

National report on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in Sweden

March 2021

Sweden

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Executive Summary

Sweden has a long tradition of active urban planning and development. During the last decades, the quality and potential of urban environments have got much attention and the issues of sustainable urban development have been subject to much discussion and a large number of local, regional and national initiatives. Sustainable urban development comprises sustainable construction and sustainable planning of homes, infrastructure, public places, transport, recycling and safer chemicals management. This in turn requires new technology and cooperation between several sectors. Inclusive and innovative urban planning is needed to make cities safe and sustainable for the future. Today, a majority of the Swedish population live in urban areas. Slums do not exist in any conventional sense; virtually all homes have functioning water, sewage, waste management, and heating, and street networks are lit. Nonetheless, there is a lack of housing, especially for households with low income. Segregation is another challenge. Sweden's national report on the NUA implementation has been carried out with limited resources in cooperation between the Ministry of Finance and the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning. The monitoring is based on available material such as official reports, evaluations and statistics.

Stakeholders and Partnerships

The making of the NUA report has not included any far-reaching cooperation with certain stakeholders. The Swedish association for local and regional authorities has been consulted, since they provide open data about the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on the local and regional level. However, there are many different initiatives among stakeholders in urban development – both by NGO:s local, academy and business as well as regional and national authorities.

Covid-19 Response

The Swedish Government has presented a range of different measures to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus and to mitigate the economic impact of it. The government's overarching goal is to safeguard people's lives and health and to secure the health care capacity. The Government's policy and decisions aim to:

- Limit the spread of infection in the country
- Ensure health care resources are available
- Limit the impact on critical services
- Alleviate the impact on people and companies
- Ease concern, for example by providing information
- Ensure that the right measures are taken at the right time.

Sustainable Development Goals

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|  | Goal 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere |
|  | Goal 2 - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture |
|  | Goal 3 - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages |
|  | Goal 4 - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all |
|  | Goal 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls |
|  | Goal 6 - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all |
|  | Goal 7 - Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all |
|  | Goal 8 - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all |
|  | Goal 9 - Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation |
|  | Goal 10 - Reduce inequality within and among countries |
|  | Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable |
|  | Goal 13 - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts |
| | |



Goal 14 - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development



Goal 15 - Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Part 1: Transformative Commitments for Sustainable Urban Development

1: Transformative Commitments for Sustainable Urban Development

1.1. Sustainable Urban Development for Social Inclusion and Ending Poverty

1.1.1. Social Inclusion and Ending Poverty

- **Eradicate poverty in all its forms**

Fighting poverty is part of the general social welfare policy, which has been applied for more than a hundred years (of course with changes and modifications over time). The policy is a complex mix of strategies with respect to welfare subsidies, free education, progressive taxation as well as labour market legislation. Fighting poverty is not particularly connected to sustainable urban development. However, several government actions have focused on upgrading of living conditions in urban areas with certain needs, in order to reduce spatial segregation and the number of people living in overcrowded conditions.

- **Address inequality in urban areas by promoting equally shared opportunities and benefits**

Formal equal rights for all adult citizens (in judicial and political respects) have been supported in legislation since decades. However, differences in financial position as well as educational background most naturally always have an impact on the individual's possibilities to affect decisions and take part of benefits. Municipalities take actions to involve local citizens and stakeholders in urban planning processes. There are also different national initiatives. For example, a government grant is provided for measures to improve green structures and public security in urban areas with socioeconomic challenges.

- **Enhance social inclusion of vulnerable groups (women, youth, older persons and persons with disabilities and migrants)**

The planning and building act as well as the construction rules provides quite strong support for the disabled in terms of availability requirements. Quite recently, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was incorporated in Swedish legislation. This might potentially somewhat strengthen the position of citizens under the age of 18 in a number of urban matters. The National Board of Planning, Building and Housing (Boverket) has recently investigated if and how the rules in the convention influence spatial planning in Sweden. The authority will soon provide planning authorities (i.e. local and regional councils) with guidelines on how to put the convention's rules into action in planning processes.

