

Statement of Government Policy

8 September 2020



In the Statement of Government Policy presented on 21 January 2019, the Government laid out its plans for the entire electoral period. This Statement of Government Policy primarily concerns the 2020/21 Riksdag session.

State of Government Policy 2020

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

Sweden is a country to be proud of.

We are leading the world in the climate transition.
Our country's natural beauty is extraordinary, our popular movements dynamic and our parental insurance system outstanding.

The generations that came before us built a country where everyone is expected to take their share of responsibility for Sweden, but where everyone also has every opportunity to achieve their full potential.

We have safety nets and support for people who become unemployed or sick; we have free education and innovative businesses.

This is our Sweden, and we should be proud of it.
This is our country, and we will make it even better. That is our common task.

Mr Speaker,

The COVID-19 crisis is testing our country.

I would like to thank all the parties and members of the Riksdag for their cooperation in these difficult times for Sweden.
You have given every person in Sweden reason to be proud of our democracy.

COVID-19 will shape our country for a long time to come, and society is equipped to deal with new outbreaks.

The Government has decided to take part in the EU's joint procurement of vaccines.

Large-scale testing, physical distancing and contact tracing will continue.
A commission is currently evaluating our society's overall response to the

COVID-19 crisis. The commission's first report is due by the end of the year and the final report will be submitted in February 2022.

This year, we have spoken much more than usual about responsibility and solidarity.

Every individual has had to take significant responsibility to help Sweden cope with the COVID-19 crisis – and we will need every person to help build a stronger Sweden.

The Sweden that was hit by COVID-19 was not perfect, with deficiencies in care for older people, ongoing climate change that impacts our children's future, and cracks in the welfare system that is meant to guarantee people's security.

That's why we will not go back to how Sweden was before the crisis. We will build back even better.

We now have the opportunity to simultaneously create jobs and address societal challenges.

We will do this by investing in health care, care of older people and the climate transition.

The basis of the Government's policy is the January Agreement, the broad political cooperation agreement that provides stability, protects our open and democratic society, and offers concrete solutions to Sweden's societal challenges.

The solidarity that has characterised our country during the crisis will also be needed in the future. The task of strengthening Sweden is a joint one, involving the social partners, civil society and the engagement of individuals.

Together we will manage COVID-19.

Together we will work Sweden out of the economic crisis.

And together we will build our country back stronger than before.

Mr Speaker,

The COVID-19 virus has severely impacted people's lives and health, but the economy has also been hit. Many entrepreneurs and employees have had a very difficult year.

When COVID-19 hit, Sweden had its lowest national debt since 1977. Our economic strength enabled measures such as short-term lay-offs and reorientation support, which have saved jobs and businesses.

We are now moving forward. We need to continue to keep transmission rates low, but the transition from crisis-response policies to long-term investments is now beginning. This involves a historic budget bill containing new proposals worth more than SEK 100 billion.

Our entire society needs to be on board to work Sweden out of this crisis. Through investments in health care, care of older people and the climate transition we will strengthen Sweden while giving people jobs here and now. Entrepreneurs must be able to hire, and it has to be easier for young people to get their first job and home of their own.

A high employment rate is crucial to Sweden's prosperity. But jobs are also crucial for the individual, for everyone who gets up when the alarm goes off, has a cup of strong coffee with their breakfast and then goes to work. Jobs provide a means of support but also a sense of belonging, the possibility to build our own lives – and contribute to our country. To better enable needs to be met, the reform of Arbetsförmedlingen (the Swedish Public Employment Service) will continue.

People need to be equipped to take the jobs that are available. For this reason, the Adult Education Initiative will continue to be expanded throughout the country. Particular focus will be placed on training programmes for shortage occupations.

Research and innovation are required to create jobs and strengthen Sweden's competitiveness. A research and innovation bill will be presented in the autumn.

Labour law will be modernised and adapted to today's labour market, while maintaining the balance between the social partners. If the social partners

reach an agreement on how to reform the Employment Protection Act, the Government will put forward corresponding proposals.

During the COVID-19 crisis, many people who are able to work from home have been doing so. Remote working, digital coffee breaks with colleagues and digital meetings have become the norm. Expansion of digital infrastructure throughout the country will continue.

It should be possible to live and work anywhere in the country. Opportunities for running a business in rural areas will continue to be improved. Investing in housing and infrastructure is an effective way of both stimulating the economy and creating job opportunities throughout Sweden.

We have a historic opportunity to implement measures that provide jobs here and now – but that also strengthen Sweden. We will seize this opportunity. Together we will work Sweden out of the crisis and build a more sustainable society.

