

# An association for its members



Swedish Association  
of Local Authorities  
and Regions



# One step ahead

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) is both an employers' organisation and an organisation that represents and advocates for local government in Sweden. All of Sweden's municipalities, county councils and regions are our members. Membership is voluntary.

As an employer organisation we work for the interests of our members and offer them support and service. Our members are the employers of more than one million people, which make us one of the largest employer organisations in Sweden. Our role is to sign central collective agreements, make our members stronger in their role as employers and create conditions for local solutions.

We also represent and advocate for local government by raising issues, acting decisively and enlightening public opinion. Our ambition is to be one step ahead and to shed light on important changes outside local government that affect our members. We speak for our members in dialogue with the Government, the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament), government agencies, the EU and other key organisations.

*”Our mission is to develop local self-government and to ensure freedom of action for our members and strong civic trust. Our vision is to develop welfare services and quality of life. To succeed we cooperate closely with our members.”*

SALAR's members are Sweden's 290 municipalities and its 20 county councils and regions.

## Our members

SALAR's members are Sweden's 290 municipalities and its 20 county councils, including the regions of Gotland, Halland, Skåne and Västra Götaland.

The Association's operations are financed by fees paid annually by members in relation to their population and tax capacity. Our other revenue sources are courses, conferences, consultancy assignments and external financing.

### A MATTER OF DEMOCRACY

SALAR is a member organisation for municipalities, county councils and regions. As their employer organisation and representative we advocate their interests and offer them support and service.

We raise issues, act decisively and enlighten public opinion.

Our mission is to provide municipalities, county councils and regions with better conditions for local and regional self-government. The vision is to develop the welfare system and its services.

It is a matter of democracy.



# A politically run organisation

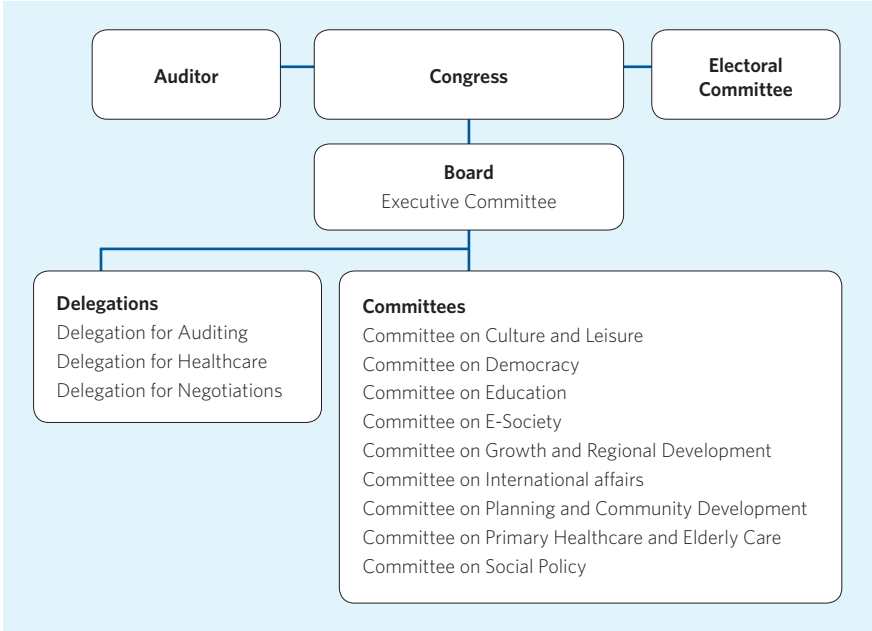
SALAR is a politically run organisation. The Association's supreme decision-making body is the Congress, which is held every four years. The Congress draws up the guidelines for SALAR's work and appoints its Board and President. The 451 congress delegates are appointed by the politically elected members of municipalities, county councils and regions.



Between congresses the SALAR Board leads the political work of the Association. It is supported by the Executive Committee of the Board and by delegations and committees. The committees work on many areas of importance to municipalities, county councils and regions, such as social issues, health care, finance, education, elderly care and growth and development issues. The day-to-day work of the Association is led and coordinated by a Director General and the administrative office.

The figure below shows SALAR’s political organisation.

Between congresses the SALAR Board leads the political work of the Association.







# The role of municipalities

In Sweden, the municipalities are responsible for a larger share of public financed services than in most other countries and they have the right to levy taxes to finance operations. The municipalities are responsible for practically all childcare and primary and secondary education. All education in the compulsory system is free of charge. Elderly care and care of the disabled are also important tasks for the municipalities. They are also responsible for example water supply, waste disposal, spatial planning and rescue services.

## The different roles

These different areas of responsibility mean that the municipalities play several different roles.

- *Service providers:* The municipalities are service providers in the fields of care, social services, education and infrastructure. Either on its own or as a commissioner of private actors.
- *Developer of society:* Municipalities plans include housing, infrastructure and community development in general.
- *Supervisory authorities:* The municipalities have a supervisory responsibility, such as measuring air and water pollution and checking the labelling of foodstuffs.
- *Employers:* While the municipalities form part of the public sector, they are also employers with responsibility for the implementation of labour law and the provision of personnel.

