

Sweden Report

Sustainable Governance Indicators 2024

Evangelia Petridou, Jörgen Sparf,
Beatrice Onn, Sven Jochem,
Mi Ah Schøyen (Coordinator)



Executive Summary

The years 2022 and 2023 have been a period of dynamic change for Sweden, with sharp political shifts occurring against the backdrop of the armed conflict in Europe between Russia and Ukraine. This war severely upset the balance of the Nordic-Baltic region, leading to far-reaching consequences. As a direct result of the conflict, Sweden, seemingly overnight, overturned a policy of neutrality that had been in place since the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1814) and sought NATO membership, effective March 2024. The process was fraught with realpolitik, with leaders from Türkiye and Hungary trying to elicit concessions from Sweden to avoid a veto. Both the Social Democratic bloc and the center-right minority government were in agreement on the NATO membership issue.

The 2022 elections resulted in the Social Democratic bloc losing power. The radical right-wing populist Sweden Democrats came in second with 73 seats, compared to the Social Democrats' 107 and the Moderate Party's 68. After the election, the cordon sanitaire against the Sweden Democrats finally fell, and the parties in the right-wing camp entered into negotiations with the Sweden Democrats. These negotiations to form a new government took 37 days. Although the Sweden Democrats do not hold cabinet positions, their influence became evident in the Tidöavtalet – the compromise that led to the government formation – which includes punitive measures against crime that also undermine civil rights. As the largest party in the right-wing bloc, the Sweden Democrats also exerted significant influence in the day-to-day process of governing as a supporting party of a minority government consisting of Moderates, Liberals, and Christian Democrats. Researchers are focusing on the conduct of elections within the broader climate of misinformation and disinformation, while political parties in general continue to lose membership.

Freedom of speech and information transparency remain robust. The public debate surrounding the Quran burnings during the NATO membership negotiations centered on the tensions between free speech and hate speech. In the end, these burnings were ruled as free speech, though a constitutional amendment limits the freedom to associate if this association is connected to, for example, terrorist activities.

The post-COVID period saw inflation spike to 10%, then fall to about 3.5% in 2022. The economy is forecast to recover, and the trend of an inclusive labor market with increased employment rates for foreign-born people persists, even as the de facto segregation of certain areas and increased violence from organized crime also persists.

Sweden remains a forerunner in environmental protection, with an articulated goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2045 and a detailed, albeit non-binding, plan to achieve this target. However, recent actions by the current center-right minority government, such as lowering fuel taxes, suggest a prioritization of economic benefits over environmental protection. Additionally, the government is working to expand nuclear energy for electricity generation.

This period also marked the proposition to radically reorganize the research funding structure in the country. A relevant commission of inquiry suggested abolishing the existing four funding agencies, which focused broadly on innovation, sustainability, working life, and high-quality research. Additionally, it recommended discontinuing the research budget for the Swedish Energy Agency. Instead, it proposed forming three large funding agencies. This change is framed as an effort to modernize the research funding structure. Such framing – “getting with the times” – was also used when the government announced large cuts to Swedish Radio.

Recent developments have led to reactive shifts in public policy and reinforced the stronghold of a radical right-wing populist party, even in Sweden. These changes underscore a trend: Swedish democracy is becoming less unique and more similar to other European countries.

Key Challenges

Perhaps the biggest challenge the world currently faces is climate change. Sweden has been a forerunner in environmental regulation, but the more permissive attitude of the current center-right minority government is a cause for concern. Radical policy priorities are necessary if Sweden is to reach carbon neutrality by 2045.

A pressing domestic challenge in the near future is the grip of gang violence in some urban areas. The Swedish system was not equipped to handle such high levels of violence. Its inability to control the situation has led to a punitive turn, with the debate focusing on retribution, long custodial sentences, and

overcrowded prisons, rather than addressing the root causes of such violence. Gang violence has recently started to spread to neighboring countries such as Norway.

Politics in Sweden is challenged to protect its consensus-oriented decision-making system. Inter-party collaboration has been precarious and short-lived, and the empowerment of the radical-right populist Sweden Democrats has disrupted collaborative processes. The ability to compromise on divergent interests in contemporary political disputes is being alarmingly challenged. Affective discordance and social changes, such as increasing material inequality, have consequences for the ability of actors to compromise.

Further, the loss of neutrality due to NATO membership represents a significant loss of identity for Sweden, even though the narrative of non-alignment has primarily catered to domestic audiences in recent years. With NATO and recent geopolitical shifts, there is an amplified emphasis on preparedness and defense. This is expected, as Sweden is considered capable of affording the increased defense expenditure that accompanies NATO membership.

It is important not to lose sight of social policies or infrastructure investment. Healthcare is one sector that has not been generously funded, and the performance of the health and care systems in Sweden is under serious pressure. The performance of the welfare state in Sweden is challenged. The policy of numerous and far-reaching tax cuts, combined with demographic changes, the challenges of integration policy, and security policy obligations, has eroded the financial basis of the welfare state alongside the need to make necessary investments in infrastructure. One challenge for the future will be to achieve a fiscal and budgetary balance against the backdrop of these developments.

In terms of inclusion policies, the labor market trend is positive for people who have traditionally faced challenges in finding employment, such as young individuals or those born outside Sweden. However, integrating the high number of migrants and the increasing number of people with low educational qualifications into one of the world's most agile and innovative societies will remain a challenge for integration policy.

Democratic Government

I. Vertical Accountability

Elections

Free and Fair
Political
Competition
Score: 9

There is no formal party registration in Sweden, though political parties may register their name to avoid misuse. Candidates are selected and ranked within party organizations with essentially no public rules guiding the process. Political representation in Sweden is overwhelmingly collective representation (Karlsson and Gilljam, 2014). Swedish voters predominantly vote for parties, not individual candidates, as only approximately 25% of the electorate used the personal vote option in the 2022 general election (Gadd et al. 2022).

The Election Authority (Valmyndigheten) is responsible for planning and coordinating general elections, and this planning does not include practices such as gerrymandering. At the subnational level, elections are administered by County Administrative Boards, Municipal Elections Commissions, and Polling Boards.

Both public and private funding is permitted, and parties that participated in elections and received public funding must disclose private donations in a report to the Legal, Financial, and Administrative Services [Kammarkollegiet]. Notably, these reports concern only income; parties are not required to report their expenses, assets, and debts, so public scrutiny has a limited scope.

This practice does not fully comply with international standards and guidelines issued by the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) (OSCE, 2018). Despite intense debate, this rule has not changed. According to the latest data published in 2021, the eight parties of the Riksdag and the Feminist Initiative received a total of SEK 167,955,204, or approximately €15 million. The women's groups of the eight Riksdag parties received financial support amounting to SEK 14,999,660, or approximately €1.3 million (Sveriges Riksdag 2024).

Free and Fair
Elections
Score: 10

There is no legal regulation regarding media time allocated to political parties; rather, this is a matter for voluntary self-regulation. Publicly funded TV channels and newspapers are expected to host and promote political debate but also to remain impartial. Private media are not legally obligated to follow this line, but they normally do (OCSE, 2022).

Eligible voters for the Swedish national elections include Swedish citizens over 18 who are either currently registered as residents or were registered as residents in the past in Sweden. EU citizens living in Sweden, regardless of how long they have been residents, along with residents from other countries or stateless persons who have resided in Sweden for 3 years prior to the election, have the right to vote in regional and local elections (Valmyndigheten, 2024).

The quality and robustness of the electoral system notwithstanding, the Swedish Election Authority has identified weaknesses following the 2022 elections and has made several recommendations, including (i) evaluating and simplifying the ballot system; (ii) demanding more rigor from parties regarding substantive representation in districts, such as implementing tighter registration rules; (iii) reviewing the system for voting from abroad; (iv) allocating more resources to the Swedish Election Authority to investigate complaints; and (v) giving more authority and power to the Election Authority to issue binding regulations (Valmyndigheten, 2023).

Recent work by Högström and colleagues (Högström and Jerhov 2023a; 2023b) highlights that despite robust democracy in Sweden, minor human errors in handling early votes and managing queues at voting places affect poll workers' perception of the voting process quality, even if no serious errors occurred in the actual conduct of the elections. A recent report concludes that although there were fears about the spread of disinformation and misinformation on social media ahead of the 2022 elections, this did not happen, with the exception of small-scale activity on Twitter (currently known as X) (Svenonius et al. 2023).

Quality of Parties and Candidates

Socially Rooted
Party System
Score: 9

Political parties are at the heart of modern representative democracy in Sweden. They are large, powerful organizations that recruit future political leaders and train current political activists. They have local chapters and, in theory, they are in tune with issues that are salient at both the local and national levels.

Erlingsson et al. (2016) identify three main developments in party organizations. First, Swedish party organizations have become professionalized and appear to be less connected with their grassroots base and civil society organizations. As a consequence, they risk providing less relevant solutions at the local level. Second, as party membership declines, parties are increasingly dependent on state subsidies. This may further disconnect them from the will of the citizens they are supposed to represent. Third, Erlingsson et al. (2016) find that although political parties are not a particularly trusted institution in Sweden, their reputation is improving, and there is little to suggest they are becoming internally less democratic.

Party manifestos are available online in an easy-to-read format. In the 2022 elections, there was significantly less focus on ideology in these documents compared to the 2018 elections. Parties either presented detailed policy proposals or conveyed a general message on safety – to address the issue of gang violence, which is currently a major concern on the political agenda (Demker, 2022).

Effective Cross-
Party
Cooperation
Score: 7

Party polarization has been increasing in Sweden, even though for a long time it was the exception. While radical right-wing populist parties were growing in countries such as Austria, Denmark and France, such a party did not enter the Swedish parliament until 2010. By the 2022 elections, the radical right-wing populist Sweden Democrats had become the second-largest party after the Social Democrats and ahead of the Moderate Party. The left-right divide, where redistributive policies were at the center of ideological differentiation, has given way to a cultural divide, with a focus on diversity (or lack thereof), identity, globalization and migration (Wikforss, 2022).

More specifically, the GAL-TAN divide (GAL: green, alternative, libertarian and TAN: traditional, authoritarian, nationalist), which refers to the political cleavages associated with values and lifestyles, has emerged as a new feature of the party system. Parties that traditionally occupied different places on the left-right spectrum may adopt similar positions within the GAL-TAN scale. For example, on issues such as migration, the Social Democrats and Conservatives share a similar policy position, while left-wing, green, and center parties tend to share a different policy position (Lindvall, 2017). There has been a polarization trend since 2010 that could mark the start of a steep polarization era. At the same time, this cleavage is not ahistorical in the Swedish context (Oscarsson et al., 2021).

Cross-party collaboration has been difficult and short-lived. The Tidöavtalet, the compromise that allowed for the formation of the minority coalition

government after the 2022 elections, illustrated this. Even though the Sweden Democrats and the Liberals promised to be tough on crime, they have different ideas on how to tackle it. While the former hold a punitive stance, the latter prefer measures that maintain the integrity of the individual (Blombäck, 2023). Although the Sweden Democrats are not represented in the governing coalition – they are a supporting party – they are clearly imprinting their programmatic stamp on government policy.

In summary, there are no legal barriers to collaboration; in fact, it is an integral part of Swedish politics. Recently, it has been more difficult for parties to find common ground due to the strategically favorable position of the Sweden Democrats as the pivotal party between the political blocs.

Access to Official Information

Transparent
Government
Score: 10

The Freedom of the Press Act is underpinned by five principles: the freedom to express one's thoughts in print, the freedom to disseminate material, free access to this material, free access to official information, and the right of anonymity. Information is considered official if it has been received or created by a public authority. Such documents are freely available unless they are classified (Sveriges Riksdag, 2024).

The professional contact information for public servants working in municipalities or regions is readily available online, enabling public communication. Official websites are constantly updated, and the quality of information is very high. An increasing amount of information on these websites is available in English as well as other languages.

Even though media freedom and freedom of information in Sweden remain robust, issues with officials attempting to withhold information – or to hamper the expeditious handing over of such information – during the COVID-19 pandemic have been reported. More specifically, there have been reports of municipalities advising their employees in elder care homes not to convey information to journalists, as well as public servants purposefully delaying the conveyance of public material to the media (Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, 2022). Nevertheless, the transparency of government actions is remarkably high.

II. Diagonal Accountability

Media Freedom and Pluralism

Free Media
Score: 10

Freedom of the media is protected in the Swedish constitution. Two of the four fundamental laws include the Freedom of the Press Act and the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression, collectively ensuring freedom of the media and expression of opinion.

Sweden consistently scores high in all aspects of media freedom and freedom of expression. It has an effective framework for regulating hate speech. The Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom reports that Sweden generally shows a very low risk for media pluralism, with indicators holding stable (Färdigh, 2022).

In 2023, the government issued a decision to formalize what had previously been practiced but not legislated. At the request of the foundation controlling Swedish media – Swedish Radio (SR), Swedish Television (SVT), and Swedish Educational Radio (UR) – it is now formally forbidden for any members of these organizations' boards to hold political office (Government Offices of Sweden, 2024).

Also in 2023, a parliamentary committee was assigned to assess Swedish public media and suggest changes if needed. This was framed as an attempt to ensure that public media keeps up with a changing media landscape and as a resource optimization issue (Sveriges Riksdag, 2023).

