



# Sweden Report

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Sustainable Governance in the  
Context of the COVID-19 Crisis

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## Executive Summary

Sweden's approach to managing the coronavirus crisis was dominated by a series of nonbinding guidelines and recommendations that served as the framework for contagion mitigation measures throughout 2020 (Ludvigsson 2020, Petridou 2020), that is, "nudges against pandemics" (Pierre 2020). This approach attracted considerable attention, since it departed from most national approaches, including the ones by the country's geographically proximate and culturally similar Nordic neighbors. Conversely, the rate of deaths due to the pandemic has been higher in Sweden than in many European countries.

Two observations emerge from the overview of the sustainability and effectiveness of Sweden's overall crisis management during the pandemic. First, the Swedish crisis-management system is premised on keeping as much of the country's public processes and services as close to non-crisis conditions as possible. This enhances the sustainability and effectiveness of the crisis-management measures, because decision-makers use existing infrastructure instead of having to come up with extraordinary institutions and policies. This approach held throughout 2020. This exceptionalism may be partly explained by the constitution of Sweden, which limits the use of states of emergency to wartime, excluding their use in the event of a pandemic (Andersson & Aylott 2020; Jonung 2020). Additionally, the administrative structure of Sweden gives priority to autonomous action by the agencies in which scientific expertise is located. Pierre argues that this may explain why the strategy for fighting the pandemic in Sweden has been rather "too evidence-based" (Pierre 2020, 489). Second, the level of policy performance, the resiliency of the country's democracy and the quality of crisis governance at the onset of the pandemic crisis were all quite high. This provided policymakers with breathing room during 2020.

Despite trends including the weakening of social democracy, expanding societal cleavages and decreases in public spending that have resulted in the decline of Swedish exceptionalism (Pierre 2016), Sweden leaned partly on that exceptionalism in the handling of the pandemic. This was particularly true in terms of policy performance, democratic resilience and crisis governance – producing an "unexceptional exceptionalism" (Andersson & Aylott 2020). As in many countries, economic policies sought to safeguard household incomes and protect businesses. In addition to supporting sectors such as transportation,

however, extra funding was also allocated to cultural, sporting and civil society organizations, partly because these are viewed as contributing to social equality. Public funds were also allocated to research and education, with a view to creating a greener economy after the crisis, a strength with regard to sustainable development. Family policies remained robust. Yet despite far-reaching efforts to support workers and keep them employed, the overall unemployment rate remains comparatively high. Unemployment is disproportionately high among certain sections of the population, especially recent immigrants and people with low educational attainment. This has exacerbated social cleavages.

Sweden's scores remain high when it comes to democratic resilience. Especially since containment measures remained voluntary throughout 2020, individual civil liberties and democratic processes were not curtailed in the name of the pandemic. A temporary law allowing the government to impose legally binding measures (though still none so restrictive as curfews or lockdowns of public life) was not adopted until early 2021. Finally, crisis governance remained depoliticized, with measures being issued by experts rather than politicians. But this scientific policymaking strategy may undermine democratic accountability, because it may be difficult for voters to understand who to hold accountable for measures implemented during the pandemic (Andersson & Aylott 2020).

In keeping with Sweden's typically deliberative, rational, science-oriented and problem-solving approach, a number of inquiries and evaluations were commissioned to assess the crisis response in a comparative perspective. The first report of one such commission details the failure of elder-care policy, as the majority of the fatalities, at least during the first wave, were among elderly people living in nursing homes (SOU 2020, Socialstyrelsen 2020).

In sum, despite the decline of Swedish exceptionalism, the country leveraged dimensions of its exceptionality to produce a crisis-era governance approach based on governance practices during normal times ("nudging"), while aiming at policy sustainability (Pierre 2020). Hence, the main feature of Swedish exceptionalism during the pandemic has been less the content of specific policies, but more the way in which policies and recommendations were conveyed to the public – that is, by avoiding strict legal rules, and relying instead on recommendations regarding individual and social behavior. Sweden avoid adopting extraordinary measures or a state of emergency, instead making reference to democratic principles, the integrity of individual rights, individual responsibility and principles of public solidarity.

## Citation:

Andersson, Staffan & Aylott, Nicholas. 2020. "Sweden and Coronavirus: Unexceptional Exceptionalism." *social sciences* 9(12), 232. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9120232>.

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## Key Challenges

As the second year of the pandemic has unfolded, national governments have been faced with a series of challenges, largely universal, though manifesting in different degrees across individual countries. First, the pandemic has foregrounded societal inequalities and structural differentials that affect the way people live and die. In Sweden specifically, the welfare state has come up short for those in elder care. The institutionalized elder-care system in Sweden has suffered from years of underfunding and privatization, resulting in high employee turnover rates and attendant struggles in keeping up hygiene regimes. The weak implementation of coronavirus-related measures in homes for the elderly goes a long way toward explaining the high death rates in this age group during the first phase of the pandemic. Concomitantly, the specificities of diverse populations, as well as the means of supporting them and their needs, must be discussed as social inclusion policies are adjusted.

Second, international cooperation and the coordination of national responses has not been a priority. Countries looked inward in an affirmation of the Westphalian system, privileging national approaches to a transboundary crisis. This has been clearly evident in the Scandinavian environment, where cross-border collaboration has traditionally been strong, and borders between Sweden, Norway and Denmark have been open for decades, with the recent exception of sporadic border controls to stem the northward influx of asylum-seekers. During the pandemic, Denmark and Norway closed their borders (with periodic adjustments) to Sweden. Notably, the EU's international effort to procure vaccines for all its members as a single entity has met with criticism

for its perceived lack of competitiveness and swiftness as compared to the United States or the United Kingdom.

Third, experts warn of impending mental health issues, especially among children and young people due to school shutdowns. The Swedish government, though it had the legal right to shut down the entire school system, did not so. In an effort to protect the mental health of young children and youth, the government did not force school closures for children and youth up to the ninth grade. Nevertheless, this issue promises to be a challenge as part of the increased pressure on the healthcare system. Fourth, the government will have to balance financial support for businesses and households with the need to keep these measures – and public budgets overall – sustainable over the long run.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, another future challenge centers on issues of communication, information, misinformation and disinformation, the erosion of public trust, and democratic legitimacy. This is relevant both for Sweden's domestic population and internationally. Notably, even though Sweden clearly has had a COVID-19 strategy and contagion mitigation measures in place, the voluntary character of these measures resulted in a lack of understanding internationally, though domestically this has not been the case. Scientific debate and criticism notwithstanding, the underlying goal of Sweden's pandemic response was sustainability over time. Time will tell if it has been successful in this regard.

# Resilience of Policies

## I. Economic Preparedness

### Economic Preparedness

Economic Policy  
Preparedness  
Score: 8

As a small and open economy, Sweden is strongly affected by the global economic environment. In 2019, economic activity worldwide was generally weaker than in the years before, with a global GDP growth rate of 3%, down from 3.6% in 2018. Brexit and the uncertainty surrounding the future relationship between the EU and the United Kingdom, U.S. tariffs on European goods and the China-U.S. trade conflict all contributed to the risks prevalent in the time period just prior to the pandemic outbreak (Finanspolitiska rådet 2020).

As a result, Sweden entered a slowdown in 2019 after a boom period between 2015 and 2019, when GDP rose by 9% (Finanspolitiska rådet 2020). At the end of 2019, resource utilization was expected to be lower, according to estimates by the Fiscal Policy Council. The National Institute of Economic Research (NIER) forecast slightly higher rates of resource utilization, but nevertheless declining, with slightly rising unemployment figures. In 2019, GDP increased by 0.3% by the third quarter. Exports contributed to the growth in demand, but there was a decrease in demand for industrial goods. While employment increased slightly in 2019, the unemployment rate was 7.0% in the third quarter (Konjunkturinstitutet 2020a). The overall unemployment rate for the year was 6.8%, though this included a rate of 15% among foreign-born individuals compared to one of 4.4% among those born in Sweden (Konjunkturinstitutet 2020a; Finanspolitiska rådet 2020).

Recent projections from the Konjunkturinstitutet indicate that economic activity has slowed due to the second wave of the pandemic. Especially in low-skill economic sectors and those with a high rate of foreign-born employees, unemployment is further increasing. The Konjunkturinstitutet assumes that this relatively high rate of unemployment will be sticky, even if the economic growth rate increases rapidly in 2021 (Konjunkturinstitutet 2020b).

A 2016 report found a lack of national strategy or action plan on the issue of resource efficiency. Having said this, the Swedish Environmental Code mandates that the management of resources in Sweden be sustainable. Some of the country's environmental quality objectives are related to resource efficiency, though these are not always associated with quantitative indicators. Historically, the country has enjoyed an abundance of natural resources such as iron and other metals, and concerns over the security of these resources as well as access to international sources has not been a consideration in Sweden for a long time (Milius 2016).

A national-level strategy document concerning the country's move toward a circular economy was issued in the summer of 2020. The document was a result of an agreement between the government (Social Democrats and the Green Party), the Center Party and the Liberals (Regeringskansliet 2020). In addition to a vision statement and the overarching goal of contributing to the fulfillment of the United Nations' Agenda 2030, the strategy includes four foci: 1) the achievement of a circular economy through sustainable production and product design; 2) the achievement of a circular economy through the sustainable consumption and use of materials, products and services; 3) the achievement of a circular economy through a circular economy involving the use of non-toxic materials in a regenerative-by-design model of economic activity; and 4) the circular economy as the driving force for businesses and other actors, through measures that promote innovation and circular business models. The fourth focus is the most important piece of this sustainability strategy (Regeringskansliet 2020).

Specific action plans are forthcoming, and special attention will be paid to the creation of instruments enabling profitable circular business models, as well as the increased offering of, and demand for, circular products and services, along with recycling and recycled materials. The action plan will also streamline environmental oversight mechanisms so that circular innovations can be implemented more quickly, promote research and innovation, and support businesses and the business climate to enable circular businesses to prosper and offer products and services nationally as well as internationally (Regeringskansliet 2020).

The formation of a national resource-efficiency strategy, authored by the minister of the environment and the minister of enterprise and innovation, is an important step. However, the instruments promoting this goal as well as specific indicators remain unclear, and this will be the case until specific action plans are put into effect.

Citation:

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### Labor Market Preparedness

Labor Market  
Policy  
Preparedness  
Score: 9

Swedish labor-market policy has three main tasks: 1) to provide work opportunities to the unemployed and labor to employers; 2) to ameliorate recruitment problems; and 3) to help those who are having difficulty finding work in the regular labor market (Larsson and Bäck 2008). Sweden has seen rising employment and employment participation rates steadily since 2005, with a brief setback during the international financial crisis in 2009 and 2010 (Forslund 2019). The 2019 unemployment rate among foreign-born persons was 15%, as compared to 4.4% among individuals born in Sweden. Additionally, it is more difficult for those with the lowest educational qualifications to enter the labor market. In 2020, the unemployment rate among people who had completed only pre-upper-secondary education was 22.6%, compared with 4.2% for those with post-upper-secondary education (Finanspolitiska rådet 2020).

The Swedish labor policy program includes a series of skills-upgrading initiatives for adults. A variety of vocational-training programs for the unemployed are offered, including: 1) upper-secondary vocational education programs, 2) adult education including Swedish for immigrants, 3) adult vocational-training programs, 4) vocational introductory jobs (a program combining work and vocational training geared towards young people with limited work experience), 5) vocational labor-market programs (training



programs for job-seekers that range in duration from a few weeks to six months) and 6) college-level vocational programs. The programs are numerous, and efforts to evaluate causality claims regarding their contribution to unemployment reduction run into external validity problems, but generally, given a long time horizon, skills-upgrading programs seem to have positive effects (Forslund 2020).

It is noteworthy that in an agreement between the red-green minority government and the Liberal Party and the Center Party in January 2019 (“Januariavtalet”), the local offices of the Swedish Public Employment Service were to be dissolved and privatized. As a consequence, implementation of labor-market programs and the matching process was to be administered largely by private agencies. The reform was highly disputed. During 2019, the reform goals were reformulated and the reform goal itself postponed. At the end of 2020, the Swedish Public Employment Service announced that it would be able to provide local services in 208 of a total 290 municipalities (Arbetsförmedling 2021).

