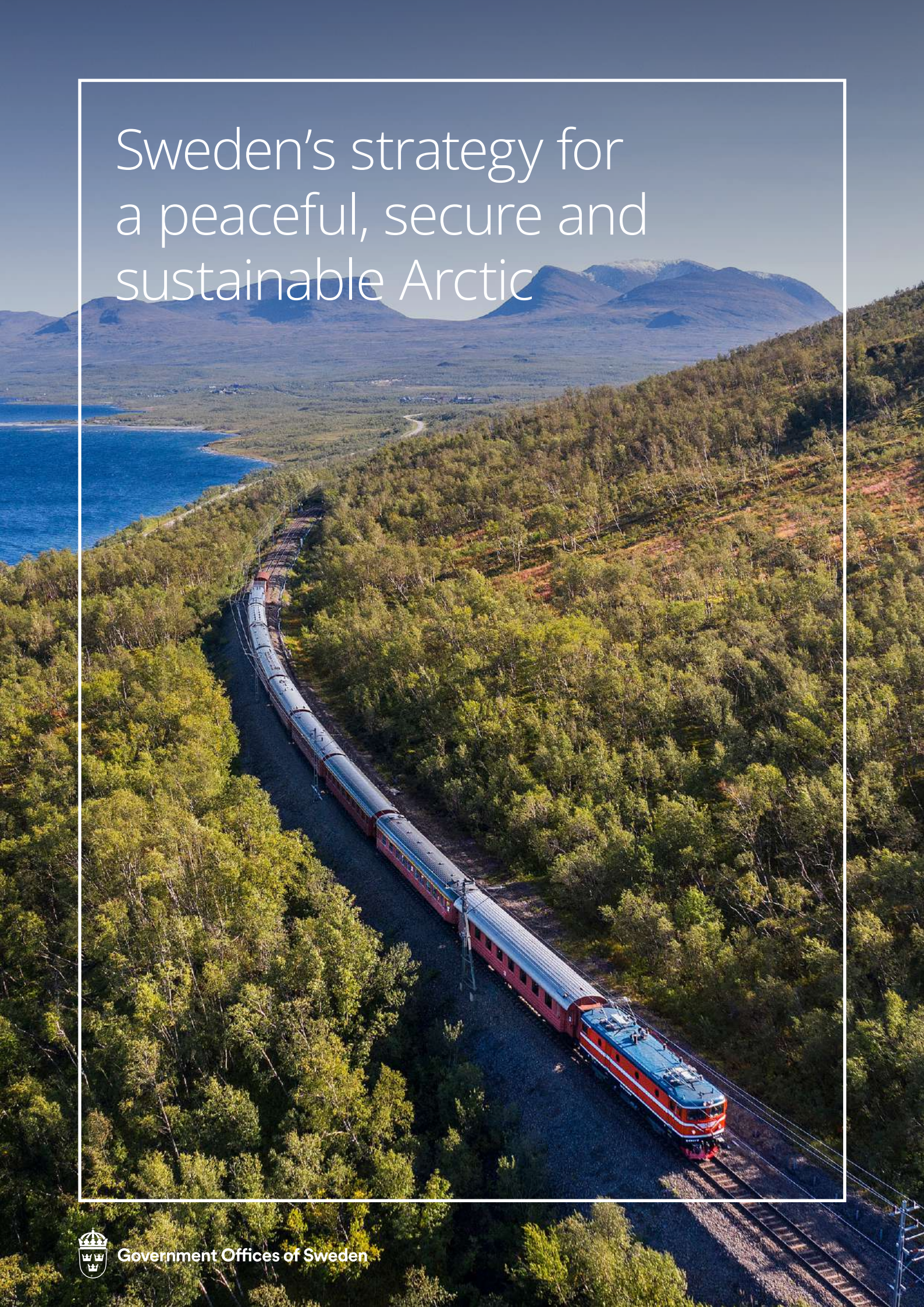
Sweden's strategy for a peaceful, secure and sustainable Arctic



Government Offices of Sweden

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Cover image: A passenger train passes Lapporten
valley by Torneträsk lake near Abisko National Park.
Image: Per Lundström/imagebank.sweden.se

Foreword

The Arctic is a region undergoing change. Both global security developments and climate change are having profound consequences in and around the Arctic. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has created a new security situation in Europe, with repercussions also in the north.

