

# Unequal Sweden – Regional socio-economic disparities in Sweden

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## Economy, employment and labour market

**Employment rate:** High employment rates can be found in northern peripheral municipalities dominated by mining (e. g. Kiruna: 87%), in western regions bordering Norway due to the tourism sector and commuters to Norway (e. g. Krokomb: 86%) and in the tourism region of Småland. There are also higher employment rates in the surrounding municipalities of Stockholm and Gothenburg, where business centres, industry and technology parks are located and commuter links exist. The employment rates of the cities are only on national mean. Lower employment rates can be found e. g. in the city of Malmö (68%) and partly in the rural regions of southern Sweden. In general, the employment rate across Sweden has increased between 2014 and 2018 with few exceptions (-2 up to -0.1 percentage points). A lower increase is partly found in northern Sweden and around the eastern coastal regions (characterised by a lower employment rate in 2018), while in western Sweden and southern inland regions a high increase is found (characterised by a high employment rate in 2018). In addition, the major cities recorded a high increase: Gothenburg (+3.6 percentage points), Malmö (+3.1 percentage points) and Stockholm (+1.7 percentage points), here mainly in neighbouring municipalities.

**Demographic dependency ratio:** The demographic dependency ratio shows higher dependencies in rural regions in northern and central Sweden, but also on the southern east coast and on the islands, which is mainly due to the high proportion of older people (e. g. Borgholm: 93). In contrast, lower dependency ratios can be found in university cities and in the urban areas of Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and their surroundings, which is due to the attractiveness of jobs for working people and commuter networks (e. g. Sundbyberg: 43).

## Educational opportunities

**Highly qualified workforce:** The regional distribution of the highly qualified shows distinct disparities between urban and rural regions: a high proportion of the highly qualified can be found in the major cities of Stockholm (49%), Gothenburg (43%) and Malmö (39%) and their surroundings, due to economic centres, industrial and technology parks and commuter links. Other university cities (e. g. Umeå 45%) and the urban regions on the east coast are also characterised by a high share. In contrast, the lowest proportion of highly qualified people can be found partly in the southern and central agricultural and forestry regions (e. g. Filipstad 14% and Dorotea 15%). Between 2014 and 2018, the share of highly qualified people has increased across Sweden (+0.05 up to +4.6 percentage points). A high increase can be found in regions on the west coast, in Jämtland, in Småland and in the metropolitan area of Stockholm. These regions are characterised by a generally high share in 2018. A lower increase can be found in parts of northern and central Sweden.

**At-risk-of-poverty rate (age 0-19):** The at risk of poverty rate is related to a lower income level. The highest at-risk-of-poverty rates (age 0-19) can be found in scattered southern and central inland municipalities (highest in Högsby: 45%). While the city of Malmö has a higher rate (37%), rates are lower in Stockholm (16 %) and Gothenburg (22%) and especially in their surrounding municipalities (lowest in Täby: 5%). In northern Sweden, which is characterised by medium rates (16 up to 29%), the mining region of Kiruna stands out with a

low rate (15%). The change in the at-risk-of-poverty-rate (age 0-19) ranges between -5 percentage points in Åsele in the central inland and +15 percentage points in Högsby and surroundings in the south-east of Sweden, which has the highest rate (45%) in 2018. Stagnation or a slight decrease can be observed for example in the major cities: Stockholm (0 percentage points), Malmö (-1 percentage points), Gothenburg (-1 percentage points).

**At-risk-of-poverty rate (age 65+):** The at-risk-of-poverty-rate of people aged 65+ ranges from 5% up to 30 %. A high rate can be found in the western part of Sweden, in Pajala, on the border with Finland, and in and around Högsby, where poverty is generally high. A lower rate is found in the metropolitan area of Stockholm (11%) and Gothenburg (15%), while Malmö has a higher rate (20%). Between 2015 and 2018, the at-risk-of-poverty rate for older people stagnated or decreased across Sweden (up to -5 percentage points). Only 12 municipalities saw a slight increase of 1 percentage points, e. g. Malmö and the regions in the south of Stockholm.

**Education of women and men (ratio):** The distribution of the ratio of women with a higher level of education among men with a higher level of education shows distinct differences between urban and peripheral regions (79 in Luleå to 591 in Eda). A low ratio can be found in southern Sweden and along the east coast, especially in university cities, while northern and central peripheral regions are characterised by a high ratio.

## Prosperity and health

**Monthly gross salary:** In general, the monthly salary has increased across Sweden between 2015 and 2019 (SEK 1,900 in Åsele to SEK 5,100 in Sollentuna). A particularly high increase in salary can be found in and around the major cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.

The distribution of the **number of employees in the medical and health sector** does not show a clear spatial pattern. A low number of employees can be found in scattered regions in southern Sweden, especially in the city of Stockholm (43.3 per 100 inhabitants over 65 years of age) and surrounding municipalities (e. g. Botkyrka and Huddinge 54 and 52.9 employees per 100 inhabitants over 65 years of age). High numbers of employees are found in and around university cities such as in Umeå (66.2 employees per 100 inhabitants over 65 years of age).