Sweden also has a rehabilitation policy for sick workers, which was restructured in 2008. The employer pays for the first 14 days of sickness (after a waiting period of one day), while the National Insurance Agency makes payments thereafter. During the first 90 days of sickness, a person’s capacity to work is assessed against their current job; between day 91 and 180, work capacity is to be assessed against any job at the sick person’s employer; and between day 181 and 365, work capacity is to be assessed against any job in the regular job market. Evaluations of the rehabilitation chain found that the time limits had an effect regarding the time it took for a person to go back to work, but had no long-term effects on labor supply (Forslund 2019).

Employment security varies significantly between different sectors of the economy. While only 10% of native Swedes work on temporary contracts, about 43% of immigrants do so (SCB 2020).

Sweden offers a voluntary unemployment insurance scheme, which is administered by independent organizations affiliated with workers’ unions (Larsson and Bäck 2008). Benefit eligibility is 300 benefit days with a decreasing payout percentage. A number of supplementary insurance programs have also been developed through collective agreements.

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### Fiscal Preparedness

Fiscal Policy  
Preparedness  
Score: 10

Sweden's current fiscal framework was introduced in 1997, and has since then contributed to the positive development of the public finances. The institutional framework enjoys broad political support, even in times of deep crisis. Whereas some parts of the framework are governed by law, others are based on norms and rules-in-use, conveying the intentions underpinning the framework. Although the latter are unwritten, adherence to them is implied and indeed widely practiced (Finanspolitiska rådet 2020).

The absence of formal rules and concomitant sanctions when it comes to deviations from the framework offers substantial flexibility. It also presupposes that participating actors respect each other as well as the system, and thus refrain from abusing it. Furthermore, the absence of ministerial rule, which allows the public agencies considerable autonomy of public agencies; the decentralized system, which results in the budgetary decisions being largely implemented at the regional and municipal levels; and the principle of public access to information all make the budget process open and transparent.

The fiscal policy framework's key elements include budgetary policy objectives, the surplus target, the expenditure ceiling, the balanced-budget requirement for municipalities and the debt "anchor" (see below). Budgetary policy is presented in the fall budget bill and the spring fiscal policy bill, both of which result from party negotiations. Under normal circumstances, the deviation between the two bills is minimal, with the latter containing minor amendments to the former (Larson and Bäck 2008; Regeringskansliet 2020b).

The surplus target is defined as an average over a business cycle (formulated as net public sector lending of an average of 1/3 of GDP), and there are no hard-and-fast rules regarding how extensive savings must be in a single year. Setting an expenditure ceiling is a voluntary act by the government, rather than being constitutionally mandated. Nevertheless, the Budget Act requires that

the government take measures to avoid exceeding this ceiling. Finally, the debt anchor is not a target, but a benchmark currently set at 35% of GDP (Fiscal Policy Council 2020).

Recent elections have resulted in minority governments. This in turn means that the budgetary process must enjoy relatively broad political support. The 2021 budget bill was based on a political agreement among the Social Democrats, the Center Party, the Liberal Party, and the Green Party (Regeringskansliet 2020a)

In summary, the structure of the fiscal framework focuses on promoting resilient public finances by meeting demographic demands and providing enough flexibility to deal effectively with unforeseen crises.

Citation:

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## Research and Innovation

Research and  
Innovation Policy  
Preparedness  
Score: 9

Sweden ranks among the top five advanced industrialized democracies on all aspects of research and development (R&D), including spending (public and private) per capita, number of researchers, number of patent applications and intellectual ownership licenses. This high level of investment in R&D has been maintained for considerable time. As an economy with high labor costs, Sweden's competitive edge lies not in large-scale manufacturing, but in knowledge-intensive sectors. R&D spending thus directly sustains that competitive edge.

The era of digital entrepreneurship has seen Sweden emerging as a global center of digital innovation. This applies to digital communication, computer games and IT-based services. The World Economic Forum, which views Sweden's tax levels as burdensome, suggests that the social welfare safety net has made Swedes less risk-averse than entrepreneurs in many other countries (WEF 2017, Thelen 2019).

Questions of innovation and economic growth at the national level are

generally addressed by the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, and fall more specifically under the purview of Vinnova, the Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems, which is tasked with contributing to Sweden's innovation capacity and the country's sustainable growth. Vinnova is the contact point for the EU framework programs for R&I and has four prioritized areas: 1) the circular and bio-based economy, 2) industry and materials, 3) smart cities, and 4) the life sciences (Vinnova 2020a). Indicatively, the total budget for Vinnova in 2019 was just under SEK 3.2 billion (Vinnova 2020b). Vetenskapsrådet (the Swedish Research Council) is a governmental agency within the Ministry of Education and Research, which funds all kinds of research and research infrastructure, while Formas, a research council for sustainable development under the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, also finances R&I specifically through the lens of sustainable development.

In terms of research commercialization, a recent evaluation of strategic innovation programs pursued by Vinnova, Formas and the Swedish Energy Agency found that successful commercialization of research results had been the exception rather than the rule. However, as the evaluation was conducted only six years after these programs were begun, the companies involved had high expectations that the future commercial impact of research findings would be high (Åström, Arnold and Olsson 2020).

Citation:

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## II. Welfare State Preparedness

### Education System Preparedness

Education Policy  
Preparedness  
Score: 8

Education policy remains a subject of heated debate in Sweden. The subject of education is high on the political agenda, although the political parties differ significantly in their analysis of problems and potential solutions.

Sweden has a nine-year compulsory education system. Almost all students (99%) continue to an additional three years of high school (SCB 2017). The share of children eligible for high school fluctuates annually at around 85% (Skolverket 2020a), and there are special programs in place that help students with difficulties become eligible. To facilitate the admission of students from different backgrounds and with different skillsets, high schools offer both theoretical programs to prepare students for tertiary education as well as vocational programs preparing students for the labor market after graduation. About 60% of high school students pursue a theoretical program for university entrance qualification, whereas 30% pursue a vocational program (Skolverket 2020b).

The first-year transition rates of high school alumni to university increased from 16% in 1997 to 23% in 2018 (SCB 2020). Swedish universities are tuition-free for Swedish and EU citizens and residents. Swedish citizens and residents have the option of favorable government loans and grants. The government promotes lifelong learning; university admission requirements are comparatively liberal and the Swedish educational design allows for flexible learning (Universitetskanslerämbetet 2020a). Ten years after graduating high school, about 59% of graduates have taken some university credits (SCB 2020). In 2020, there was a total of 375,400 students at Swedish universities, which is an increase of 10% compared to the fall of 2019 (Universitetskanslerämbetet 2020b). Conversely, the number of incoming international students had dropped by 40% compared to 2019. The number of students graduating with a bachelor's degree increased from about 55,000 in 2010 to 66,000 in 2019, while that same year there were about 40,500 master's degrees granted (Universitetskanslerämbetet 2020b).

To a large extent, Sweden's economic development relies on knowledge-intensive sectors. For this reason, the quality of education is a major concern for politicians as well as businesses. With the aim of improving the quality of the Swedish education system, the National Agency for Education operates seven national development programs focusing on areas such as digitalization, school and work life, systematic quality, and assessment and grading. Substantial resources are also expended on educational research, with the Swedish Institute for Educational Research ([www.skolfr.se](http://www.skolfr.se)) serving as a major funder. Variation in the quality of education, rules that have given municipalities responsibility for the provision of schools since 1989, and the introduction of a school voucher system in the 1990s have all led to a far-reaching privatization of schools; broad variation in pedagogical approaches and methods used for teaching and learning; and the implementation of different learning platforms (see Edmark et al. 2014, Hinnerich and Vlachos

2017). A report from the Swedish Teachers' Union (2019), however, showed that six out of 10 teachers interviewed would not use a digital platform unless they had to, and that eight out of 10 teachers experienced stress and decreased work satisfaction due to the platforms.

ICT investments are important for a nation that wants to be “a society that takes advantage of the opportunities of technology” (Government Offices of Sweden 2016, p.3). Infrastructure investments include fiber and mobile networks allowing for information access and online education. While the provision of free access to computers was a high priority in past IT strategies, the goal of improving students' and teachers' IT skills has risen on the agenda more recently (Godhe 2019, Skolverket 2019). A majority of schools are close to completing implementation of IT strategies focusing on the rollout of technical equipment. A report from April 2020 shows that 80% of schools have assessed the need for technical and pedagogical support regarding IT (Skolverket 2020c).

Seeking to arrest a downward trend in terms of schools' and teachers' reputations, the government introduced national certifications for teachers at all school levels in 2011. Only certified teachers are eligible for permanent positions. A new career program for teachers was launched in 2013, providing opportunities for professional development and higher salaries.

Despite these policies aimed at improving education quality, there might be other structural risks to the quality of education in Sweden. According to the Institute for Evaluation of Labor Market and Education Policy (IFAU), the Swedish high school system has become increasingly unequal during the 2000s. The main reasons identified are an increased level of housing segregation and the introduction of private schools (Böhlmark et al. 2015, Homlund et al. 2014).

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## Social Welfare Preparedness

Social Welfare  
Policy  
Preparedness  
Score: 7

Social inclusion policies have traditionally been a feature of Swedish political life and social welfare. In recent years, a range of challenges have arisen in areas such as the integration of immigrant populations, and efforts to address unemployment and poverty (Schierup & Ålund 2011). As in many European countries, a growing radical right-wing party (Sweden Democrats) has changed the political landscape (Rydgren & van der Meiden 2019).

Generally, the share of GDP devoted to social insurance benefits has remained fairly stable since the 1980s, with the exception of sickness and disability benefits, whose share has decreased from almost 7% in 1989 to about 2.5% in 2019 (Försäkringskassan 2020a).

Sweden does not have a basic income scheme; financial support is instead based on assessment of individual needs. Just over 202,000 households in Sweden (about 5%) received economic support at least once in 2019. This amounted to a total of SEK 11.6 billion (Socialstyrelsen 2020) paid to approximately 116,000 women, 133,000 men and 133,000 children as individual beneficiaries. Approximately 40% of the beneficiaries are between 30 and 49 years old. The most common grounds for receipt of financial support include unemployment and sickness, while 179,000 households received housing subsidies (Socialstyrelsen 2020; Försäkringskassan 2020b).

According to Statistics Sweden (SCB 2020a), the share of the population living under the poverty line has fluctuated between 3% and 4% in recent years, which translates into about 400,000 people. Sweden uses a higher cut-off point than the EU when defining poverty, so if the EU definition of poverty is applied, the share of the population falling into this category decreases to 1.8% in 2019 (Eurostat 2020). Social transfers have a larger Gini coefficient impact in Sweden than in any other EU member state, counted as equivalized disposable income (Eurostat 2018). Economic cleavages in Sweden have increased markedly and steadily since the 1970s, with the Gini coefficient rising from 0.2 to 0.32 (SCB 2018). No groups in particular have fared worse over time but the lowest income groups have lagged behind since the 1990s. The main reason for this is that unemployment benefits and other economic support programs have not kept pace with wages, which means that the major difference is really between employed and unemployed people (Roine and Calmfors 2018). Additionally, the highest-income groups have benefited from tax reductions and a rise in investment income.

While the UN's Agenda 2030 delegation pointed out economic vulnerability among homeless people, asylum-seekers, undocumented persons and EU migrants as a particular challenge for Sweden, the government seems to have been fairly successful in this area (Svenska FN-förbundet 2020). At the same time, a recent report shows major differences in a wide range of areas between groups with different backgrounds and in different living conditions (SCB 2020b). The differences concern several groups, including people with disabilities, children of socially disadvantaged parents and immigrants from certain parts of the world. The report also showed that immigrants are far more economically disadvantaged than people born in Sweden, as is the case for single mothers compared to single fathers. Of all EU countries, the share of foreign-born inhabitants running the risk of ending up in poverty is among the highest in Sweden, which indicates that economic and social integration pose a major challenge for policy in Sweden (SCB 2020c).

For most children, Sweden is a good country to grow up in, and the Swedish government has a long tradition of prioritizing the safety and security of children. Despite this, Sweden scores below average among the 38 OECD/EU countries with regard to the mental well-being of children (UNICEF 2020), and social differences are increasing. In a multi-measure international comparison that included income, education, health and life satisfaction, Sweden ranked 23 out of 35 countries with regard to inequality among children (UNICEF 2016).