- **Ensure equal access to public spaces including streets, sidewalks, and cycling lane**

General access to public space is ensured through active local spatial planning under the strict planning and building act. The local municipality councils carry out the spatial planning.

1.1.2. Access to Adequate Housing

- **Ensure access to adequate and affordable housing**

The general housing supply per capita is among the highest in the world, largely due to earlier subsidised construction programs. The quality of the housing stock is high, due to strict construction rules. Rental housing is generally affordable to a large share of the population, particularly due to a general, soft, rent control regime. However, rents in new production are visibly higher than in the older stock due to high production prices. Another aspect is that Sweden does not have social housing (low-cost housing designated only to households in need), and there is in fact no systematic strategy for ensuring access to housing for households most in need.

- **Ensure access to sustainable housing finance options**

Households finance their owned housing to large extent through mortgage loans from mortgage lenders and banks. This source of lending works well, and housing mortgages are highly available at low costs for households that meet income requirements. Most naturally, this means households with low income and small savings have difficulties getting hold of housing mortgage loans and may instead be referred to more costly consumer loans. There are no longer any general Government-supplied subsidised housing mortgages available, for rental housing there is, since 2016, an investment aid and for owned dwellings (home-ownership and tenant-ownership) there is interest deduction for part of the interest expenditures. A Public Inquiry was initiated by the Government in December 2020 with the mission of presenting proposals that will make it easier for households to buy their first home. The inquiry will report on its remit by no later than November 1st 2021.

- **Establish security of tenure**

The rental act ensures tenants, i.e. holders of rental contract, in multi-family rental housing a far-reaching tenure security. Second-hand tenants of rental apartments have less secure tenure, however they too are to some extent supported through the general rental act.

- **Establish slum upgrading programmes**

Slums do not exist in Sweden anymore.

1.1.3. Access to Basic Services

- **Provide access to safe drinking water, sanitation and solid waste disposal**

Safe drinking water is supplied in all urban areas by the respective local council. Strict general legislation regulates water protection, water supply, and sewage instalments. Water and sewage costs are covered entirely by fees, paid by the customers.

- **Ensure access to safe and efficient public transport system**

Safe and efficient public transportation systems are provided nation-wide. Public transportation supply (along with health care) is the major responsibility of the regional councils. They operate under strict general legislation.

- **Provide access to modern renewable energy**

A nation-wide efficient energy supply has been in place for decades. Energy supply is primarily based on hydroelectric power, nuclear power and various forms of fossil power, however with a gradually growing share of wind power. Phasing out fossil energy is a political focus and central government strategy. District heating totally dominates the supply in urban areas.

1.2. Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Prosperity and Opportunities for All

1.2.1. Inclusive Urban Economy

- **Achieve productive employment for all including youth employment**

A nation-wide programme for promoting full employment has been in place for decades. The programme includes employment service, unemployment securities, education, tax rules, etc. The programme is part of the labour market policies, rather than the policy for sustainable urban development.

- **Strengthen the informal economy**

There are no official ambitions to strengthen the informal economy. However, certain tax rules (Swedish: ROT and RUT) are designed in order to give incentives for small enterprises in the construction industry to be included in the formal economy.

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1.2.2. Sustainable Prosperity for All

- **Diversify of the urban economy and promote cultural and creative industries**

Cultural and creative industries are in many cases promoted through public employment. There are also certain cases of government subsidies to enterprises and activities within these industries.

- **Develop technical and entrepreneurial skills to thrive in a modern urban economy**

All schooling is free of charge and open to everyone. Schooling up to 9th grade is compulsory and an additional 2-3 years at upper secondary school are largely encouraged. Higher education is also free of charge. Most youngsters attend some kind of higher education.

