

# Strategy for sustainable consumption



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# Strategy for sustainable consumption

How can consumption be made more sustainable? What can be done to make it easier for consumers to make climate-smart choices? These are some of the questions in focus in the Government's strategy for sustainable consumption. The aim is for the strategy to contribute to environmentally, socially and economically sustainable consumption.

Many of today's environmental problems are linked to our private consumption. To reduce consumption's negative climate and environmental impact, we must change how and what we consume. The Government's strategy for sustainable consumption focuses on what the State can do, together with municipalities, the business sector and civil society, to make it easier for consumers to act sustainably.

## Focus areas

- Increasing knowledge and deepening cooperation
- Encouraging sustainable ways of consuming
- Streamlining resource use
- Improving information on companies' sustainability efforts
- Phasing out harmful chemicals
- Improving security for all consumers
- Focusing on food, transport and housing



## Increasing knowledge and deepening cooperation

Knowledge about the impact of consumption on the environment needs to be enhanced and cooperation deepened at different levels in society.

### Forum on eco-smart consumption

The Government wants to establish a new forum to bring together actors who, in various ways, can contribute to more eco-smart consumption and lifestyles. The forum aims to spread examples of good practice and create solutions for more sustainable consumption. The Swedish Consumer Agency will be responsible for the forum and will collaborate with other relevant government agencies. In the Budget Bill for 2017, the Government has proposed an investment of SEK 43 million up to 2020, and thereafter SEK 9 million per year for the Agency's work on environmentally sustainable consumption. A network will be linked to the

forum to promote active cooperation with researchers, the business sector, county administrative boards, municipalities and county councils, and civil society.

### Environmental focus in schools

Schools play an important role in increasing children's and young people's knowledge about consumption and the environment. The Government wants to task the Swedish Consumer Agency with collaborating with other relevant actors to facilitate teaching about the impact of consumption on the environment, for example by ensuring that school materials and lesson plan suggestions are easily accessible.

## Encouraging sustainable ways of consuming

As consumers, we can contribute to environmentally sustainable consumption by changing our behaviours. But many of us often experience obstacles, such as a lack of information. Often costs, habits, lack of time and influence from our surroundings also underlie our purchasing decisions and other behaviour patterns.

### Eco-smart behaviour patterns

The Government proposes that the Swedish Consumer Agency be tasked with a special assignment to actively promote more eco-smart consumption and lifestyles. The assignment would include various ways of ‘nudging’ consumers by encouraging and making it easier for them to choose the best alternatives from an environmental perspective. The work should be linked to the forum and coordinated with the Agency’s efforts to improve environmental information in its Hallå konsument (Hello consumer) information service.

### Positive developments in the sharing economy

The sharing economy, which involves goods and services being shared in various ways, can provide increased freedom of choice

and lower prices, contributing to greater opportunities to consume sustainably. The Government has instructed an inquiry to map out the sharing economy, analyse the legal status of different users and examine the need for measures to promote positive developments in the sharing economy.

### More effective ecolabelling

For ecolabelling to have a strong impact, in addition to gaining consumer confidence, it is essential that it keeps up to date with developments on the market. The Government intends to promote effective, independently certified ecolabelling schemes that gain good traction among companies and consumers – internationally too. The Government will consult relevant actors on the potential and requirements of ecolabelling ahead of upcoming measures.





## Streamlining resource use

Reusing goods instead of buying new ones contributes to a more sustainable lifestyle and leads to major benefits for the environment.

### Goods that last longer

To encourage the recycling of goods, the Government proposes a reduction in the VAT rate from 25 per cent to 12 per cent for repairing bicycles, shoes, leather goods, clothing and household linen. A tax reduction will be introduced for the repair and maintenance of white goods carried out in the home. The Government is also working to ensure that, based on the EU Ecodesign Directive, sustainability requirements are introduced for more product groups and for providing information about opportunities for repairs.

### Circular economy

The Government is working in various ways to facilitate the development of a circular economy.

In addition to pushing EU efforts, the Government has instructed an inquiry to propose policy instruments to promote a circular economy, including making it easier to reuse goods through, for example, trade in used goods, and repairing and upgrading goods.

### Sustainable waste management

Waste prevention efforts focus on food, textiles, electronic products and construction materials. The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency has been instructed to present proposals for a revised national waste management plan for the period 2018–2023. In the EU, the Government is pushing to ensure products are designed in a way that facilitates recycling.

## Improving information on companies' sustainability efforts

Through demand and engagement, consumers can influence companies in a more sustainable direction. But this necessitates clear information about companies' sustainability efforts, including the consideration they take of the environment.