In 2023, against the background of spiraling costs due to inflation, Swedish Radio announced that they would have to make significant reductions in activities to run a balanced budget in the coming years (SVT, 2024). This trend may weaken public broadcasting and media pluralism in Sweden in the future.

Pluralism of
Opinions
Score: 9

Media plurality and freedom of expression are protected from governmental abuse. In addition to the constitution, which automatically grants constitutional protection to internet publications, media and freedom of expression are regulated by the Radio and Television Act (SFS 2020:875) (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020). The latter was updated in 2020 to include

provisions for video recording platforms, regulatory changes regarding TV broadcasting, child protection (for example ads cannot target children under 12), and program accessibility for people with disabilities.

Sweden is rated high risk for news media concentration indicators (96%) and commercial and owner influence over editorial content (68%), while the score for transparency of media ownership is medium (50%). The EUI Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom argues that the Swedish regulatory system is inadequate and cannot ensure transparency and prevent media concentration (Färdigh, 2022).

Civil Society

Free Civil
Society
Score: 10

The freedom of association and the freedom of assembly are constitutionally protected. Civil society organizations in Sweden have a formal seat at the policymaking table through the referral system (remiss system): the findings of any commission of inquiry ahead of proposed legislative changes are sent out to relevant stakeholders, including civil society organizations, for comments, which form the final piece of legislation.

Rules and conditions under which demonstrations may take place are posted by the Swedish police on their website (see <https://polisen.se/om-polisen/polisens-arbete/demonstrationer/>). Recent events, embroiled in larger geopolitical challenges and domestic politics, have challenged the freedom of assembly and highlighted the tensions between free speech and hate crimes. This has engendered a heated debate. Amnesty International reports that the UN International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice in the Context of Law Enforcement expressed concerns that responses aimed at addressing security challenges are handled through over-policing, surveillance, and arbitrary stops and searches (Amnesty International, 2023).

Public burnings of the Quran culminated in June 2023, sparking heated public debate. These incidents became fodder for power games played by Erdoğan, who used them to extract as many concessions as possible from Sweden toward Turkey in the bargaining of Sweden's NATO membership. Several voices within the country urged the police to ban the burning of the Quran; however, the courts ruled that this act does not constitute a hate crime and that the only permissible action within the existing legal framework would be to move these burnings to a less sensitive area (SVT, 2023). The Swedish Institute reports that such incidents have the potential to damage the country's image abroad (Svenska Institutet, 2023).

Effective Civil
Society
Organizations
(Capital and
Labor)
Score: 10

In early 20th-century Sweden, the relationship between labor and industry underwent significant evolution, marked by a series of compromises aimed at addressing the pressing social and economic challenges of the time. One pivotal agreement was reached in 1938 with the establishment of the Saltsjöbaden Agreement, a landmark accord that laid the groundwork for collective bargaining and labor rights. Spearheaded by the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) and the Swedish Employers Association (SAF), this agreement aimed to strike a balance between the interests of workers and employers, fostering a cooperative framework for resolving labor disputes and negotiating fair wages and working conditions. The Saltsjöbaden Agreement emphasized the importance of mutual respect, dialogue, and compromise, setting a precedent for collaborative labor relations that would come to define Sweden’s social model.

Central to the compromise between labor and industry in early 20th-century Sweden was the concept of “wage solidarity” (lönesolidaritet), which sought to ensure equitable pay scales across various industries and professions. This principle, enshrined in subsequent agreements following the Saltsjöbaden pact, aimed to mitigate income disparities and foster a sense of social cohesion. Additionally, the compromise facilitated the establishment of comprehensive social welfare programs, including universal healthcare and unemployment benefits, which provided a safety net for workers and their families. Through these compromises, Sweden achieved a delicate equilibrium between the demands of labor and the imperatives of industry, laying the foundation for its renowned welfare state and cementing its reputation as a model for progressive social policy (Elvander 1988).

A legacy of this agreement is that the government is not involved in salary negotiations between labor unions and employers. As a consequence, there is no governmentally mandated minimum wage. The right to unionization is legislated (SFS 1976:580). Three major unions cover the gamut of professions: LO (public and private blue-collar professions), TCO (public and private white-collar professions), and Saco (academics and professions such as civil engineers and lawyers) (Nordiskt Samarbete, n.d.). These organizations are major players in shaping public policy. They have the resources, both monetary and expertise, to influence the policy process.

Effective Civil
Society
Organizations
(Social Welfare)
Score: 9

In Sweden, civil society organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role in shaping social welfare policies through active participation in the policymaking process articulated through the referral system [remiss]. With a long-standing tradition of robust civil society engagement, these organizations possess significant capacity to influence and co-create relevant policies in the realm of

social welfare. Through advocacy, research, and grassroots mobilization, CSOs articulate the needs and concerns of diverse communities, ensuring that policy decisions are informed by a broad spectrum of voices. This participatory approach fosters transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of social welfare initiatives.

The Swedish government recognizes the value of collaboration with CSOs and has established mechanisms to facilitate their involvement in policy development. This is partly because increasing iterations of right-wing coalition governments have promoted the transfer of the provision of welfare services, such as the handling of crises, to civil society organizations with their large networks of organized volunteers (see Petridou et al., 2021).

Various advisory bodies and consultative forums provide platforms for dialogue between government officials and representatives of civil society. Moreover, funding schemes and grants support the operational capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs), empowering them to conduct research, organize campaigns, and implement programs aimed at addressing social welfare challenges. By leveraging their expertise and grassroots networks, CSOs contribute invaluable insights and practical solutions to the policymaking process, enriching the discourse and enhancing the responsiveness of government initiatives.

However, despite these strengths, challenges persist in ensuring that civil society organizations can fully participate in policy co-creation in Sweden's social welfare sector. Structural barriers such as limited resources, bureaucratic hurdles, and unequal access to decision-making processes can hinder the meaningful engagement of CSOs, particularly those representing marginalized or underrepresented groups. Moreover, shifts in political dynamics or changes in government priorities may impact the extent to which CSOs are included in policy discussions, potentially undermining the continuity and effectiveness of collaborative efforts. Addressing these challenges requires ongoing commitment from both government institutions and civil society actors to foster a culture of partnership, mutual respect, and shared responsibility in shaping policies that promote social justice and equity.

The public agency responsible for civil society issues in Sweden is the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, focusing on youth policy and policy on civil society. It also has the mandate to distribute funds to civil society in the form of support for organizations, projects, and international collaboration.

The structure of CSOs in Sweden is complex. CSOs may be voluntary, faith-based, foundations, member-based organizations, consultancies and financing

Effective Civil
Society
Organizations
(Environment)
Score: 10

entities, limited liability companies with restrictions on gain distributions to shareholders, and cooperatives (MUCF, 2024).

The latest annual report released by the agency in 2023, with results concerning 2022, finds that some volunteer CSOs are still grappling with the consequences of the pandemic, particularly in terms of shrinking membership among the elderly. Additionally, high electricity prices and the Russian invasion of Ukraine present further challenges (MUCF, 2023).

Environmental civil society organizations (CSOs) are significant actors in the Swedish environmental policymaking process, much like other societal sectors. While several important initiatives exist, including the notable Fridays for Future started by Greta Thunberg (see www.fridaysforfuture.org), the largest environmental CSO in Sweden is The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), which has been in operation since 1909. This member-based not-for-profit organization, like all Swedish CSOs, receives state funding in addition to membership fees. It boasts 200,000 members (Naturskyddsföreningen, 2024).

SSNC has local chapters and extensive international operations supported by Sida. The organization has five objectives:

1. Atmosphere: clean air and limited impact on the climate;
2. Land-based ecosystems: a viable nature in forests and on land;
3. Aquatic ecosystems: vibrant waters from spring to ocean;
4. People: environmentally sound individuals in sustainable societies; and
5. The association’s resources: a strong and influential organization.

In pursuit of the last objective, SSNC collaborates with organizations in ten countries and four continents (Naturskyddsföreningen, 2024).

III. Horizontal Accountability

Independent Supervisory Bodies

Effective Public
Auditing
Score: 10

Riksrevisionen, the Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO), is the independent auditing body.

It is an independent public agency under the Riksdag charged with auditing public agencies and operations. Established after a 2003 reform, its purpose is to oversee the financial operations of Swedish public agencies and ensure that resources are used according to the decisions made in the Riksdag.

It is the only body with the authority to audit all state finances. The Swedish NAO also has significant international operations, with a mandate to help developing countries build better auditing practices (Riskrevisionen, n.d.,a; n.d.,b). It issues numerous audit reports available on its website, many also in English. A search in the Retriever database (covering print and digital media, radio, and TV) conducted in January 2023, with the keyword “Riskrevisionen,” returned 13,671 hits for the two-year period 2022 – 2023. The amount, diversity, and relevance of the reports result in considerable media attention.

Effective Data
Protection
Score: 10

The public agency tasked with protecting individual privacy in Sweden is the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection (Integritetsskyddsmyndigheten, IMY in Swedish). The data protection regulatory reform associated with the implementation of the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in 2018 expanded the agency’s remit, which includes protecting citizens’ personal information, such as health and financial data (IMY, 2024a). Consequently, the IMY has seen significant growth in budget allocation and staff in recent years. By December 2023, the number of employees had reached 132 (109 full-time equivalents), compared to just over 30 employees in 2007 (IMY, 2022, 2024b).

The agency audits both public and private sector organizations – from municipalities to H&M – at all levels of governance. These reports are independent, used as legitimate evidence in court decisions, and reported as such in the media (IMY, 2024c).

Rule of Law

Effective Judicial
Oversight
Score: 10

The Council on Legislation (Lagrådet) has the mandate to advise and provide an overall assessment of the quality of all legislation that could relate to constitutional issues.

The council has a purely advisory (non-binding) role. Judicial review is mainly carried out by the government and public agencies, with Swedish courts traditionally serving as tools of political executive power rather than as a means of balancing power (Ahlbäck Öberg and Wockelberg 2016). In the consensus-oriented corporatist Swedish system, agreements are typically

reached by political parties and other actors, rendering judicial intervention less important than in the United States, where the courts are commonly used as adjudicators. Supreme Court justices are appointed by the cabinet by simple majority. These appointments shall be meritocratic and not guided by political allegiances. The findings of a landmark commission of inquiry titled Enhanced Protection for Democracy and the Independence of the Courts (Förstärkt skydd för demokratin och domstolarnas oberoende) were released in 2023. This report concerns a series of proposed legislative changes, including constitutional amendments, aimed at further protecting the independence of courts and justices.

The commission posits that the current system effectively ensures the independence of courts and judges but proposes proactive changes to safeguard this independence in the long term. One key recommendation is a constitutional amendment explicitly stating that “justice is administered by independent courts” (SOU 2023, 47).

Additionally, the commission calls for the establishment of a new, autonomous central court administration agency named Domstolsstyrelsen, or the Board of Courts. The leadership of this agency would be selected by a board, with a majority of its members being permanent judges, thus ensuring independence from the government.

The commission further suggests amendments related to the appointment and removal of justices. These amendments would limit governmental influence in the appointment procedure and include formal rules to ensure diversity and broad representation on the Judges Proposal Board, which handles the nomination process.

Further recommendations include changes in the oversight and accountability of courts, the number of justices, and, if necessary, the special composition of the Supreme Court. These proposals are consolidated in a joint act, the Law about Courts and Justices (lag om domstolar och domare).

In summary, this commission of inquiry recommends sweeping and fundamental changes in a proactive attempt to strengthen institutions against potential future misuse. As of January 2024, these changes are in the process of being legislated.

Civil rights and an egalitarian society are core Swedish values. The constitution has a chapter devoted to human rights, and legal certainty is a governing principle for public administration.

However, there are increasing causes for concern. Although discrimination based on sex, transgender identity or expression, religion or other beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, or age is illegal, the Discrimination Ombudsman (DO) reported an upward trend in incidents in 2021, with high numbers continuing in 2022 (DO 2022; 2023). The DO suggests that discrimination occurs in all segments of society, with discrimination based on sex, ethnicity, or age being the most prevalent. The DO also reports a high number of incidents against Muslims or people perceived to be Muslim.

In 2022, the constitution was amended to limit the right to associate with groups that support terrorism, have military operations, or persecute people on the basis of ethnic origins or skin color (Sveriges Riksdag, 2022).

The de facto segregation of suburbs in large metropolitan areas continues, and gang violence remains a significant challenge in some regions, infringing upon citizens' personal freedom of movement. This societal fracturing is cause for concern and an issue that has remained unresolved for quite some time.

Effective
Corruption
Prevention
Score: 9

Corruption is addressed by a special unit within the Swedish Prosecution Authority (Åklagarmyndigheten, n.d.). Sweden's transparency systems, characterized by low power discretion within the administration, high freedom of the press, and an autonomous judiciary, result in the country having one of the lowest levels of corruption globally. It ranks 5th out of 143 countries. The country excels in both de facto and de jure transparency. However, there has been concern in the past decade regarding attempts by Swedish companies conducting transactions abroad to gain a competitive advantage (Corruption Risk, 2023).