- **Develop urban-rural linkages to maximize productivity**

The industrialisation and urbanisation processes have gone so far, under such a long time, so the issue is no longer that of productivity maximisation (if it has ever been). The issue is rather that of supporting certain rural areas with public services, and timely enabling the supply of housing and transportation in the growing urban areas. A program for gradually including (close to) all properties in a fibre network has been launched and will be completed within a few years.

1.3.1. Resilience, Mitigation and Adaptation of Cities and Human Settlements

- **Minimize urban sprawl and loss of biodiversity resulting from it**

In practice, urban sprawl is not really a problem in Sweden. The current demographic and construction processes points towards an urbanisation process with concentration of people and housing to central locations in the cities and regional centres. Urban municipalities tend to densify their urban districts, e.g. by turning previous brownfields into new attractive residential and mixed-use districts. But there is also a smaller trend where people move to the countryside within commuting distance to cities and regional centres. Overall, Swedish towns and urban areas are getting denser since the urban population is growing at a faster rate than the area of cities. Urban sprawl and related negative consequences are prevented as almost no construction may take place without building permits and a spatial planning decided by the local municipality council in accordance with the strict Planning and Building act.

- **Implement climate change mitigation and adaptation actions**

The main tools for curbing climate mitigation are development of new techniques and the carbon dioxide tax as well as other fees and taxes on environmentally harmful emissions and activities. Actions to curb risks due to climate change and adapt to new realities are mainly taken by municipalities suffering from either floods or droughts, while little action is taken by the national government.

- **Develop systems to reduce the impact of natural and human-made disasters**

The planning process under the planning and building act in combination with the environmental protection process under the environmental protection act is the basis for the Swedish system. Several other authorities, working under other laws, are involved in the control, reduction and prevention of disasters.

- **Build urban resilience through quality infrastructure and spatial planning**

All urban development is taking place following spatial planning carried out by the respective municipality council under the planning and building act. The development process takes place under the surveillance of professionals employed by the council. The councils are supported by guidelines from the national authority for planning, building and housing and the national authority for environmental protection, as well as other national authorities.

1.3.2. Sustainable Management and Use of Natural Resources

- **Strengthen the sustainable management of natural resources in urban areas**

Guidelines for valuation, safeguarding and develop eco systems services in urban areas are provided by the national authority for planning, building and housing. Blue-green structure plans are also tools used in planning of urban areas. Moreover, both the environmental protection act and the planning and building act include several rules on management and protection of natural resources in urban areas (and everywhere). 14% of Sweden's total land area (including lakes and streams) is protected nature areas (i.e. national parks, nature preserves and more). Many of these areas are situated in or close to urban areas.

- **Drive resource conservation and waste reduction, reuse, and recycling**

Waste management is carried out under the environmental protection act. The municipality councils are responsible for household waste. Waste is collected at each household, but recycling hubs are also available where households may deposit fractions of waste separately. Enterprises have a more far-reaching responsibility for their waste management. Circular economy is enhanced within all sectors.

- **Implement environmentally sound management of water resources and urban coastal areas**

A general shoreland protection applies to all coastal areas, lakes, waterways and islands throughout Sweden. Local municipality councils and regional councils cooperate with the national authority for environmental protection regarding management of water resources. Coast-zones are managed by the municipalities in co-operation with the national authority for marine and water management.

- **Adopt a smart-city approach that leverages digitization, clean energy and technologies**

Major towns and cities have a smart-city approach, benchmarking with international frontrunners.

Part 2: Effective Implementation

2: Effective Implementation

2.1. Building the Urban Governance Structure: Establishing a Supportive Framework

- **Decentralize to enable Subnational and local governments undertake their assigned responsibilities**

The full responsibility for all rural and urban development is in various ways split between the national government, the regional councils and the local municipality councils. Each responsibility is carefully defined legally in the different laws concerned (including among others the Planning and Building Act and the Environmental Code (protection act). Perhaps, the most remarkable element in the Swedish model for distributing the responsibilities is the extraordinary strong position that has been given to the local municipality council concerning spatial planning. All planning is certainly carried out under the general Planning and Building Act, but it is still basically a local matter (unless there is a conflict with interests of utmost national importance). The only national spatial planning is infrastructure plans.

