



Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Department for International Law, Human Rights
and Treaty Law

Office of the United Nations High
Commissioner for Human Rights

Information re. the impact of economic reform policies on women's full enjoyment of their human rights

1. General comments

Sweden welcomes the attention paid to the question of the impact of economic reform on women's full enjoyment of human rights by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights.

Contributing to gender equality and the full enjoyment of human rights by all women and girls is of high priority for the Swedish Government. Since 2014, Sweden has a feminist Government, meaning gender equality is central to the Government's priorities – in decision-making, and resource allocation. A gender equality perspective is brought into policy-making both nationally and internationally.

Sweden wish to promote gender equality with a policy agenda that combats inhibitive gender roles and structures, so that women and men, boys and girls can live their lives to their full potential. It is a matter of recognizing gender inequality, that women and men do not have access to resources and power on equal terms, and committing this to make a change.

Gender equality is an engine driving social development and genuine change in society and people's lives. Gender equality is a prerequisite for sustainable economic development, as well as development of the labour market, and the welfare state. Gender equality is part of the solution to many of the challenges we face in our societies today. Hence, including gender equality in

policy making is of significant importance – it makes better use of resources spent and it makes policy more efficient. Gender equality is also a matter of human rights, of democracy and of justice.

Sweden wish to contribute to the Independent Expert's report on the situation of women in the context of economic reforms by presenting Sweden's national gender equality policy and an analysis of Sweden's gender-responsive budgeting. Links to further information are to be found below.

2. Sweden's national gender equality policy

Gender equality is equality between women and men, who should have the same opportunities to shape society and their own lives. This area includes issues such as power, influence, finances, education, work and physical integrity.

The overarching goal of the Swedish gender equality policy is that women and men are to have the same power to shape society and their own lives.

Starting from this objective, the Swedish Government is working towards six sub-goals:

1. Gender equal division of power and influence. Women and men are to have the same rights and opportunities to be active citizens and to shape the conditions for decision-making.
2. Economic gender equality. Women and men must have the same opportunities and conditions as regards paid work, which give economic independence throughout life.
3. Gender equal education. Women and men, girls and boys must have the same opportunities and conditions with regard to education, study options and personal development.
4. Equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care. Women and men must have the same responsibility for housework and have the opportunity to give and receive care on equal terms.
5. Gender equal health. Women and men, girls and boys must have the same conditions for a good health and be offered care on equal terms.
6. Men's violence against women must stop. Women and men, girls and boys, must have the same right and access to physical integrity.

3. Swedish gender-responsive budgeting

Sweden's feminist Government pursues a gender perspective in its budgetary process and policy. Accordingly, as far as possible, the budget is to promote gender equality so that all people, regardless of gender, can benefit from social resources. The budget of a feminist government must be based on gender analyses of proposals and reforms to ensure that choices, priorities and resource allocation in the budget reflect the Government's gender equality ambitions.

Gender-responsive budgeting involves the application of gender mainstreaming to the budget process, and it means that priorities, choices and the allocation of resources in the budget should as far as possible promote gender equality. Gender-responsive budgeting helps the Government ensure that economic policy is used to increase economic equality and help advance gender equality in society. It is a matter of fairness, making use of the potential of every person, but it is also an important condition for sustainable economic growth and development of the labour market, welfare and the Swedish model. Gender equality is part of the solution to many of the challenges facing society.

Pursuing gender equality in the budget process is vitally important in realising feminist policies. The budget process takes account of the effects on and consequences for gender equality when designing proposals and reforms and in the distribution of resources. Integrating a gender perspective in policies helps to shape a society that is sustainable in the long-term. To ensure that the central government budget contributes to gender equality, this perspective is included at the earliest possible stage, and in all stages of the budget process. Intensive work on gender-responsive budgeting has been under way at the Government Offices ever since the Government took office. Important steps have been taken to ensure that the gender equality effects of budget policy are highlighted in the background material on which budget decisions are based so that the Government can present a budget that promotes gender equality.

Sweden is still marked by differences in the living conditions of women and men. The Swedish Government intends to analyse the importance of tax system reform from a gender perspective. The analysis is to be complete in 2018. The Government's objective is for women's employment rate to be as high as men's and for the gender pay gap to be closed. The Government's proposed additional resources to the local government sector, that in Sweden is a major service provider and employer, will also help improve employment and work environment conditions for women.

In this endeavour Sweden recognise the crucial role that economics play. To advance gender equality in society, not only here in Sweden, but everywhere, resources must be adequately allocated to that end.

Sweden has a telling experience that demonstrates the connection between economic reforms, allocation of resources and the advancement of gender equality in society: In the 1970's important reforms were implemented within the labour market and social policy, such as separate income taxation for spouses; gender-neutral parental leave; and development of affordable public childcare. These reforms pushed gender equality, and increased women's access to the labour market on an equal footing with men. Women gained access to gainful employment, and greater financial independence, which increased their well-being and bargaining power in the household. These reforms also contributed to the development of a modern welfare state in Sweden.