## Citation:

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## Healthcare System Preparedness

Health Policy  
Preparedness  
Score: 7

Accessibility of primary care in Sweden continues to be a problem, though the quality of specialist and hospital care is very high. The Swedish healthcare system is regulated and controlled by the national level, while the planning, financing and provision of healthcare services including specialist and hospital care is the responsibility of the 21 regions (Pierre 2020). Primary healthcare is provided in local healthcare centers. The quality of healthcare in Sweden, especially the quality of specialist and hospital healthcare, is quite high. Sweden has a tax-financed, universal healthcare system. There has been some degree of privatization when it comes to local healthcare centers, but hospital and specialty healthcare is basically public (Blomqvist and Winblad 2014; Rönnestad and Oskarsson 2020).

The Swedish healthcare system is based on the premise that healthcare must be egalitarian, accessible, evidence-based, effective and based on people's individual needs. Accessibility is one of the premises of good care quality according to the Health and Medical Services Act (Socialstyrelsen 2020). However, there have been long-standing problems with accessibility in Swedish healthcare. Attempts to remedy this have spanned decades and include changes in legislation (including the waiting-time guarantee), continuous national assessments of waiting times, and contractual agreements between the government and the regions (Socialstyrelsen 2020). Sweden entered the pandemic with a waiting-time guarantee structure as follows:

- An individual seeking primary healthcare shall be able to contact a primary healthcare provider on the same day;
- An individual seeking primary healthcare shall have a medical opinion by a doctor or other primary-care physician within three days;
- Those needing specialist healthcare shall not wait more than 90 days for a visit after a referral has been sent out;
- Those in need an operation or other specialist treatment shall not wait for more than 90 days (Socialstyrelsen 2020). Faced with a longer waiting time, one has the right to seek care in a region other than the region in which one is registered. Waiting times are reported in a database, and are made available to the public.

Still, in international comparison, people in Sweden face considerable wait times in accessing primary care. Moreover, they do not have a regular physician, though they have a regular local healthcare center. However, few people in Sweden feel that the physician they meet is aware of their medical history. Additionally, people with complex health problems report coordination failures that result in dissatisfaction with the healthcare they receive (Inspektionen för vård och omsorg 2020; Myndigheten för vård-och omsorgsanalys 2020). Doctors in Sweden report high levels of stress. Compared to their counterparts in 10 other western countries, they also see a lower number of patients, with longer visits (about 20 – 25 minutes in Sweden vs. 10 – 20 minutes as an international average). Finally, a cross-national study of Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States ranked Sweden first in the use of digital tools in primary care (Vårdanalys 2020).

Availability of intensive-care beds was quite low at the beginning of the pandemic. In 2019, there were 4.89 intensive-care beds for adults per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to 24.6 in Germany and 20 in the United States, while the European average in 2010 – 2011 was 11.5 (Engerström 2019).

Long-term care and nursing homes are a major problem in the Swedish health sector. Privatization and a shift of responsibility toward local governments has posed severe challenges in guaranteeing the quality of care (Pierre 2020). The quality of care differs from region to region, and from nursing home to nursing home. Attempts to monitor quality using explicit criteria have not been successful.

In the pandemic, the Swedish government increased monetary contributions to municipalities and county administrative boards, which enabled them to order medical equipment and other supplies. However, the real problem is not a lack of equipment, but rather the capacity of the personnel – that is, the available manpower and the exhaustion felt by many working in the health system.

Citation:

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## Families

Family Policy  
Preparedness  
Score: 10

Scandinavian countries in general and Sweden in particular have always scored high with regard to family policies, which typically include generous and gender-neutral maternity and paternity leave. The expansion of public (as well as private) day-care centers has provided a suitable framework for combining work and family.

Benefits include an obligatory two-week leave for mothers immediately before or after delivery. This is either paid, or the compensation is deferred to a subsequent period of leave (Dufvander & Löfgren 2020). The other parent is

entitled to 10 days of paid leave associated either with childbirth or adoption (to be taken within 60 days). For both parents, 77.6% of their regular salary is paid by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (Försäkringskassan). The 10-day benefit is gender-neutral, and is given to the parent that was not pregnant. If the parent who has been pregnant is a single parent, the benefit may be allocated to another person who is close to them (Dufvander & Löfgren 2020). Women may also be entitled to benefits during pregnancy if their jobs are physically demanding or involves a risky environment, and the employer cannot relocate her to other tasks (Försäkringskassan 2020a).

Beyond this short-term benefit, the Swedish system for parental leave is comprehensive, egalitarian and flexible. Each parent is entitled to full-time leave from work until their child is 18 months old, regardless of whether they are using paid benefits. Parents with joint custody are eligible for 240 days of parental leave benefit each until the child turns 12 years old; some days are transferrable between them while others are nontransferable (Försäkringskassan 2020b). For 390 of the total 480 days, the benefits provided during parental leave are based on income – up to an earnings ceiling, currently of SEK 465,000. A flat rate of SEK 180 per day is provided for the remainder of the time (Försäkringskassan 2020b). Parents can take full-time or part-time paid leave days, and can combining paid and unpaid leave to enable parents to stay at home longer. Regardless, all parental leave benefits offer pension credits (Dufvander & Löfgren 2020).

A range of adjustments are available, for instance if both parents wish to take parental leave at the same time, in case of multiple births, in case of sole custody, when a child is sick, or if a child has a disability. There is also a housing benefit available for families with children (Försäkringskassan 2020c). More than SEK 233 billion in social insurance benefits were provided in 2019, which is 4.5% of GDP (Försäkringskassan 2020d). Of this, approximately SEK 89 billion (38%) was for the economic safety of families and children. Finally, early childhood education and care services (ECEC) are providing beginning at 12 months – full-time for the children of full-time employed parents and part-time for unemployed parents' children (Dufvander & Löfgren 2020).

Citation:

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### III. Economic Crisis Response

#### Economic Response

Economic  
Recovery  
Package  
Score: 10

The Swedish government reacted quickly to the pandemic, enacting economic measures through several budget amendments during 2020, in itself an unusual occurrence. Twelve amendments were approved by the parliament beyond the two normal instances when the annual budget is decided, typically falling in the fall and spring.

Measures aimed at supporting households and businesses, and included financial benefits for short-time work or when firms had been closed; increased subsidies for sickness periods, including an end to the one-day waiting period for sick-leave pay; and some subsidies for people in high-risk groups. Specific sectors targeted by the measures included media and culture, sports, public transportation, railways, airlines and shipping, research and innovation, and higher education (Regeringskansliet 2020a). The measures additionally included several tax reductions, including tax reductions for labor and companies, for combined sums of SEK 8.49 billion, SEK 10.61 billion and SEK 16.96 billion respectively in 2021, 2022 and 2023 (Regeringskansliet 2020b). The National Institute for Economic Research (Konjunkturinstitutet; NIER) estimates that all 2020 pandemic-associated measures cost up to SEK 194 billion. In December 2020, NIER also noted that the governmental financial support had not been used to the degree that the government had originally estimated (Konjunkturinstitutet 2020).

NIER reported that the Swedish economy recovered more quickly than expected in the third quarter of 2020, with a GDP increase of about 5% over the second quarter. However, due to the second wave of the pandemic, the recovery stalled during the fourth quarter. In the third quarter of 2020, productivity rose by 3.6% on the second quarter of the same year. Municipalities in general were projected to have a surplus in 2020. By the third quarter, household consumption rose by 6.3% on the first quarter, while car consumption, after a sharp decline in the first two quarters, rose by about 60% in the third quarter. Public investment in infrastructure and defense spending was set to increase considerably in 2021. The recovery of the small

and open Swedish economy, however, is overall crucially dependent on international economic developments.

In summary, the economic recovery package aimed at protecting the income of households and businesses. The finance minister pointed out the better-than-expected recovery of the Swedish economy in Q3 of 2020 as a result of historically aggressive measures in support of the labor market and businesses (Regeringskansliet 2020c). NIER was more cautious in assigning a direct causal relation between the measures taken by the government and better performance. NIER emphasizes that the assumptions underpinning the forecasts made in 2020 are more uncertain than usual (Konjunkturinstitutet 2020). Regardless, one may wonder what the state of the Swedish economy would have been in the absence of these measures. Even though the national debt increased, it is still lower than the EU average, at 39% of GDP. Finally, Sweden's financial supervision agency (Finansinspektionen) reported in 2020 that the government's measures helped stabilize the overall financial system in Sweden, combating the uncertainty imposed by the pandemic.

Citation:

Finansinspektionen. 2020. "Stability in the Financial System." Ref: 20-9224. [https://www.fi.se/contentassets/4f6f3f5ef8ca464d8dda818cda870a56/stability\\_in\\_the\\_financial\\_system\\_2020-01.pdf](https://www.fi.se/contentassets/4f6f3f5ef8ca464d8dda818cda870a56/stability_in_the_financial_system_2020-01.pdf)

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### Sustainability of Economic Response

Recovery  
Package  
Sustainability  
Score: 9

The recovery measures contained in the 2021 budget bill resulted from a broad political agreement between the Social Democratic Party, the Center Party, the Liberal Party and the Green Party. They were framed as "(a) powerful and green economic restart" (Regeringskansliet 2020a:4). The government proposed a series of investments as part of a package intended to kick-start the economy after the pandemic, aimed at leveraging opportunities for sustainable transformation.

Among them was a green state credit guarantee for large-scale industrial investments contributing to the achievement of environmental and climate goals, as well as for the reduction of emissions.

Expenditure on emission reduction was set at SEK 1.88 billion, SEK 1.14 billion and SEK 0.52 billion respectively in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Financing for updating the heavy-vehicle infrastructure was set at SEK 0.50 billion and SEK 0.55 billion for 2020 and 2021 respectively, while support for public transport was set at SEK 2 billion for 2021, and funding for railway maintenance was set at SEK 0.50 billion each year for 2020, 2021 and 2022. Funding to promote a circular economy was also provided in the budget (Regeringskansliet 2020b).

Notably, the Ministry for Enterprise and Innovation issued a national strategy for the transition to a circular economy. The investment agreed to in the budget signaled the government's willingness to invest in a broader set of action plans and implementation efforts designed to promote circular-economy innovations. Finally, the measures included investment support for rental housing, funding for multifamily-housing energy efficiency, renovation and outdoor spaces, as well as a transition of the transport sector, with the latter set of funding amounting to SEK 1.22 billion for 2021 and 2022, and SEK 0.89 billion for 2023 (Regeringskansliet 2020a). Finally, the extra funding allocated to research and innovation as part of a post-coronavirus recovery is geared toward research aiming at sustainable transformations of the society and economy.

Citation:

Regeringskansliet (Government Offices of Sweden). 2020a. "From the Budget Bill for 2021: Budget Statement."

<https://www.government.se/4a73a0/contentassets/ddfaf5ce78494ce991ec231acf9c5b83/summary-budget-statement.pdf>

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### Labor Market Response

Labor Market  
Policy Response  
Score: 8

The pandemic had a substantial impact on the Swedish labor market in 2020. In March 2020, a total of 42,000 people were placed on short-time work – twice as many people as in the worst month of the financial crisis. The unemployment rate settled at 9.1% in the third quarter of 2020, the highest rate of unemployment since the deep recession Sweden experienced in the 1990s. Approximately half of the short-time work ultimately led to layoffs; 20% of those working short-time in March and April were registered as unemployed three months later (Konjunkturinstitutet 2020). Nevertheless, the overall unemployment rate for 2020 was 8.3% (exactly the same percentage for men and women), slightly lower than at the end of the financial crisis in Sweden in 2010 (SCB 2021).

High unemployment rates did not affect everyone equally. Rather, the pandemic exacerbated existing cleavages, including generational and educational differentials, as well unemployment among people not born in Sweden. More specifically, the unemployment rate among young people not in school and looking for full-time work was 14%, whereas among older age brackets, unemployment rose at a lower rate. The transportation, hotel and restaurant sectors were hit the hardest, and these sectors employ a large number of people not born in Sweden – this group makes up about 33% of the workforce in these sectors compared to the 20% average in the private sector in general. Unemployment among this group rose to 20.5% in Q3 while dropping to 15.7% in Q4. Finally, the unemployment rate among people without a high school diploma rose to 30% during Q3, up from an average of 20% during the 2010s (Konjunkturinstitutet 2020).

The transnational character of this crisis (Boin 2019) and its gradual progression from China toward Europe allowed governments to gain a sense for the potential consequences of the pandemic and act to ameliorate them (Petridou, Zahariadis and Ceccoli 2020). The Swedish government adopted a series of measures as a part of its 2020 budget amendments designed to protect household incomes and address increases in unemployment and its fallout through 2022. Measures included a decrease in employers' contributions for young people, tax reductions on labor income, a reduction in employer's social security contributions, higher unemployment benefit levels, and increased numbers of education and training places (Regeringskansliet 2020).

