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Ministry of Employment

State Secretary Rasmus Cruce Naeyé  
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***1. What is the latest situation in the Council of Europe member States concerning welfare policies in supporting women's employment?***

- Thank you, let me start by **providing a broader picture of Sweden's perspectives and priorities** when it comes to welfare policies that support women's employment.
- Sweden has the world's first feminist Government. That means that we are committed to achieve gender equality through a **policy agenda that combats inequality** and limiting gender roles and structures. We believe that gender equality must be central to all decision-making nationally and internationally.
- **In Sweden gender mainstreaming therefore has been the Swedish Government's** overarching strategy for the implementation of its gender equality policy since 1994. **It is an important strategy for reaching our** six gender equality objectives, which all are key for supporting women's employment:
  1. Equal distribution of power and influence
  2. Economic gender equality
  3. Gender equality in education
  4. An equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care work
  5. Gender equality in health, care and social services
  6. Men's violence against women must stop.
- In order to ensure an active implementation of the Government's gender equality policy **all ministers are responsible for mainstreaming a gender perspective in decisions and actions taken in his or her policy area. The Swedish Government has also incorporated gender-responsive budgeting** to incorporate a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures to reach the realisation of the Government gender equality objectives. The approach is based on the understanding that **there are no gender-neutral budget allocations.**

## **2. What are examples of policies and reforms to support women's employment to promote gender equality and work-life balance?**

- Generally, Sweden is often at the top of international rankings on gender equality. Recently for example, the European Institute for Gender Equality rated Sweden number one on its Gender Gap index for the European Union (scoring 83,9 out of 100). This is the result of a long-term systematic gender equality work.
- The **Swedish historic experience** suggests that at least three family friendly reforms need to be implemented to enable gender equality for women and men as well as work-life balance throughout their careers:
- First: improve the social infrastructure, in particular the set-up of accessible and affordable **child-care and elderly care** of good quality (1974 public childcare reform). When child-care and elderly care is insufficient, women's labour force participation suffers.
- Second: **abolish joint taxation** and introduce separate income taxation for women and men (1971 separate income taxation for wife and husband reform). Estimates show that this leads to an increase in women's labour market participation.
- Third: **introduce parental leave for both women and men/both parents** (1974 gender-neutral paid parental leave benefit reform, first country ever) and provide incentives for men and women to use equal shares of the parental leave.
- Several new measures have been taken by the Government with the aim of **promoting a good and sustainable situation in the labor market** for women and men. The Government has, for example, contributed to strengthening the situation for foreign-born women in the labor market by providing language education and subsidized introductory jobs. As the employment rate among foreign-born women still is quite low (65% employment rate), further measures need to be taken.
- The Government has very recently during the Spring 2022 **launched a huge reform for Flexibility, Adaptability and Security in the labor market**. This reform will have substantial positive impact on both gender equality and for the transition to a green economy.
- The reform implies that **we will legislate on the right to full-time work**. This means that full-time work will become the norm and part-time work the exception. This is of course especially important to women, as some 26 percent of women in Sweden today work part-time and the most common reason for this is that they cannot get a full-time employment.

- The **reform package will also address the issue of life-long learning**. Everyone in Sweden who has worked for more than eight years will be given the opportunity to study for up to one year with financing providing at least 80 per cent of their previous income up to a maximum amount.
- **Regarding parental leave**, in Sweden a parent, with joint custody of a child, is entitled to half of the parental leave days (in total 480 days) and 90 days – three months – are reserved for each parent. The reserved days cannot be transferred to the other parent. There is however still a remaining gender gap in the **overall use of parental leave**. Over time, there is a positive trend towards a more gender equal distribution of parental leave, but still women withdraw about 70 percent of the parental benefit, while men withdraw about 30. This gap needs to be closed.
- Also, the **expectations of an equal take of parental leave are different depending on the parents' income**. If a parent has no income or does not meet certain qualification conditions, he or she will instead receive compensation for parental leave at a basic level (250 SEK per day). We see that the unequal distribution of parental leave is reinforced when it comes to parental leave on the basic level. **The government will therefore propose that also the days at the basic level should be reserved** for each parent.
- What also remains to be done in Sweden, when it comes to closing gender gaps in care, is to obtain **a more equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care work between women and men**. Women are still carrying out the bigger part of this unpaid work at home, while men spend more time on paid work at the labour market. The Government regularly monitors trends regarding the division of unpaid housework and childcare between women and men through a statistical survey carried out by Statistics Sweden approximately every ten years. A new survey of time use will be presented in April.

Going forward, a focus for the Swedish Government is **to increase economic equality between women and men in the long term**. The Government therefore appointed a Commission for gender-equal lifetime earnings, which recently submitted its final report. We are currently looking into the proposals of the report, which includes