The Arctic is our part of Europe – and our concern. As one of the world's eight Arctic states, Sweden has a specific role and a specific responsibility in the region. Sweden must exercise its influence as an Arctic state in order to promote positive development in the region based on Swedish interests and values, leveraging strategic resources such as Swedish polar research and space capability.

The Government's new strategy for the Arctic focuses on security and stability, economy and trade, and climate and the environment. The Government's long-term objective is a peaceful and secure Arctic, with sustainable, robust and attractive communities and reduced environmental and climate impact. To achieve this, international relations built on trust, common solutions and compliance with international law are needed in the Arctic. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of states must be respected. The policy of constraint in relation to Russia is reflected in Sweden's Arctic policy.

A secure and stable Arctic builds on sustainable and resilient societies. In Arctic Sweden, local, regional, national and European initiatives contribute to societal transformation and sustainable growth. A strong Arctic region in northern Sweden is a strength for our country internationally, and an influential Sweden in international Arctic affairs benefits Arctic Sweden. Many actors are involved in this work: the Government, the Riksdag, government agencies, municipalities and regions, academic institutions, representatives of indigenous peoples, civil society organisations, business sector representatives and individual citizens. This diversity is a strength.

The Arctic is facing strategic challenges, but also major opportunities. Sweden has strong interests in peaceful development in the Arctic in order to seize on those opportunities. In this strategy, the Government outlines the direction and priorities of this work.



Minister for Foreign Affairs Maria Malmer Stenergard



Wind farm in Luossavaara, Kiruna, with the Scandinavian mountain range in the background.
Image: Jonatan Stålhös/imagebank.sweden.se

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1. A new approach in Swedish Arctic policy

The Arctic is undergoing dramatic change. Global security policy conditions are impacting the region, and climate change is adding to insecurity and elevated risk. The military-strategic importance of the Arctic is growing. In step with geopolitical developments, Sweden's NATO accession and climate change, the Arctic and the High North have become substantially more important to Sweden. Sweden is also expected to assume greater responsibility for peace, security and development in the Arctic.

With the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, allied security policy and military-strategic links between the Arctic and the Baltic Sea Region have been strengthened. The Arctic, the High North and the Baltic Sea Region form a strategic and operational whole. This carries with it a special role, a special responsibility and a special interest for Sweden.

In Sweden, the Arctic region of Norrbotten and Västerbotten Counties accounts for over one third of the total land area. Moreover, 15 per cent of Sweden's land area lies north of the Arctic Circle. These parts of our country have substantial natural resources and make an important contribution to Sweden's economy and prosperity, and EU economic security. At the same time, Sweden's Arctic region needs to be developed further in order to benefit even more from those resources and to strengthen security in the northern areas of Norway, Sweden and Finland. A secure and stable Arctic builds on sustainable and resilient communities, with participation of the indigenous Sami people, the region's national minorities and all other residents of the Swedish part of the Arctic.

NATO and the EU are key to peace and development in the Arctic. Sweden has reason to work actively to strengthen the Arctic dimension of both NATO and EU policy, and to promote strong solidarity for the European Arctic from the whole of Europe.

Swedish Arctic policy encompasses both international and national policy, and strategic challenges as well as significant opportunities. With this Strategy, the Government ties together the different dimensions of the situation in the Arctic, in analysis and in action. Policy is strengthened by clarifying the links between security policy, international law, the economy and the environment and climate, as well as between local, regional, national and international levels. Swedish Arctic policy is being updated and developed. In comparison with earlier Swedish Arctic strategies, in this Strategy, the Government places greater emphasis on security issues, both as a thematic focus area and as a perspective that permeates other areas. The Government is also taking a new approach in highlighting the link between strategic resources and capabilities and Sweden's role and influence, particularly in the area of security policy. The Government's policy of constraint in relation to Russia also impacts Swedish Arctic policy.



Image: Johnér/imagebank.sweden.se

The Government's objective and 10-point plan

The Government's long-term objective is a peaceful and secure Arctic, with sustainable, robust and attractive communities and reduced environmental and climate impact. The Government intends to pursue this objective through activities and measures in the following 10 priority areas.

