

Enabling Social Innovation in Sweden

Country Snapshot

Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." ¹

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Sweden's social innovation ecosystem.

✓ Direct focus on social innovation 🔗 Connected but indirect focus on social innovation ✗ No focus on social innovation

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Official Definition of Social Innovation 🔗



While no single statutory national definition of social innovation was identified in public law, the Swedish ESF Council uses an operational definition drawn from the EU social innovation field: innovations that are social in both their goals and means, meeting social needs while creating new relationships and collaborations. The 2018 government strategy instead focused on social enterprises and their role in building "a sustainable society through social enterprise and social innovation." ^{2 3}

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓



Rather than a standalone ministry for social innovation, responsibility is spread across several public actors:

- **Vinnova (Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems)** promotes sustainable growth through innovation systems and funds needs-driven innovation. ⁴
- **The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket)** supports enterprise, regional development and social enterprise-related work. ⁵
- **The Swedish ESF Council** administers ESF+ and includes a dedicated national programme area for social innovation. ⁶

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓



Sweden has an identifiable national policy anchor through the **2018 strategy for social enterprises – a sustainable society through social enterprise and social innovation**. It aimed to strengthen the development of social enterprises and improve public-sector recognition of them as contributors to sustainable societal development. Broader national innovation policy also supports innovation for sustainable development, though not always under a specific social innovation label. ^{3 7}

Policies, Laws & Regulations ✓ 🔗



Relevant framework elements include:

- **Act (2022:900) on registration of idea-based organisations**, in force from 1 January 2023, creating a special register for idea-based organisations in publicly funded welfare. This increases visibility and differentiation in procurement and choice systems. ⁸
- **Public procurement rules and guidance** allow reserved contracts and employment requirements for suppliers whose main purpose is social or professional integration of disadvantaged groups. ⁹
- Sweden also has adjacent legal frameworks for co-operatives and foundations, which support the broader social economy landscape. ¹⁰

Official Statistics



While Sweden does not appear to publish official statistics specifically labelled “social innovation,” it has strong adjacent official statistics on civil society and non-profit institutions.

- Statistics Sweden (SCB) publishes **official statistics on civil society**.¹¹
- Since 2021, this has been part of Sweden’s official statistics system.¹¹
- SCB also maintains satellite-account style statistics for non-profit institutions and civil society.^{11 12}

Government Programs



Public support is visible through several programmes:

- In 2018, the Government tasked Vinnova to support the development of social enterprises as part of the national strategy.³
- **ESF+ 2021–2027** includes a distinct programme area for **social innovation**.⁶
- Government-backed funding through agencies such as Vinnova and Tillväxtverket also supports innovation, entrepreneurship and cross-sector collaboration with social relevance.^{5 6}

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders



Sweden’s ecosystem is institutionally dense and collaborative. Key actors include:

- **Forum for Social Innovation Sweden (FSIS)** at Malmö University, a national knowledge and collaboration platform for social innovation and social entrepreneurship.¹³
- **Coompanion Sweden**, a major co-operative and social enterprise support network with regional presence.¹⁰
- **Mikrofonden**, a social investor for co-operatives and non-profit organisations.¹⁰
- Social Entrepreneurship Forum and **CSES (Centre for Social Entrepreneurship Stockholm)** as ecosystem enablers noted in OECD mapping.¹⁰

Support Initiatives



Support infrastructure includes:

- ESF+-funded **regional competence centres for social innovation**, launched to strengthen cross-sector solutions.¹⁰
- Vinnova-backed initiatives such as **civil society’s innovative solutions for a sustainable society** and **Innovative Impact Startups**.^{14 15}
- University-based and regional platforms offering coaching, applied research, collaboration spaces and innovation support.^{10 13}

Collaboration



Collaboration is a notable strength.

- Swedish practice relies heavily on partnerships among public authorities, universities, civil society and business.^{10 13}
- FSIS hosts conferences, events and knowledge-sharing activities.¹³
- Regional and municipal actors in places such as Skåne, Västra Götaland, Örebro and Umeå have integrated social innovation or social economy approaches into development work.¹⁰

FINANCE

Financing Schemes



Sweden combines public, EU and philanthropic financing:

- The 2018 strategy was followed by government assignments and, according to the Government Offices yearbook, **SEK 120 million during 2018–2020** for initiatives linked to social enterprises. ¹⁶
- **ESF+ 2021–2027** includes a dedicated social innovation strand. ⁶
- **Allmänna arvsfonden (Swedish Inheritance Fund)** is a distinctive public fund financing non-profit projects for children, youth, older people and persons with disabilities; it reported **SEK 1,735 million in inflows in 2025**. ¹⁷
- Vinnova and Mikrofonden provide additional routes for innovation and social-enterprise finance. ^{10 14}

Financing Inclusivity



Inclusivity features are visible in several schemes:

- ESF+ social innovation is directed toward challenges in **social inclusion, labour market participation and education**. ⁶
- Procurement guidance highlights opportunities for people facing barriers to labour-market entry, including **young people, newcomers and the long-term unemployed**. ²
- The Inheritance Fund and several civil-society programmes target children, youth, persons with disabilities and older persons. ¹⁷

SOCIETY

Public Awareness of Social Innovation



Public awareness is present, though stronger in ecosystem and policy circles than in a single national mainstream narrative. A Tillväxtverket review documents Swedish media visibility around social enterprises, social entrepreneurship and social innovation over 2008–2019, suggesting sustained public discourse. ¹⁸

Research



Sweden has a visible research base linked to social innovation and social entrepreneurship.

- Malmö University hosts FSIS and related projects on social innovation for sustainable transition. ¹³
- OECD's 2025 country note identifies universities and knowledge bodies as important anchors for competence-building and policy support. ¹⁰

Education & Human Capital



Education and training opportunities are available through universities and ecosystem platforms.

- Stockholm University offers a Social Entrepreneurship course explicitly introducing students to social innovation and social entrepreneurship. ¹²
- Universities and support bodies also offer multidisciplinary innovation, entrepreneurship and challenge-driven learning formats. ^{13 20}

Entrepreneurship

Sweden remains one of Europe’s strongest innovation environments.



EIU Business Environment Ranking

The World Bank’s B-READY framework provides Sweden benchmarks for business entry and related business environment topics, replacing the old Doing Business model. ²³



Innovation Capacity

Sweden ranked 2nd globally in the **Global Innovation Index 2025**. ²¹



Social entrepreneurship prevalence

GEM Sweden 2024/2025 reports a decline in entrepreneurial activity in 2024, with TEA falling from 9.2% to 8.4%. ²²

Social & Environmental Consciousness

Sweden remains one of Europe’s strongest innovation environments.



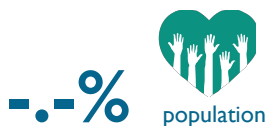
EU Climate Action Progress

Sweden’s climate framework includes a Climate Act, milestone targets for 2030 and 2040, and a long-term target of net-zero emissions by 2045. ²⁶



Political participation

OECD notes parliamentary voter turnout above 80% in Sweden. ²⁴



Volunteering

SCB reports 265,700 civil-society organisations in 2023, and 3.8% of all employed people worked in civil society. ¹²



Sustainability

Sweden ranked 6th in the 2024 Environmental Performance Index. ²⁵