



# Sweden



**Population:** 10 million inhabitants

**Form of Government:** Constitutional Monarchy, Parliamentary Democracy

**Elections:** Every fourth year, same day for parliament, regional and municipal councils

**Parliament:** 349 members in one chamber. 8 Parties represented

**Government:** Coalition in minority – Social Democrats and Green Party

**Local and Regional councils:** 9 national parties and 140 local/regional parties

# Two levels of Local Government

## **290 Municipalities:**

- Provide the majority of local services, including pre-university public education.

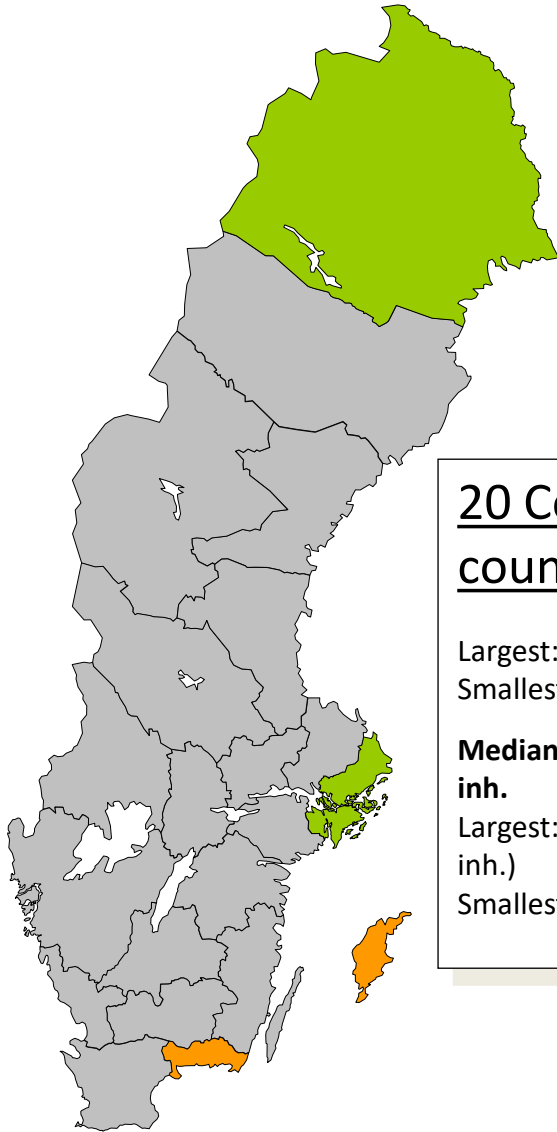
## **20 County councils/Regions:**

- Mainly responsible for health care and inter-municipal public transport.
- Most of the County councils have gained regional status, with regional councils taking over additional responsibilities for regional development from the Governorates.

No hierarchy between the two levels.

Together they play a dominant role in welfare and service provision, accounting for around 25 per cent of GDP.

# The Sub-National Map

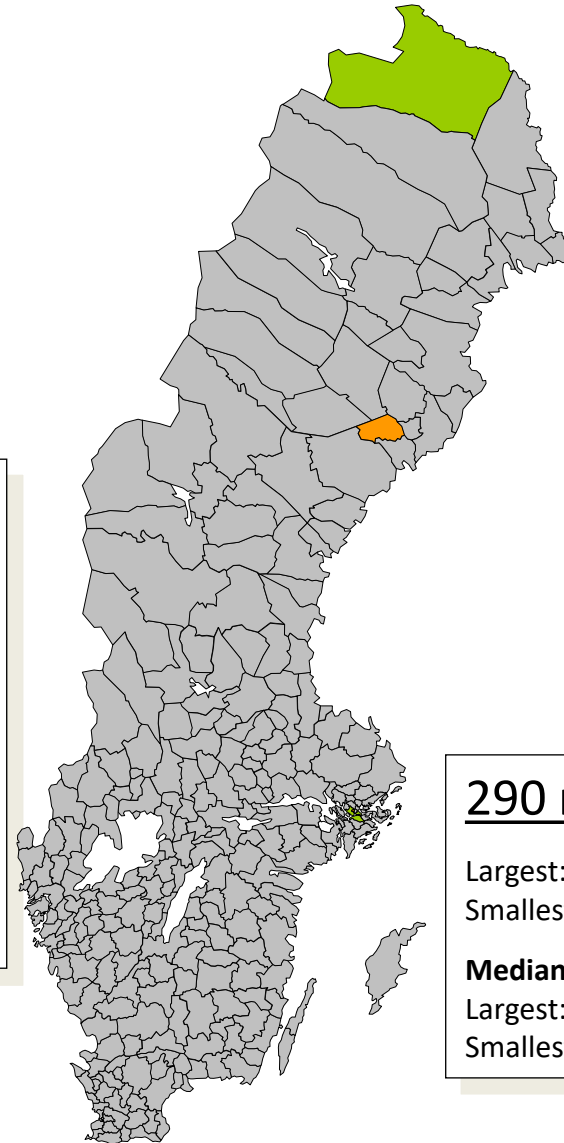


## 20 County councils/regions

Largest: Norrbotten (98 911 km<sup>2</sup>)  
Smallest: Blekinge (2 941 km<sup>2</sup>)

**Median population: 300 000 inh.**

Largest: Stockholm (2 308 143 inh.)  
Smallest: Gotland (58 595 inh.)



## 290 municipalities

Largest: Kiruna (19 447 km<sup>2</sup>)  
Smallest: Sundbyberg (9 km<sup>2</sup>)

**Median population: 15.000 inh.**

Largest: Stockholm (949 761 inh.)  
Smallest: Bjurholm (2 451 inh.)