The Government intends to:

1. work to ensure that international law is respected by all states operating in the Arctic, that common challenges are addressed in peaceful collaboration and dialogue, and that democratic principles and human rights are respected;

2. deepen security and defence cooperation, develop national military capabilities and strengthen military mobility for enhanced deterrence and defence capability in the High North, with a focus on coordination and development of Arctic and subarctic capabilities, including through Sweden's responsibility as a framework nation for NATO's Forward Land Forces Finland;

3. strengthen sustainable regional and local development and resilience in Arctic Sweden in cooperation with civilian and military actors at local, regional and national level, including Indigenous Peoples, and promote cross-border cooperation with Finland and Norway;

4. contribute to utilising the economic opportunities in the Arctic in consideration of security dimensions, the importance of strategic independence and Swedish economic security, sustainability and environmental factors, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, in accordance with international law and for the benefit of local communities;

5. work to enhance efforts to limit warming of the Arctic in line with the 1.5 degree target of the Paris Agreement, improve capacity to manage the effects of climate change, preserve and sustainably use biodiversity, including stronger protection of marine areas, and reduce pollution in the Arctic, underpinned by Swedish and international environmental monitoring;

6. promote and utilise strategic resources that strengthen Sweden's position and security policy role in the Arctic, including polar research, a research icebreaker, space infrastructure and digital infrastructure capabilities;

7. prioritise work in the Arctic Council – the Arctic states' primary forum for cooperation on common issues, in which the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic participate – and help the Council maintain its status and continued relevance, with a particular focus on Sweden's Chairship in 2027–2029;

8. strengthen Nordic cooperation on Arctic issues, safeguard transatlantic relations and develop forms of cooperation with non-Arctic states that can contribute to a peaceful, secure and sustainable Arctic;

9. contribute, as one of the EU's three Arctic Member States, to the EU pursuing an ambitious, relevant and effective Arctic policy that joins together support to Europe's Arctic regions with foreign policy action, long-term climate action and strengthened economic development, and provide appropriate responses to security challenges; and

10. promote enhanced Swedish Arctic expertise and Sweden's foreign and security policy impact through strategic initiatives.

The Government's Arctic Strategy does not have an explicit end date, but its priorities and activities are based on a time frame of approximately five years. Follow-up of the Strategy will take place continuously, in dialogue with national and international partners.

Definitions of the Arctic

The following definitions are used in this Strategy:

There are several different definitions of what makes up the Arctic region. Demarcation takes place in different ways within various scientific areas and political agreements. *The Arctic* refers to the land, air and sea north of the Arctic Circle. In connection with the establishment of the Arctic Council in 1996, its members declared that the world's eight *Arctic states* are: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States.

In Sweden and other Arctic countries, the land area that is considered *Arctic* often also includes areas south of the Arctic circle due to similarities in climate and natural, living and socioeconomic conditions. The areas that are included may differ between contexts. In this Strategy, the *northern areas* of Finland, Norway and Sweden are those with Arctic and subarctic climate conditions. In Sweden, these are Norrbotten and Västerbotten Counties.

The *European Arctic* refers to the territories of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The *High North* refers to the parts of the Arctic that fall under the responsibility of NATO's highest military commander, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). The High North includes the Allied territories of the North Calotte, Svalbard and Jan Mayen, Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands and the Greenland Sea, the northernmost parts of the North Atlantic, the Norwegian Sea, the Barents Sea and the GIUK Gap between Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom. The 'High North' is a term used predominantly in NATO contexts, but it also appears in other contexts.

The North Calotte refers to the counties of Finnmark, Nordland and Troms in Norway, Norrbotten County in Sweden, the Lappland region in Finland and Murmansk Oblast in Russia.

Subarctic areas refer to the areas near the Arctic Circle that have subarctic climate conditions. Operating in subarctic areas requires special defence capabilities that differ from Arctic defence capabilities.

The *High Arctic* refers to the northernmost parts of the Arctic that have an Arctic climate.



Map of the North Pole and the eight Arctic states.

Image: Arctic Portal

2. Situation in the Arctic – strategic challenges

The Arctic is undergoing major change. The region has transitioned from being a low-tension area to an arena of great-power rivalry, and is in increasing geostrategic focus for Arctic and non-arctic states alike. The new geopolitical situation in the Arctic needs to be understood from three main perspectives: security tensions, economic interests and climate change – and how they interact with each other.