The Government Offices issued an action plan to combat corruption in public administration for 2021 – 2023. The strategies include better controls integrated into organizational operations, risk analyses, increased knowledge and ethical practices, routines for handling suspected corruption, and collaboration for experience sharing (Government Offices, 2020). A report evaluating this action plan and the efforts of public agencies against corruption was expected on December 31, 2023, but was not yet available at the time of writing this report.

Legislature

Sufficient
Legislative
Resources
Score: 10

The Riksdag Administration (Riksdagsförvaltningen) has a staff of about 700 employees and is a public agency tasked with providing administrative support and services to the members of the Swedish parliament (Sveriges Riksdag 2023). These services include providing expert knowledge as a basis for policy decisions. The agency is also mandated to ensure that the Riksdag constitutes a good work environment.

Riksdagsförvaltningen is responsible for a range of tasks, including communicating the Riksdag’s work to the public and maintaining the buildings and artifacts it houses. Reports drafted by Riksdagsförvaltningen are available upon request.

Effective
Legislative
Oversight
Score: 10

Parliamentary committees have the right to review all public documents, with the exception of those that are classified or part of an ongoing decision-making process. The Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Affairs (KU) is responsible for reviewing the work of members of parliament. The committee has the mandate to weigh in on any issue raised by members of parliament, including EU subsidiarity issues, which have been on the rise in 2023 (Sveriges Riksdag 2023). KU also has the authority to summon parliamentarians and access documents. While this access to documents has been an issue in past years, current reports do not indicate the continuation of this problem.

Effective
Legislative
Investigations
Score: 10

Oversight and legislative investigations are conducted by the Parliamentary Committee for Constitutional Affairs (KU). Any member of parliament can initiate an investigation by petitioning the committee. This holds true both de jure and de facto. KU includes members of all political parties in proportion to the seats they hold in parliament. Furthermore, the current chair belongs to the Social Democrats, a party currently in the opposition.

A vote of no confidence can be initiated by any party, as long as 35 members of parliament support it. For a vote of confidence to pass, a simple majority of 175 MPs is required. The Riksdag has voted on this issue 14 times in total (Sveriges Riksdag 2024).

In 2021 an unprecedented vote took place, partly demonstrating the increasing power of the radical right Sweden Democrats in Swedish politics. The Sweden Democrats initiated a vote of no confidence against the then Social Democratic Prime Minister Stefan Löfven. The vote passed for the first time in Sweden’s history, with 181 for, 51 against, 51 abstaining, and 8 MPs absent

(Sveriges Riksdag 2024). This event threw the government into turmoil since what is common practice in countries such as the UK or Greece – snap elections – is never done in Sweden. They are not unconstitutional, as in Norway, but they are not part of the normally stable Swedish political environment.

The result of the vote of no confidence was the Social Democrat Margareta Andersson replacing Stefan Löfven, leading a largely caretaker government until the 2022 elections. In those elections, the social democratic coalition lost to the right-wing alliance led by the Moderate Party.

Legislative
Capacity for
Guiding Policy
Score: 10

Parliamentary work takes place in 15 committees and one Committee on European Union Affairs. These roughly align with the ministries in the Government Offices. If there are issues cutting across two committees, a joint committee is formed. For example, if work needs to be performed across the Committees on Foreign Affairs and Defense, a joint committee would be created. Each committee has 17 members, proportionally divided according to the seats parties have in parliament. Committee chairs can – and often do – belong to opposition parties. The allocation of committee chairs is a bargaining process among political parties (Sveriges Riksdag, 2024).

In a rare public glimpse into parliamentary committee work, this bargaining was highlighted after the 2022 election. The radical right-wing Sweden Democrats had sufficient voter backing to negotiate the leadership of committees, including the chair of the Committee on Justice and the vice chair of the Committee on Defense.

Governing with Foresight

I. Coordination

Quality of Horizontal Coordination

Effective
Coordination
Mechanisms of
the GO/PMO
Score: 8

Policymaking in Sweden is characterized by a small government and numerous autonomous public agencies. The central administrative entity, known as Government Offices (Regeringskansliet), is led by the prime minister and has a small staff that assists the government (Regeringen) in preparing policy and governing the country. This entity comprises the Office of the Prime Minister (Statsrådsberedningen) and all the ministries.

The GO employs a very small fraction of the public servants working for more than 300 government agencies. Furthermore, Sweden is characterized by the absence of formal ministerial rule when it comes to public agencies. This means that, even though agencies belong to a specific ministry, public agencies and civil servants have considerable freedom in interpreting laws or exercising public authority (Larsson and Bäck 2008). Ministries focus on strategic planning and budgeting, and the managerial autonomy of agencies has increased in the past decades (Hall 2016).

The leadership of the GO and the PMO is asserted when policies are initiated, when final decisions are made, and if a disagreement emerges among the governing parties or ministers, rather than as a continuous monitoring of policy implementation work. Regular briefings and informal consultations occur frequently. This informal coordination procedure nevertheless ensures that the PMO, in line with the finance ministry, plays a crucial role in policy developments. As is the case in many aspects of Swedish politics, there are established yet informal rules regulating procedures when there is disagreement among non-political advisers on how to design policy. The practicalities of policy design are left to specialist public servants, whereas the GO and the PMO operate at the strategic level.

Effective
Coordination
Mechanisms
within the
Ministerial
Bureaucracy
Score: 6

Finally, line ministries often seek advice from executive agencies during the early stages of the policy process because these public agencies possess the necessary expertise in the policy sector (Jacobsson, Pierre, and Sundström, 2015; Niemann, 2012; Page, 2012; Premfors and Sundström, 2007).

Interministerial coordination has long been problematic in the Swedish system of government. Formally, the government and its departments operate as a collective actor. All decisions are made collectively, and there is no individual ministerial accountability. The PMO and the finance ministry play a significant role in this process. Additionally, when the government is a coalition, as has been the case since 2006, policies must be coordinated not only among the relevant departments but also among the governing parties (Jacobsson, Pierre, and Sundström, 2015).

Collective decision-making becomes even more complex in practice. Each department has a fair amount of autonomy in its respective sector. Coordination among departments occurs at different organizational levels, depending on whether the issue is technical and administrative or politically charged. With the latter, political actors make the final decisions.

Formal collaboration – a program that started in 2006 in the Government Offices of Sweden and has evolved to a broader partnership scheme – falls under the purview of Vinnova, Sweden’s innovation agency, with the latest strategy covering the period from 2019 – 2022. The scheme addresses four thematic areas: business climate change, skills supply and lifelong learning, health and life science, and business digital and structural transformation (Vinnova, 2021).

Complementary
Informal
Coordination
Score: 7

When the government consists of more than one party, as has often been the case in Sweden’s recent history, mechanisms are in place to address disagreements. Either the political leadership proactively intervenes in the policy-planning process or such disagreements are “lifted” to the political level for a ruling. These mechanisms largely unfold during informal meetings.

Public agencies are often consulted by line ministries in the early stages of the policy process due to the significant policy knowledge that public servants possess (Jacobsson, Pierre, and Sundström, 2015; Premfors and Sundström, 2007).

“Informal mechanisms of coordination among civil servants and politicians are a salient practice (Petridou and Sparf, 2017). However, they may not always be effective. Yet, informal contacts between departments and agencies are believed to be integral to the efficiency of the politico-administrative system.

Informal coordination procedures effectively filter many, but not all, policy proposals (de Fine Licht and Pierre, 2017).”

Quality of Vertical Coordination

Effectively
Setting and
Monitoring
National
(Minimum)
Standards
Score: 8

Over the past decades, public services have been extensively decentralized. Once the provision and management of services are transferred from the national level to local governments, safeguarding national standards – and even defining and sustaining those standards – becomes problematic. This issue is exacerbated with increasingly privatized services, where oversight over national standards is even more challenging.

For a unitary state, the Swedish subnational level has pronounced autonomy, constitutionally protected in the idea of “kommunal självstyre,” or municipal self-government (SKR, 2024). In practice, this does not mean the 21 regions and 290 municipalities can make policy as they wish; rather, they have considerable leeway in implementing broadly articulated national policy and providing a wide range of welfare services, such as healthcare, which is the responsibility of the regions, and education, which is the responsibility of the municipalities.

The national government employs extensive evaluation structures to control policy implementation at the national level. Public agencies manage these evaluations. For example, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (Myndigketen för samhällsskydd och beredskap, MSB) oversees Risk and Vulnerability Analyses, which are reported up the levels of governance from the municipal to the national (MSB, 2021). Municipal public servants have expressed concerns that these reports become instrumental, creating disproportionate work relative to the benefits they provide.

Effective
Multilevel
Cooperation
Score: 8

In the context of municipal autonomy, the main vehicle for collaboration between the national and subnational governments is the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (Sveriges kommuner och regioner, SKR) (SKR n.d.).

SKR is a membership organization that encompasses all municipalities and regions in the country. Its purpose is to support its members with knowledge and expertise. SKR is the largest employer organization in Sweden and conducts salary negotiations for employees of regions and municipalities. SKR enjoys legitimacy and is a key player in intergovernmental relations.

There are several formalized networks to connect public servants from different parts of the country who work in sectors such as education and health (SKR, 2024a). They meet regularly.

While the government announced an increase of SEK 6 billion in funding for regions and municipalities in 2022, budget cuts are expected in 2024 (Government Offices of Sweden 2022; SKR, 2024b). Recently, sectors such as healthcare have been chronically underfunded, resulting in serious consequences, especially for post-COVID treatment.

II. Consensus-Building

Recourse to Scientific Knowledge

Harnessing
Scientific
Knowledge
Effectively
Score: 8

In a recent reconceptualization of policy styles, Petridou (2022) posits that Sweden has a “managerial” policy style. This style is characterized by high policy capacity and significant inclusiveness of non-governmental actors in the policymaking process, including academics who produce expert knowledge regularly feeding into public policy.

The linear, consensus-building, problem-solving approach to making public policy lends itself to incorporating academic knowledge, particularly in the process of commissions of inquiry (Statens offentliga utredningar, SOU) and during the referral process of any new legislation. Sweden has a long tradition of evidence-based policymaking. For instance, the Riksdag arranges an annual research day. The theme of the 2023 seminar, held in June, was how the Riksdag can address complex challenges with the help of research (Sveriges Riksdag, 2023).

Recent developments are concerning. The agreement that enabled government formation after the gridlock of the 2022 elections (Tidöavtalet) highlighted the newfound political influence of the radical right-wing party Sweden Democrats. The agreement included a provision to change the undergraduate education for social workers, emphasizing punitive measures with the obligatory inclusion of courses on youth criminality. It also mandated that teachers and other street-level bureaucrats report suspect individuals to authorities. Both provisions faced severe criticism and, as of this writing, have not been implemented (Ahlgren et al., 2022; Hedman, 2022). The government

also attempted to involve itself in academia by shortening the mandate period of university board members, which met sharp criticism from the vice chancellors of Swedish universities (Viberg et al., 2023).

Involvement of Civil Society in Policy Development

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Capital and
Labor)
Score: 9

Cooperation between the government and trade unions in Sweden is traditionally strong and has historically played a central role in shaping the country's policies and legislation. This cooperation is an expression of the Swedish model, which is based on a tripartite structure in which the government, employer organizations, and trade unions work together to resolve labor market issues. This approach is often referred to as the "Saltsjöbad spirit" (Elvander 1988). In 2022, the main agreement between labor, employers, and the government was renewed with modified rules and under political pressure (Kjellberg 2023a).

Union membership in most Western countries has declined over the past few decades, though Sweden and other Nordic countries seem somewhat sheltered from such trends. However, in the last two decades, even Sweden has exhibited both a decline in trade union membership and a less close relationship between the unions and their traditional political partners, i.e., Social Democratic Parties. Foreign-born workers are not unionized to the same extent as Swedish-born workers, which can be explained by the fact that workers not born in Sweden are mainly employed in sectors that are difficult to organize, especially in the service sector with low qualification requirements. Despite this, around 90% of all workers are covered by collective agreements, i.e., mainly bilateral negotiations between labor and capital.

While the union density rate has remained relatively stable at 70% in recent years (with slight fluctuations), the density rate for private-sector employers is around 88%. In the public sector, the degree of organization is 100% for obvious reasons. This means that around 88% of employees work in companies affiliated with an employers' association (Kjellberg 2023b).

With regard to power resources and the strengthening of tripartite agreements, the integration of the interest groups of labor and capital has been implemented both intensively and comprehensively in Sweden. While cooperation between unions, employers' associations, and the government takes many forms, the most institutionalized policy feedback mechanism is the referral ("remiss") system (Government Offices of Sweden, n.d.).

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Social Welfare)
Score: 8

In Sweden, the government has traditionally worked to facilitate and promote the participation of leading social welfare CSOs in decision-making. Through various forms of consultation, dialogue and participation in committees and councils, these organizations have the opportunity to influence policy and legislation related to social issues. The government often sees CSOs as important partners and recognizes their expertise and commitment to welfare issues, making it natural to involve them in the decision-making process. These bodies can be composed of representatives from both the government and CSOs and aim to gather different perspectives and expertise to shape social policies. CSOs have the possibility to provide policy feedback in the institutionalized process of referral.

