

MEMO

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Increased possibilities to make offline card payments in Sweden

Introduction

This document describes the work that the Riksbank and a broader group of market actors have been conducting since the autumn of 2024 with the aim of expanding the possibility of making offline payments with debit and credit cards in Sweden.

The Riksbank has led the working group, which has consisted of representatives of the card issuers (banks) covered by the Riksbank's regulations and general guidelines (RBFS 2023:3) regarding companies of particular importance for the execution of payments during peacetime crisis situations and in states of heightened alert (Swedbank, Handelsbanken, SEB, Länsförsäkringar Bank, Danske Bank and Nordea), the card networks (Visa and Mastercard), the four largest card acquirers in Sweden (Swedbank Pay, Nets, Adyen and Wordline), and representatives of the retail sector (Axfood, Ica, Coop, Apoteket, Svensk Handel and Drivkraft Sverige in its capacity as representative of the fuel companies).

The document presents the solution agreed by the working group to be implemented in the Swedish card payment market. The document also sets out the measures that each participant should strive to take to achieve the Riksbank's goal of having a solution in place for offline card payments by 1 July 2026.

Background

According to the Sveriges Riksbank Act (2022:1568), the Riksbank is responsible for civil preparedness in the area of payments. The Riksbank shall ensure that the general public can make payments, both in peacetime crisis situations and in states of heightened alert. Making digital payments possible in an offline mode, i.e. without functioning data communication, is one way to strengthen the resilience

of the payment system. Being able to pay by card offline is particularly important, as card payments are clearly the most common means of payment in physical retail.

In light of the above, the Riksbank initiated work in the autumn of 2024 with the aim of increasing the possibility for the general public to make card payments offline. The Riksbank's objective is that, by 1 July 2026, it shall be possible to make card payments offline for the purchase of essential goods in the event of disruptions lasting up to 7 days. This possibility should at least apply to all persons over the age of 18 with cards issued by the banks covered by the Riksbank's contingency regulations. Essential goods are food, pharmacy products and fuel.

Purpose

The purpose of the document is to reflect the common direction agreed by the working group. The document provides clarity on what measures each actor should strive for in order for the solution to be implemented effectively.

Offline authorisation via chip

In the light of the analysis and discussions held within the working group, the participants agree that a solution based on offline authorisation via the physical card's EMV chip¹ is appropriate to implement, as it is a well-proven technical solution that already exists and works today.

The solution assumes that the card networks' regulatory framework allows a merchant to accept a card payment authorised offline up to a certain amount per transaction at the card issuer's risk, a so-called floor limit. The solution also requires card issuers' credit and debit cards to have offline functionality in the card's chip with an "offline limit", which refers to the total amount that the cardholder can pay for one or more purchases via offline authorisation, and which is reset when an online authorisation is made with the card. Furthermore, it is assumed that the cardholder uses their physical card and PIN for this, as the solution does not work for contactless card payments. In addition, card acquirers, together with merchants, need to have the conditions in place in the form of payment terminals with the right software and parameters that enable offline card payments in line with the card networks' regulations. Finally, merchants also need to have the capacity to store offline transactions for up to seven days.

¹ EMV stands for Europay, Mastercard and Visa and is a standard for credit cards, payment terminals and automated teller machines. The standard is based on the fact that the cards are equipped with a chip and that a PIN is required to authenticate a payment transaction.

Measures taken by each actor

The measures that each actor should strive for in accordance with the agreed solution are described below. Both coordination and cooperation between market actors are required to put the solution in place. This is deemed to be possible to a large extent within the framework of existing cooperation structures in the Swedish card payment market.

Card issuers

Shall strive to:

- ensure that cards issued from 1 July 2026 onwards, provide an accumulated offline limit in the cards' EMV chip that is at least equivalent to the cost of a household's purchases of essential goods for one week.² This refers to debit and credit cards with offline functionality issued to customers over 18 years of age in Sweden.³
- for existing debit and credit cards that, as of 1 July 2026, have a lower offline limit than agreed, actively work towards updating the offline limit on such cards either through scripting or by replacing the cards.⁴

The Riksbank encourages card issuers other than the six covered by the Riksbank's regulations to also contribute to civil preparedness and strive to offer offline functionality on their cards as described above.

Card networks

Shall strive to:

- regulate in their respective regulatory frameworks an amount limit per transaction for which the retail outlet can, in the event of a data communication breakdown, make an offline authorised card payment at the card issuer's risk - the so-called floor limit - corresponding to at least SEK 2 000.⁵ This floor limit should cover at least outlets selling essential goods. Essential goods are food, pharmacy products and fuel. Outlets selling essential goods refer to companies that have been categorised as selling such goods based on the network's Merchant Category Codes

² In dialogue with the Riksbank and based on estimates of households' costs for purchasing such goods in a week.

³ It does not cover customers who do not fulfil the conditions for obtaining an offline card, i.e. where overdrafts are not granted, and therefore cannot obtain a bank card unless it is restricted to online-only. The largest group in this category is young people under 18. For these, when the customer's card expires for the first time after the customer reaches the age of 18, it shall be replaced by a card with offline functionality, provided that the customer fulfils the other conditions for obtaining such a card.

⁴ The accumulated offline limit, timetable and implementation of replacement and scripting of existing cards are agreed in a bilateral process between the card issuers concerned and the Riksbank.

⁵ The amount of SEK 2 000 corresponds to the European standard of EUR 200 applied in several other countries. The amount is based on an assessment of the card networks.

(MCC). The regulatory changes should be implemented by 1 February 2026 in order to allow other relevant market actors, in particular acquirers and merchants, to implement the changes before 1 July 2026.

Card acquirers

Shall strive to:

- implement the card networks' regulatory changes in their own processes and in their customers' payment terminals by 1 July 2026, in consultation with the merchants concerned.

The retail sector

Shall strive to:

- implement, in consultation with card acquirers, a floor limit in accordance with the current card network regulations in payment terminals at retail outlets providing essential goods by 1 July 2026.
- ensure that offline authorisation is not abused and that payment terminals are set to always try to authorise a card purchase online before allowing offline authorisation.
- ensure that the retail outlet can sustain sufficient storage capacity to manage offline payments for up to seven days.

Sveriges Riksbank

Commits to continue coordinating and leading the work at an overall level, including convening further working group meetings as necessary, liaising bilaterally with the companies involved and following up on the implementation of the solution.