Security tensions

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it fundamentally altered the security situation in Europe, with consequences also in the Arctic.

Russia poses the most serious threat to Sweden's national security. On the Kola Peninsula, which is only a day's travel by car from northern Sweden and borders Norway and Finland, Russian military build-up continues. The Kola Peninsula is key to Russia's nuclear deterrence and has a major concentration of nuclear weapons. Russia's nuclear weapons capability, bases and strategic submarine fleet have an extensive impact on the area's strategic and defence and security policy dynamics. The High North and the Arctic are the primary geographical areas in which the strategic deterrence interests of the major powers meet.

Russia's Northern Fleet operates from naval bases around Murmansk, with its primary area of operations being the sea areas of the Arctic. Russia's 'shadow fleet' that is used to export Russian oil in violation of sanctions and oil price caps also operates in the Arctic. The vessels are often in a dilapidated condition and undertake high-risk manoeuvres at sea, which makes the shadow fleet both a security and an environmental threat.

Russia's military build-up is taking place in Sweden's immediate neighbourhood and threatens security and stability in the Arctic. From a military-strategic perspective, the Arctic and the Baltic Sea Region are part of the same contiguous geography, so a conflict in one can have immediate consequences in the other. It is therefore a strength that all Arctic states and Baltic Sea states except Russia are NATO Allies.

Sweden's and Finland's NATO accession strengthens the Alliance's presence as well as deterrence and defence capability in the European Arctic. This is of major importance to Sweden's security, and that of NATO as a whole, including in the event of crisis or war. NATO is enhancing its presence and its deterrence and defence capabilities in the High North.

The Arctic and the High North are a key area for NATO's supply lines between North America and Europe and for the defence of North America and Europe. Russian nuclear weapons that are based in or must pass through the Arctic are a threat to North America and a reason for the United States to maintain its Arctic engagement and defence cooperation in the High North. Security in the Arctic is a joint transatlantic concern.

As NATO Allies, the Nordic countries are making extensive investments in both military and civil defence in the High North. Nordic cooperation on Arctic issues is being strengthened against a backdrop of strong shared values and interests. Sweden's cooperation with Canada on Arctic issues is also being deepened. Arctic engagement is expanding and deepening within the EU, and an updated European Arctic strategy is being drafted.

Interest in the Arctic among non-Arctic states has increased significantly in recent years. In many cases, non-Arctic states cooperate with Arctic states and actors in areas that are strategically important and benefits development in the Arctic, such as research. Respect for international law is vital for well-functioning forms of cooperation.

China defines itself as a 'near-Arctic state' and has expressed its ambition of becoming a major power in the polar regions. Since 2013, China has been an observer state in the Arctic Council. The Arctic constitutes a long-term strategic interest for China, and it is develop-



Satellite image of Greenland, Europe and the North Pole in true colours.
Image: Planet Observer

ing dual-use capabilities that can support its presence there, including satellite systems, icebreakers and nuclear submarines. China is advancing its positions in Arctic research, and Chinese activities are assumed to have both civilian and military aims. Extraction of natural resources and diversification of trade routes are Chinese security interests. China has enhanced its economic cooperation with Russia. Russian exports of oil and gas to China, with an increasing share being delivered via the Northern Sea Route, benefit Russia's war economy and increase security risks in the Arctic.

The military dimension of China's presence in the Arctic remains limited, although defence cooperation between China and Russia has intensified in the region. . In recent years, China and Russia have conducted coordinated patrols and naval exercises, primarily in the sea areas around north-eastern Russia. China's enabling support for Russia's aggression against Ukraine remains a threat to Sweden's and Europe's security.

In 2026, the security situation in the Arctic has also been impacted by the US administration's statements concerning Greenland. Denmark and Greenland, as well as Sweden, the EU and many NATO Allies, have dismissed those statements on grounds of international law and security policy. Fundamental rules under international law and established arrangements for intergovernmental cooperation have been highlighted.