At the same time, there are challenges and criticisms regarding the degree of participation and influence that CSOs actually have in decision-making. Some organizations feel their opinions and proposals are not always taken seriously enough or that they are not given sufficient time and resources to participate fully. Additionally, issues of transparency and openness in the decision-making process can impact the ability of organizations to participate meaningfully.

A recent report focuses on collaborations between CSOs and regions. More specifically, it addresses a power imbalance between civil society and the regions. The regions are in a much stronger financial position and have significantly more employees, which means they can independently make the necessary decisions for collaboration and perform the essential tasks. Additionally, collaboration is overly dependent on the individuals involved and lacks sufficient structure. The risk of an overly personal collaboration is that uncertainty arises as soon as an individual is replaced, and it can be more difficult for the collaborating organizations to achieve a common understanding of the work. There is a need for formalized collaboration arrangements to ensure they endure the often high personnel turnover (MUCF, 2023).

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Environment)
Score: 9

Consultation with societal actors has historically been a strong feature of Swedish democracy. Public consultation remains a core component of the Swedish policymaking process. In this corporatist arrangement, the government consults with key societal partners on a wide range of issues, including those concerning the environment and climate action. Stakeholders are thus given an opportunity to influence public policy from the early stages of the policy process until implementation.

Public inquiries and participation in various committees and councils are among the forms of consultation. The government often recognizes the

expertise and commitment of environmental NGOs in addressing environmental issues, viewing them as essential actors in achieving sustainability goals and promoting environmental protection.

The center-right minority government elected in 2022 has taken a permissive stance on environmental policy, eliciting criticism from environmental CSOs in print media, television, and their websites. The Swedish Climate Policy Council, an independent interdisciplinary organization tasked with evaluating Swedish climate policy against the possibility of achieving its goals, posits that the current policy will increase emissions and prevent Sweden from meeting its targets (Klimatpolitiska rådet, 2023).

Openness of Government

Open
Government
Score: 8

In 2019, Sweden scored significantly below the OECD average on open government data – a composite indicator assessing governments’ efforts to implement open data in three areas: Openness, Usefulness, and Re-usability of government data (OURdata) (OECD, n.d.).

Public documents are generally available to the public unless they are classified. Government websites and all levels of governance, including public agencies, increasingly make information available in various languages. Several websites also provide data that can be reused and reconfigured according to the users’ individual needs. For example, the Riksdag’s “open data” service offers APIs (application programming interfaces) and current and historical data on documents, professional information on members of parliament, votes, debates, and more (Riksdagen, 2023).

DIGG, the Agency for Digital Government, suggests increasing governmental support through funding for easy-to-implement digital solutions to enhance the availability and usability of data on government websites (DIGG, 2023).

III. Sensemaking

Preparedness

Capacity for
Strategic
Foresight and
Anticipatory
Innovation
Score: 8

The Swedish government established the Committee for Technological Innovation and Ethics (Komet) in 2018. Komet operated until 2022, when the government changed. Its mandate was to help identify policy challenges, contribute to reducing uncertainty surrounding existing regulations, and support policy development in innovation and technology, especially as it related to the relationship between governmental regulation and large private companies (Komet, 2022).

Digitalization and the effective use of technology in public administration are overseen by DIGG, the Agency for Digital Government. The agency has a four-part mission: (i) supporting the digitalization of public administration; (ii) managing Sweden's digital infrastructure; (iii) monitoring and analyzing the digitalization of society; and (iv) assisting the government in making well-informed decisions (DIGG, 2024).

Any further research that leads to innovation in public administration and political science is funded by research councils. The current structure of research funding includes five agencies:

- The Swedish Energy Agency (Energimyndigheten), which promotes research and innovation in the field of energy, had a budget of SEK 1.46 billion in 2023.

Formas, the Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development, funds basic and needs-oriented research in the environment, agricultural and built environment fields, with a 2023 budget of SEK 1.87 billion.

The Forte, Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life, and Welfare, funds basic and needs-oriented research in the working life, welfare, and public health fields, with a 2023 budget of SEK 0.87 billion.

- The Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) funds research across all scientific fields and supports larger research infrastructures, with a 2023 budget of SEK 8.09 billion.

- Vinnova, the Swedish innovation agency, fosters sustainable growth by funding needs-oriented research and creating effective innovation systems. Its 2023 budget is SEK 3.41 billion.

A 2023 commission of inquiry proposes a radical reorganization of the research funding structure by phasing out the existing councils and agencies

into three entities: the Science Agency, the Strategic Research Agency, and Vinnova (SOU, 2023). Additionally, public agencies fund research per sector. For example, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) has traditionally had a research department and has allocated funding to universities as well as municipalities for projects in risk and crisis management.

Analytical Competence

Effective
Regulatory
Impact
Assessment
Score: 7

The purpose of regulatory impact analysis (RIA) is to assess the degree to which regulation has negative effects and unintended consequences for the subjects of regulation. RIAs aim to prevent increasing regulatory burdens on private firms and identify which regulatory frameworks should be abolished or simplified.

Ex ante assessments of regulatory impact have been mandatory since 2007. In the latest OECD iREG scores, Sweden ranks slightly below the OECD average for primary laws and subordinate regulations (OECD, 2021).

A 2022 memorandum from the Department of Finance suggests changes in how RIAs are conducted, based on criticism of the existing process, including a complicated regulatory framework fragmented across various pieces of legislation. Criticisms include that RIAs come too late in the process – when solutions are already formulated – a lack of competence and a failure to scientifically consider causal mechanisms between measures and their impact, and the limited scope of RIAs. The memorandum proposes legislative changes to incorporate RIAs into the work of public agencies when they issue ordinances and advice to the public, as well as in the commissions of inquiry that result in proposals for legislative change (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022). This memorandum was in the referral phase at the time of writing this report.

Effective
Sustainability
Checks
Score: 8

Environmental sustainability has been well integrated into the policy process. All government bills, procurements, and directives to commissions of inquiry are required to be assessed to determine their impact on environmental sustainability.

As for other types of sustainability criteria, there has been little evidence about the extent to which they are considered in the RIA process. The 2022 memorandum issued by the Department of Finance aims to change this by proposing clear social, economic, and environmental dimensions in RIAs (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022).

Effective Ex Post
Evaluation
Score: 8

Ex post evaluations take various forms. For the past two decades, performance measurement and management have been an integral part of public management in Sweden, as in most other countries. Audits conducted by the Swedish NAO [Riksrevisionen] are also important evaluation instruments.

There is, however, a tendency to focus more on institutions and cost efficiency – the audit approach – than on programs and impact – the evaluation approach. This is a common trend among Western democracies. Both approaches, however, are useful as feedback on public policy (Pierre, Peters and de Fine Licht, 2018; Peters and Pierre, 2019).

Sustainable Policymaking

I. Economic Sustainability

Circular Economy

Circular
Economy Policy
Efforts and
Commitment
Score: 9

Sweden continues the work it initiated at the beginning of the decade, outlining a vision for a transition to a circular economy. Though some policy instruments are legally binding, most are voluntary at this point.

Sweden is a party to the EU's Green Deal and the action plan for a circular economy issued in 2020. The action plan targets over 30 measures and includes a framework for sustainable production design, increasing consumer power, targeting key sectors, and decreasing waste (Europeiska Rådet, 2024).

In 2021, the government published a strategy for the transition toward a circular economy. The overarching target of the strategy was to contribute to reaching the environmental – and global – targets in the Agenda 2030. The strategy's vision is “a society where resources are used efficiently in toxin-free circular flows that replace virgin materials” (Regeringskansliet, 2021a).

Four areas are highlighted: (i) circular economy through sustainable production and product design; (ii) circular economy through sustainable consumption and use of materials, products, and services; (iii) circular economy through toxin-free and circular cycles; and (iv) circular economy that incentivizes the business sector and other actors through measures that encourage innovation and circular business models (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021a).

The government has developed a comprehensive action plan based on the strategy's four focus areas, employing several regulatory instruments, some of which have already been adopted (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021b). The strategy and action plan are divided into specific strategies targeting different themes: plastic, textiles, food, renewable and biobased raw materials,

construction, the real estate sector, and innovation in critical metals and minerals (Geerken, Manoochehri & Di Francesco, 2022). The government has also drafted a specific strategy for plastic, comprising 55 measures designed to mitigate the environmental and climate effects (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021c).

The strategy and action plans are developed in accordance with the national environmental interim targets, which serve as indicators to measure progress (see section P17 Effective Climate Action for information about the interim targets).

The strategy and action plans are not binding but are reviewed in the budget proposition in the same way as national environmental targets. Involved stakeholders, such as agencies, regions, and municipalities, have been commissioned to follow the development. However, legally binding measures are being taken for the different themes in the action plan. In relation to waste management, for example, seven new rules concerning municipal waste management were implemented in 2024, with measures such as mandatory sorting of non-liquefied food waste and liquefied grease and separating the content from the packing (Avfall Sverige, 2024).

The central actors in the transition are the government and the Riksdag, the EU, the business sector, the public sector and civil society. The Ministry of Climate and Enterprise is the lead unit responsible for matters concerning climate and the environment, but numerous actors are involved in the transition toward a circular environment. These include the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, the Swedish Consumer Agency, Vinnova, the state research council Formas, universities and research institutes, municipalities, and regions.

Viable Critical Infrastructure

Preparedness and the protection of critical infrastructure have been at the forefront of governmental discussions for some time, particularly in the two years since Russia invaded Ukraine. This invasion led to the end of the policy of non-alliance and Sweden's NATO membership.

One key aspect of the government's commitment is the development of comprehensive risk management frameworks and collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including private sector entities and international partners. The protection of critical infrastructure in terms of cybersecurity, information

security, and communication systems largely falls under the purview of MSB (Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap). MSB reports on how national policy on critical infrastructure protection aligns with EU policy (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020; MSB n.d.).

Government efforts have focused on cybersecurity, partly due to the high degree of digitalization of services in both the public and private sectors. Other types of critical infrastructure have suffered from chronic underfunding. For instance, the lack of investment in railway infrastructure, combined with increased demand, has brought the system to its knees with delays and frequent cancellations; accidents have also occurred.

Decarbonized Energy System

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Achieving a
Decarbonized
Energy System
by 2050
Score: 8

Environmental policy surfaced on the political agenda in the 1970s, coinciding with the establishment of the Environmental Party [Miljöpartiet De Gröna]. Since then, environmental issues, including energy transitions, have remained prominent. With its history as a high-energy-consuming industrial economy, Sweden undoubtedly faces significant challenges, but it has set ambitious goals for emissions reductions. Much of this effort occurs at the urban level.

Energy issues fall under the jurisdiction of the Swedish Energy Agency and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. Both public agencies have developed detailed plans for a sustainable energy transition. The Swedish Energy Agency released its 2025 – 2028 strategic priorities in research and innovation, which include technology and sustainable value chains for energy transition, accelerated transition through system demonstrators and business development for accelerated energy transition, a resilient and robust energy system, increased competence for energy transition, governance, and conflicting objectives and pathways for the energy system (Energimyndigheten, 2024). The agency places a pronounced emphasis on renewable energy sources.

In the restructuring of the funding agencies, research funding for the Swedish Energy Agency is discontinued. About 30% of electricity production is generated by nuclear plants – six reactors in three plants, currently planned to run until 2040 (Strålsäkerhetsmyndigheten, 2024). The current government is planning to further expand nuclear plants.

Sweden aims to be carbon neutral by 2045. The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency has a detailed plan with constituent targets to achieve this goal (see <https://www.sverigesmiljomal.se>). These targets are non-binding but

are part of the climate framework, which includes legislation, goals, and an advisory board that lend significant political weight to the issue (Naturvårdsverket, 2023). However, the current right-wing government tends to have a more permissive attitude toward climate issues.

Adaptive Labor Markets

Policies
Targeting an
Adaptive Labor
Market
Score: 8

The purpose of Swedish labor market policy is threefold. It aims to provide work opportunities for citizens, supply labor to employers, and assist those struggling to find employment.

“Despite earlier predictions that unemployment would decrease to 6.7% in 2023 (Konjunkturinstitutet 2021), it remained relatively high at 8.5% (SCB 2024a). Nonetheless, the percentages of full-time employment and the employment of people born outside Sweden have increased significantly (SCB 2024b). Both part-time employment and the employment of people born outside Sweden have been problematic issues in the past.”

In the aftermath of the pandemic, professions in IT, education, and social work show more potential for mobility, while employees in transportation, manufacturing, and maintenance services have more constrained mobility opportunities (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2022).

In order to promote lifelong learning and professional mobility, the government announced a “transformation package” [omställningspaket] with, among other provisions, subsidies for mid-career individuals who choose to return to school or change careers (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022). According to recent EU data, Sweden is the “top performer” in the EU, with more than a third of adults participating in lifelong learning schemes in 2021 (Eurostat 2023).

Policies
Targeting an
Inclusive Labor
Market
Score: 7

Despite slightly decreasing inflation from more than 10% at the end of 2022 to 3.5% in November 2023, Sweden experienced a mild recession in 2023, which is expected to end in 2024. The labor market withstood economic pressures, as unemployment rose slightly in 2023; a further modest increase is estimated for 2024 (Konjunkturinstitutet, 2023a).