**House prices:** The distribution of house prices shows disparities between urban and rural regions, which is a consequence of urbanisation (similar to rental prices). Predominantly above-average prices can be found in regions with much immigration, such as the major cities in southern Sweden and university cities. In Stockholm and its surrounding municipalities can be found the highest house prices (between SEK 6,722,000 in Sollentuna and SEK 11,209,000 in Danderyd, which is the residence of the richest citizens of Sweden), followed by the cities of Gothenburg, Malmö and their surroundings, and the islands of Gotland and Öland. In contrast, the lowest house prices can be found in the very sparsely populated regions of northern and southern Sweden (e. g. Åsele: SEK 330,000).

**Gender pay gap:** The distribution shows disparities between urban and rural regions due to the variety of earning opportunities. The lowest pay gap can be found in rural regions in northern Sweden (except in the mining region of Kiruna, lowest in Sorsele: 93), in scattered southern municipalities and on the island of Gotland. In contrast, the largest pay gap can be found in the municipalities surrounding the major cities of Stockholm (e. g. Danderyd: 65), Gothenburg and Malmö. The pay gap in the cities of Stockholm and Gothenburg are on national mean (79), while the pay gap in Malmö (84) is lower.

**Life expectancy:** The geographical pattern of life expectancy shows distinct disparities between northern peripheral (and mining-dominated) regions and the urban regions on the coast and in southern Sweden (79 in Munkfors up to 85 years in Danderyd). The variation in life expectancy is due to an interplay of health behaviour and health knowledge (which is affected by education) and environmental conditions such as clean environment and working conditions.

**Rental prices:** The distribution of rental prices (median annual rent per square metre in rented dwellings) shows disparities between urban and rural regions which is a consequence of urbanisation (similar to house prices). Predominantly above-average prices can be found in regions with much immigration, such as the major cities in southern Sweden and university cities. The highest rental prices can be found in Stockholm and the surrounding municipalities (SEK 1,393, highest in Täby: SEK 1,601), followed by Malmö (SEK 1,326) and surroundings and along the west coast (Gothenburg: SEK 1,221). Furthermore, the rental prices on the islands Gotland and Öland are above average. In contrast, the lowest rental prices can be found in the very sparsely populated regions of northern and southern Sweden (lowest prices in Bjurholm: SEK 761). The municipality of Åre in Jämtland (SEK 1,128) stands out here, which contrasts with the trends in northern Sweden. In general, rental prices increased across Sweden between 2016 and 2020 with few exceptions (SEK -7 to SEK -69). A high increase can be found in southern regions that are generally characterised by high rental prices, such as the surrounding municipalities around the major cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö (highest in Vallentuna, north of Stockholm: SEK +461).

## State action and participation

**Voter turnout:** In 2018, voter turnout for the Riksdag had the highest national average since 1985 (87%). In general, Sweden has a high voter turnout across the country. Nevertheless, there are disparities between urban and rural regions at a high level. High turnout is found in the more densely populated south, especially around the major cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö (highest in Lomma, located in the north of Malmö: 94%), followed by the university cities and urban areas along the East coast. Stockholm's turnout is average, while in Malmö (82%) and in Gothenburg (84%) the turnout is slightly below average. In contrast, turnout is lower in rural regions in northern and central Sweden (lowest turnout in Haparanda, located at the border to Finland: 73%).

**Municipal total assets:** The distribution of the municipal total assets shows no clear spatial pattern. The highest municipal total assets can be found in mining regions in northern Sweden (Kiruna: SEK 233,890 and Gällivare: SEK 172,912), followed by the major cities of

Stockholm (SEK 157,680), Gothenburg (SEK 132,873) and Malmö (SEK 104,804). The lowest municipal total assets can be found in scattered inland regions in southern and central Sweden (e. g. Hedemora: SEK 31,244).

**Tax income:** The distribution of tax income shows disparities between urban and rural regions. The highest values can be mainly found in and around Stockholm. Danderyd, north of Stockholm, is by far the richest municipality in Sweden, as many wealthy Stockholmers have settled there (highest value of SEK 85,098). The cities of Gothenburg and Malmö are still above average at 9,220 and 6,839 SEK respectively. Furthermore, regions along the west coast and regions with mining activities in northern Sweden are characterised by high values (e. g. Pajala at SEK 8,963). In contrast, lower tax income can be found in the sparsely populated forested regions in northern and central Sweden (lowest value in Munkfors, central Sweden, at SEK 2,251).

**Investment by local government:** The distribution of investment by local government shows distinct disparities between regions but no clear spatial pattern: the value range is from SEK 1,028,000 per capita in Laxå, southern inland, to SEK 29,471,000 in the mining-dominated region of Gällivare. High investments can be found also in the southern urban centers in and around Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.

## Migration

The migration pattern shows distinct disparities between urban and rural regions. Rural areas throughout Sweden are mainly confronted with a loss of inhabitants due to internal migration. Ljusnarsberg (-126 per 1,000 inhabitants), located in central Sweden, has the highest emigration, followed by northern mining-dominated regions (e. g. Kiruna: -69 per 1,000 inhabitants). In contrast, the regions of Uppsala, Malmö and Gothenburg and along the east coast are characterised by high immigration. Stockholm is also growing (+18 per 1,000 inhabitants), but there is migration in the direct municipalities around the city.