- **Link urban policies to finance mechanisms and budgets**

We have not been able to answer this question.

- **Develop legal and policy frameworks to enhance the ability of governments to implement urban policies**

We have not been able to answer this question.

- **Build the capacity of local and Subnational governments to implement local and metropolitan multilevel governance**

Major regions are commissioned by central government to draft comprehensive regional plans. These are developed in dialogue with the municipalities within each region.

- **Implement participatory, age- and gender-responsive approaches to urban policy and planning**

The foundation for participation is the democratic political institutions. These are open to all adult citizens. Still, certain measures have been taken to support participation beyond everyone's responsibility to take active part in the democratic political processes, including local spatial planning. These measures include public information meetings concerning new development plans.

- **Achieve women's full participation in all fields and all levels of decision-making**

Gender equality has developed for the last century in Sweden and is even today a particular focus by our feminist central government.

- **Implement integrated and balanced territorial development policies**

The planning and building act (as well as all other laws that affect the urban development process) is designed with the ambition to force the planning process to take all relevant aspects and interests into account in a well-balanced way. The national government has decided on many objectives in various areas (natural and cultural environment, transport, etc.), and more than a hundred of these goals are supposed to be considered by the municipalities while making their physical plans. Most municipalities (with exception for the least populated) employ well-educated planners to support the local political assemblies to achieve a good, balanced planning which takes all relevant aspects and interest into account.

- **Integrate housing into urban development plans**

Same as above.

- **Include culture as a priority component of urban planning**

Same as above.

- **Implement planned urban extensions and infill, urban renewal and regeneration of urban areas**

Same as above.

- **Improve capacity for urban planning and design, and training for urban planners at all levels of government**

Urban planners generally have a masters degree in planning (5 years education at a university). University studies are free of charge and open to everyone that meet the qualification requirements. The supply of programs that are suitable for the planning profession is good.

- **Strengthen the role of small and intermediate cities and towns**

The main program for strengthening cities in the province is that of establishing public universities and colleges in most intermediate cities, as well as relocating certain national government authorities and other government-financed public activities from the capital (Stockholm) to intermediate cities. This programme has been on-going over several decades, with time-varying intensity.

- **Implement sustainable multimodal public transport systems including non-motorized options**

Urban planners generally have a masters degree in planning (5 years education at a university). University studies are free of charge and open to everyone that meet the qualification requirements. The supply of programs that are suitable for the planning profession is good.

2.3. Means of Implementation

- **Develop financing frameworks for implementing the NUA at all levels of government**

The solid base for financing government investments in the urban development process is borrowing, whereas maintenance, operation and annual investment costs are be financed by annual taxes and fees. Financial stability and a large and stable tax base are fundamental for securing availability of financing at low cost. In order to maintain trust in government participation in infrastructure investments from financial markets and the general public it is important to apply cost-benefit analyses to all projects and to reject the non-profitable ones. Certain larger projects are also financed through public-private partnership.

- **Mobilize endogenous (internal) sources of finance and expand the revenue base of Subnational and local governments**

Not applied and not necessary in Sweden.

- **Formulate sound systems of financial transfers from national to Subnational and local governments based on needs, priorities and functions**

Taxes are collected at each of the three levels (national, regional, local municipality). Transfers from the national to subnational levels, as well as transfers among the subnational levels, are also applied. This is done, based on needs etc., following a thorough and complex model.

- **Mobilize and establish financial intermediaries (multilateral institutions, regional development banks, Subnational and local development funds; pooled financing mechanisms etc.) for urban financing**

Not applied and not necessary in Sweden.