In the first part of 2023, for the first time in many years, employment rates among people born outside Sweden have significantly increased, although the trend began just before the pandemic. While some of this increase can be attributed to data generation methods, the long-term trend is explained by a stronger labor market (Konjunkturinstitutet, 2023a). The employment rate for

people born outside Sweden rose by four percentage points in 2022 alone (Konjunkturinstitutet, 2023b).

Strong incentives for education and comprehensive lifelong learning schemes contribute to a low NEET rate (6.8% in 2022, the second lowest rate in the EU) (Ekonomifakta, 2023). Finally, there is a debate to re-evaluate rules and regulations for working from home, which may further increase integration into the labor market.

Policies
Targeting Labor
Market Risks
Score: 8

In Sweden, policies and regulations generally provide robust social protection for workers, aiming to extend existing social insurance schemes to previously excluded worker categories and adapt them to non-standard forms of work. The country's welfare system is comprehensive and inclusive, encompassing various social insurance programs such as unemployment benefits, sickness benefits, parental leave, and healthcare.

Efforts have been made to ensure that workers in non-standard employment arrangements, such as part-time workers, temporary workers, and self-employed individuals, have access to these social protections. Major features of Sweden's social insurance policies include the separation of spouses' income and individual taxation, the expansion of public and private day care centers, and a very generous parental leave program provided to both women and men, which has created much better possibilities to combine a professional career with parenthood (Dufvander and Löfgren, 2020).

The basic difference between the social democratic and green parties, on one hand, and the center-right parties, on the other, is that the former emphasize gender equality, whereas the latter emphasize freedom of choice. Both blocs, however, are fully committed to the overarching goals of family policy and see it as integral to promoting gender equality.

Additionally, reforms have been introduced to address gaps in social protection for workers in non-standard employment, such as the introduction of income-related unemployment benefits for part-time workers (Försäkringskassan, 2024).

Regarding employment protection legislation, Sweden ranks below the average for all OECD countries in terms of temporary contracts. However, concerning employment protection for regular workers, Sweden ranked in the top third of all OECD countries in 2019, the year with the latest available data (OECD 2020).

Sweden has established mechanisms to facilitate the transfer of social insurance benefits and pensions for individuals who move among different jobs, sectors, or countries. Additionally, within the European Union, Sweden adheres to regulations that guarantee the portability of social security benefits for EU citizens working or residing in different member states.

Overall, while Sweden’s policies and regulations provide extensive social protection for workers and strive to address the needs of those in non-standard employment arrangements, there may still be areas for improvement, particularly regarding the effectiveness of measures ensuring the portability of social rights across diverse employment contexts.

Sustainable Taxation

Policies
Targeting
Adequate Tax
Revenue
Score: 9

Tax policy is no longer a major impediment to the competitiveness of Swedish businesses. The administrative capacity for levying and collecting taxes is very high, with efficient, digitalized services. The agencies handling tax issues are the Swedish Tax Agency and the Swedish Economic Crime Authority.

Current levels of business taxation are low from a comparative perspective. There are innovation incentives in the form of R&D grants and regional and tax incentives for international businesses relocating to Sweden (Business Sweden, 2022). In 2024, tax revenues are projected to balance the budgets of municipalities as well as reduce any deficits at the national level (Konjunkturinstitutet, 2023).

Policies
Targeting Tax
Equity
Score: 8

Horizontal equity in tax policy has improved in recent years. Simplification of the tax system, including fewer deductible items, has broadened the overall tax base. This improvement in horizontal equity results from a combination of a less progressive tax rate and an overall reduction in taxes.

Vertical inequity has increased significantly over the past decade (OECD 2015; 2022). While the country remains one of the more egalitarian in the OECD, the trend of rising inequality persists. One way to counteract this trend is to improve the redistribution effectiveness of the tax and benefit system.

A recent report suggests that the tax system would also benefit from incorporating a gender perspective, arguing that gender blindness has adversely affected women’s income (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten 2023). The report revisits the long-standing debate on the need for tax reform, which was considered during the January Agreement – the compromise that allowed for the formation of the previous government in 2018 – but was never initiated.

Policies Aimed at
Minimizing
Compliance
Costs
Score: 8

A significant tax reform in Sweden in the early 1990s simplified taxes and reduced both deductible items and tax rates. Since then, two commissions of inquiry and a recent report have advocated for another large-scale tax reform, although none has been implemented so far. The report argues that the current system is overly complex, contains too many exceptions, and imposes high marginal taxes (Eklund, 2021; see also Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2022). Generally, taxpayers can easily file returns electronically through the Swedish Tax Agency's digital services.

Policies Aimed at
Internalizing
Negative and
Positive
Externalities
Score: 8

Tax policy has been used to absorb negative externalities and promote positive ones. In 2022, environmental tax revenue amounted to SEK 97 billion, a decrease of SEK 6.5 billion from 2021. The new government reduced the tax on fuel, while the center-right government decreased revenue from electricity.

Having said that, tax revenue from emissions rights has increased threefold from 2021 to 2022. Energy taxes contribute the most to environmental tax revenue and include energy tax on fuels, carbon dioxide tax, and energy tax on electricity (SCB, 2023).

Sustainable Budgeting

Sustainable
Budgeting
Policies
Score: 9

Since the mid-1990s and after the financial crisis of the early 1990s, fiscal and budgetary discipline in Sweden has been extraordinarily strong, and its tight budgetary regime has begun to yield benefits. Maintaining sound fiscal policy has been an overarching goal for both center-right and center-left governments. Sweden is one of the few countries that targets a budget surplus, and neither the government nor the opposition plans to diverge (Brenton and Pierre, 2017).

The budget surplus goal issue ultimately relates to the Keynesianism–monetarism controversy. Right-wing parties, currently in government, take a more monetarist approach, while the social democratic opposition has a more Keynesian perspective. This continuum aside, the fiscal and budgetary regulatory framework helps sustain a course of strong and sustained economic development. However, during the recent past, center-right parties and trade unions and employers' organizations have argued for changing the strict rules to invest more money into climate protection measures (von Seth 2023). Indeed, public debt decreased during 2021 and 2022 and is expected to decrease further in 2023 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022).

Sweden is a country with very low public debt compared to other OECD countries. On the other hand, Sweden has very high private household debt (OECD n.d.), which may cause problems if property prices fall in the near future.

The Swedish Fiscal Policy Council (2022) raises concerns about the volatile geopolitical situation that could change very rapidly. The council does not believe the current fiscal framework can accommodate spending 2% of GDP on defense by 2028, necessitated by Sweden's NATO membership (Finanspolitiska rådet, 2022).

Sustainability-oriented Research and Innovation

Research and
Innovation Policy
Score: 7

Research and innovation policies have traditionally been a priority for a country whose competitive advantage lies in the knowledge sector. Sweden is one of the eco-innovation forerunners (Rosenberg Johansen, 2022) and, through its commitment to the circular economy, has a distinct focus on sustainable development, economy, and society. Innovation is driven by Vinnova, which has a series of publications for different sectors. However, there is no single national strategy that can be characterized as a roadmap for innovation.

One of Sweden's research councils, FORMAS, is the Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development. It funds basic and needs-based research in the fields of the environment, agriculture, and spatial planning. The council's budget was SEK 1.87 billion in 2023. The 2021 budget increased under the previous government's higher education and research policy titled "Research, Freedom, Future – Knowledge and Innovation for Sweden."

However, this is about to change. A recent commission of inquiry proposes that FORMAS – as well as other research councils – be phased out as they restructure into three (or alternatively, two) funding agencies. It is unclear how sustainability will be addressed in this structure; the word appears twice in the English summary (once in a footnote) and once in Swedish (SOU, 2023).

Stable Global Financial System

Global Financial
Policies
Score: 9

The Swedish government has been a forerunner in enforcing regulations aimed at preventing criminal financial behavior in international financial management. Sweden also supports and implements rules laid out by the

European Union as well as other international bodies in the field of international finance.

The appetite for a Tobin tax is nonexistent following the failure of its enforcement in the late 1980s. Domestically, there has been some friction between the Ministry of Finance and large commercial banks over the past few years. A new “risk tax” came into effect in 2022, requiring banks to pay a tax if their debts associated with Swedish operations exceeded SEK 150 billion in the previous year. In 2022, the tax rate was 0.05% and is set to increase to 0.06% in 2023 (Sveriges Riksdag, 2021).

II. Social Sustainability

Sustainable Education System

Policies
Targeting Quality
Education
Score: 8

Education has consistently been a political priority, with each government promising reform to address ongoing issues of poor student performance. The current administration asserts that schools and the education system must return to basics, emphasizing facts and skills such as writing and arithmetic (Regeringskansliet, 2023).

Even though education is a prioritized policy area, Sweden’s expenditure on public education was slightly lower than the OECD average in 2020. Despite efforts to improve the education system, Sweden was ranked 14th in the PISA results from 2022, which is lower than the 11th place achieved in 2018 (PISA, 2024). In 2022, Sweden’s performance in math and reading comprehension decreased to the same level as in 2012, marking Sweden’s lowest scores in these categories. The results in natural sciences remained unchanged from 2018. However, Sweden’s average score of 4.49 is above the OECD average of 4.43 (Skolverket, 2023a).

Learning about sustainable development is integrated into the curriculum and is one of the learning objectives for Swedish elementary schools (Skolverket 2023c; Skolverket 2023d). In 2019, the government voted to implement sustainable development as a mandatory subject in schools (Motion 2019/20:1110). During 2022, the Schools Inspectorate reviewed the quality of elementary schools’ work in mainstreaming sustainable development in all subjects. The inspection showed that teaching on sustainable development issues could be improved in 27 of the 30 examined schools. Few schools reach high quality in their work (Skolinspektionen 2023).

Labor market policy in Sweden is regulated by the Act (SFS 2000, 625) on Labor Market Policy Initiatives. The initiatives consist of programs and activities designed to strengthen individual opportunities for obtaining or retaining employment. These regulations apply nationally and thus cover all regions. However, different circumstances apply to residents of support regions 1 and 2 seeking assistance to start a business. Support regions, or De-SO regions, denote areas eligible for special business support. De-SO areas are demographic statistical zones divided into three groups: Area A covers larger populations or urban areas, Area B consists mostly of larger populated areas outside the main city of a municipality, and Area C primarily comprises areas located within the main city of a municipality. Support regions 1 and 2 encompass De-SO municipalities in northern or central Sweden, with support region 2 also covering five municipalities in the county of Västra Götaland in southwestern Sweden. In these areas, individuals do not need to be unemployed or at risk of unemployment to qualify for support. The programs offer assistance to job seekers and employers and provide initiatives for individuals with disabilities that may affect their ability to work. Additionally, the programs aim to ensure job seekers are trained in areas in demand by the labor market to prevent labor shortages. The Swedish Public Employment Service (arbetsförmedlingen) is generally responsible for these initiatives and annually publishes a report on the labor market policy initiatives and programs (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2022).

Lifelong learning opportunities are a prioritized policy area, and the Higher Education Act (högskolelagen) (1992:1434) regulates that university organizations should encourage lifelong learning.

The government has assigned Sweden's universities to analyze their courses as part of implementing new retraining support (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2022). The retraining support is directed to individuals between the ages of 27 and 62 who have worked for at least eight of the last 14 years. The support applies to the same forms of education as ordinary student financing but is geared toward strengthening individuals' roles in the labor market (CSN, 2023). According to recent EU data, Sweden is "the top performer" in the EU, with more than a third of adults participating in lifelong learning schemes in 2021 (Eurostat 2023).

Policies
Targeting
Equitable Access
to Education
Score: 8

Sweden provides equitable access to education for all (SFS 2010, 800), which contributes to the country's strong performance in gender equity in educational attainment. Municipalities are responsible for pre-schools, elementary schools, special elementary schools, high schools, special high schools, municipal adult education, special education for adults, education in Swedish for immigrants, and after-school activities, unless otherwise stated. Pre-schools and schools are

considered critical societal operations, and the law requires that they be maintained during times of crisis and heightened alert to the extent that prevailing circumstances allow (Skolverket, 2023a). The Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010, 800) regulates the recruitment of teachers, ensuring highly skilled educators. However, there is a persistent lack of qualified personnel in rural areas, especially in the north.

Sweden has a strong tradition of preschool education, and the government spent €8,294 million on early childhood education in 2020, the third highest expenditure in Europe after Germany and France (Eurostat, 2023a). Sweden was ranked fourth among OECD countries in terms of early childhood education for children aged between three and the starting age of compulsory primary education. It is also one of four countries where over 90% of children between ages 2 – 3 are enrolled in early childhood education (OECD, 2023).

Equal access to education is regulated by the Education Act (SFS 2010, 800). Gender-equal education is a key component of Sweden's equality targets. Currently, there are notable gender differences in study results, mental health, choice of education, and values. In 2021 – 2022, girls generally had grades that were 10% higher than boys' grades. Additionally, 78% of girls reported experiencing quite a lot or a high level of stress from schoolwork, while the corresponding figure for boys was 51% (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2023).