# Municipal functions

## Mandatory

- Social services
- Childcare and pre-school
- Primary and secondary education
- Care for the elderly
- Support to the physically and intellectually disabled
- Health and environment protection
- Spatial planning
- Refuse collection and waste disposal
- Water supply and sewerage
- Rescue and emergency services
- Road maintenance
- Library

## Optional

- Culture
- Housing
- Energy
- Employment
- Industrial and commercial services
- Intra-municipal public transport

# High Level of Independence

## Constitutional setting:

- Local governments are mentioned in the first paragraph of the Constitution (the “instrument of Government”) together with the parliamentary form of government.
- Decision making powers are exercised by elected assemblies.
- Local governments have the right to levy taxes.
- A general mandate: “Local governments are responsible for local and regional matters of public interest.”
- *Any restriction in local self-government should be proportional, that is, not exceeding what is necessary given the aim of the restriction.*

# The Local Decision-Making

- The municipal council elects members and presidents of the executive board and thematic committees.
- The political representation in the board and the committees is proportional i.e. both majority and opposition participate in these bodies in relation to their strength in the council.
- *In practise, a majority of the decisions are taken in consensus.*
- The executive board is responsible for steering and coordinating the administration of the municipality and for supervising the activities of the thematic committees.
- The committees take decisions regarding the implementation of the tasks within their areas of responsibility and on the matters that have been delegated to them by the council.
- The committees cannot take decisions in relation to the rights and obligations of the municipality.

# Municipal financing - Taxes

Tax	Level	Calculation	Collection	Equalisation	Percent
Personal Income tax	Decided buy each municipality	State Tax Agency	State Tax Agency	Yes, by using state grants	63 %
Property tax	Decided by central government with a low ceiling – approx. 800 EUR per house	Evaluation of property and calculation made by State Tax Agency	State Tax Agency	No	3 %
				Total:	66 %

# Municipal financing – Government grants

Type	Modality	Percent
General Government Grants	Channelled through Tax Equalization System	14 %
Conditional Government Grants	Based on each municipality's adherence to the criteria set up	4 %

# Equalisation

All citizens should have access to local services of “equal value”, independent on the financial and structural conditions of their local setting.

## Tax equalisation

- Differences in “tax power” are equalised.
- Mainly by using unconditional state grants to “top up” tax revenues of municipalities.
- All municipalities guaranteed 115 per cent of average national tax power.
- Only a few municipalities are net contributors to the system.

## Cost equalisation

- “Levels the board”
- Take into account demographical, geographical imparities as well as differences in salary levels etc.
- “Robin Hood modality”. Municipalities with favourable conditions contribute to entities with a less favourable structure.

# Local Self-Government vs. National Policies

- The Central Government give detailed regulations in many areas of responsibilities.
- Decides “What?”
- Specify which rights citizens – “Rights holders” – have.
- Local governments have large freedom to organise activities as they see fit.
- Decides “How?”
- “Duty bearers” obliged to respect, promote, protect and fulfil rights of individuals.

Local and regional self-government is the Principle of Subsidiarity put in practise. Services are dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level that is consistent with their resolution.

The modalities of implementation and levels of ambition may often be decided to fit the local conditions and priorities.

The relation between local decision-makers and citizens is triple:

- Service provider vs. service user
- Administrator of funds vs. tax-payer
- Local policy setter vs. voter

# Three strong arguments

- **Efficiency:** Local and regional adjustments to local and regional needs/specifics
- **Innovation:** There's a need for local and regional front-runners in a drive towards innovation
- **Participation:** Option for local adjustments and decisions closer to citizens - democratic

# Various levels of supervision – From below

## 1. Right to appeal,

- Any citizen or property owner may test the legality of a council decision by appealing to the administrative court
- Those affected by a municipal decision may appeal, thus providing protection against arbitrariness or abuse of power.

## 2. Ombudsmen institutions:

- Anyone may submit a complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsman or the Equality Ombudsman. These institutions may then inquire into local authority treatment of particular cases and issues.

# Various levels of supervision – From within

- Local assemblies elects layman auditors.
- This elected audit committee assigns and supervises external professional auditors and is responsible for audit report and recommendations.
- Committee chairperson is normally elected from among the oppositions parties.

Auditors are responsible for checking:

- If operations have been conducted consistently with their purpose stated by the council and in a financially satisfactory and effective manner
- If the accounts are correct
- If the internal control has been adequate

# Various levels of supervision – From outside

Media, civil society organisations and individuals are scrutinizing local government management:

- The access to information is enacted in the constitution and could be denied only if there is a specific mentioning of the type of information and conditions in the Official Secrets Act.
- Public databases and publications make possible comparisons between local governments on a multitude of performance indicators.
- Citizens tend to see their relation with local governments as one between taxpayer and provider of services and reacts on both deficient services and irresponsible spending

# Various levels of supervision – From above

- In specific areas of local responsibility, the state supervises local authorities through National Board of Health and Welfare and the National Agency for Education.
- These agencies provide guidance, support, follow up and evaluation but may also apply sanctions: public criticism, fines or, in serious cases, a temporary operating ban.
- Governorates give advice and monitor local authorities compliance with the law in areas such as environmental protection, animal welfare and alcohol licensing.
- Governorates also give opinions on proposed physical planning in relation to defined national interests.

# Civic participation

- Mandatory only in physical planning processes.
- “Municipal committees shall work to promote consultations with those who utilise their services” – Local Government Act.
- *Citizens’ dialogues* are common and normally based on the decision-makers understanding of the need to involve various perspectives, priorities and ideas in the decision making processes.
- *Dialogues with users* of municipal services are also frequent and important both for politicians, managers and staff in the design and implementation of services.
- SALAR has a unit specialised in supporting the members in promoting civic participation.



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