

**Statement from Sweden to the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable
Development, March 19th, 2020**

We regret to not be able to meet in Geneva due to the outbreak of Covid-19. Our thoughts are with those affected and their families.

The outbreak of Covid-19 perfectly illustrates the interconnectivity of our challenges. Local crises quickly becoming global and affecting us all. However, global crises also tend to have disproportionately negative impact on the most vulnerable – in this case the elderly, the sick, the poor and those with a lack of access to health care services.

The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2019 pointed to interconnected challenges such as rising inequalities, climate change, biodiversity loss and increasing amounts of waste from human activity as a major threat to our progress towards achieving the SDGs by 2030.

The Covid-19 outbreak, as well as these other negative trends are a call for action and solidarity. Sweden stands firm in its support for the multilateral system, as global challenges cannot be tackled in isolation from each other. As we move into a decade of action, Sweden is focusing its efforts to deliver on the principle of leaving no one behind. We need not only to combat rising inequalities but target actions towards those groups that are most negatively impacted by conflict, climate change, pandemics, as well as social, political and economic uncertainty.

The ten points outlined in the political declaration, that was adopted during the SDG summit in 2019, serve as a roadmap to accelerate action and commitments now and in the years to come. Sweden is committed to deliver. We are scaling up our Feminist Foreign Policy. We have launched a Drive for Democracy. We doubled our contributions to the green climate fund in 2019. We continue to show leadership for inclusive growth and social dialogue together with ILO, OECD, and a core group of countries, companies, employers' organizations and trade unions in the initiative the Global Deal.

Domestically, Sweden aims to become the world's first fossil-free welfare state by 2045 and will the Government will issue its first green bond this year. While Sweden is a world leader in many areas, we also face multiple challenges. The latest report from Statistics Sweden showed that inequalities between groups, as well as in income, health, living, and exposure to violence are growing. Our high climate ambitions will not be reached unless we undergo a profound social and economic transformation. Violence is becoming more widespread and our youth are experiencing bullying to a greater extent from previous years.

Resolving challenges both at home and abroad can only be done through working in partnerships. We were looking forward to exchange of experiences with colleagues from the UNECE region and to share some examples of successful partnerships that respond to many of the thematic discussions of the forum. However, since this was not possible allow us to at

least highlight a few of the innovative partnerships and key messages our Swedish experts wanted to bring to the table.

Here are some Swedish initiatives to accelerate progress on the SDGs:

Building Partnerships and Ensuring SDG Integration through the DG Forum – Swedish Government Agencies in Collaboration for the 2030 Agenda

The "DG Forum – Swedish government agencies in joint collaboration for the 2030 Agenda" comprises hitherto of more than 80 governmental agencies. It is a unique platform through which the heads of public agencies conduct strategic dialogue at the management level, while simultaneously creating opportunities for concrete partnerships. The forum's collaboration plan is the starting point from which participants work on solving common challenges and identifying the opportunities for implementing the sustainable development goals. The public agencies are integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development into their activities based on their respective core missions. Read more:

<https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/gd-forum-agenda-2030/english/>

Advancing Sustainable Cities and Urban Development through Participation and Knowledge Co-Creation

Cities embody most challenges related to infrastructure, energy, climate change, water and sanitation but also inequality. Sustainable cities are therefore linked to a majority of the SDG targets and can only be achieved through the co-creation of knowledge by bringing together various stakeholders. An example is the Mistra Urban Futures research and knowledge centre. They have developed a research agenda called "Realising Just Cities". It enables interventions to be built on transdisciplinary knowledge and the experiences from several fields of research and societal sectors. It is comprised of several local projects in Cape Town, Kisumu, Sheffield/Greater Manchester, Lund/Malmö and Gothenburg. In addition, the Mistra Urban Futures have generated eleven "comparative co-produced research projects".