Schools are obliged to prevent and remedy discrimination as regulated by the Discrimination Act (SFS 2008:567), which stipulates seven grounds for discrimination: sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation, and age. In higher education, there are more female students than male students, but slightly more men than women are Ph.D. students. Higher positions at universities are less equal; for example, only three out of ten professors are women (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2023).

Sweden ranks 15th in the PISA results concerning socioeconomic background (OECD, 2023). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds perform worse in math, reading comprehension, and natural science. Math scores are not statistically significantly different from the OECD average, but in reading comprehension and natural science, the differences are larger in Sweden than the OECD average (Skolverket, 2023b). Students with foreign backgrounds generally achieve lower scores than those born in Sweden. However, the differences diminish after adjusting for socioeconomic background (Skolverket, 2023b).

Elementary and high school levels of education for adults are referred to as municipal adult education and are regulated by the Education Act (SFS 2010, 800). The purpose of adult education is to strengthen and stimulate lifelong learning, providing opportunities for knowledge and skills that enhance an individual’s role in the labor market and society. Priority is given to those with the least education, with the educational approach based on the individual’s needs and circumstances.

Sweden’s policies are reflected in the increase in the population with post-secondary educational attainment over the last three decades. In the early 1990s, just over 10% of the population had some form of post-secondary education, while in 2022 (latest available data), this figure had increased to almost 50%. More women than men have attained at least a three-year tertiary education, whereas slightly more men than women have attained a doctorate degree. Sweden performs well in gender equity but less well in spatial terms. Educational attainment is higher in urban areas than in rural areas, likely reflecting the gap in employment opportunities. Finally, people born outside Sweden have a slightly lower level of education, though there are disparities within this group depending on country of birth, immigrant group, age, and reasons for migration (SCB, 2022).

Sustainable Institutions Supporting Basic Human Needs

Policies
Targeting Equal
Access to
Essential Services
and Basic Income
Support
Score: 9

Sweden has a tradition of strong social welfare and social inclusion policies. The Social Services Act (SFS 2001:453) regulates aid and aims to promote economic and social safety, equity, and the ability to actively participate in society.

The political landscape has changed in recent years, resulting in a transformed welfare system and challenges in areas such as the integration of the immigrant population, unemployment and poverty (Petridou et al., 2022). The so-called Tidöavtalet, the government cooperation agreement of the minority government with the supporting radical right-wing Sweden Democrats, includes for the term of office 2022 – 2026 reforms that affect social welfare and inclusion. For example, the Social Services Act (SFS 2001:453) will be reformed, municipal crime prevention efforts will be regulated, and immigration and criminality have become more strictly regulated. The Tidöavtalet implies a “paradigm shift” in the perception of the reception of asylum-seekers. According to the agreement, Sweden will not in any way be more generous concerning asylum than demanded by EU law and other binding international agreements (Tidöavtalet, 2022).

Information about individuals’ right to access essential services and basic income support is available on the National Board of Health and Welfare’s website. The website contains general information and rules about income support and other forms of economic support, a service to calculate income support, and information about how to apply for income support at the municipality level.

Income support is regulated by the Social Services Act (SFS 2001:453), and everyone who fulfills the income verification requirements has the right to be supported by social services through income support. The support is designed to strengthen individuals’ ability to lead an independent life.

The income support is meant to cover the household’s regular monthly expenses according to the national standard – the minimum income benefits for the costs of food, clothing, shoes, leisure activities, consumables, health, hygiene, newspapers, and phones. Additional parts of the income support cover the actual costs for housing, electricity, insurance, commutes, and union and unemployment insurance (Socialstyrelsen, 2023; Baptista, I. & Marlier, E., 2020).

Policies
Targeting Quality
of Essential
Services and
Basic Income
Support
Score: 8

State financial support to individuals and families in need is flexible and not designed to be “one-size-fits-all.” The National Board of Health and Welfare states that the decision calculus for governmental subsidies should account for factors such as medical reasons for an expensive diet and after-school activities for children when considering any increase in the disbursement amount. Social Services should provide support for electricity, work-related travel expenses such as public transportation or car costs for individuals who depend on a car to commute, home insurance, union membership and unemployment insurance, and other life costs such as health and dental care, glasses, home equipment, moving costs, baby equipment, social trips, costs for municipal services, recreation, and funeral costs (Socialstyrelsen, 2019). Essential services such as water, sanitation, energy, public transport, and digital services are covered by the social assistance program, while a means-based housing allowance covers other necessary costs. The municipalities are responsible for managing the financial support (Baptista & Marlier, 2020).

As of 2022, the number of households and individuals who received financial support decreased by 7.6% compared to the preceding year (Stockholm University, 2023). Approximately 161,000 households received financial support at some point during 2022, which represents around 3% of the total number of households. The most common age group among those who received support was 30-39-year-olds. Single men without children are the most common type of household to receive financial support, followed by

single women without children. When adjusting for household type, financial support is most common among single women with children; around 13% of all single women with children received financial support. The number of people who receive financial support varies between municipalities (Socialstyrelsen 2023).

Despite the decrease in households and individuals receiving financial support, the risk of poverty in Sweden is higher than the OECD average. According to the quantitative indicators in this report, Sweden is rated above average concerning individuals who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Sustainable Health System

Policies
Targeting Health
System
Resilience
Score: 8

Several government initiatives aim to bolster the resilience of the Swedish healthcare system, including building a digital infrastructure and integrating the healthcare system into successful preparedness for crises or war. These efforts are set against the backdrop of scarce resources and an aging population that further strains these resources.

The first initiative regarding digital healthcare was adopted in 2006 and updated in 2016. The ehealth vision states that by 2025 Sweden will have the “best” digital healthcare in the world (e.hälsa 2024). Despite the ambitious goal of this vision, regions report that digital care is integrated into healthcare provision, with 75% of the regions currently using digital solutions. Self-monitoring is used by healthcare providers. However, people over 75 tend to use fewer digital services, and there is variation in the usage of such services among the foreign-born population. Regions are also exploring AI and how it could streamline healthcare (Socialstyrelse 2023a). Digital healthcare is also part of the “good and close-by” initiative, a collaboration between the state and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (Regeringen 2023a).

The importance of healthcare as part of the total defense strategy has been highlighted in a recent commission of inquiry (SOU, 2020, 23), especially in light of recent geopolitical developments in the region. To ensure the functionality and resilience of healthcare systems during crises, policies and regulations specify how healthcare should be organized. The Health and Medical Services Act (2017:30) (Socialstyrelse 2023b) remains applicable during periods of heightened alert or war. The government aims to strengthen healthcare capacity through reforms and measures, such as implementing state subsidies for preparedness, which replace former agreements between the state and regions and municipalities (Government Offices, 2023a).

After the COVID-19 pandemic, a special investigation was appointed to analyze Sweden's regulation of disease control to prepare for future pandemics (Regerigen, 2023b). It is the responsibility of the regions and municipalities to plan to maintain their functions in such times, and the Swedish Armed Forces are involved in coordinating the organization (SOU 2020, 23; Government Offices of Sweden, 2023b).

Sweden has an aging population, and the share of people who are 60 years or older has increased (SCB, 2022). Sweden is transitioning its healthcare system toward "good and close-by care," which is seen as crucial to meet the needs of an aging population.

Funding remains a persistent issue in the Swedish healthcare system, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic, especially regarding human resources. The government is expected to make a decision on further allocation of resources in 2024 (SKR 2024).

Policies
Targeting High-
Quality
Healthcare
Score: 8

Preventive healthcare and a healthy lifestyle are included in Sweden's public health targets (PHA, 2023). However, in practice, preventive healthcare is not always readily available at public primary care centers. A public health policy aims to close any healthcare gaps within a generation through political efforts and the promotion of healthy lifestyles, including smoke-free areas, traffic speed limits, and legal age limits on tobacco and alcohol.

Sweden's public health is generally good, with several indicators showing improvement, but disparities exist among population groups. Individuals with low socioeconomic status, especially women without upper secondary education, have shorter life expectancies (PHA, 2023). The Swedish population's perceived health status, with a score of 5.67, is slightly above the OECD average of 5.38 (OECD output indicator P11.6). Additionally, Sweden performs well in terms of healthy life expectancy, scoring 6.63 compared to the OECD average of 5.57 (OECD output indicator P11.4).

Sweden's spending on preventive healthcare increased from 2021, but as of 2023, it is still lower than the OECD average. In the OECD's report "Health at a Glance 2023," Sweden's public health and preventive measures generally score well compared to other OECD countries. In terms of healthy food consumption, Sweden scores higher than the OECD average for daily vegetable consumption but lower than the average for fruit consumption. Fifty-six percent of both men and women in Sweden engage in at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week. This figure is the sixth highest and well above the 40% OECD average. The self-reported overweight and obesity rate

among adults is 15% in Sweden, compared to the OECD average of 18%. Sweden scored high in mammography screenings within the past two years, with 80% of women aged 50 – 69 participating, compared to the OECD average of 55.1%. Between the COVID-19 pandemic years 2020 – 2022, Sweden had 214 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, which is just below the OECD average of 225 deaths (OECD, 2023).

The quality of Swedish healthcare is good and performs well in international comparisons. Few people abstain from care due to costs or travel times, but long waiting times in Sweden do cause some to forgo care (AHCSA, 2022; Janlöv et al. 2023 119).

In 2021, Sweden spent 11.25% of its GDP on healthcare expenditures, a figure that declined to 10.67% in 2022. These numbers are higher than the OECD average of 10%. While the OECD average remained stable from 2020 – 2022, other countries also exhibited a similar decline in spending as Sweden. In comparison with other OECD countries, Sweden’s healthcare resources are relatively lacking. In both 2021 and 2022, there were 3.18 physicians per 1,000 inhabitants, below the OECD average of 4 physicians. Additionally, Sweden and Greece had the lowest number of consultations with doctors among all OECD countries. Sweden had 2 hospital beds per 1,000 inhabitants in 2021, compared to the OECD average of 5 beds. The number of computed tomography scanners per 100,000 inhabitants decreased from 23.04 in 2021 to 22.96 in 2022, whereas the average for all OECD countries remained at 29 for both years.

Sweden’s healthcare costs are high compared to those of other countries, and improving efficiency is a major health policy goal. There is an ongoing reform to strengthen primary care and enhance integrated care in the pursuit of “a good and close care” (Janlöv et al., 2023, 170). One of the main challenges in Sweden is the coordination of care between different providers. Policies to improve coordination include clinical pathways implemented between 2015 and 2019 aimed at streamlining care and reducing waiting times. However, the implementation is recent, and there is not yet sufficient evidence to assess its impact (Janlöv et al., 2023, 119).

Policies
Targeting
Equitable Access
To Healthcare
Score: 8

The healthcare system is part of Sweden’s welfare services. It offers universal healthcare, with the main objective of providing good and equitable health and care for the entire population (Janlöv et al., 2023). Healthcare is decentralized, with responsibility distributed among municipal, regional, national, and EU levels. The national government is responsible for policies and regulations – in this respect, the EU also provides incentives for national regulations – while the regions plan, organize, manage resource allocation, and are responsible for

inpatient care and dental care. Municipalities are responsible for long-term care. Regions and municipalities divide the responsibility for ambulatory care and public health services (Janlöv et al., 2023).

An equitable and health-promoting healthcare system is one of eight target areas in Sweden's public health initiatives, with several agencies involved in policy and evaluation. The policy aligns with Agenda 2030 and global targets, particularly target 3 concerning health and well-being. Despite efforts to ensure an equal healthcare system, differences in health persist between groups and regions.

The national evaluation of healthcare in 2022 shows a positive trend, but differences remain. Healthcare-related avoidable mortality and the health gap have decreased across the population, but they are larger for those with pre-secondary education compared to other education groups. Individuals in poor health report a more negative experience with healthcare and care coordination than those in good health.

“Covid-19 affected the population unequally. The number of individuals who fell ill and required intensive care was higher among those with pre-secondary education and those born outside of Sweden. The relative difference between individuals with varying levels of education remained constant from 2020 to 2022. However, the disparity based on country of birth was significantly higher at the beginning of the pandemic but decreased in 2022 (PHA, 2023).”

Further, regional differences affect the quality of and access to healthcare, particularly regarding waiting times, health outcomes, and the degree to which healthcare is “patient-oriented” (AHCSA, 2022). Issues of healthcare quality and accessibility are especially challenging in rural areas, due to factors such as long distances, medical outcome measures, and continuity (AHCSA, 2021).

Gender Equality

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Achieving
Gender Equality
Score: 9

The goal of gender equality efforts in Sweden is for men and women to have equal power and the ability to shape their own lives and influence society at large. Gender mainstreaming has been a core strategy since 1994. Sweden's work toward equality is divided into several objectives: an equal division of power and influence, economic gender equality, equal education, equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care, equal health, and an end to men's violence against women (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2023a). The Swedish Gender Equality Agency is the lead coordinating unit for equality

efforts, but gender equality is mainstreamed across all agencies, social institutions, county boards, regions, municipalities, and universities (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2023b). Statistics Sweden has developed several indicators to evaluate six equality targets (SCB, 2021).

Men's violence against women is a poignant equality issue. Men's violence against women refers to "all kinds of physical, mental, sexual violence, digital violence as well as threats of violence in personal relationships; honor-based violence and oppression, including child marriage, forced marriage and genital mutilation of girls and women; prostitution and trafficking for sexual purposes and sexual exploitation of children and the commercialization and exploitation of women's bodies in commercials, media and pornography" (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2023a).

