. We will actively pursue these issues in view of the new global development agenda due to be negotiated by the UN member states ahead of the UN Summit in September 2015.

Today, we are among the very largest financiers of the UN's global development work. Via the UN, Sweden has contributed to a reduction of almost fifty per cent in the number of children dying before the age of five, down from 12.6 million in 1990 to 6.6 million in 2012. Last year alone, UNICEF provided water to 24 million people and sanitation to 7 million people, and gave 13.1 million people the possibility to wash their hands. In 2013, 3.6 million children in humanitarian crisis situations gained access to education. UNICEF has also contributed to 123 countries making all forms of sexual violence towards girls and boys punishable offences, and enabling 7 300 children with links to armed forces or groups to return to their families and communities.

At the same time, as ardent supporters of the UN we will not be afraid to criticise it if necessary. Swedish taxpayers' money must be used efficiently, and the UN needs to be reformed in order to be able to tackle the challenges of the future.

Human rights – including the rights of the child – are a cornerstone of Swedish foreign policy. But we also want to set a good example for other countries. Being a leader means leading the way. For this reason we will now take the next step, and begin the work to make the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child law in Sweden.

Standing up for children's rights and working for greater social and gender equality in the world will be the hallmarks of the new Government's work. As the ministers responsible for foreign affairs, development cooperation and children, we will shoulder our share of the responsibility for ensuring that children are able to enjoy their incontrovertible right to be just that – children.