Economic opportunities

The Arctic is rich in natural resources on land, in the sea and in the seabed. The sea is abundant in foods such as fish and crustaceans. There are extensive oil and natural gas reserves in the circumpolar region. The Arctic also has considerable mineral deposits, including rare earth metals and other critical minerals and precious metals. Iron ore and base metals, as well gold and copper, are extracted in the Swedish Arctic. These are essential to Sweden's competitiveness and its capacity to adjust and produce goods in times of crisis or war.

With sea ice melting due to climate change, long-term opportunities arise for commercial shipping in the Arctic. The construction of underwater infrastructure such as fibre optic cables and pipelines is increasing. Many non-Arctic states are driven by the expected economic opportunities presented by extraction of natural resources and possibilities in areas such as tourism. Several non-Arctic countries are developing icebreaking capability, although only a small number of countries, including Sweden, have icebreakers with the capacity to reach and operate in the High Arctic. Non-Arctic countries are also expanding scientific programmes or seeking out forms of commercial cooperation with other actors in the Arctic.

The prospects for economic activity and investments vary significantly between different parts of the Arctic. Oil and gas revenues account for almost 85

per cent of Alaska's economy, whereas commercial fishing is the backbone of Greenland's economy. The northern areas of Norway, Sweden and Finland are home to heavy basic industries that utilise the Arctic natural resources with a high degree of refinement and serve as a growth engine in and beyond the Arctic region. However, what the Arctic countries have in common is that they are, to varying degrees, rich in natural resources and have vast, sparsely populated expanses of land and a harsh climate.

Climate and environmental change

The Arctic is warming at a significantly faster pace than the global average. According to scientific research, warming is occurring nearly four times more rapidly north of the Arctic circle. Warming is causing extensive and partly irreversible changes to glaciers, sea ice, permafrost and ecosystems, with major consequences for people and the environment in the Arctic, as well as for the global climate system. Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution constitute a triple planetary crisis with security policy consequences that are difficult to predict and may also pose risks to society's capacity to resist crises and people's health and welfare.

Melting glaciers and sea ice, and thawing land-based polar ice and permafrost are causing rising sea levels and erosion along Arctic coastlines. Increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is causing ocean acidification, which in turn impacts life in the sea. Melting glaciers and sea ice and rising sea levels are mutually reinforcing consequences of climate change that diminish the Earth's ability to reflect sunlight and increase the risk of surpassing critical thresholds in the global climate system. A potentially very serious but difficult-to-assess risk with a bearing on the Nordic countries is the loss of the critical transfer of heat if the Atlantic streams change.

The ozone layer above the Arctic recovers more slowly than in other regions, and climate change is increasing the likelihood of ozone depletion periods in the coming decades. This may result in major relative increases in UV radiation.

This, together with other influential factors such as pollution and physical exploitation, also have dramatic consequences for the Arctic's unique biodiversity and constitute a threat to the sensitive natural environment of Sweden's mountain region. Climate change deteriorates grazing conditions and impacts the natural pasture-based reindeer herding in Sweden's Arctic region.

As Arctic sea areas become more accessible, economic activity increases and thus impacts ecosystems. As maritime transport and other activities increase, there is a risk of incidents and accidents that can have major negative impacts on sensitive Arctic ecosystems. Increased maritime transport also raises underwater noise levels, primarily affecting marine mammals.

Environmental monitoring and other forms of data production are essential for describing and predicting impact on the environment, designing climate models and developing measures for adaptation to future climate change. Research cooperation in the Arctic has been negatively affected by the growing tensions resulting from Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The possibility of gathering climate-related data from Russia, which has by far the longest coastline around the Arctic Ocean, is severely limited and impacts possibilities for adequate environmental monitoring.

Basic premises of Sweden's Arctic policy

Security tensions, economic incentives and climate change are the main factors defining developments in the Arctic. The situation in the Arctic also affected – in all of these areas - if international law is challenged. Compliance with international law creates long-term predictability and stability, benefits prosperity and safeguards national sovereignty. The conflict resolution mechanisms of international law put small and large states on an equal footing. If international law is challenged, the security situation worsens.

Increased tensions in the Arctic challenge the national interests of Sweden and the other Nordic countries. However, developments in the Arctic also entail opportunities. Sweden requires a solid knowledge base, robust preparedness, an integrated outlook and an ambitious and strategic approach to the Arctic in order to take advantage of opportunities and tackle challenges. Swedish interests and the rules and principles of international law form the basis of our Arctic policy.