Mr Speaker,

Global warming is the defining issue of our time. The effects of a warmer climate – fires, drought, rising sea levels – continue to impact people. The world's poorest are the least to blame for the climate emergency but they are the hardest hit.

Sweden's goal is to be the world's first fossil-free welfare nation. We will continue to be a world leader in fighting global warming and implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Sweden's world-leading position on climate transition and electrification benefits our companies, our exports, our workers, our welfare and our country.

A green tax shift will be implemented, which means that taxes on environmentally damaging activities will be increased and taxes on labour and enterprise will be lowered.

Sweden's first climate action plan is being implemented.

The Government is currently making the biggest rail investment of modern times. Next year, the Government intends to present an infrastructure bill to

the Riksdag containing proposals for the long-term development of our infrastructure.

The solidarity and determination that society is demonstrating during the COVID-19 crisis are needed to ensure a just climate transition.

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

During this unusual summer, more Swedes than ever have explored our fantastic country. Many have taken advantage of the right of common access, which is enshrined in the Constitution, to roam in our beautiful mountains and deep forests.

Listened to the silence, breathed the fresh air, discovered how delicious a chocolate bar tastes after a long hike.

Sustainable tourism is important to Sweden, and the Government will therefore improve the conditions for the recovery of the tourism and hospitality industry.

We are taught that when we are out in nature, we must not leave any litter behind – a principle that applies in other situations, too.

We need to make the transition away from our current unsustainable use of resources.

The Government is currently drafting the first Swedish action plan on realising a circular economy. New rules on single-use plastics will be introduced.

Sweden's coasts will be places to be proud of. Our seas will be full of life. The Government is continuing to work to reduce the effects of eutrophication, achieve sustainable fisheries and ensure that no plastics end up in the sea.

Sweden's natural environments, with their great biodiversity, well-managed forests and nature reserves, must be preserved so that future generations can enjoy them as well.

Mr Speaker,

We can all take pride in Sweden's welfare system.

We have large hospitals and small village schools. We have preschools and home-help services; we have safety nets and springboards.

A welfare system built on the idea that nobody should be left behind or held back.

Even before this crisis, the Government had begun to boost Swedish schools, care for older people and health care. Since 2014, we have invested heavily in welfare services, which now employ 100 000 more people. We need to do more; we will do more.

The COVID-19 crisis has clearly exposed cracks in our society – cracks that can only be mended through substantial investments and hard political effort.

Older people, who have helped build Sweden, are entitled to a good life in their old age and a good pension. I can now announce that pensioners' finances will continue to be reinforced.

Next year, a special pension supplement of up to SEK 600 per month will be introduced for those who worked hard their entire lives in low-paid jobs. This money will make a difference. Pensions and earned income will no longer be taxed differently.

At the same time, the Government will take the next step towards raising pensions in the long term through in-depth discussions in the Working Group on Pensions. In the Government's view, payments into the pension system need to increase.

Anyone working in care for older people has an important job involving great responsibility. This needs to be clear. In her novella *De levande* ('The Living'), Catrin Jansson, a licensed practical nurse working in the home-help service, wrote:

"The evenings are the worst; so many people, so little time. It is hard to be human. The needs are so great, the assistance so little.

The worry comes in the evenings, the fatigue, the thoughts, the constant alarms; there is no time for the unexpected. But the impossible becomes possible."

Working in care for older people must be attractive, and care staff must receive clear recognition.

To increase skill levels, the Government is implementing a care for older people initiative.

This means that people will be able to train as nursing assistants or licensed practical nurses during paid working hours.

It is estimated that the care for older people initiative will lead to more than 10 000 new permanent jobs in the sector. 'Licensed practical nurse' will become a protected professional title.

There are calls that everyone fears when the telephone rings, and that many have received this year: the call to inform them that a family member has been admitted to hospital, or that their condition has sadly deteriorated.

At that moment, life stops; the day-to-day problems that previously seemed so huge suddenly become trivial.

Sweden must have equitable, world-class health care that is accessible to all.

The COVID-19 crisis has placed the greatest strain on our health services in modern times.

Health and care staff have demonstrated great skill in very challenging conditions. You have impressed an entire nation. You have earned the gratitude of an entire nation.

To ensure the availability of emergency care, many patients' appointments and operations have been postponed. The health care system must have resources to handle the backlog of care needs and care related to COVID-19. The needs in our country are great. The reinforcement of the general grants to local authorities will continue.

Primary care will be reformed. The Government wants to make it easier to get appointments at health centres throughout the country, strengthen care services for older people and others, and improve the conditions for preventive interventions. Continuity of care is crucial.

