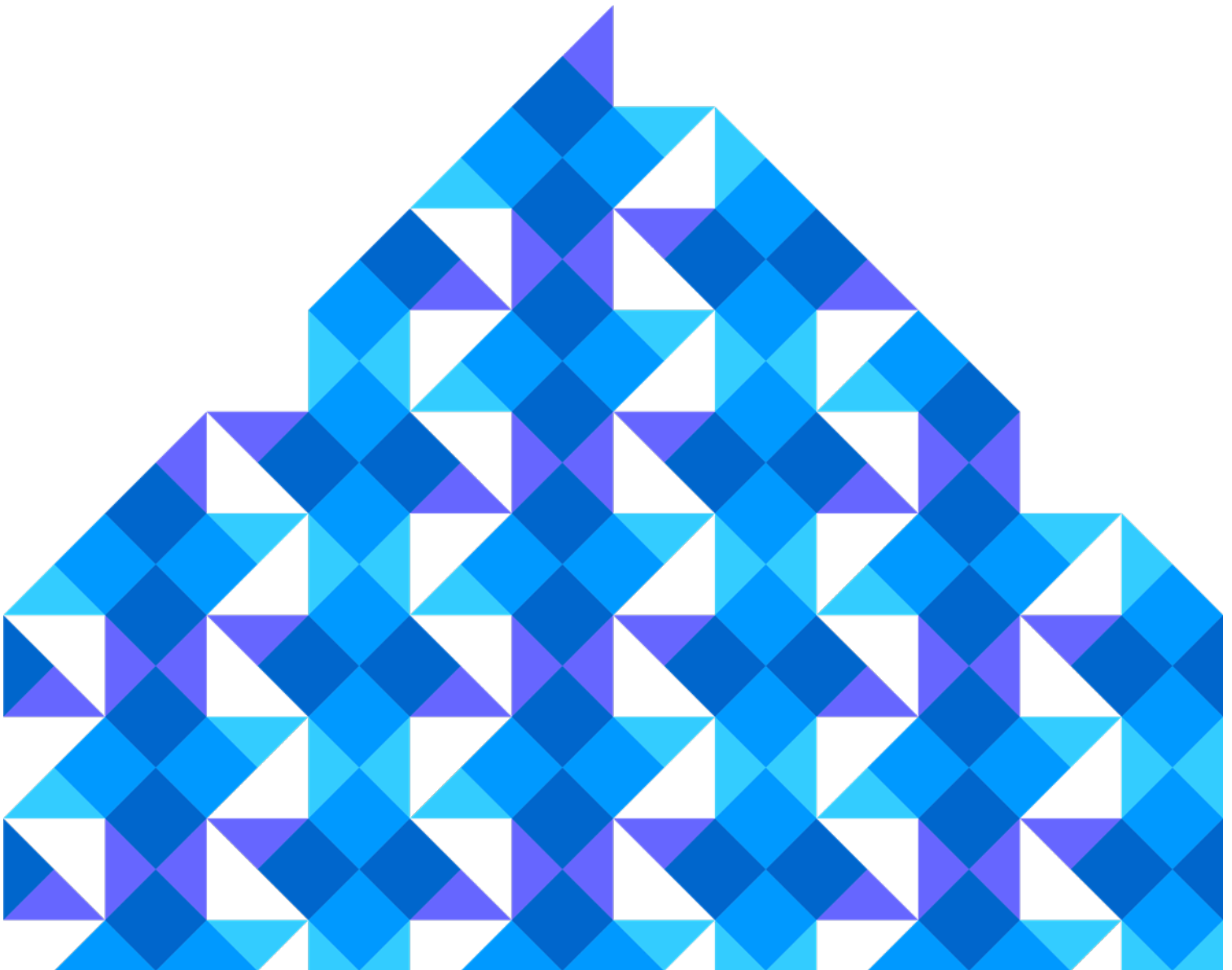


Disability Policy in Sweden

An overview



Swedish Agency for Participation, 2023

Disability Policy in Sweden – An overview

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Summary

Sweden's disability policy is based on international commitments in the area of human rights and is part of the work to ensure a more equitable society in which people's different backgrounds or situations should not determine whether they can participate in society. Measures to prevent and counteract discrimination are fundamental to ensuring that the equality of all human beings is respected. Preventing all forms of discrimination is therefore an important part of the work to ensure equality and participation.

Taking the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a starting point, the national goal for disability policy is to achieve equal living conditions and full participation for persons with disabilities in a society based on diversity. This goal will contribute to greater gender equality and consideration of the children's rights perspective.

Gender equality is an important part of disability policy and is clearly stated in the national goal for disability policy. Closing the gap between girls and boys and women and men with disabilities is prioritised. It is important to clarify the rights of the child in all measures concerning children with disabilities. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children are individuals with their own rights, and their best interests must be considered in all actions that affect them.

People's individual situations and needs are also a fundamental starting point in the work on socially sustainable development. The goals set as part of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, which, among other things, aim to realise human rights for all, are an important part of this work (Government Bill 2016/17:188).

An essential component of the implementation of the national goal for disability policy is to, in accordance with the Convention, closely consult with, and actively involve, persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through the organisations that represent them.