The Swedish Employment Service estimates that the measures described above ameliorated the effects of the pandemic crisis on (un)employment. However, the agency also predicted that unemployment would rise again in 2021, partly because some people went back to school or university, something that was encouraged by the government through extra funds in the budget. Upgrading the workforce's skills will have a positive impact in the long run, especially for those who have only a high school diploma or less. However, a decrease in the supply of jobs, that is, the risk of an unbalanced job market, is an immediate pressing challenge for the labor market in Sweden. The Swedish Employment Service fears that this crisis implies permanent or long-term unemployment for those who do not upgrade their skills, which makes continuing education an imperative (Arbetsförmedlingen 2020).

As unemployment insurance in Sweden is voluntary, the pandemic and the labor-market crisis that began in March 2020 led to increasing numbers of trade union members as well as an increase in the number of people



participating in unemployment insurance schemes. Rapidly adopted policies easing eligibility and increasing unemployment insurance schemes' replacement rates helped strengthen the unemployment insurance system and the trade union movement (Kjellberg 2020).

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## Fiscal Response

Fiscal Policy  
Response  
Score: 9

Sweden entered the pandemic crisis with strong public finances, even if in December 2019 the country was in a relative slowdown phase after years of exceptional growth. The country's consolidated gross debt (Maastricht debt) was equal to the benchmark of 35% (Konjunkturinstitutet 2020).

The public budgeting process includes an amendment bill introduced in the spring proposing changes to the bill adopted by the parliament the previous fall (Regeringskansliet 2020b). Normally there is not much difference between the two bills. Unsurprisingly, 2020 was an exception. In February 2020, the Finance Committee decided to amend the budget for the current year. This was the first time such a decision had been made. It broke with the principle of a comprehensive budgetary process, and according to the Fiscal Policy Council, a government agency, this decision constituted a weakening of the budgetary policymaking process. The Fiscal Policy Council projected that the emergency measures agreed upon by the red-green government and the Riksdag in the Spring Bill would result in the weakening of public finances in 2020 (Finanspolitiska rådet 2020; Sveriges Riksdag 2020). For example, amendments to the budget introduced in the spring of 2020 increased the expenditure ceiling by SEK 350 billion or 7% of GDP, while the burden on public finances increased by SEK 170 billion. Public debt increased accordingly to 39% of GDP (Konjunkturinstitutet 2020).

Emergency measures do not constitute economic incentives per se. Rather, their purpose has been to protect businesses and households by ameliorating the negative effects of the crisis. More specifically, they aimed at ensuring the survival of viable businesses, while seeking to prevent unemployment from increasing drastically or becoming long term, and trying to protect household incomes to the greatest extent possible. These measures included further provisions for individual workers such as additional allowances, increased incentives for training, extensions of labor-market programs and a relaxation of rules regarding the waiting period for sick benefits. Furthermore, the emergency measures provided greater funding for local governments. These measures are all temporary; some were implemented for a period of a few months, while others were slated to sunset during 2021. Given the transparency of the budgetary process, and the fact that the document is the result of a political agreement between the red-green government, the Liberals and the Center Party, it seems reasonable that the government will enact an exit strategy (Finanspolitiska rådet 2020; Regeringskansliet 2020a;b).

The Fiscal Policy Council suggests that public finances are unsustainable in the long term, though a relatively small revenue increase or expenditure decrease would render them sustainable. As noted above, the government also introduced many policies that would heighten sustainability and promote the circular economy in the short run (Regeringskansliet 2020c).

Citation:

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## Research and Innovation Response

Research and  
Innovation Policy  
Response  
Score: 7

The Swedish government stressed the importance of research and innovation in combating the causes and the societal consequences of the pandemic early on. In April 2020, the government announced an investment of SEK 100 million in research and innovation aimed at halting the spread of COVID-19 and preventing future pandemic outbreaks (Regeringen 2020a). The funds were allocated to Vetenskapsrådet (the Swedish Research Council) and Vinnova (the Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems) for investment in research activities in 2020. This resulted in a variety of research projects aimed at time-sensitive research with data that were important to collect immediately.

The 2021 budget includes an investment of approximately half a billion SEK per year for 2021 – 2024. These funds are slated mostly for medical and public health research (Regeringen 2020b). Research calls in 2020 included collaborative arrangements between the Formas research council and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) for research geared toward preparedness and crisis management. That call resulted in an unexpectedly high number of applications – indeed the interest among academics who live and work in Sweden seems to be quite high (MSB, personal communication).

Even though the Swedish government did not invest in a vaccine, it used its considerable infrastructure to channel funds into research and innovation in a timely fashion.

Citation:

Regeringen. 2020a. "100 miljoner till Snabba Forskningsinsatser för att Möta det Nya Coronaviruset." <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2020/04/100-miljoner-till-snabba-forskningsinsatser-for-att-mota-det-nya-coronaviruset/>

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## IV. Welfare State Response

### Education System Response

Education  
Response  
Score: 10

The Swedish response to the pandemic in the education sector was based on providing equal access to educational resources, protecting children's short- and long-term mental health, and ensuring that a large share of the work force,

including essential personnel, was not forced out of work due to extensive closures.

More specifically, the government proactively presented more than 130 new regulations regarding schools and education during the pandemic (Regeringskansliet 2021). Although the Riksdag voted in March 2020 to allow the government to temporarily close preschools, schools and other educational activities, no centralized shutdown order was issued. The act allowed for the temporary shutdown of educational activities in some cases, while also enabling continuity-focused adjustments, especially for disadvantaged students and students in professional programs who needed access to special equipment. The government laid the groundwork to ensure – should the situation change – that care would be available for children and students whose parents were essential workers (Regeringskansliet 2020).

Preschools and schools remained open throughout 2020 on the premise that students have the right to education regardless of the pandemic (Utbildningsdepartementet 2020a). The consequences of not going to school may also have included severe long-term effects and risks to the health of children over time. Additionally, schools are viewed as spaces that constitute a safe environment for children with precarious home situations. What is more, school closings could also have resulted in understaffing of vital societal functions due to parents staying at home to take care of the children, or the exposure of grandparents to the disease when helping out with child support (Utbildningsdepartementet 2020a).

In March 2020, the government recommended that Sweden's upper-secondary schools, municipal adult education, vocational adult education and higher education institutions switch to online learning in order to decrease the spread of the virus. The recommendation was withdrawn in June and then reinstated in December (Konjunkturinstitutet 2020).

In order to mitigate the economic consequences from the virus outbreak, the government adopted a range of measures to support individuals engaged in education and training (Utbildningsdepartementet 2020b). For the higher education sector, examples include the following:

- A total of SEK 120 million was allocated in 2020 for extra summer school courses to help students who did not manage to graduate from secondary school or high school.
- An estimated to SEK 1 billion was to be provided to primary schools in 2021 to meet the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic.
- Funding for higher education was increased by SEK 683 million for 2020 and SEK 862 million for 2021; this included student allowances and loans

facilitating an increase in student numbers by 9,300 and 6,600 respectively.

- The earnings ceiling associated with student-benefits eligibility was temporarily lifted to allow students to perform extra work in the healthcare sector without having their benefits withdrawn. Another measure allowed benefits to continue being paid even when students could not continue their education due to coronavirus-related restrictions.
- University summer courses were opened up to 6,000 more students than originally planned.
- To support more young people in becoming eligible for university programs in the fields of healthcare and engineering, admission slots were increased by 2,000 and 4,000 respectively in 2020 and 2021.
- A permanent university-admissions slot increase was proposed, with 1,300 more students in 2020 and 2,600 in 2021; this was geared especially for people needing to expand their skills, and meant to serve industries facing major labor shortages.
- A total of SEK 50 million was allocated to MOOCs (“massive open online courses”) and an additional SEK 10 million to the Swedish University Computer Network (Sunet).
- A total of SEK 700 million was allocated to municipal education centers to provide vocational training for people in need of new skills after losing their jobs due to COVID-19. Another SEK 365 million was allocated in 2020 for an increased number of students, classes and programs.
- Vocational-training funding was also expanded by SEK 374 million at the national level via the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education.

The crisis was also experienced as an opportunity to rethink methods and ways of working. Bergdahl & Nouri (2020) note that four pedagogical activities were central for distance education in the crisis: 1) video-based communication, 2) distribution and sharing of learning material and exercises, 3) student interaction and collaboration, and 4) assessment and examination. The study also reported that teachers were surprised to discover that their contact with students improved in the context of the new learning landscape, even though it was clearly different to the teacher-student relationship in the traditional classroom. Activity levels also shifted in the sense that formerly active students could be disengaged, while at-risk students (including nonengaged students), tech-savvy students and students with autism could increase their participation in learning activities when attending online.

Citation:

Bergdahl, Nina and Jalal Nouri. 2020. “Covid-19 och Omställning till Distansundervisning i Svensk Skola.” Stockholms Universitet. <https://www.ifous.se/app/uploads/2020/03/COVID19-omstllningen-till-distansundervisning.pdf>

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<https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2020/03/sa-ska-samhallet-fortsatta-fungera-aven-om-skolorna-skulle-behova-stangas/>  
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### Social Welfare Response

Social Welfare  
 Policy Response  
 Score: 8

The pandemic crisis has exacerbated existing societal cleavages worldwide, affecting some sections of the population more than others (especially the elderly, people of low socioeconomic status, immigrant populations). Sweden made an early, conscious decision to not shut down schools up to the ninth grade, partly to safeguard the mental health of children and their parents, and partly to ensure that the latter could go to work. However, high schools did switch to online education for large periods of time during 2020 as a means of containing outbreaks. As a result, the risk of children going hungry increased, because such children missed the lunches provided for no charge at school. To remedy this, schools provided bag lunches for students in need (Duvander and Löfgren 2020).

In addition to financial measures geared toward reducing the risk of unemployment and long-term unemployment, the government sought to ameliorate the consequences of open unemployment (Regeringskansliet 2020a). Nevertheless, the risk of being unemployed is higher for people not born in Sweden and low-skilled workers. This inequality, already observable before the pandemic, became more challenging during the pandemic.

In March 2020, the government allocated SEK 500 million each to the culture and sport sectors (non-public organizations) to cover some of the lost revenues (Regeringskansliet 2020b). Of the SEK 500 million for the culture sector, SEK 35 million was earmarked for independent artists (Regeringskansliet 2020c). An additional SEK 1 billion is allocated to the culture sector in the 2021 budget, of which SEK 4 million is allocated to Sami culture (Regeringskansliet 2020d). These huge investments are intended to stabilize household incomes during the crisis. A commission of inquiry appointed in December 2020 will investigate the consequences of the pandemic for the culture sector and provide further recommendations (Regeringskansliet 2020e).

Over 50% of the Swedish population participates in one or more of the country's 25,000 voluntary organizations. The sector has been hit hard by the

coronavirus pandemic. The government allocated SEK 100 million in April 2020 to civil society to support work with particular groups such as children in precarious environments, women, children and LGBTQ persons exposed to violence, and people exposed to gender violence and oppression including “honor” killings (SFS 2020:265).

Citation:

Duvander, Ann-Zofie and Niklas Löfgren. 2020. “Sweden Country Note,” in Koslowski, A., Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G. and Moss, P. (eds.) “International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2020.” [http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp\\_and\\_r\\_reports/](http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/)

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## Healthcare System Response

Health Policy  
Response  
Score: 7

The contagion mitigation measures taken by the Swedish government were largely depoliticized decisions spearheaded, as dictated by law and the constitution, by the Public Health Agency of Sweden (Jonung 2020, Pierre 2020). The staff of the Public Health Agency are experts and base their decisions and measures on scientific knowledge. Hence, these measures were evidence-based, adapting to the rapidly evolving scientific knowledge on the spread of the coronavirus. Nevertheless, the scientific proposals made by the Public Health Agency were highly disputed from April 2020 onward by other scientists who demanded strict lockdown measures as implemented in the Nordic neighbor countries, where there were significantly lower rates of infections and deaths.

Despite the relatively low adult intensive-care bed ratio per 100 people in Sweden, the healthcare system managed to keep up with demand, though the situation in the fall of 2020 deteriorated somewhat. This mainly manifested in exhausted personnel rather than in horror stories about patients having to be

treated in corridors, which as of the time of writing had not been the case in Sweden.