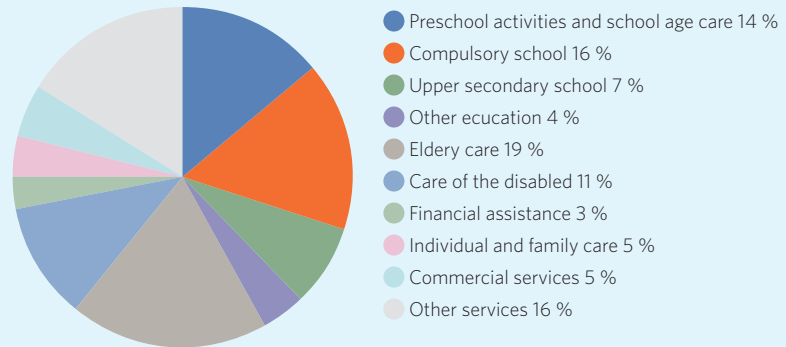


## One person in five works for the municipalities

The municipalities are major employers. Many people in Sweden are working in, or on behalf of, a municipality. Most of them work in the care and education sectors.



## Expenditures of the municipalities



Source: Statistics Sweden and Salar, 2012.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MUNICIPALITIES

The municipalities are legally or contractually responsible for example:

- › Childcare and preschools
- › Primary and secondary education
- › Care of the elderly and disabled
- › Social services
- › Water supply and sewerage
- › Infrastructure, traffic
- › Plan and environmental issues
- › Rescue services and emergency preparedness.

Other services provided on a voluntary basis include for example:

- › Culture and leisure services
- › Housing
- › Industrial and commercial services.





# The role of the county councils and regions

## Healthcare

County councils and regions are responsible for ensuring that everyone living in Sweden has good health and equal access to good healthcare. Healthcare is largely tax financed. The principle of local self-government gives the county councils and regions the right to design and structure their activities in the light of local conditions.

The foundation of the Swedish healthcare system is the community healthcare centres. At these healthcare centres patients can be treated for all the health problems that do not require the technical and medical resources of the hospitals. Preventive health work is an important element of primary care.

Highly specialized care and medical treatment are provided by hospitals.

The foundation of the Swedish healthcare system is the community healthcare centres.

## Dental care

Although dental care is provided by both public and private providers, the county councils and regions have an overall responsibility for the provision of dental care. Dental care is free of charge for all children and young people up to the age of 19.

## Regional services

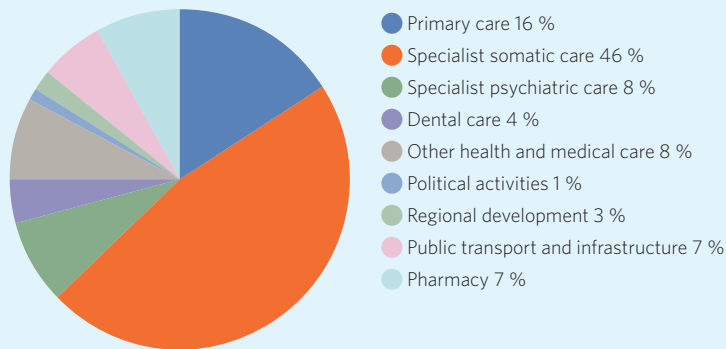
In most counties, public transport is operated by the county council, often together with the municipalities. The transport services are operated by private providers contracted by the regional public transport authority.



Three county councils (Skåne, Västra Götaland and Halland) and one municipality (Gotland) are on top of this also responsible for issues concerning regional development. For that reason they are called Regions instead of county councils.

*“Sweden has a national healthcare guarantee stipulating certain time limits within which the county councils have to offer their patients medical care and treatment.”*

### Expenditures of the county councils and regions



Source: Statistics Sweden and Salar, 2012.







# Local self-government

There is no hierarchical relation between municipalities, county councils and regions, since all have their own self-governing local authorities with responsibility for different services. Elected representatives in municipalities, county councils or regions take decisions about the services that are closest to the citizens and they have independent powers of taxation. The possibility of decision-making based on regional and local conditions is known as local self-government and is enshrined in the Swedish constitution.

Local self-government is important in democratic terms. Citizens' closeness to decision-making makes it easier for them to gain access to local politicians and hold them accountable for their decisions. This in turn improves their opportunities to influence service provision in their municipality, county council or region and how their taxes are used.

Since local self-government makes it possible to design services in a range of ways, it is easier to find flexible solutions that are suitable for a particular municipality, county council or region. This helps to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service provision.

## Procure services from private companies

Municipalities, county councils and regions may procure services from private companies. Privately managed providers financed from tax revenue must offer the service concerned to citizens on the same conditions as those that apply to a similar public service.



There are  
44 000 elected  
representatives  
in municipalities,  
county councils  
and regions.




## Independent powers of taxation

Compared with other EU member states, Swedish municipalities, county councils and regions have wide-ranging responsibilities. They largely finance themselves by means of local and county council taxes and the fees paid by the citizens for various services. Taxes are levied as a percentage of the inhabitants' income. The municipalities, county councils and regions decide on their own tax rates. The activities are also funded to some extent by government grants. The average, overall local tax rate is 30 per cent. Approximately 20 per cent goes to the municipalities and 10 per cent to the county councils/regions.

## Local government financial equalisation

Citizens in Sweden should have access to welfare on equal terms regardless of their place of residence. At the same time, conditions vary a great deal between municipalities, county councils and regions in different parts of the country, as do their economic ability to provide such services. To solve this problem, Sweden has a system of local government financial equalisation which is one of the most far reaching in Europe.



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This booklet describes The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). It also includes a brief description of our members areas of responsibility. For more information please visit [www.salar.eu](http://www.salar.eu)

This booklet can be ordered from our website [webbutik.skl.se](http://webbutik.skl.se)

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