Ice front of the C.H. Ostenfeld Glacier that flows into Victoria Fjord in northern Greenland. The glacier had a floating ice tongue over 40 kilometres in length that broke apart around 2002. Today, only a small number of larger floating ice tongues remain in Greenland's fjords.

Image: Jamie Barnett/Felicity Holmes

3. The objective, interests and principles of Sweden's Arctic policy

The overarching and long-term objective of Sweden's Arctic policy is a peaceful and secure Arctic, with sustainable, robust and attractive communities and reduced environmental and climate impact. In the short and medium term, the Government will advance priorities, promote interests and take measures that contribute to the long-term objective.

In the Arctic, foreign and domestic policy are closely interlinked. Many policy areas, societal sectors and actors – public and private – collaborate and contribute directly and indirectly to developments in the Arctic, both within Sweden's borders and beyond. The Government's priorities and measures complement what is being done at municipal and regional level, as well as within the EU and NATO, to promote a peaceful, secure and sustainable Arctic.

Sweden's interests and role in the Arctic

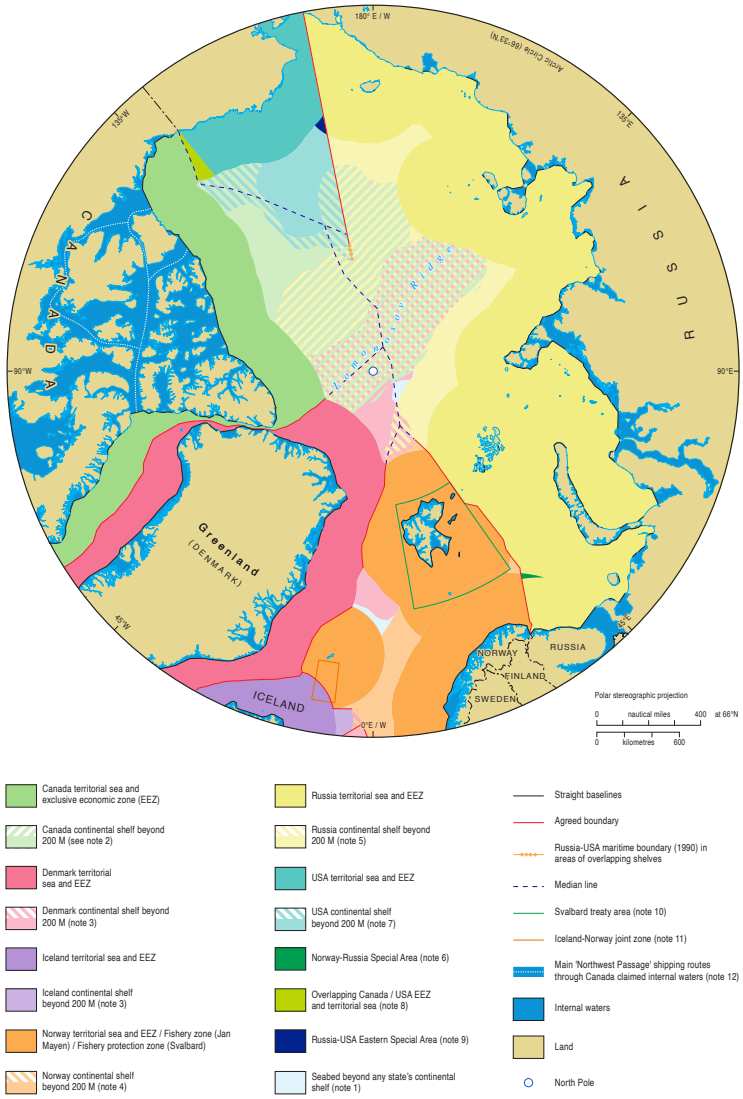
A rules-based international order and a secure and stable neighbourhood constitute Swedish strategic interests. Sweden and the other Nordic countries are at a disadvantage if respect for international law and multilateral cooperation in the Arctic is weakened. Sweden has a direct interest in seeing positive security developments in the Arctic and international law being upheld. It is also in Sweden's interests that functioning forums for dialogue and cooperation are in place, and that relations between actors and peoples in the Arctic are characterised by trust, reciprocity, predictability and a long-term approach. Common challenges require common solutions.