- **Expand opportunities for city-to-city cooperation and fostering exchanges of urban solutions and mutual learning**

There are no formal limitations for co-operation and mutual learning. Municipalities are generally very interested in mutual learning. Politicians and professionals at the subnational level study each other's initiative. They recurrently participate in national seminars on urban issues, where projects and initiatives are reviewed. The national authority for planning, building and housing (Boverket) analyses and reports on activities in the field, aiming at supporting the local municipalities. Furthermore, there are several university departments within the applied field of urban studies that analyse and evaluate urban projects and policies. The findings are reported in research papers, on national seminars and in media, thus providing a platform for learning. The applied research is also reported and analysed in international academic journals and seminars. One problem, however, is the relative shortage of good official statistics on spatial planning.

- **Implement capacity development as an effective, multifaceted approach to formulate, implement, manage, monitor and evaluate urban development policies**

The Planning and Building Act requests that each municipality should have professional support by an architect. National guidelines and seminars support municipal staff in their work. In addition, the Association of Local Authorities and Regions support their members within these questions as well. In all major planning matters, environmental assessments are carried out.

- **Build capacity at all levels of government to use data for evidence-based policy formulation including collecting and using data for minority groups**

See above.

- **Build the capacity of all levels of government to work with vulnerable groups to participate effectively in decision-making about urban and territorial development**

See above.

- **Engage local government associations as promoters and providers of capacity development**

See above.

- **Implement capacity development programmes on the use of legal land-based revenue, financing, and other tools**

See above.

- **Implement capacity development programmes of Subnational and local governments in financial planning and management**

See above.

- **Increase cooperation and knowledge exchange on science, technology and innovation to benefit sustainable urban development**

See above.

- **Develop user-friendly, participatory data and digital platforms through e-governance and citizen-centric digital governance tools**

Efficient longitudinal data production should generally be based on registries, rather than on surveys. Several high-quality records on real property, demography and socio-economic variables are in use and Statistics Sweden produces extensive publicly available statistics on the data. Some of the records have been carefully maintained in detail for several hundred years. This has been a great advantage for the nation for the purpose of analysing and evaluating development in so many fields. Still, regarding urban development Sweden still has a long way to walk. Few of the data series refers to spatial planning.

- **Expand deployment of frontier technologies and innovations to enhance shared prosperity of cities and regions**

The Swedish Innovation Agency VINNOVA supports certain innovative urban development projects that may result in findings that are useful on a larger scale.

- **Implement digital tools, including geospatial information systems to improve urban and territorial planning, land administration and access to urban services**

The real property registry includes geocode information for each piece of property. This record is one of the base records in the Swedish data system, and key variables (including geocodes) are linked to data on other major records.

- **Build capacities at all levels of government to effectively monitor the implementation of urban development policies**

See above. One needs quantitative longitudinal data on urban development variables that stretches over decades in order to be able to fully evaluate policies. Sweden has excellent data production in general. However, more needs to be done within the field of spatial planning.

- **Strengthen all levels of government and the civil society in the collection, disaggregation, and analysis of data**

See above.

Part 3: Follow-up and Review

3. Follow-up and Review

The real implementation of the New Urban Agenda is mainly taking place at the local level, above all through the planning and building process. The Government's role is to create tools and good opportunities for sustainable development in cities and communities. Sweden's national report on the NUA implementation has been carried out with limited resources in cooperation between the Ministry of Finance and the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning. The monitoring is based on available material such as official reports, evaluations and statistics. One important source is the annual report from Statistics Sweden on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Sweden (Statistical Review 2021). The report highlights some factors connected to SDG 11 as particularly notable in a Swedish context. These are a growing number of people living in overcrowded conditions, a densification of cities, improved access to public transportation and good access to green areas. There are several cooperation projects and initiatives aiming to facilitate and strengthen the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, some of them focusing on urban development. For example, the think tank Global Utmaning made a report 2017 in order to highlight the local implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It particularly illustrates how the SDG11 can be integrated with the New Urban Agenda on the local level.

Additional Information

1. Website: <https://www.government.se/information-material/2018/06/strategy-for-liveable-cities/>
2. Social Media

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