Attempts to increase access to medical equipment and hospital bed capacity included use of a field hospital in the Stockholm region that had been decommissioned in April 2020. It was never used (Hjertén and Nordström 2020). As became apparent during this crisis in Sweden as well as in other countries, the issue was not always, or not exclusively, the lack of intensive-care beds; rather, a more pressing and long-term problem has been the paucity of personnel and the fact that physicians and nurses are forced to work long hours with no end in sight.

The 21 regions have an agreement with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKR 2020) to activate the “crisis situation agreement,” stipulating a 48-hour work-week for healthcare personnel for a maximum of one month, with 220% of normal wages as compensation (SKR 2020; SVT 2020). However, in a drawn-out crisis such as this one, activating this agreement (which would be done by the regions themselves) is unlikely to solve the lack of healthcare workers or address the fatigue of those working in hospitals. Regions also have mechanisms to help each other by accepting patients outside their jurisdiction (SVT 2020a). The provision of routine healthcare varies among regions and has varied along the different phases of the pandemic crisis. All regions perform COVID-19 testing with results available within one or two days.

The elder-care sector performed quite under par during the crisis. Unlike hospital care, this is the political and administrative responsibility of municipalities. Elder care has been plagued by the effects of far-reaching privatization, strengthening a trend already visible before the pandemic crisis of understaffing and a need for more highly educated workers. The lack of sufficient regulations, inconsistent oversight and other structural issues within the many municipalities meant that these facilities often lacked sufficient access to physicians, and had an insufficient supply of personal protective equipment (SOU 2020). Data show that a majority of the elderly women who died because of COVID-19 did so in nursing homes, whereas the majority of elderly men dying from the virus’ effects did so in hospitals (Socialstyrelsen 2020).

Citation:

Hjertén, Linda and Andreas Nordström. 2020. “Fältsjukhuset i Älvsjö Avvecklas – Användes Aldrig.” Dagens Nyheter. 4 June. <https://www.dn.se/sthlm/faltsjukhuset-i-alsvjo-avvecklas-anvandes-aldrig/>

Jonung, Lars. 2020. “Sweden’s Constitution Decides Its Covid-19 Exceptionalism.” Lund University. Department of Economics. School of Economics and Management. Working Paper 2020: 11. [https://project.nek.lu.se/publications/workpap/papers/wp20\\_11.pdf](https://project.nek.lu.se/publications/workpap/papers/wp20_11.pdf)

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### Family Policy Response

Family Support  
Policies  
Score: 10

As part of its response to the pandemic, the Swedish government issued measures adjusting the already generous parental leave and benefits. This included measures aimed at limiting the spread of the disease, ameliorating the burden on the healthcare system, strengthening economic security, reducing negative effects on employers and relaxing eligibility requirements (Regeringskansliet 2020a). As of January 2021, the measures were set to expire on 30 April 2021.

As part of the relaxation of eligibility requirements, women may claim the pregnancy benefit if there was a risk of contracting coronavirus in the workplace. Additionally, and in keeping with restricts on visitors in hospitals, fathers are not allowed to be present during deliveries.

Parents can receive temporary benefits if they have to stay home from work to care for a child when a preschool or school is closed due to coronavirus restrictions (Regeringskansliet 2020b). People in high-risk groups and potentially members of their household may receive SEK 804 per day for a maximum of 90 days. The allowance is meant to compensate for taking time off from work in order to avoid contagion or to avoid transferring the disease to a person in a high-risk group (Regeringskansliet 2020c).

The parental benefits for taking care of a sick child were also adjusted. After seven days of sickness, a doctors' certificate is normally required to receive the allowance. This was not required during the pandemic, and periods of temporary parental leave were not limited in length, though the upper limit of 120 days per year remained in place. Early childhood education and care was open for all children throughout 2020, though children were sent home if they exhibited any signs of sickness (Dufvander & Löfgren 2020). From July to December 2020, an extra housing allowance of 25% was added for eligible beneficiaries (Regeringskansliet 2020d).

In summary, the administration of parental leave worked well during the pandemic, and waiting times for benefits did not increase. During March 2020, there were 200,000 more applications for temporary parental leave than expected, but by the end of April the numbers had returned to normal (Dufvander & Löfgren 2020).

Citation:

Duvander, Ann-Zofie and Niklas Löfgren. 2020. "Sweden country note," in Alison Koslowski, Sonja Blum, Ivana Dobrotić, Gayle Kaufman, and Peter Moss (eds.) "International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2020." [http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp\\_and\\_r\\_reports/](http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/)

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## International Solidarity

International  
Cooperation  
Score: 8

Together with the other Nordic governments, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs advocates increased international collaboration to fight COVID-19 and its consequences. In a September 2020 collective op-ed, the Nordic governments identified four crucial areas: mobilizing international collaboration to leave no one behind, ensuring transparency and access to reliable information, ensuring a gender-transformative perspective in the global response, and remaining vigilant to ensure that international standards and principles did not slip (Regeringskansliet 2020a).

A total of 52 billion SEK of non earmarked funds, or 1% of GDP, is allocated annually to international aid, and channeled through a range of international organizations, funds and programs. An additional SEK 1.2 billion was allocated to specific coronavirus-related initiatives operated by organizations including UNICEF, UNHCR, ICRC and the International Vaccine Institute (IVI) (Regeringskansliet 2020b).

As a member of the EU, Sweden aligns its policies with the measures adopted by the European Commission, such as travel restrictions in and out of the EU (Regeringskansliet 2020c). Countries worldwide have affirmed the Westphalian system in the sense that operative cross-country collaboration has been minimal. International solidarity in Sweden is carried out in the form of financial contributions to international organizations.

## Citation:

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## Resilience of Democracy

### Media Freedom

Media Freedom  
Score: 10

Swedish media policy is aimed at providing the preconditions for citizens to form their own opinions and freely exchange ideas. Media policy is also underpinned by the notion that social phenomena and activities may be reviewed and assessed in the interest of citizens, necessitating the presence of diverse high-quality media. Media policy applies to daily newspapers, radio and television, while also addressing the protection of children and young people against harmful influences. Eight national agencies under the Ministry of Culture implement media policy, ensuring that there is a free and independent media (Regeringskansliet 2020).

The policy's constitutional foundation is the Freedom of the Press Act, enacted in 1766, which has five principles: the freedom to express one's thoughts in print, the freedom to disseminate printed matter accompanied by free access to this material, free access to official information, and the right of anonymity. A document is categorized as official if it has been received or created by a public authority. Such documents are freely available unless they are classified as secret (Larsson and Bäck 2008). The professional contact information for public servants working for municipalities or regions is readily available online, enabling citizens to communicate with them to offer questions, suggestions or complaints. A number of municipalities have implemented electronic participation procedures such as citizen dialogues, electronic notice boards or citizen chats (Norén Bretzer 2010).

The Swedish government is aware of the danger of disinformation, online hate (speech and harassment) and propaganda, and for this reason commissioned an inquiry in 2018 (National Investment in Media and Information Capacity and the Democratic Society) to explore possible ways of combating these problems. The committee delivered its findings in September 2020, advocating increased collaboration among the public agencies dealing with media policy;

the long-term financing of efforts against disinformation; the involvement of schools, school libraries and public libraries; and the availability of accurate information in a variety of languages beyond the recognized minority languages in order to reach a broad swath of target groups. The committee also suggested tightening legislative restrictions on online hate speech (SOU 2020).

A large majority of Swedish journalists classify themselves as being rather left-leaning politically (Lantz 2020). Additionally, before and especially during the pandemic, a small “opinion corridor” led to a sort of “public health nationalism” (Eriksson 2020), that is, the defense of the national strategy in the media. Nevertheless, dissenting opinions were reported, most obviously by “the 22,” a group of scientists that mounted a very sharp critique of the policies of the Public Health Agency in the *Dagens Nyheter* newspaper (Andersson & Aylott 2020). Hence, the media ensured a broad range of opinion and information during the pandemic.

Citation:

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### Civil Rights and Political Liberties

Civil Rights and  
Political Liberties  
Score: 10

Sweden has constitutional safeguards in place against the curtailment of civil and political rights. The state does not have the right to declare a state of emergency during peace time (Jonung 2020). Most coronavirus-related measures issued by the government and public agencies have thus been in the form of “national recommendations” (allmänna råd), which are nonbinding and centered on the main message conveyed by public authorities, focusing on personal responsibility for one’s own health as well as for the collective good. Between March 2020 and December 2020, the Public Health Agency of Sweden issued 28 coronavirus-related recommendations (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2020a;b), mostly amending and updating regulations.

Some regulations, such as the prohibition on serving alcohol after a certain time, were statutory (Sveriges Riksdag 2020a). Regulations regarding the

number of people allowed to congregate in one place were not bound by statute. Regardless of the degree to which the regulations were binding, they were slated (at the time of writing) to expire in June 2021 at the latest (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2020a). However, the measures are amended quite frequently.

In January 2021, the Swedish government passed a temporary COVID-19 law giving the national government the legal ability to impose (and enforce) restrictions on gatherings in public places, places where recreational or cultural activities take place, commercial spaces, or public transportation, and on the renting of spaces for private gatherings (Sveriges Riksdag 2020b). The law itself (that is, not any of the measures that may be enforced because of it) will be in effect from 10 January to 30 September 2021, thus limiting the extraordinary powers (by Swedish standards) vested in the national government.

Citation:

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## Judicial Review

Judicial Review  
Score: 8

The Swedish system of judicial review works well and efficiently. The Swedish constitution does not allow for the declaration of a state of emergency during peace time (Jonung 2020). This, combined with the autonomy accorded to public agencies and local authorities, pushed the Swedish coronavirus response to take the form of a series of guidelines rather than extraordinary laws (Petridou 2020).

Generally, the Swedish judiciary system is more fragmented than its peers in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, with two systems of courts: one handling criminal and civil law and another handling administrative issues. There is no constitutional court (Larsson and Bäck 2008). Notably, until 2011, the judiciary and the government administration were regulated by the same chapter in the Swedish constitution. Judicial review is mainly carried out by

the government and public agencies, with the Swedish courts traditionally serving as tools of political executive power rather than a means of balancing power (Ahlbäck Öberg and Wockelberg 2016). In the Swedish system, agreements are typically reached by political parties and other actors, rendering judicial intervention less important than in the United States, for example, where the courts are quite commonly used as adjudicators.

Critics have increasingly questioned this model of judicial review over the past few years. They argue that it is part of a more general trend toward the judicialization of politics, where courts and lawyers acquire an inappropriate level of influence over political decisions. However, these criticisms are not particular to Sweden; they are observable in most European countries.

This does not mean that governmental action during the pandemic has remained unchecked – quite the opposite. First, a commission of inquiry – the Corona Commission (which has the status of a public agency until it delivers its findings and is disbanded) was convened to assess the Swedish response to the pandemic (Regeringskansliet 2020). Additionally, the Swedish National Accountability Office (Riksrevisionen) has issued a report on the legality of the government’s budgetary response to the pandemic (Riksrevisionen 2020). A cross-party parliamentary committee was convened in December 2020 with the task of following up the work of the parliament and the Riksdag Administration during the pandemic (Sveriges Riksdag 2020).

Citation:

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### Informal Democratic Rules

Informal  
Democratic Rules  
Score: 10

Up until the late 1990s in Sweden, the Social Democrats dominated the political system. Since this time, a (modified) two-party system has emerged,

with emerging pre-electoral coalitions that encompass all the parties with electoral representation (Aylott 2016), with the exception of the radical right-wing Swedish Democrats that came into the Riksdag in 2010. An annual survey among parliamentarians regarding the subjective placement of their parties on a left-right continuum shows that the ideological left/right distinction remains relevant, but also that the two main parties – the Social Democrats and the Moderates – have moved closer to each other (Höjer 2019).

Sweden is not a particularly politically polarized society (Höjer 2019). With regard to the national response to the coronavirus crisis in particular, mitigation measures were from the onset depoliticized. The decisions were made and communicated by a public agency (the Public Health Agency of Sweden), with the government and politicians remaining in the background. The crisis was not weaponized in the political debate; there has been both international and domestic criticism of the measures implemented, but the domestic criticism has been leveled by experts, not by party leaders (Petridou 2020; Petridou and Zahariadis 2021).