The focus of the Government's new disability policy strategy is on monitoring the national goal for disability policy. The strategy emphasises the government agencies' sectoral governance as the basis for the implementation of disability policy, which is based on the principle of responsibility and financing. Each sector in society is responsible for ensuring that disability policy is implemented (Government Bill 1999/2000:79).

Cross-sectoral governance of disability policy

The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs has responsibility for the coordination of disability policy and is accordingly also responsible for coordinating Sweden's report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Government Bill 2016/17:73).

All government agencies have an explicit responsibility for disability policy. The basic responsibilities of the government agencies are regulated in Ordinance (2001:526) on the responsibility of government agencies for the implementation of disability policy. Under Section 1 of this ordinance, government agencies must design and conduct their activities with consideration for the disability policy goals. The government agencies must work to ensure that persons with disabilities are given full participation in societal life and equal living conditions. Under Section 2 of the same ordinance, government agencies are obliged to make their premises, activities and information accessible to persons with disabilities by, among other things, conducting inventories and preparing action plans. The government agencies must, where there is reason to do so, consult with the Agency for Participation on how initiatives pursuant to the ordinance should be designed, as stipulated in Section 3 of the same ordinance.

The government agencies' sectoral governance is the basis for the implementation of disability policy and is based on the principle of responsibility and financing. This principle essentially means that each sector of society is responsible for ensuring that disability policy is implemented. The whole of society is responsible for ensuring that people are not excluded and that all people's skills are utilised. The costs of removing obstacles and creating accessibility for all people will be financed within the framework of regular activities. In accordance with the specification of the principle, each sector must design and carry out its activities so that they are accessible to all citizens, including persons with disabilities.

To more effectively implement disability policy, the following government agencies have been assigned a sectoral responsibility: the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Swedish Work Environment Authority, the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the Swedish Post and Telecom Authority, the Swedish National Heritage Board, the Swedish National Agency for Education, the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare and the Swedish Arts Council. According to the instructions for these government agencies, they must coordinate, support and be the driving force in relation to other actors in the sector. The Swedish Consumer Agency also has a particular responsibility in that it must integrate a disability perspective into its activities and, based on this, support and urge other relevant parties.

National goal and focus

Taking the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a starting point, the national goal for disability policy is to achieve equal living conditions and full participation in society for persons with disabilities. This goal will contribute to greater gender equality and consideration of the children's rights perspective.¹

To achieve the national goal, the implementation of disability policy will target four areas:

- the principle of universal design
- accessibility shortcomings
- individual support and solutions for individual independence
- preventing and countering discrimination

These four areas are interdependent. The aim is that they will together contribute to an accessible and equitable society regardless of functional capacity. Responsible actors are thus given guidance in their activities to ensure that the national goal for disability policy can be achieved. The focus is also useful for actors at other levels of society – nationally, regionally and locally. The proposed focus areas will also be able to contribute to the operationalisation of the national goal for disability policy at different levels of society.

The principle of universal design

The principle of universal design enables the realisation of the Convention's goals as well as the goal of equality and participation. Universal design means that society is designed with an awareness of the variation found in the population and enables persons with disabilities to function in everyday life on the same terms as persons without disabilities. The Government considers the principle of universal design a prioritised focus area in the implementation of disability policy. In a cohesive country like Sweden, society must be designed so that it can, as much as possible, be used by everyone. This increases the possibility of becoming a society that creates accessibility and participation for persons with disabilities.

Accessibility shortcomings

Accessibility shortcomings make it more difficult for persons with disabilities to participate on the same terms as the rest of the population. The work to identify and address obstacles to increasing accessibility is, in the Government's

¹ Ministry for Health and Social Affairs. *National goal and focus areas for the disability policy*. See link (in Swedish): <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/proposition/2017/05/prop.-201617188/>

assessment, a prioritised focus area for the implementation of disability policy. This work needs to be conducted systematically and persistently and be preceded by an analysis to identify shortcomings and obstacles.

Individual support and solutions

Individual support and solutions will be seen as a prioritised focus area for the implementation of disability policy. Often, such support can be crucial for the individual to be able to participate. However, individual support and solutions should be seen as a complement to general accessibility in society. As previously mentioned, the principle of universal design is aimed at general solutions in order to increase accessibility. However, this is not always sufficient, and there is therefore a need for society to provide individual support and solutions. These solutions can be seen as making up for shortcomings in how society is built or for functional capacity and can, for example, include aids, accessories, travel services, special support in school and personal assistance. These solutions are designed to ensure independence and self-determination for the individual and to enable participation in society.

Preventing and countering discrimination

The principle of non-discrimination is central in the UN conventions on human rights and in Swedish legislation and policy. Chapter 1, Section 1 of the Swedish Discrimination Act (2008:567) states that “the purpose of this Act is to combat discrimination and in other ways promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of disability or other circumstance. Chapter 2 of the Discrimination Act contains provisions on the prohibition of discrimination. The chapter covers virtually all areas of society. Furthermore, as of 1 January 2015, discrimination in the form of inadequate accessibility has been prohibited (Chap. 1, Section 4(3) of the Discrimination Act). Preventing and countering discrimination entail not only the direct prohibition of discrimination but also preventative work. Discrimination does not occur solely due to inadequate accessibility in society or through structures that disadvantage. It also takes the form of individual actions. There are still stereotyped perceptions, prejudices and attitudes in society that lead to discrimination against persons with disabilities.