Read more: <https://www.mistraurbanfutures.org/en/about-us/how-we-work>

Another example of knowledge co-creation is the Urban Girls Toolbox, aimed at implementing methods and tools that contribute to increased equality and inclusion in urban development, and thereby contribute to SDG 3, 5, 10, 11 and 17. The objective is to provide a digital platform in order to increase capacity of end users (politicians, city planners, real estate companies etc.) to create accessible, inclusive and equal public places. It is a cooperation project between the independent Swedish think tank Global Utmaning (Global Challenge) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). Read more: https://www.globalutmaning.se/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2020/02/Urban-Girls-Toolbox_Folder.pdf

Resource Efficiency for Sustainable and Circular Economies

The majority of circular economy practices globally are reactive approaches focusing on finding the use of, and reducing the negative impact of, materials and products already produced. These are necessary, but more proactive approaches to circular economy are needed where materials and products are produced with the intention to be reused, repaired and recycled. This implies adopting a systems perspective of society's resource flows, including a comprehensive approach where producer - user - recycler - new producer is included in the production chain. This approach will advance the shift towards more resource efficient systems. In 2018, the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences started the project *Resource effectiveness and circular economy* which builds on previous work related to resource efficient business models. It has now delivered action plans for politics, industry and academia on resource-efficient mobility for goods and people. Moreover, it has increased sharing of good examples such as the role of plastic in a resource-efficient circular society; a resource-efficient, circular textile flow; and measurement and reduction of food waste. A transformation from a linear to a circular economy does not only enhance resource efficiency, but also promote other social benefits at large – e.g. gains in employment and contributes to several SDGs.

Read more: <https://www.iva.se/en/projects/resource-effectiveness-and-the-circular-economy/>

Fossil Free Sweden –Towards achieving Carbon Neutrality

The Fossil Free Sweden initiative was launched by the Swedish government ahead of the COP21 climate change conference in Paris in 2015. It aims at bringing together many different actors such as enterprises, municipalities, associations to identify common challenges in their transformation towards lower greenhouse emissions, as a step towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2045. The initiative is open to all actors who want to stand behind a declaration stipulating the shared goal of a fossil free world and that Sweden must show leadership in this area. The actors who stand behind the declaration also commit to outline concrete measures to reduce emissions.

Read more: <http://fossilfritt-sverige.se/in-english/>

School Meals as a Tool to Deliver Sustainable Food and Nutrition for People and Planet

Sustainable food production and consumption are crucial to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. It is important to deliver coordinated efforts among public food sector organisations in order to e.g. prevent food waste, promote innovation and reformulation of composition and assortment of foods. In this regard, school meals as a pedagogic tool to educate future consumers. Swedish school meals have a great potential to, early in life, contribute to sustainable eating habits, sustainable consumption and to increase the demand for sustainably produced food. It acts as a lever to change within the whole food system. The Swedish Food Agency is coordinating the project “A new recipe for school meals”, aimed at

identifying obstacles and enablers for a sustainable food system. A multidisciplinary design team consisting of several other national agencies, actors work together through an open user-centred design process, which enables each participant to understand how they contribute to maintaining the current system and what type of measures are needed – from farm to fork – to support transformation.

Read more about school lunches in Sweden here: <https://www.livsmedelsverket.se/en/food-habits-health-and-environment/maltider-i-var-d-skola-och-omsorg/skola>

As a final remark, Sweden values the opportunity to share good practices and lessons learned with partners across the UNECE region. Sweden welcomes an enhanced UN regional follow-up and review mechanisms to increase accountability. We would like to see the opportunities for VNRs not only at the global level but also at the regional level. We believe this would allow for more focused assessment of regional challenges as well as enhanced peer-learning elements in the whole review process, from national, regional to global levels.

These examples highlight the need to embrace complexity and address the underlying causes of unsustainability. We need to work towards policies and initiatives that will capitalize positive synergies and resolve negative trade-offs between the global goals. We need doers that can lead by doing. Sweden is ready to do its part and we will work with others in partnership. We are ready for a decade of action and delivery.