This enabled the parliament to pass 12 budgetary amendments (in addition to the two regular budget bills) containing economic relief measures for households and businesses. Additionally, an extraordinary corona law was enacted in January 2021 (Regeringskansliet 2020). The political culture of consensus has thus held up even during the crisis, preventing political gridlock.

Swedish democracy is built on mutual trust. The general population's level of trust in the government and the Public Health Agency was quite high through the end of 2020. Thereafter, trust levels declined significantly. Popular confidence in the elder-care system was already relatively low at the beginning of 2020, but declined further during the pandemic. In January 2021, only 20% of the Swedish public indicated that they trusted the country's elder-care system. Moreover, that same month, only 44% of the public judged the pandemic strategy pursued by the government and agencies as being balanced and trustworthy; in March and April of 2020, approximately 60% of the public had backed the COVID-19 measures (Wennö 2021).

Citation:

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# Resilience of Governance

## I. Executive Preparedness

### Crisis Management System

Crisis  
Management  
System  
Score: 8

Sweden's crisis-management system is based on the premise that public and private organizations, civil society, and individual citizens are expected to be prepared for contingencies, and will be included in response measures. The institutionalized public-management structure is part of the public sector. This includes all municipalities, county boards, regions, national agencies and the national government. All of these entities are obliged by law to have staff that are responsible for preparing for and managing crisis situations. The crisis-management responsibilities include an effective early-warning system, multiple levels of responsibility, and appropriate risk and vulnerability assessment mechanisms. Risk assessments typically follow the governmental mandate period, with annual updates and revisions. The municipalities report their assessments to the relevant regional boards, which in turn report to the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB). The regions also report their assessments to the MSB, as do some of the national agencies (MSB 2020a).

In 2001, the Swedish Commission on Vulnerability and Security (Regeringskansliet 2001) proposed three guiding principles, which were later enshrined in law: 1) the principle of responsibility, under which entities responsible for an activity during normal times are to retain this responsibility in times of crisis or war; 2) the principle of parity, under which authorities are to retain their structure and locations in times of crisis or war; and 3) the principle of proximity, under which crises should be handled at the lowest possible level of government. The principle of collaboration is deemed to be equally important, but is not formally articulated in law.

The Public Health Agency of Sweden (Folkhälsomyndigheten) has an officer on call around the clock. The agency has the capacity to analyze samples of suspected severe infections as they appear. It has the only high-containment laboratory at biosafety level 4 (BSL-4) within the Nordic countries, which is an important aspect of national preparedness. In order to track and fight communicable diseases, over 60 diseases are monitored via the reporting received in accordance with law and through voluntary notification. All reported cases of these diseases are registered and analyzed. This gives the Public Health Agency of Sweden an overview of the epidemiological situation in the country. County Medical Officers and many other actors across the country play an important role in ensuring that the country is well protected from infections (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2020).

The Public Health Agency of Sweden is legally mandated to coordinate preparedness measures designed to respond to serious health threats. The agency has also been appointed the national lead entity in implementing the International Health Regulations (IHR). Pandemic plans are regularly updated and consist of three major documents, respectively addressing the issues of preparedness (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2019a), communication (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2019b) and access to medication (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2019c). All municipalities, regions and agencies that receive information about a suspected or confirmed incident that may pose an international threat to human health must immediately notify the duty officer at the Public Health Agency of Sweden. The agency must then determine whether there may be an international threat to human health, and if so, notify the WHO within 24 hours. The Public Health Agency of Sweden is also charged with providing feedback and informing the relevant agencies, municipalities and regions what measures have been taken.

The National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) is responsible for enhancing the preparedness of the health system and social services, thus enabling them to respond to adverse events and helping to mitigate any consequences associated with such events. The risk and vulnerability analyses conducted by the National Board include pandemic scenarios, although the latest analysis, dating from 2014, addressed the threat of pandemic fairly perfunctorily (Socialstyrelsen 2014). The National Board also coordinates and monitors civil preparedness planning within the health system and the social services. In the event of an emergency, the National Board must inform the government offices and the MSB (Socialstyrelsen 2020).

The National Board is additionally tasked with developing and maintaining expertise and disseminating knowledge regarding disaster medicine and

emergency preparedness, so as to assist the Swedish health system and the social services in times of emergency or disaster management. The government has commissioned the National Board to coordinate and manage the availability of medicine and medical supplies as needed during states of heightened alert (MSB 2020).

The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) is responsible for helping society prepare for major accidents, crises and the consequences of war (MSB 2020b). The agency rarely takes an operative role in emergencies, but rather supports actors in a variety of sectors and at all administrative levels, helping them respond to crises. The MSB is responsible for issues in the areas of civil protection, public safety, emergency management and civil defense as long as no other authority has responsibility. Responsibility in this context refers to measures taken before, during and after an emergency or crisis (MSB 2020c).

The scope of MSB activities includes:

- Knowledge production, support, training, exercises, regulation and evaluation;
- Close cooperation with the municipalities, county councils, other authorities, the private sector and various organizations; and
- The manage to enhance security and safety at all levels of society, from the local to the national (MSB 2020c).

Collaboration among these agencies at the national level was evidenced by their joint participation in a number of press conferences following the onset of the pandemic. The elaborate crisis-management architecture described above notwithstanding, the first findings of the Corona Commission found that the regions suffered from an initial lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), reported in early February 2020 by the National Board of Health and Welfare (Regeringskansliet 2020). Subsequently, the biggest municipalities and regions in Sweden drafted an agreement for the joint procurement of PPE (SKR 2020). This speaks to the autonomy of the local level, but hints at the notion that bigger municipalities and regions with more resources than their smaller equivalents might enjoy greater access to more or better crisis-preparedness materials. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKR), an organization that supports the country's regions and municipalities, explicitly aims at evening the playing field among local authorities in terms of competence and resources, even in the area of crisis preparedness.

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## II. Executive Response

### Effective Policy Formulation

Effective Policy  
Formulation  
Score: 8

Sweden chose to respond to the coronavirus pandemic crisis in a way that privileged a series of voluntary guidelines (or "nudges") rather than mandating a lockdown, a curfew, business closures or the wearing of face coverings when in public (Ludvigsson 2020, Pierre 2020). The Swedish strategy diverged from those pursued elsewhere in Europe and indeed around the globe, and even from the mitigation strategies of the culturally similar and geographically proximate Scandinavian countries. The national approaches pursued in Denmark, Finland and Norway were more stringent, in that they included varying degrees of mandated closure, along with some form of lockdown for

some period of time (Christensen and Læg Reid 2020; Girtli Nygren and Olofsson 2020). Concomitantly, during the initial phase of the pandemic crisis (roughly between the end of January and the end of May 2020) Sweden experienced more per capita deaths than did Denmark, Finland or Norway, and indeed had a higher death rate than the EU as a whole.

The public faces of the Swedish response to the pandemic included chief epidemiologist Anders Tegnell, deputy chief epidemiologist Anders Wallensten, as well as Public Health Agency of Sweden (PHAS) Director General Johan Carlson, who proposed that COVID-19 should be classified as a danger to the society as early as 31 January 2020 (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2020a; 2020b). The first press conference on the issue, sponsored jointly by the Public Health Agency of Sweden and the National Board of Health and Welfare, was held on February 26 (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2020c), with similar events continuing throughout the year. These press conferences were primarily run by the PHAS and a handful of other agencies, but also included external entities such as the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) or county governments, if their participation was deemed relevant. On March 2, the contagion risk for Sweden was upgraded to “very high” (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2020d). During March and April, the PHAS passed a series of measures, albeit most of them in the form of guidelines, ranging from recommendations that people over 70 limit social contact to suggestions encouraging civil society organizations to postpone annual meetings and other major functions. Additionally, gatherings of more than 50 people were prohibited (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2020e;f;g).

General guidelines such as recommendations that people work from home, engage in physical distancing and wash their hands well will remain in place at least until 30 June 2021 (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2020h). As of November 2020, gatherings of more than eight people (including gatherings in public venues) were banned, while alcohol sales were prohibited after 22:00. As of December 7, high school instruction was once again moved online (Regeringskansliet 2020a). The annual budget process included economic measures designed to protect household and business incomes (Regeringskansliet 2020b).

In the early phase of the pandemic, the circle of experts involved was limited to the those working for PHAS. Over the course of 2020, a critical debate resulted in an expansion of this circle. In late 2020, the government stepped in, and since that time policy has been more influenced by political considerations rather than scientific considerations alone, with the government seeking to balance the diverging views of the experts.

In summary the Swedish response was timely and based on expert knowledge. Admittedly, it consisted of a set of voluntary measures, which stirred both international and domestic criticism. This decentralized response was a product of the country's political and administrative system and legal framework (Petridou 2020, Pierre 2020). The voluntary nature of the compliance notwithstanding, the measures were decided upon by national agency experts, based on scientific evidence, with minimal political involvement.

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Folkhälsomyndigheten. 2020f. "Proposal: Further Limitations on Gatherings." <https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/nyheter-och-press/nyhetsarkiv/2020/mars/forslag-ytterligare-begransningar-av-allmanna-sammankomster/>

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Folkhälsomyndigheten. 2020h. "Folkhälsomyndighetens Föreskrifter och Allmänna Råd om Allas Ansvar att Förhindra Smitta av Covid-19 m.m. (HSLF-FS 2020:12)." [https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/globalassets/publicerat-material/foreskrifter/konsoliderade/hslf-fs\\_2020\\_12.pdf](https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/globalassets/publicerat-material/foreskrifter/konsoliderade/hslf-fs_2020_12.pdf)

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Policy Feedback  
and Adaptation  
Score: 7

## Policy Feedback and Adaptation

Swedish policymaking takes place in an open, consensus-driven process. It is also deliberative and geared toward problem-solving, as well as rationalistic, in the sense that great efforts are made to gather as much information as possible about the issue at hand (Pettersson 2016). The pandemic policy response has been no exception to this way of thinking. In terms of long-term policy feedback and learning, in June 2020, the Swedish government appointed a commission of inquiry to evaluate the measures taken to mitigate the spread of the virus. The commission was also charged with conducting an international comparison with other relevant countries. More specifically, the commission was charged with evaluating the performance of crisis-management structures in the government offices, relevant agencies, regions and municipalities during the pandemic, and with assessing how the state's crisis-management principles and allocation of geographical areas of responsibility have functioned. Finally, the commission was tasked with submitting proposals for reform based on the inquiry (Regeringskansliet 2020).

However, the fluidity and the protracted character of the pandemic has also called for continuous monitoring and adaptation. This task falls under the purview of the Public Health Agency of Sweden. This agency coordinates efforts in a dialogue with the government, the National Board for Health and Welfare and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB). Medical data are gathered inter alia from the 21 regions, which are responsible for healthcare provision. The data are reported weekly, and are used to determine the mitigation measures suggested by the agency (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2020). For example, wearing a mask in public places is not a recommended measure in Sweden. This is not necessarily the result of a lack of research on this issue, but rather stems from a judgment call made by the chief epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell, on this issue (see, for example, TV4 2020). In summary, the institutional crisis-management structure provides for the continuous examination and evaluation of data, on both a short-term and long-term basis.

Citation:

Folkhälsomyndigheten. 2020. "Folkhälsomyndighetens Roll under Arbetet med Covid-19." <https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/smittydd-beredskap/utbrott/aktuella-utbrott/covid-19/folkhalsomyndighetens-arbete-med-covid-19/folkhalsomyndighetens-roll-under-arbetet-med-covid-19/>  
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Public  
Consultation  
Score: 8

### Public Consultation

Policymaking at the national level often involves preparatory work performed before a government bill is drafted. In many cases, a commission of inquiry is assembled, which independently investigates a societal problem with a view to finding a policy solution. During the past decade, the quality of these commissions has deteriorated (Dahlström, Lundberg & Pronin 2019). The deliberative process is furthered by the small size of ministries. The commissions are appointed by the parliament, always include experts and generally have a membership that reflects the party-political composition of parliament, though in two-thirds of them, a civil servant drawn from the relevant ministry additionally serves on the commission as an expert or secretary. After a report is completed, a referral process ensues that allows relevant ministries, agencies and civil society organizations to submit comments. The process concludes when the government drafts a bill and submits it to the parliament (Larsson & Bäck, 2008). It is important to note that this referral process is used for all kinds of policy formulation and implementation, public or otherwise, at all levels of governance, and even at the level of organizations. This consensus-based decision-making model is part of a Swedish duality that separates the political and administrative functions (Hall 2016). The authors of any given commission report have regular meetings and constant negotiations with the politicians who ordered the investigation. In practice, conflicts regarding the contents of the report are teased out during that time (Petridou 2020; Petridou and Sparf 2017). During the pandemic too, interest groups intervened in the public debate, and were given a hearing in some commissions.