A ten-year national strategy to end men's violence against women was implemented in 2017 with four targets: extended and effective preventive work against violence, improved detection of violence and stronger protection for women and children who experience violence, efficient crime prevention, and better knowledge and methodologies. Further, the strategy aims to challenge former ideas concerning power and masculinity that justify violence and the buying of sexual services. It also focuses on combating prostitution and trafficking for sexual purposes, sexual exploitation of children, and honor-based violence and oppression (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2023a).

After the 2022 election, the Riksdag consisted of 46% women, and the government and its administration have nearly achieved the 50-50 target. In municipalities, men are overrepresented on municipal boards, which are often led by men. About 22% of women in politics avoid certain issues due to exposure or anxiety, compared to 14% of men.

There is an increasing difference in young men and women's attitudes toward equality. Young men are more likely to assert that society is equal and that women exaggerate inequality. Additionally, they are less likely to disagree with the statement that men are better political leaders and managers than women. Meanwhile, income disparities between men and women are widening. Between 2020 and 2021, the gap grew more significantly than it has for a long time. Women's disposable income is generally 20% lower than men's. This discrepancy is attributed to men owning more capital than women. Furthermore, women are more likely to be outside the labor market, work part-time and in low-wage occupations, use more parental leave, study longer, and have higher sickness absence rates than men (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2024).

Parental leave and paid parental leave are regulated by the Parental Leave Act (SFS 1995:584). In 2022, 54% of women and 46% of men received paid parental leave. There were 48.9 million paid parental leave days, with men using 30% of the days (Försäkringskassan, 2023).

During 2022, the cost of living and inflation increased significantly, raising food prices and disproportionately affecting women's finances more than men's. Single women with children and elderly women on a low fixed income were particularly impacted (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2023c).

There are prevailing differences between girls and boys concerning school results, mental health, and the choice of education. Girls generally have better grades than boys but experience more anxiety (see section 9.3 on equal education). Women have worse health than men in several areas, including mental health. In 2022, 22% of women and 9% of men between the ages of 16 and 29 experienced anxiety. Women live longer than men but report worse health. The average life expectancy is steadily increasing for both men and women, but not at the same pace for women with low education. The goal for equal health targets physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health and includes preventive public health work, inputs to social services, support for people with disabilities, and healthcare and publicly financed care (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2023d).

Strong Families

Family Policies
Score: 9

Sweden has a long tradition of public policies supporting families. The main pillars of these policies are extensive childcare benefits and family support measures. These are regulated by the Parental Leave Act (SFS: 1995, 584). Mothers are entitled to at least seven weeks of maternity leave before their due date and seven weeks after the child's birth. Two of these weeks before and after delivery are mandatory. Employees also have the right to maternity leave for breastfeeding. The other parent or carer is entitled to ten days of paid leave for a child's birth or adoption. In 2022, the parental leave benefit was 77.6% of the individual's full salary. Additionally, a parent has the right to fully paid or unpaid parental leave until the child is 18 months old.

Each parent has the right to 240 paid days of leave. The first 195 days are paid at 77.6% of the individual's salary, and the subsequent 45 days are paid SEK 180 (approximately €16) each day. Of these days, 90 are reserved for each parent and cannot be transferred to the other parent, except in special cases and in single-parent families (Duvander & Löfgren, 2023). It is illegal to

disadvantage an employee or job seeker due to reasons related to parental leave (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2022).

The fact that these social benefits are generational rather than means-based and are coupled with institutionalized parental leave for fathers contributes to employers not discriminating against job seekers who are women of childbearing age or have small children.

The family support system also provides paid leave to care for sick children and relatives. This regulation generally covers children between 8 and 12 years old, and a doctor's note is required for a leave longer than seven days. Employees have the right to care for a close relative or friend with a significant health impairment for up to 100 days. Compensation amounts to approximately 80% of the individual's salary (Försäkringskassan, 2023a; Försäkringskassan, 2023b).

Day care is provided to children after their first birthday, a service that is a municipal competence (SFS 2010:800). After the age of three, all children have the right to free public preschool for up to 525 hours per year (Skolverket, 2024). The state provides a child subsidy for each child living in the country (SFS 1947, 529). Families may also be eligible for further financial support depending on income or if the parents are students.

Despite these policy efforts, Sweden currently scores just above the OECD average in terms of the child poverty rate. In 2022, 10% of children experienced poverty, and 20% were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Sustainable Pension System

Policies Aimed at
Old-Age Poverty
Prevention
Score: 8

The Swedish pension system consists of three components: a national public pension provided by the state, an occupational pension, and private savings or assets. The national public pension is based on a person's total income from their working life in Sweden. For those with low or no pension, a Guarantee Pension is available, designed to provide basic protection. Financial support for the elderly is also available to individuals with very low income in retirement. This support depends on the individual's income and housing costs to ensure a fair standard of living (Pensionsmyndigheten, 2024).

The pension system has been a focal point in political debates in recent years, and the Swedish Pensions Agency has published several evaluations. The gender gap in the national public pension system is 20%, generally a consequence of women's lower earnings in the labor market. The difference in

disposable income between genders is nearly 30%, a gap that has persisted since the 1990s. With the current pension system, it would take 40 to 50 years before pensions are fully equalized, even if incomes were equal. Policy efforts aim to narrow the pension gap; however, there are debates on whether gender gaps should be prioritized ahead of the gap between other income groups. This raises the question of whether the pension system needs reform and whether life income should be the basis for calculating pensions (Kirs & Johannisson, 2022).

In 2023, the earliest retirement age increased from 62 to 63 years. As life expectancy rises, there are further official plans to raise pension ages. Policy efforts to strengthen the pension system were implemented, and the targeted pension benefit increased by 12% in 2022. In 2023, the Guarantee Pension was removed for those residing outside Sweden (OECD, 2024), pointing to a trend of cost-cutting measures by the Swedish Pensions Agency.

Policies
Targeting
Intergenerational
Equity
Score: 8

The pension system is designed to encourage people to work longer. As with most national pension schemes, the longer a person waits to draw their pension, the higher their monthly benefits. However, people with low enough incomes to qualify for the minimum Guarantee Pension might not benefit from postponing their pension benefits (Pensionsmyndigheten, 2024).

Further incentives to keep working have been implemented in recent years, such as a tax rate reduction for the elderly population's disposable income in 2021. In 2022, a tax allowance for people over 66 years of age was expanded (OECD, 2023). If a person has to exit the labor market before age 62 due to health reasons, they can apply for disability benefits at the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. If the person has been part of the labor market, these benefits are at 64.7% of their mean income from their last year in the workforce, with a ceiling of 23,171 SEK before tax monthly (approximately €2,070). Those with low or no previous income receive minimum compensation. Although the amount fluctuates with age, those over 30 years old receive 13,275 SEK before tax monthly (approximately €1,185) (Försäkringskassan, 2023).

To address the challenges posed by rising life expectancy in Sweden, the retirement age is continuously being adjusted. In 2023, the minimum age to draw a pension was raised from 62 to 63. The age for the Guarantee Pension increased from 65 to 66, and the right to remain employed was extended from 68 to 69. The official retirement age for the years 2026 – 2029 is set at 67 (Regeringskansliet, 2023).

Sustainable Inclusion of Migrants

Integration Policy
Score: 7

The Swedish Migration Agency is the lead unit responsible for migration policy, but the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, municipalities, regions, county boards, the government, and the SKR (The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions) are also part of these operations.

In recent years, Sweden's immigrant policies have become far less permissive than they were in the past. After the 2022 election, the new center-right minority government, with decisive support from the radical right-wing party Sweden Democrats, has made migration and integration a prioritized policy area and agreed on a reform of the current immigration system.

The goals of current migration policy under the new coalition government (described as a paradigm shift) are to stem the influx of migration by restricting asylum, emphasizing that immigrant populations become part of the culturally and ethnically understood Swedish society, clearing the so-called shadow society – a term describing a hidden world of organized crime – and especially facilitating the migration of a highly educated and trained workforce.

To meet these targets, the government has agreed on controversial policies such as increased surveillance, checks for undocumented immigrants, and intensified efforts to deport people who do not qualify to stay in Sweden. Additionally, a lower rate of quota refugees (900 per year instead of 5,000 per year) was implemented, zones in which the police have the right to search and frisk were introduced, and participation in criminal gangs was further criminalized (Tidöavtalet, 2022; Regeringskansliet, 2023).

Currently, to obtain Swedish citizenship, adults must be over 18 years old, be able to prove their identity, have lived an “orderly” life in Sweden, and have a permanent residence permit, a right to residency, or a residence status. In 2020, Sweden ranked 83rd in access to nationality – this corresponds to the seventh best rank worldwide – and the process was evaluated as straightforward (Mipex, 2020). Taking into account all policy indicators used in a comparison of integration policies in 56 countries for 2020, Sweden ranks first.

The political bargaining driven by the radical right Sweden Democrats during the agreement that led to government formation following the 2022 election has resulted in the gradual tightening of rules for obtaining citizenship. Upcoming changes include a longer residence requirement of at least eight years, stricter requirements regarding knowledge of and integration into

Swedish society and culture, a requirement to be self-supporting, stricter demands for a lack of criminal records, and even a loyalty declaration, citizenship conversation, or another mandatory ceremony to complete the process of becoming a citizen. Further provisions include revoking the citizenship of individuals with dual citizenship who have committed serious crimes or whose citizenship was granted on false grounds (Tidöavtalet, 2022).

Policies governing the migration of family members are considered strict due to economic resource requirements, which imply that the person residing in Sweden must be able to financially support themselves and their family members. This requirement, however, does not apply to refugees if the family applies for residence permits within three months (Mipex, 2020). The new government has agreed that the right to family reunification will not be more generous than the regulated minimum levels and is investigating the possibility of transforming existing permanent residence permits in the interest of a restrictive asylum policy (Tidöavtalet, 2022).

The official governmental goals for integration are “equal rights, obligations, and opportunities for all regardless of ethnic or cultural background” (Regeringskansliet, 2017). To measure these target values, Statistics Sweden uses the following indicators: occupation, health, housing, demography, municipal recipients, income, and education (SCB, 2023). Despite stricter policies on migration, Sweden was ranked second in labor market mobility and sixth in political participation in 2020 (Mipex, 2020). Sweden, along with other Nordic countries, has the most inclusive voting rights in the EU. In terms of labor market access, people born in foreign countries are more often unemployed and underemployed compared to Swedish-born individuals. Labor market accessibility varies between groups of immigrants – men generally secure a first stable job faster than women, and there is variation based on country of origin. Individuals born outside of Europe have lower salaries and receive more financial support, but these differences decrease after a period of time in Sweden (IFAU, 2022).

An obstacle to obtaining a job and accessing the labor market is the lack of language skills. In 2021, 8.17% of the foreign-born population experienced such difficulties, compared to the OECD average of 8% (OECD Output Indicators). Language courses (SFI, Swedish for immigrants) are offered according to the regulation (SFS 1994:895) on Swedish education for immigrants for those in need of basic knowledge in Swedish. These courses are available to individuals over 16 years who reside in Sweden. Students have the right to at least 15 hours of SFI per week (Skolverket, 2023a). Since 2022, Sweden’s municipalities are required to provide a cohesive program within adult education as part of establishment programs for participants in labor

market programs or initiatives. This cohesive program should cover at least 23 hours per week and include SFI, courses at the elementary or high-school level, and follow a municipality-decided plan that outlines the training goals, organization, and main content (Skolverket, 2023b).

In summary, problems with the integration of foreign-born populations in Swedish society persist, and the response from the current right-wing alliance – under the direct influence of the radical right-wing Swedish Democrats – is to restrict immigration. Uneven integration of immigrant populations has led to sensational news stories about no-go zones in big cities and gang violence. At least in the labor market, even though income disparities exist between people born in Sweden and foreign-born people, such differentials tend to decrease over time.

Effective Capacity-Building for Global Poverty Reduction

Management of
Development
Cooperation by
Partner Country
Score: 9

Sweden has traditionally been at the forefront of international aid and development. The center-right minority coalition government elected in 2022 has reformed Sweden's international aid policies. Development strategies now guide goals for international aid and focus on long-term planning, transparency, and efficiency. This shift in strategy reflects the ideological tenets of the right-wing government as well as the changing geopolitics following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The strategy centers on fighting poverty through job creation and free trade, increasing humanitarian support to save lives and minimize poverty, encouraging freedom and fighting oppression, and strengthening the connection between aid and migration policies. Additionally, it includes increasing efficient climate aid, empowering women and girls, and improving health and education for the most vulnerable. In the new strategy, Sweden is prioritizing Ukraine and the adjacent area (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023).

There are two kinds of aid: development cooperation and humanitarian aid. These are implemented through bilateral, regional, and thematic strategies. The strategies cover five years; the results are evaluated annually and reported to the government and the Riksdag. The results are measured in different ways depending on the methods and outcomes being evaluated, but there is no mention of clearly defined indicators to measure results.