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. There needs to be commitment to create fair and gender equal conditions for women and men, girls and boys.

To achieve gender equality the strategy of gender mainstreaming is crucial. Gender equality is created where resources are allocated, where standards are set and where decisions are made. In Sweden's feminist government, each minister is also a minister for gender equality, responsible for the advancement of gender equality in their policy areas.

While gender mainstreaming is an essential tool it must be combined with special measures for gender equality. This dual approach is necessary to move ahead on gender equality. While we must include a gender perspective when formulating reforms and developing policy we must also be willing to implement specific policies and actions - and spend money - targeting gender inequality. For Sweden, this dual approach has been a strategic choice for implementation of gender equality policy since the mid- 1990's.

Economic policy is crucial for shaping living conditions; how resources are distributed and what is considered important and is prioritised has a major effect on women's and men's lives and conditions. The budget process and the Budget Bill are of key importance in realising the government's policy and it is therefore imperative that all budget work is conducted so that effects and consequences for gender equality is taken into consideration when decisions are made about policy direction or distribution of resources.

Consequently, gender budgeting is an important part of the government's efforts to implement a feminist agenda. Economic policy in Sweden is to be

used to increase economic equality and support advancement of gender equality in society. An extensive effort to further develop gender budgeting in the state budget is now under way in Sweden. Sweden define gender budgeting as an application of gender mainstreaming in the budgetary process. Thus, a gender perspective must be included in the preparation of the government's Budget Bill from the outset, and by the actors normally involved in the process.

Sweden's renewed focus on gender budgeting has resulted in improved and more extensive gender equality analysis and a more systematic use of statistics disaggregated by sex, among other things.

However, it is not enough to conduct an analysis of gender impact for a specific policy, and Sweden must not stop at just presenting statistics disaggregated by sex. The conditions that apply to women and men, girls and boys must inform our policy making. As policy makers Sweden has an obligation to use the available data, to rectify gender inequality.

To move from words to action, Sweden is dedicated to make gender equality part of all policy making and to allocate adequate resources to implement policy for gender equality. To this end Sweden has initiated a work to formulate objectives for gender equality in several highly prioritised and strategic policy areas. These objectives constitute a way to make concrete how Sweden can move forward on implementation of its gender equality policy goals, and realise the government's feminist aspirations. Customised policy objectives and actions for gender equality, along with indicators to follow up the result, have been formulated. These strategic policy areas are labour market, health and social policy, education, foreign and development policy, and juridical policy.

The Swedish Government has taken important steps to ensure that the preparation of the Swedish annual Budget Bills is gender mainstreamed. Among other things, Sweden has a formalised requirement in the budget circular that policy proposals and reforms presented in the Budget Bill must be based on gender equality impact analyses, and new policy should be developed with a gender-sensitive approach.

Moreover, a step-by-step guide on how to conduct a gender equality analysis in the budget process has been developed, and trainings are provided for officials in the Government Offices. Policy statements and formal requirements are important but Sweden must also provide hands-on, operative support to people in the Government organisation.

The significance of a gender analysis in policy development can be illustrated with an example from the realm of education: in Sweden school results

differ significantly between girls and boys, girls perform well and receive good grades while boys lag behind. Girls, on the other hand, suffer from stress related health issues, and report a higher degree of socio-psychological problems than their male peers. So, measures to deal with these challenges must take gendered differences into consideration: health work in schools and efforts to improve school results must be designed so that they are apt for the needs and conditions of both boys and girls.

The Swedish government will continue to enhance the work with gender budgeting, with a view to ensuring that policy will contribute to gender equality. A feminist government's policy agenda must be paired with allocation of resources and a true commitment to making a change.

4. Links to further information

Gender equality policy in Sweden:

<http://www.government.se/4afec2/contentassets/efcc5a15ef154522a872d8e46ad69148/161219-infokit-uppdatering2.pdf>

Gender-responsive Budgeting in Sweden:

<http://www.government.se/articles/2016/10/gender-responsive-budgeting/>

Swedish Budget Statement 2017:

<http://www.government.se/4a6f9e/contentassets/08c1cdf5ddf345e796015e4d54ce49ca/from-the-budget-bill-for-2017-budget-statement>

Gender equality in health:

<http://www.government.se/articles/2015/07/gender-equality-in-health/>

Sweden's feminist foreign policy - Action plan 2015-2018:

<http://www.government.se/4990fa/contentassets/bca76b4547ad46fb929ec47e7cfe26d/swedish-foreign-service-action-plan-for-feminist-foreign-policy-2015-2018-including-focus-areas-for-2017.pdf>

Sweden's feminist foreign policy – Examples from three years of implementation:

<http://www.government.se/4ab455/contentassets/654bcc72d8f44da087386b4906043521/swedens-feminist-foreign-policy--examples-from-three-years-of-implementation.pdf>