### Businesses' and the financial market's sustainability efforts

The Government has proposed new regulations that require major companies to report on their work on sustainability issues, for example the environment, human rights and anti-corruption activities. The financial sector plays an important role in the achievement of sustainability objectives. An inquiry has proposed measures that improve comparability with regard to which sustainability aspects are taken into account in fund management, which involve new and stricter information requirements. As part of deliberations on whether Sweden is to pioneer free and fair trade, viewpoints have been obtained from civil society, and further measures are being considered.

### Tougher measures against false green claims

Environmental claims are increasingly being used in marketing. Nevertheless, consumers can sometimes be misled regarding which environmental considerations companies have actually taken. The European Commission has produced special guidelines on making environmental claims in marketing. The Swedish Consumer Agency has commissioned a study on how environmental arguments are being used and on which markets. The study will form the basis of the Agency's supervision of the area. The Agency is also entitled to immediately stop companies engaging in unlawful marketing practices, such as false environmental claims.





## Phasing out harmful chemicals

The Government's environmental efforts include measures to ensure a toxin-free environment and reduce the risks associated with chemicals in our everyday lives. Children are particularly vulnerable to hazardous chemicals and are therefore given special priority.

### Toxin-free everyday environment

The Swedish Chemicals Agency has been given a renewed mandate to work on the action plan for a toxin-free everyday environment, which includes contributing to effectively regulating chemicals at EU level. The Government is pushing for the EU to ensure hazardous chemicals are phased out

of the circular ecocycle as soon as possible. The Government has proposed a specific tax on hazardous chemicals in certain electronic products. Special measures are also being taken regarding microplastics, among other things. A proposal to establish a knowledge centre to produce alternatives to hazardous chemicals is currently being investigated.



## Improving security for all consumers

Strengthening social sustainability involves paying attention to consumers' different circumstances, for example based on financial situation, age, gender, disability or other personal circumstances.

Efforts to combat over-indebtedness

In autumn 2015, the Government presented a strategy to combat over-indebtedness. The strategy contains augmented debt restructuring activities and instructions to the Swedish Consumer Agency to produce recommendations for municipal budgetary and debt counselling services. The Agency has also been tasked with cooperating with the Swedish Enforcement Authority and the Swedish financial supervisory authority (Finansinspektionen) to promote deeper cooperation with various stakeholders, which may help people who have, or risk having, debt problems to get their financial situation in order. In autumn 2016, the Government will receive a proposal from an inquiry on a more accountable market for quick loans and other types of consumer credit. The Inquiry

into gambling licences is currently analysing whether the ban on gaming on credit needs to be stricter to combat over-indebtedness as a result of gaming and lotteries, among other things.

Consumers' different circumstances

Certain consumers are more vulnerable than others to aggressive business practices, which should be taken into account to a greater extent in connection with national and EU legislation. This issue may be relevant in connection with the upcoming review of EU consumer protection legislation and in connection with measures to promote more sustainable consumption. Attention will also be paid to issues concerning consumers' different circumstances in connection with follow-ups of the overall consumer support.



## Focusing on food, transport and housing

Three areas in sustainable consumption are particularly important: the food we consume, the means of transport we choose, and the type of housing we live in. These areas together are responsible for the greatest emissions from private consumption. The environment, our health and household finances will benefit from changing our behaviours in these areas to a more sustainable approach. The forum on eco-smart consumption will have an important role to play in this context.



### Sustainable food

The consumption of food, such as meat, accounts for a large share of consumers' climate impact. The Government is currently working on a food strategy. The Government also wants to see country of origin labelling of meat for restaurants and institutional catering.

### Sustainable housing

Operation and maintenance of housing, and housing construction and renovation, have a considerable impact on the environment, health and household finances. Energy use in housing is affected both by the choice of products and how they are used. A lot of work has been carried out and is continuing: a new joint

EU-wide energy labelling scheme for household appliances is on the way; the Government is working actively to ensure clear energy and environmental requirements based on the EU Ecodesign Directive; the municipal energy and climate advisers should be able to offer target-group-tailored support; a forum for smart electricity grids has been established; and a tax credit scheme has been introduced for microgeneration of renewable electricity.

### Sustainable transport

A number of measures are being implemented to encourage individuals to travel by public transport, bicycle or foot. Investments are being made to improve public transport in rural areas, and

state support is being provided for municipalities' work on sustainable cities and public transport in urban areas. Investments have been made to promote cycling and a cycling strategy is being drafted. In addition, further support to local climate investments has been proposed, such as investments in charging stations and biogas. The Government is working on a proposal from an inquiry on a bonus-malus system that uses a bonus to reward the purchase of vehicles emitting relatively low levels of carbon dioxide, while vehicles emitting relatively high levels of carbon dioxide pay higher tax. In autumn 2016, a government inquiry will present proposals on tax on air travel to the Government.



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