In summary, the relationship between the political, policymaking and administrative circles in Sweden is designed to accommodate conflicting interests by seeking compromise so everyone will agree on the output. Swedish policymaking is deliberative in the sense that problem-solving is done by various experts, often in the context of commissions of inquiry with input from the agencies and other relevant actors (Hall 2016). Swedish policymaking is rationalistic and oriented toward problem-solving in the sense that great efforts are made to amass as much information as possible about the political issue at hand (Pettersson 2016, Pierre 2020). It is an extensive process during which the proposal is sent out to all relevant organizations for feedback, encouraging a rational debate about the merits of the proposal, with the goal of finding points of consensus among major parties and interest organizations.

## Citation:

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### Crisis Communication

Crisis  
Communication  
Score: 8

The official communication associated with the Swedish government’s response to the coronavirus pandemic reflects the independence accorded to the individual national agencies. The relevant agencies have been responsible for communicating the updated numbers related to the spread of the virus, as well as the broader picture with regard to healthcare and crisis-management issues more generally. The government, by contrast, has communicated the policy measures that have been implemented either directly or indirectly in response to the pandemic.

Beginning on 6 March 2020, the Public Health Agency, the National Board of Health and Welfare, and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) began holding regular joint press briefings (20 – 75 min.) several times a week. The briefings were broadcast live, and the recordings are available with closed captioning and sign-language interpretation on the agency’s YouTube channel (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2020). Several of the press briefings were designed for children.

All three agencies mentioned above publish their information and updates on their websites and through their social media accounts (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube). The National Board of Health and Welfare is also on Instagram, and runs a podcast series. The major public information platform on crises and emergencies is [www.krisinformation.se](http://www.krisinformation.se). The platform is run jointly by the national Swedish agencies, and the information is available in Swedish, English and many other languages, in easy-to-read text as well as in audio formats. The platform has accounts on Facebook and Twitter.

On Monday, 14 December 2020, a mass text message was sent to all registered mobile phone numbers in the country. It read as follows: “Information from

the public agencies: Follow the new stricter national regulations and general advice in order to stop the contagion of COVID-19. Read more on the web site krisinformation.” The message was minimal and intentionally did not include any links – instead, it prompted the recipients to go the public information platform mentioned above. Notably, the Public Health Agency and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency had released information regarding this mass text message before its dispatch in order to prepare the public and minimize confusion. They also explained the rationale for the message’s format, citing security concerns as the reason to eschew links. MSB reported 3.5 million visitors to the Krisinformation website on that Monday, as compared to just 54,000 the previous Monday (MSB 2020).

The text message retained the spirit of personal responsibility and solidarity – that is, the idea that each and every resident is responsible for the well-being of the collective by being careful and following the rules. The verb usage additionally changed, replacing the modal verb “should” (bör) with the imperative mood, for instance in the constructions “avoid public transportation” or “avoid making new contacts with people during a journey” (Krisinformation.se 2020)

A scientific report produced by Gothenburg University indicated that the government’s communication was not fully effective for all parts of society in the spring of 2020. The information did not reach certain areas of the larger cities with a high proportion of immigrant residents (Esaiasson et al. 2020). In November 2020, the national government instructed the Public Health Agency, the counties and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency to collaboratively coordinate, strengthen and develop efforts to communicate information to the public (Regeringen 2020).

Citation:

Esaiasson, Peter, Johansson, Bengt, Ghersetti, Marina & Sohlberg, Jacob. 2020. ”Krisinformation och segregation i en pandemi – hur boende i utsatta områden informerades sig om coronaviruset våren 2020.” Gothenburg University. <https://www.gu.se/nyheter/ny-studie-coronakommunikationen-fungerade-samre-i-utsatta-fororter>

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MSB (Myndigheten för Samhällsskydd och Beredskap). 2020. ”Kraftig Ökning av Trafik till Krisinformation.se.” [https://www.mynewsdesk.com/se/msb/news/kraftig-oekning-av-trafik-till-krisinformation-dot-se-417559?utm\\_campaign=send\\_list](https://www.mynewsdesk.com/se/msb/news/kraftig-oekning-av-trafik-till-krisinformation-dot-se-417559?utm_campaign=send_list)

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Implementation  
of Response  
Measures  
Score: 9

### Implementation of Response Measures

The Swedish government used existing structures to implement new measures designed to ameliorate the consequence of the coronavirus pandemic for regions and municipalities. In summary, in addition to the two regular budgetary processes (in the fall and the spring), the government had as of 25 November 2020 submitted 12 additional budgetary amendment proposals related to the pandemic. The first such proposal was made on March 17, and the last on November 3. The parliament deliberated on them in the time period between March 19 and November 25, with generally short turnaround times. The measures included support for employers and businesses, civil society organizations (especially those addressing domestic violence issues), sports organizations, cultural entities, mass transportation companies including railways, airlines and shipping companies. Moreover, it increased financial support already being provided to students and families with children. The total cost of these financial measures was estimated at just over SEK 200 billion (Regeringskansliet 2020).

On 25 November 2020, the parliament voted to amend and extend the 2020 budget, adding an additional SEK 18.1 billion. Extra funds were to be allocated to municipalities and regions, including for increased testing and other additional coronavirus-related healthcare and social services costs (Finansutskottets betänkade 2020). These funds were channeled to subnational governments – regions and municipalities – using the same institutional arrangements as during non-crisis times.

The allocation of funds is transparent, as reported by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, with detailed information on how much funding has been provided to each municipality and region (SKR 2020). Additionally, municipalities have to apply for these funds; that is, they are not allocated automatically. For example, the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) handled the funds dispersed to regions and municipalities for the purposes of COVID-19 contact tracing. The total number of applications, information on which regions and municipalities applied, as well as the amount they applied for was reported on the National Board's web site (Socialstyrelsen 2020). This transparency is aimed at combating the misuse of public funds. The staff in the various authorities and boards are trained to administer the various policies effectively and transparently.

Overall, crisis measures were continually updated and communicated during the pandemic (krisinformation.se). However, there are no strict laws or prohibitions; rather, the government sought to change human behavior in

everyday life on a voluntary basis, as the PHAS' strategy was based on the assumption that dealing with the pandemic would be a long-term activity.

Citation:

Finansutskottets Betänkande (Statement of the Finance Committee). 2020. "Höständringsbudget för 2020 samt Extra Ändringsbudget för 2020 – Ytterligare Medel till Kommuner och Regioner, Ökad Testning och Andra Merkostnader med Anledning av Coronaviruset samt Ändrade Regler för Kostförmån i Särskilda Fall." 2021/21FiU11. <https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/29BE2543-C7A6-4EED-99D4-75AD210F86AD>

Regeringskansliet (Government Offices of Sweden) 2020. "Ekonomiska Åtgärder för 2020 till Följd av Virusutbrottet." <https://www.regeringen.se/sveriges-regering/finansdepartementet/statsbudget/ekonomiska-atgarder-med-anledning-av-covid-19/>

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SKR (Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner) (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions). "Tillskott av Statsbidrag under 2020." <https://skr.se/ekonomijuridikstatistik/ekonomi/budgetochplanering/statsbidrag/tillskottavstatsbidragunder2020.33681.html>

## National Coordination

National  
Coordination  
Score: 9

The extensive Swedish welfare architecture is based on a decentralized administrative system. Municipalities are in charge of a large part of the provision of public services, such as secondary education and care for the elderly, while the regions are responsible for the provision of healthcare services (Lindström 2016). A series of reforms over the years have reduced the number of subnational units. Currently there are 290 municipalities and 21 regions.

This decentralization and the considerable autonomy accorded to the regional and local levels are encapsulated in the idea of "local self-government." This concept is articulated in the Swedish constitution and legislated in the Local Government Act of 1991 (SFS 1991:900) (Montin 2016). The term "local government" includes both municipalities and counties/regions, which means that municipalities are not subordinate to the regional level; rather, the regional level acts as an intermediary between the local and the national levels. In summary, the local authorities have substantial autonomy (Petridou 2020).

Such decentralization levels in a unitary state require substantial levels of coordination if policies are to be coherent in their formulation, implementation and impact. Crisis-preparedness coordination is largely governed by an agreement between the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKR). In general, there is a broad and well-established structure of networked, collaborative arrangements in all policy fields, involving lateral collaboration and coordination (among the various municipalities and regions) as well as vertical coordination (between the subnational and national levels).

The current three-year agreement, expiring in 2022, is based on legislation and covers issues such as financing by the national government; the obligations of regions and municipalities; spatial delineation of responsibility; training and exercises; and evaluations (MSB 2018). Municipalities and regions are tasked with performing the risk and vulnerability analyses that inform the MSB's annual National Risk and Capacity Assessment (MSB 2019). During 2020, the regions and municipalities' crisis-preparedness officers used the structures that were already in place, but reported coronavirus-related activities and updates more regularly and in parallel to their regular work (Malmö Stad 2020).

In summary, crisis-preparedness management mechanisms are decentralized, but with structures in place to ensure coordination and information exchange between the national and subnational units. These structures allow for measures sensitive to local needs to be implemented within the broad range of national guidelines and policies.

Citation:

Lindström, Anders. 2016. "Introduction: Subnational Government." In Jon Pierre (ed.) "The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics." Oxford: OUP. 365-6.

Malmö Stad (The city of Malmö) 2020. "Personal Communication with the Preparedness Coordinator" 20 November, 2020.

Montin, Stig. 2016. "Municipalities, Regions, and County Councils: Actors and Institutions." In Jon Pierre (ed.) "The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics." Oxford: OUP. 367-82.

MSB (Myndigheten för Samhällsskydd och Beredskap) (The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency). 2019. "Risk- och Sårbarhetsanalyser." <https://www.msb.se/sv/amnesomraden/krisberedskap-civilt-forsvar/risk-och-sarbarhetsanalyser/>

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Petridou, Evangelia. 2020. "Politics and Administration in Times of Crisis: Explaining the Swedish Response to the Covid-19 Crisis." European Policy Analysis n/a. doi:10.1002/epa2.1095

## International Coordination

International  
Coordination  
Score: 6

The Swedish government signaled an early investment in the global fight against COVID-19 with the pledge of SEK 40 million to the World Health Organization's (WHO) Contingency Fund for Emergencies in February 2020 (Regeringskansliet 2020). However, this pledge did not in practice translate into subsequent international collaboration. Countries in general followed the Westphalian order, and turned inward in an effort to protect their own citizens in their own territories (Petridou and Zahariadis, 2021). Moreover, Sweden's liberal response, unique even among its Nordic neighbors, resulted in criticism, a negative portrayal of Sweden in the media in other Nordic countries, and in practice, closed borders to its neighbor countries (Christensen and Lægheid. 2020; Svenska Institutet 2020).

More collaboration was evident in the second phase of the response. The minister for foreign trade and Nordic affairs announced on 13 December 2020 that Sweden would procure vaccines for Norway, Iceland and Switzerland as a means of correcting the mistakes of the first phase of the response in the Nordic countries, which was characterized by a lack of international collaboration (Holmberg 2020). In addition to institutional collaboration through Sweden's EU membership, Sweden is part of the Nordic Cooperation. The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers additionally formulate initiatives and collaborate within the geographical area (Nordic Cooperation 2020). In other words, despite considerable administrative capacity for collaboration, the first phase of the pandemic response was characterized in Sweden, in Scandinavia and other European countries more generally by nationally focused measures, while the logistics of vaccine procurement and distribution are providing an impetus for collaborative action.