However, the thematic areas guiding international aid include democracy, human rights and freedom of speech, peaceful and inclusive societies, health, sustainable oceans and water, climate and environment, migration and development, sexual and reproductive health and rights, education, research

and innovation, trade, sustainable energy, equality, farming and secured food supply, private sector, occupation, and water and sanitation (Sida, 2023a).

The strategies are produced by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) based on instructions from the government, in relation to learning outcomes from previous strategies and in dialogue with cooperative organizations. The final strategy is decided on by the government (Sida, 2024).

Sida's work is integral to Sweden's national politics for global development and contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. To ensure that development cooperation aligns with efforts to reduce poverty, Sida has constructed a "poverty toolbox" containing materials and methods to analyze multidimensional poverty. Sida has identified four dimensions of multidimensional poverty: lack of resources, lack of options, lack of power and influence, and lack of human safety. These dimensions are analyzed through political and institutional contexts, economic and social contexts, environmental contexts, and conflict contexts (Sida, 2023b). The dimensions of poverty serve as the foundation for Sida's work to reduce poverty and enhance development cooperation efficiency. Further efforts to ensure effective poverty reduction and combat corruption are implemented through project evaluations and multilevel controls of international aid.

Sida advocates for equal healthcare and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all individuals. Sweden's international aid targeting healthcare provides more people with access to care, treats infectious diseases, and helps reduce child and maternal mortality. Sida supports SRHR by increasing women's right to have an abortion, making SRH services available in healthcare, and banning female mutilation (Sida, 2023c; Sida, 2023d).

Research and innovation are among Sida's thematic areas. Sida supports efforts to strengthen research capacity by developing national research systems and supporting national research in low-income countries. Additionally, it aids in building innovation systems to communicate research, access health, and implement energy-efficient innovations for agriculture. Furthermore, Sida supports research relevant to low-income countries, including studies on various diseases and vaccines, agricultural methods, nature conservation, culture, community building, and climate adaptation (Sida, 2022).

In 2020, a new digitalization support initiative was implemented to help low-income countries build digital social services and reduce poverty. The support is directed to the World Bank's digital fund DDP and the organization Dial. The DDP supports countries in various ways, for example, by making the

internet accessible for the entire population, improving citizens' digital skills to access digital services, and aiding governments in developing the digital infrastructure needed to provide social services. Dial (Digital Impact Alliance) is an independent organization that works to strengthen digitalization in several ways, such as identifying obstacles to efficient digital development and providing working methods and standards to overcome these obstacles (Sida, 2020).

III. Environmental Sustainability

Effective Climate Action

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Achieving
Climate
Neutrality by
2050
Score: 8

Sweden has a long tradition of stringent climate policies and regulation. The regulatory framework is detailed and consequential, with evaluations showing progress or lack thereof. However, the right-wing alliance elected in 2022 has relaxed environmental regulations to the point that the ambitious targets will not be reached within the suggested timeline.

The Climate Act of 2017 (SFS 2017, 720) mandates a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gases, assigning emission targets to the Riksdag. Sweden's climate actions are guided by 16 sector-specific environmental targets and an overarching generational goal. Evaluations are conducted yearly, with extensive reviews every four years at both national and regional levels.

The generational goal conceptualizes environmental problems as a duty the current generation has to future ones: to solve environmental issues without exacerbating environmental and health problems in countries outside of Sweden.

The environmental targets encompass 16 different areas, including the built environment, natural habitats, littoral areas, and land, affecting both humans and non-humans. Each target contains extensive and precise descriptions, totaling 78 specified indicators, reports, suggested measures, and an evaluation of whether the targets will be reached.

Currently, only the target for protected ozone layers is being reached. The targets for fresh air, an environment free of toxins, and safe radiation environments are close to being reached. The targets can be considered political goals and are not legally binding. As a consequence of the targets' lack of legal status, they are not mentioned in the verdicts from the land and

environmental courts. In turn, this means that regulation attached to these goals is voluntary.

The government presented a heavily criticized climate action plan in 2023, with few measures to reduce Sweden's emissions in the near future. Instead, emissions are expected to increase in the short term. Two opposing parties, the Center Party and the Environmental Party, declared a vote of no confidence against the Minister of Climate and Environmental, Romina Pourmokhtari (The Liberal Party), as a result of the climate action plan, but the minister survived the vote.

Nevertheless, the environmental action plan covers thematic areas related to environmental politics. For example, sustainable public procurement and policy development in procurement are encouraged in the action plan, and the government has commissioned the National Agency for Public Procurement to update its system for analyzing climate impact on procurement (Skr. 2023/24/59).

There are several agencies working to reach the environmental targets. These include the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management, the Swedish Board of Agriculture, the Swedish Forest Agency, and the county boards.

Sweden has set five stage targets to limit climate impact. The primary aim is to reduce greenhouse gases from domestic transport by at least 70% by 2030 compared to 2010 levels. Additionally, Sweden aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions in the ESR sector (operations not included in the EU's system for trade and emission rights) with several milestones: a 63% reduction by 2030 compared to 1990, and a 75% reduction by 2040. The final target is to achieve zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045 and subsequently attain negative emissions. By 2045, at minimum, emissions from Swedish territory should be at least 85% lower than in 1990. However, these targets will not be reached under the current policy landscape (Sveriges Miljömål, 2023).

The government reduced taxes on gas and diesel by SEK 5.64 million during 2024, and the reduction obligation (reducing greenhouse gas emissions) was lowered by six percent between 2024 – 2026 and removed for 2027 – 2039. The argument for reducing taxes and reduction obligations was to lower fuel prices. However, the government's decision to lower fuel prices undermines policy efforts and environmental targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Sweden’s surface is covered by 69%, or 29 million hectares, of forests, making it the EU country with the largest forest area. Of these lands, 2.1 million hectares are productive forests (Mittuniversitetet, 2022). “Living forests” is one of Sweden’s national environmental targets, with indicators to measure the results that include formally protected forest lands, voluntary provisions, consideration areas, unproductive forest lands, old forests, nesting birds in the forest, environmental considerations in forestry, and structures in the forest landscape. With current and planned policy efforts, the target will not be reached, and the development for the forests is negative.

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency released a report in 2022 concerning policy instruments to expand natural greenhouse gas sinks. The report concluded that there is a lack of incentives among stakeholders, specifically forest owners, leading them to use their forests for other purposes, such as forestry (Gong et al., 2022). In the national environmental action plan, the government states that measures are needed in forestry and agriculture to expand natural greenhouse gas sinks, but no specific measures are suggested (Skr. 2023/24:59).

Effective Environmental Health Protection

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Minimizing
Environmental
Health Risks
Score: 9

Sweden’s commitment to minimizing environmental health risks related to climate change through pollution and emissions is covered by the generational target and several of the 16 environmental targets, such as clean air, an environment free of toxins, no overfertilization, good quality groundwater, and good living environments (see section 17 for a description of Sweden’s environmental targets and strategies, their legal status, and the agencies working on evaluating them). Some of these targets are close to being reached, such as environments free of toxins and clean air, but others, like no overfertilization and good quality groundwater, are not yet met. The targets are evaluated through 20 different indicators, such as the amount of nitrogen dioxide emissions, travel habits, polluted areas, and environmental toxins in breast milk and blood (Sveriges Miljömål, 2023).

In 2021, none of Sweden’s urban population was exposed to air pollution concentrations exceeding EU standards. However, air pollution was responsible for 650 attributable deaths (EEA, 2023). The Public Health Agency of Sweden has analyzed the health risks posed by environmental changes in the country. The most significant threats in a changing climate are heat waves and tick-borne infections, followed by a high probability of pollen allergies, floods, deteriorating drinking water quality, and disease outbreaks through water and food (Naturvårdsverket, 2023).

In the 2023 evaluation of the environmental targets, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency examined the environmental targets and policy efforts to reach them. The agency stated that the targets for clean air and an environment free of toxins will be partly reached or that the necessary preconditions, such as policy instruments and measures, will be in place by 2030. Air quality has shown positive development for a long time, and the evaluation suggests that the specifications for the clean air target will be strengthened according to new guidelines presented by WHO. The policy efforts to reach the target of an environment free of toxins are guided by measures within the EU’s chemical strategy and the Green Deal, and are expected to be largely implemented by 2030, increasing the chances of reaching the target (Naturvårdsverket, 2023).

Effective Ecosystem and Biodiversity Preservation

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Preserving
Ecosystems and
Protecting
Biodiversity
Score: 9

Preserving ecosystems and protecting biodiversity are national environmental targets. These goals are included in the generational target and several of the 16 environmental targets, which cover areas such as wetlands, mountains, forests, oceans, plant and animal life, acidification, and overfertilization. In 2014, the Riksdag accepted a proposition for a Swedish strategy for biological diversity and ecosystem services. This strategy focuses on protecting land and oceans, safeguarding threatened plant and animal species, maintaining genetic diversity, considering nature and cultural environments, and enhancing cooperation with the business sector (Prop 2013/14:141).

One of the measures in the proposal is to implement regional action plans for green infrastructure, a step already taken by all of Sweden’s county boards in collaboration with relevant agencies. The purpose of these action plans is to provide a basis of knowledge, planning, and priorities to achieve the environmental targets (Naturvårdsverket, 2023a).

Further, Sweden is implementing the EU strategy for biodiversity 2030, which aims to legally protect at least 30% of the EU’s land areas and 30% of the oceans. The EU voted in favor of making nature restoration legally binding in 2023. However, nine out of twelve Swedish EU parliamentarians voted against it.

Sweden has approximately 4,000 Natura 2000 areas, totaling around 7 million hectares, some of which are nature reserves or national parks. Natura 2000 is an EU network of valuable nature areas deemed worthy of protection by the EU. Sweden signed the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1993,

and in 2023 the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency [Naturvårdsverket] proposed a national strategy and action plan connected to CBD.

The proposed national strategy and action plan concerning CBD is formulated according to the EU strategy on biodiversity. It is comprehensive and includes one overarching target and three strategic themes consisting of 21 measure areas with specific targets and main indicators. The strategy and action plan have been produced through a collaboration that involves the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management, the Swedish Forest Agency, the Swedish Board of Agriculture, the Swedish Energy Agency, the Swedish Transport Administration, the Sami parliament, the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, and other stakeholders.

The strategy and action plan will be assessed against the CBD, and the updated strategy and action plan will be presented before COP16, along with national targets and main indicators for each target. The national results will be reported according to templates by 28 February 2026 and 30 June 2029 to provide a basis for future COP meetings. Sweden also reports to the EU, and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency suggests that evaluation processes should be synchronized as much as possible. The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency concludes that further measures are needed to fully meet the CBD, such as developing even more concrete measures and indicators for evaluation. The proposed strategy and action plan were presented to the government in November 2023, and there is no information on whether it will be accepted or legally binding (Naturvårdsverket, 2023b).

Effective Contributions to Global Environmental Protection

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to a Global
Environmental
Policy
Score: 10

In 2022, the government implemented a strategy for global development cooperation within the environment, climate, and biodiversity for 2022 – 2030. The strategy adheres to Sweden's international aid target, which aims to create preconditions for better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression. It is based on the principles of aid and development efficiency outlined in Agenda 2030, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the Paris Agreement. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) is responsible for implementation, evaluation, and annual reporting related to the strategy's activities, which are funded with SEK 8 billion.

The strategy has clearly defined capacity-building targets, and operations are geared toward contributing to these goals. These targets include increased

water safety through sustainable governance of freshwater resources and ecosystems, limited climate impact through greater access to renewable energy and improved energy efficiency, and the development of more environmentally sustainable and inclusive cities and societies. Further goals include sustainable production and consumption patterns, the shift to sustainable food systems, reduced pollution, and sustainable chemical and waste management. The strategy also aims to strengthen the ability to adapt and build resilience against climate change and natural disasters. Additional objectives include creating cleaner oceans and coasts, sustainably using, managing, and restoring marine natural resources, and conserving biodiversity and ecosystems. Moreover, the plan calls for increased protection, conservation, and restoration of ecosystems and biodiversity and strengthened preconditions for the sustainable management and use of land-based natural resources (Utrikesdepartementet, 2022).

SIDA works with climate and environmental goals to strengthen countries' ability to develop sustainably and to improve people's living conditions. The work is guided by the strategy for global development cooperation within the environment, climate, and biodiversity for 2022 – 2030, and the support ranges from global to local organizations, to countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and South America. The efforts focus on a sustainable environment, sustainable climate and oceans, and sustainable use of natural resources (SIDA, 2022).

In late 2023, the government published a climate action plan. The plan emphasizes the importance of international cooperation, but it lacks an assessment of the risk of spillover effects from national environmental policies (Skr. 2023/24, 59). In a report published the same year, which offers suggestions on how to achieve climate neutrality before 2050, it is stated that measures need to be taken if consumption and trade patterns within the EU cause increased emissions in other parts of the world. Such measures shall be decided on an EU level (Hassler 2023).

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Address | Contact

Bertelsmann Stiftung

Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256
33311 Gütersloh
Germany
Phone +49 5241 81-0

Dr. Christof Schiller

Phone +49 30 275788-138
christof.schiller@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Dr. Thorsten Hellmann

Phone +49 5241 81-81236
thorsten.hellmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

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