Crisis preparedness in health services is being strengthened. Both public and private actors' responsibility for ensuring provision of pharmaceuticals is being investigated, along with the possible introduction of contingency pharmacies with this specific responsibility.

Compulsory schools in Sweden remained open throughout the spring term. This is a sentence that has almost certainly never been uttered in any previous Statement of Government Policy. In these new conditions, teachers and other school staff have done a fantastic job.

There must be order in school classrooms – and order in school governance. A national plan for conducive learning environments and security in schools is being developed. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate will be given a broader mandate to close independent and municipal schools with substantial and persistent failings.

Knowledge and learning are the guiding principles of the new revised course and subject syllabuses, and thus of the Swedish school system. Pupils' learning outcomes have improved in several international educational performance assessments, and preliminary statistics from the first half of this year show that the proportion of Year 9 pupils who are eligible for upper secondary school is increasing.

The Government's focus is on ensuring that knowledge attainment continues to increase. School resources will be allocated according to need, and schools will be more equitable. An inquiry on returning responsibility for the school system to central government will be appointed. The waiting lists for child and adolescent psychiatry will be reduced and school health and welfare services will be safeguarded.

Skilled preschool teachers, teachers and head teachers are the foundation of successful schools. A professional programme will be designed to enable preschool teachers, teachers and head teachers to grow within their profession, develop their teaching and contribute to research.

The Swedish welfare system will be strengthened – this year and in the years to come.

Mr Speaker,

The objective of Sweden's foreign policy is to create security in our country and around the world. The major challenges of our time are best tackled through multilateral cooperation – in the UN, in the EU and in our neighbourhood.

We build our common security together.

The EU is our most important foreign and security policy arena. No other cooperation is as crucial to Sweden's security and peace.

The EU is also central to Sweden's economy, welfare and climate action. Its crisis preparedness must be strengthened, and the single market must be developed to withstand stronger competition in the global economy. Sweden will participate fully in and shape EU cooperation in a way that safeguards both Sweden's and Europe's interests.

The EU is built on our common values. Sweden will continue to push for all countries to respect principles such as judicial independence and media freedom. Countries that do not respect the rule of law should not be entitled as before to EU grants.

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

Sweden stands up for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We condemn Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its illegal annexation of Crimea. We support the EU sanctions against Russia. At the same time, we will have contact and seek dialogue with Russia and Russian society.

We support the Belarusian people's quest for democracy. The developments in Belarus affect security in Sweden's neighbourhood.

The security situation in Sweden's neighbourhood and in Europe has deteriorated over time. For this reason, the Government considers that total defence capabilities need to continue to be strengthened and increase significantly. Considerable additional resources are being allocated to military defence. Sweden should continue to deepen its bilateral and multilateral defence and security cooperation.

Civil defence is being vigorously strengthened after many years of dismantlement. Preparations to set up an agency for psychological defence will continue. A national cyber security centre will be set up this year.

A bank tax will be introduced to fund defence investments.

Europe must take greater responsibility for its own security. The European security order must continue to be defended, including every country's right to choose its own security path. In 2021, Sweden will chair the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). This is a considerable responsibility in these uncertain times.

We welcome the Riksdag's consensus on the written communication on Sweden's policy on China. Sweden and the EU will pursue an active policy in relation to China, based on our values and interests. We support the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle to preserve Hong Kong's autonomy.

The transatlantic relationship is essential to the security and prosperity of Sweden and Europe.

Nordic cooperation is unique. Our countries must learn from how the COVID-19 crisis was managed and stand united in the future.

Sweden will continue to be the leading force in the world for feminist foreign policy. The COVID-19 crisis has brought the need for equality and health care into sharp relief all over the world. The focus of development cooperation on democracy will continue. Sweden will push for effective and responsible development assistance globally.

Multilateralism is the watchword as the United Nations celebrates its 75th anniversary. Sweden will continue to do its part to promote peace, freedom and cooperation.

Mr Speaker,

On 15 June, 61 new police constables began working in Police District Stockholm Syd. Police District Nordvästra Skåne has 22 new police constables, while Police District Västerbotten has 11.

Sweden now has almost 21 000 police officers, the highest number ever. We are halfway to meeting our target of 10 000 more police employees by 2024.

Reinforcement of the Swedish Police will continue.

When gangs spread fear and violence, those affected are often hard-working people living in vulnerable areas.

It is society's responsibility to push back against organised crime. Our laws apply in every city, every neighbourhood and every square. No criminal individual, gang or family should believe that they are stronger than society.

The penalties for gang-related crime will be more severe, and public authorities will be given new tools to work together to tackle gangs.