National strategy for systematic monitoring

On 23 September 2021, the Swedish Government adopted a strategy for systematic monitoring of disability policy from 2021 to 2031. The strategy stipulates that disability policy must be monitored by a number of designated government agencies and that the Agency for Participation must support them in their monitoring work. The purpose of the strategy is to follow up disability policy based on the national goal.²

The Government concurrently tasked a number of government agencies with following up disability policy from 2021 to 2031 based on the national goal for disability policy. Each government agency must submit the results of this monitoring in an annual report to the Government Offices. As a guideline for monitoring, a report should be provided of how the four areas for the implementation of disability policy have been considered in the government agency's work, where applicable, to implement disability policy. These four areas are the principle of universal design, accessibility shortcomings, individual support and solutions for individual independence and preventing and countering discrimination. The measures taken pursuant to the national goal of contributing to greater gender equality and considering the children's rights perspective must also be reported. A report should also be provided of how the measures that the government agency has taken in accordance with the national goal for disability policy contribute to meeting the goals of the UN's 2030 Agenda. The government agencies' consultations with the disability organisations and other relevant actors must also be reported.

The government agencies' reports will, for example, provide the basis for the Government's report in the Budget Bill of progress in meeting the national goal for disability policy. The strategy marks the beginning of an effort to improve the monitoring of disability policy through enabling a more systematic follow-up of progress in meeting the national goal for disability policy. A more reliable basis through improved monitoring is needed to be able to take appropriate measures, for instance, or for the development of action plans on various levels in the area of disability. This is also in line with Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on Statistics and data collection. The assessment is that it should be possible to decide by 2026 – the middle of the strategy period – a

² Ministry for Health and Social Affairs. *Strategy for systematic monitoring of the disability policy during 2021–2031*. See link (in Swedish): <https://www.regeringen.se/informationsmaterial/2021/09/informationsmaterial-strategi-for-systematisk-uppfoljning-av-funktionshinderspolitiken-under-20212031/>

new national action plan for disability policy based, among other things, on results from improved monitoring.

Support in monitoring and implementation

The Swedish Agency for Participation is tasked with working cross-sectorally and promoting the systematic and effective implementation of disability policy at all levels of society and with monitoring, evaluating and analysing the efforts of government agencies, municipalities, regions and other actors to meet the national disability policy goals. The Agency also has a special mandate to provide support and guidance to the government agencies in both their monitoring and implementation of the national goal. As part of the mandate, the Agency will annually submit a compiled report, based on the government agencies' annual reports, to the Government Offices (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs) for all prioritised areas of society. The Agency's mandate further entails providing the support that the government agencies need to implement the national goal.

Prioritised areas of society and government agencies

The focus of the disability policy strategy is on monitoring the national goal for disability policy. The strategy emphasises the government agencies' sectoral governance as the basis for the implementation of disability policy, which is based on the principle of responsibility and financing. Each sector in society is responsible for ensuring that disability policy is implemented.

The government agencies tasked with specifically monitoring the national goal for disability policy in accordance with the focus of this task are:

Work and livelihood

The Swedish Public Employment Service, the Swedish Work Environment Authority and the Swedish Social Insurance Agency.

Education and lifelong learning

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, the Swedish National Agency for Education and the Swedish Higher Education Authority.

Transport

The Swedish Transport Administration and the Swedish Transport Agency.

Built environment and community planning

The Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning.

Digitalisation

The Swedish Agency for Digital Government and the Swedish Post and Telecom Authority.

Public procurement

The National Agency for Public Procurement.

Health, public health and social welfare

The Public Health Agency of Sweden, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the Health and Social Care Inspectorate and the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare.

Culture and leisure

The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, the Swedish National Heritage Board and the Swedish Arts Council.

Democratic participation

The Swedish Agency for Accessible Media and the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society.

Judiciary

The Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority, the Swedish National Courts Administration, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service and the Swedish Police Authority.

Consumer policy

The Swedish Consumer Agency.

Crisis preparedness

The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency.

Regional and municipal level

The Swedish social model is largely based on municipalities and regions being responsible for welfare and for accessibility and participation in the local community. The way the municipalities and regions implement disability policy therefore significantly impacts whether or not the national goal will be achieved. To make it easier for municipalities and regions to implement the national disability policy, the Agency provides support for the regional councils in terms of skills transfer, development of monitoring systems, statistics on disabilities and application of the principle of universal design. The support the Agency and the regional councils provided to the regions and municipalities in implementing their disability policy strategies and plans throughout the 2018–2020 period was extended to 2021–2023, as set out in a decision in the appropriation directions for the budget year 2021 for the Agency for Participation (S2020/01534, S2020/09593) and the appropriation directions for budget year 2021 for the regional councils (Fi2021/02403, Fi2021/02502).