Citation:

Christensen, Tom and Per Læg Reid. 2020. "Balancing Governance Capacity and Legitimacy - How the Norwegian Government Handled the Covid-19 Crisis as a High Performer." *Public Administration Review* n/a. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13241>

Holmberg, Carina. 2020. "Nordiskt samarbete ska ta länderna ur krisen." *Sverigesradio*. <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=83&artikel=7622558>

Petridou, Evangelia. 2020. "Politics and Administration in Times of Crisis: Explaining the Swedish Response to the Covid-19 Crisis." *European Policy Analysis* n/a. doi:10.1002/epa2.1095

Petridou, Evangelia and Nikolaos Zahariadis. 2021. "Staying at Home or Going Out? Leadership Response to the Covid-19 Crisis in Greece and Sweden." *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12344>

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Svenska Institutet (The Swedish Institute). 2020. "Hur rapporteras det om Sverige i Norden under coronapandemin?" <https://si.se/hur-rapporteras-det-om-sverige-i-norden-under-coronapandemin/>

## Learning and Adaptation

Learning and  
Adaptation  
Score: 6

Sweden has been a pioneer in Europe in the use of policy evaluation (Knill and Tosun 2012). Policy formulation is based on institutionalized evaluations at all levels of government. At the national level, the preparatory work in advance of the drafting of a government bill or amendments to existing legislation is carried out by commissions of inquiry. The crisis-management and policy responses following the outbreak of coronavirus were no exception to this rule. A commission was appointed by the government on 30 June 2020 to evaluate the Swedish response to the pandemic in a comparative perspective. The evaluation of the containment measures taken at the national and subnational levels was intended to generate social and policy lessons (Regeringskansliet 2020). Evaluations in Sweden are routinely used as input in policymaking, especially when they are the products of high-profile commissions (such as the COVID-19 commission).

At the subnational level, plans and documents relating to municipal crisis management are regularly reported to the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) through the county boards at the regional level. Risk and vulnerability assessments are conducted annually, with the results reported to the county board every four years, or at the latest on 31 October after a municipal council election (MSB 2019). During the pandemic, this reporting has been more frequent.

The pitfalls of careful planning notwithstanding (Keller et al. 2012), Sweden has a robust evaluation structure in place, enabling organizational learning following crises. As noted, evaluations were being carried out at the time of writing, and it remained to be seen whether they would result in reforms.

Citation:

Keller, Ann C., Chris K. Ansell, Arthur L. Reingold, Mathilde Bourrier, Mark D. Hunter, Sahai Burrowes and Theresa M. MacPhail. 2012. "Improving Pandemic Response: A Sensemaking Perspective on the Spring 2009 H1N1 Pandemic." *Risk, Hazards & Crisis in Public Policy* 3: 1-37.

Knill, Christoph and Jale Tosun. 2012. "Public Policy: A New Introduction." New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Posavac, Emil J. and Raymond G. Carey. 2007. "Program Evaluation: Methods and Case Studies." Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Regeringskansliet (Government Offices of Sweden). 2020. "Coronakommissionens Ledamöter Utsedda." <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2020/07/coronakommissionens-ledamoter-utsedda/>

### III. Resilience of Executive Accountability

#### Open Government

Open  
Government  
Score: 10

The bulk of the information regarding the coronavirus pandemic is published by the Public Health Agency of Sweden (PHAS) on the agency's website. Additionally, information is available at [www.krisinformation.se](http://www.krisinformation.se), which is a website that publishes information from all public Swedish agencies during crises. The PHAS offers current and historical information regarding infection rates on the basis of multiple variables such as region, municipality, age and gender. The raw data may be downloaded, and the maps on the website are interactive (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2020). Current and historical weekly reports, as well as archived press conferences, are also available on the website. The website of the government of Sweden also offers current and historical information regarding coronavirus-related measures (Regeringskansliet 2020). The information is easy to find and accessible by the public.



Health-related information is additionally provided at the regional and municipal levels. For example, the region of Jämtland Härjedalen provides weekly statistics regarding case numbers, hospitalizations, fatalities and the number of people discharged from hospitals (Region Jämtland Härjedalen 2020). The website links to the national websites mentioned above in a way that is clear and accessible.

Citation:

Regeringskansliet. (Government Offices of Sweden) 2020. "The Government's Work with the COVID-19 Pandemic." <https://www.regeringen.se>

Folkhälsomyndigheten (Public Health Agency of Sweden). 2020. "Confirmed Cases in Sweden – Daily Updates." <https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/smittskydd-beredskap/utbrott/aktuella-utbrott/covid-19/statistik-och-analyser/bekraftade-fall-i-sverige/>

Region Jämtland Härjedalen 2020. "The Corona Virus and COVID-19 – For You who Wants to Know More." <https://www.regionjh.se/kampanjsidor/coronaviruset/covid19.4.236a06661703ffc4fb616555.html>

### Legislative Oversight

Legislative  
Oversight  
Score: 10

Operations in Sweden's parliament (the Riksdag) largely moved online during the pandemic. Earlier investments in communication infrastructure, including internet connectivity in the entire country, facilitated this transition, enabling remote participation for public servants and politicians.

The Riksdag Administration (Riksdagsförvaltningen), the authority tasked with supporting the Swedish parliament in fulfilling its duties adopted a series of measures enabling the work of the Riksdag to continue during the pandemic. Meetings were as a rule held digitally, though physical meetings were allowed under certain circumstances. All 349 members continued to work, but only 55 members were allowed to be in the chambers during voting. Parties were allowed to decide which of their members would physically participate in every vote – in other words, it was not the same 55 members present every time, and the members attending were free to sit wherever they chose (Riksdagen 2020). The date for deliberations on EU matters was postponed to January 2021 (from the scheduled date of November 2020), and the latter part of 2020 featured fewer votes than the first six months of 2020 (Riksdagen 2020a). Having said this, the legislature was able to convene, debate and vote, and made the proceedings available to the public as required by law.

On 16 December 2020, the Constitution Committee voted to submit the Riksdag's work during the pandemic to evaluation by a cross-party committee. The evaluation is focused on three primary issues: first, given the urgency of the decision-making necessitated by the pandemic, the committee will assess

whether the parliament's decisions had adhered to statutes, budgetary requirements and EU issues. Second, the committee would evaluate participation conditions for members of parliament, given the restrictions on physical presence. Finally, the committee will assess the support and service provided to the members of parliament by the Parliament Administration. The committee, consisting of 12 members from seven parties, was expected to deliver its report in November 2021 (Riksdagen 2020b).

Citation:

Riksdagen (Swedish Parliament) 2020. "Riksdagens Arbete med Anledning av Coronaviruset." <https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/riksdagens-arbete-med-anledning-av-coronaviruset/>

Riksdagen (Swedish Parliament) 2020a. "Dokument och Lagar (2019/20, 2020/21)." <https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/?riksmote=2020/21,2019/20&doktyp=votering&p=7>

Riksdagen (Swedish Parliament) 2020b. "Direktiv för en Parlamentarisk Utredning om Riksdagens Arbete under Coronapandemin." <https://www.riksdagen.se/globalassets/08.-sa-funkar-riksdagen/riksdagsforvaltningen/riksdagsstyrelsen/direktiv-for-en-parlamentarisk-utredning-om-riksdagens-arbete-under-coronapandemin.pdf>

### Independent Supervisory Bodies

Auditing  
Score: 9

The agency tasked with auditing in Sweden is the Swedish National Audit Office (Riksrevisionen; NAO). The operations of the NAO were not affected by the pandemic, in the sense that audits have been published as planned in 2020, while the full calendar for publication of 2021 audits is on time and available online on the agency's web site (Riksrevisionen 2020a; 2020b).

The NAO is an independent public agency reporting to the parliament, charged with auditing public agencies and operations. It examines whether public agencies follow relevant directives, rules and statutes, and whether goals are reached in an effective way. If this is not the case, it provides recommendations for the improvement of agency operations. The NAO was established after a 2003 reform for the purpose of overseeing Swedish public agencies' financial operations, and for additionally ensuring that resources are used in accordance with the decisions made by the parliament (Riksrevisionen 2020c). From this perspective, the NAO has the ability to assess whether the budgetary measures adopted by the parliament have followed the existing regulatory framework. It is not within its purview, however, to evaluate the implementation of these measures. No evaluation of this kind was conducted in 2020, and none was planned for 2021.

Having said this, the Swedish NAO did conduct an audit of the governmental implementation of the fiscal policy framework in 2020 as reflected in the state budget (2020c). The National Institute for Economic Research (Konjunkturinstitutet; NIER) has expressed concern about Sweden's rising spending and debt levels (Konjunkturinstitutet 2020); however, the remit of

the NAO was only to ensure that the budgetary measures did not contravene existing rules and regulations. The audit found that the budgetary measures were broadly in line with the fiscal policy framework, but that there had been some deviations, including the increase in the spending limit for 2020 and 2021. The audit report contended that this increase raised the risk that expenditures would be less effectively prioritized. It concluded that the size of temporary vis-à-vis permanent budgetary expenditures should be stated more clearly in the budget, including a detailed justification. The audit recommended that in the spring budget bill for 2021 at the latest, the government should 1) show how the budget would return toward the goal of surplus, 2) present new expenditure-ceiling proposals to the parliament that take into account the way expenditures might develop over time, and 3) present a clearer picture of the effects of the budgetary measures, so that the relative sizes of the temporary and permanent expenditures could be more easily grasped (Riksrevisionen 2020d).

It is unclear how an audit of the implementation of the coronavirus-related measures will be conducted, or which agency would conduct it, as the remit of the Corona Commission is specifically to evaluate infection-containment measures (Regeringskansliet 2020).

Citation:

Konjunkturinstitutet (National Institute for Economic Research (NIER)). 2020. "Utvärdering av Makroekonomiska Prognoser." [https://www.konj.se/download/18.16add5b5171ac20b6c43c37b/1588148484912/Specialstudie\\_prognosjämförelse%202020.pdf](https://www.konj.se/download/18.16add5b5171ac20b6c43c37b/1588148484912/Specialstudie_prognosjämförelse%202020.pdf)

Regeringskansliet (Government Offices of Sweden). 2020. "Coronakommissionens Ledamöter Utsedda." <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2020/07/coronakommissionens-ledamoter-utsedda/>

Riksrevisionen. (The Swedish NAO). 2020a. "Rapporter och Andra Granskningsresultat." <https://www.riksrevisionen.se/rapporter.html>

Riksrevisionen. (The Swedish NAO). 2020b. "Nu Granskas." <https://www.riksrevisionen.se/nu-granskas.html>

Riksrevisionen. (The Swedish NAO). 2020c. "Om Riksrevisionen." <https://www.riksrevisionen.se/om-riksrevisionen.html>

Riksrevisionen. (The Swedish NAO). 2020d. "Den Finanspolitiska Ramverket – Regeringens Tillämpning 2020." RIR 2020: 29. [https://www.riksrevisionen.se/download/18.78abb6c61764bda823b43426/1608109048035/RiR%202020\\_29%20Anpassad.pdf](https://www.riksrevisionen.se/download/18.78abb6c61764bda823b43426/1608109048035/RiR%202020_29%20Anpassad.pdf)

Data Protection  
Score: 9

The public agency charged with protecting individual privacy in Sweden has been the Swedish Data Protection Authority (Datainspektionen; DPA). In January 2021, this agency changed its name to the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection (Integritetsskyddsmyndigheten; IMY). The data-protection regulatory reform in 2018 increased this agency's remit, which is to protect citizens' personal information, including health and financial data. For this reason, individual infection information is considered health data, and the IMY regulates the way it is handled. In general, sensitive health information may not be disclosed, but employers may do so if they are fulfilling their

obligations under the labor laws. For example, the question of whether an individual is infected with COVID-19 is considered personal health information, while information on an employee having returned from a risk area is not. Personal health information is considered sensitive, and may not be made public (Datainspektionen 2020).

The agency is less clear regarding the issue of digital contact tracing. First, the responsibility regarding data collection from apps and mobile networks belongs to a different body, the Post and Telecom Board (Post- och telestyrelsen). The IMY stated that it had not received any inquiries regarding digital contact tracing involving individuals (Datainspektionen 2020a). Sweden did not use a digital application for contact tracing due to questions about the handling of personal information. Moreover, the public is reported to have a negative attitude regarding the use of such digital tools (Kävrestad and Padyap 2020).

Citation:

Datainspektionen. 2020a. "Coronaviruset och Digital Smittspårning."

<https://www.datainspektionen.se/nyheter/coronaviruset-och-digital-smittsparning/>

Datainspektionen. 2020b. "Om Datainspektionen." <https://www.datainspektionen.se/om-oss/>

Kävrestad, Joakim and Padyap, Ali. 2020. "Majoriteten Svenskar är emot Appar för Smittspårning."

Forskning.se. <https://www.forskning.se/2020/11/12/majoriteten-svenskar-ar-emot-appar-for-smittsparning/>

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