Measures will be implemented to break the culture of silence and strengthen the legal process. The penalties for recruiting young people into crime and for offences linked to disputes between criminals will be more severe.

The Government proposes abolishing reduced sentences for young adults involved in serious crime. The expansion of National Board of Institutional Care facilities and Swedish Prison and Probation Service correctional institutions and remand centres will continue.

It is entirely possible to push back against serious crime. All the increasingly severe penalties, additional police officers and increased resources to law enforcement authorities are important.

But to succeed, it is vital that we stop recruitment into crime. No teenager should ever see a life of crime as their future. The engagement of all members of society is essential to achieve this.

In her book *Osebol*, about the northern Swedish village where she grew up, Marit Kapla interviews villager Lars Jörlén. He describes how he and his school colleagues drove around, picking up pupils whose parents did not get them off to school in the morning.

"It wasn't our responsibility but people helped out.

We took the approach – or at least tried to – that every child was everyone's child.

Even though a child has parents, they're still a child of the community."

Social workers, teachers, football coaches, school staff and neighbours – everyone can do their part to support and guide teenagers who might be heading down the wrong path.

Municipalities will be given a statutory responsibility to prevent crime. The Government is prioritising prevention. Our entire society needs to pull in the same direction.

We must push back against criminal gangs.

We must ensure that today's young people do not become tomorrow's criminals.

We need a whole, strong society to succeed.

Mr Speaker,

Sweden must continue to protect gender equality, equality and democracy – in our country and around the world.

Despite the fact that racism and Nazism should have been relegated to the scrapheap of history long, long ago, they are flourishing today. This year, African Swedes, for example, have raised their voices against the racism they have been subjected to. All members of society must be involved in stopping racism in all its forms and expressions.

The Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism has been postponed due to COVID-19 but will take place in October 2021.

Swedish migration policy must ensure legal certainty and be effective and humane. The right to asylum must be protected. Sweden has shouldered a great deal of responsibility for providing a safe haven for people who have left their country to seek protection. More EU Member States must take their share of responsibility. The Cross-party Committee of Inquiry on Migration will soon present its final report. Work on a sustainable regulatory framework for future migration policy will then continue.

Anyone coming to Sweden who is not entitled to stay must return. But every person who flees to Sweden and is entitled to stay must receive all the help they need to become part of this society.

Every person in Sweden must take part in our society and know their rights. The Government intends to set up an independent, national human rights institute in 2021. Ahead of this, broad parliamentary support will be sought.

Sweden will continue to strengthen the free formation of public opinion, protect freedom of expression and support media freedom throughout the country. Information about Swedish society provided to asylum seekers will be expanded and become a mandatory part of the asylum process.

No child should ever have to worry about violence or being forced into marriage. This is why we are now drawing up a national strategy to combat all forms of violence against children, including honour-based oppression. In addition, a specific criminal classification for honour-based offences will be introduced.

Everyone in Sweden must have the same opportunities to achieve their full potential. Greater economic equality is needed for this to become reality. And no child's future should be decided by their parents' income – or lack of income. The Equality Commission has presented important proposals for increasing economic equality.

Reforms to strengthen and promote the rights of LGBTI individuals will continue. Parental legislation is being reviewed to determine how it can be made more gender-neutral.

Sweden will be a cultural nation to be reckoned with. Culture unites us, broadens our horizons and inspires new ideas. The cultural sector has been hit hard by COVID-19. It has impacted the finances of every cultural creator – as well as Sweden as a country. Daily life loses its vibrancy when cinemas, concert halls and theatres are closed.

For people to be moved by a powerful poem, enjoy a concert or find a new favourite song, there must be people creating them.

Financial security for cultural creators will be safeguarded. A written communication on arts policy will be presented. Culture aimed at children and young people will be strengthened.

Sport brings people together and promotes health. The Swedish sports movement will be given the conditions it needs to weather the current crisis and reach all children and young people who want to take part in sport.

Sweden will continue to be a country where gender equality, equality and democracy are a given in every part of our society.

Mr Speaker,

COVID-19 is putting Sweden to the test. But we, our country, will pass this test too. We are in this crisis together, as a country where we all take responsibility.

The strengths highlighted by the crisis are strengths we must carry forth as we build our country stronger than it was before. Responsibility. Solidarity. It has become so clear – we are all dependent on each other.

We have a new political landscape.

The Government I lead will do what it takes to mend the cracks in our society.

But to succeed, we need to face the future as we have faced the crisis.

As one country, where we continue to take responsibility for each other,
for Sweden,
for our society,
where we continue to face hard times and good times together.