Furthermore, it is in Sweden's interests that economic opportunities in the Arctic are leveraged in a way that creates prosperity and resilience at local, regional and national level. Extraction of natural resources, increased maritime transport and development of infrastructure have good potential and should be utilised with respect for international law and a sustainable environment in the Arctic. The traditional knowledge and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and national minorities, as well as those of local communities, must be taken into account in the regional development of the Arctic, and economic development must benefit the entire Arctic population.

Moreover, Sweden has a fundamental interest in effectively managing the consequences of climate change in the Arctic through emissions reduction and adaptations. Climate change is already impacting Sweden's security today, and over time, it constitutes an existential threat to humanity. Effective climate and environmental action are an important part of global climate efforts and benefit all countries, including Sweden.

Sweden has several strategic resources that enhance our position as a foreign and security policy actor and our relevance and importance as a partner in an Arctic context. This includes Arctic research and the icebreaker Oden, advanced space capabilities and infrastructure – particularly the Esrange space centre – and cutting-edge expertise on digital infrastructure that enables Swedish participation in strategic underwater cable projects in Arctic sea areas. These capabilities will continue to be reinforced.

As an Arctic state, Sweden has a specific role and responsibility. Sweden will actively utilise the opportunity to exercise influence that this entails. It is in Sweden's interests that the EU has an ambitious and cohesive Arctic policy and strategic role, that NATO is a unified Alliance that can effectively meet threats in the neighbourhood, and that the Arctic Council remains an effective body for Arctic states and Indigenous Peoples to promote sustainable development. It is also in Sweden's interest that understanding of the Arctic



Map showing the Arctic states' submissions to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), established under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, regarding their extended continental shelves. They are presented together with a number of other maritime law zones. The map provides a comprehensive picture of CLCS recommendations and submissions pending action or decision. Read more at durham.ac.uk

Image: IBRU, Durham University, UK. January 2024.

within the EU and NATO improves, and that other non-Arctic and likeminded states actively contribute to constructive and rules-based international engagement in the Arctic.

Fundamental principles

Respect for international law, including human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, democratic values, peaceful cooperation and states' sovereign equality, are guiding principles for Sweden's engagement in the Arctic and partnerships with other Arctic and non-Arctic countries. The rules-based international order established after the Second World War serves us well and provides clear, transparent frameworks for conduct in the Arctic. Institutionalised cooperation between Arctic states, embodied by the Arctic Council and other cooperation initiatives and agreements that promote peaceful and sustainable development in the Arctic, need to be maintained and developed.

The Government stresses that all states must respect international law, including the law of the sea, in the Arctic. Within the framework of the law of the sea, all states have, inter alia, the right to freedom of navigation, marine scientific research and utilisation of resources in the sea areas that are part of the Arctic.

International law in the Arctic

Under international law, there is no legal void in the Arctic; nor is it subject to any special regulation. Arctic land, air and sea areas either belong to one of the eight Arctic sovereign states or consist of international waters and airspace over which no state has sovereignty.

International law applies in the Arctic in the same way as it does everywhere else. International law comprises, inter alia, the United Nations Charter, human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, environmental law, maritime law, air law and space law. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is particularly relevant as the Arctic consists largely of sea areas, and the Convention regulates how the sea and seabed, and the airspace above, may be used and how they are to be protected.

Multilateral, regional and bilateral conventions are applied there on a daily basis. The Arctic coastal states have concluded delimitation agreements on their sea and land borders. In 2010, Norway and Russia concluded an important treaty on maritime delimitation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean, and in 2022 Denmark and Canada concluded an agreement on Hans Island/Tartupaluk.

All five Arctic coastal states have the right to an extended continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean. The Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, established under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, is tasked with determining whether the coastal states' description of the limits of the continental shelf conforms to the criteria of the Convention. Extensive exploratory work is requred to gather data on the shelf, and not all Arctic coastal states have managed to do this. Therefore, it is still unclear how all continental shelves will be delimited.

A core regional convention is the Svalbard Treaty of 1920 (also known as the Spitsbergen Treaty). The Treaty recognises Norway's full sovereignty over the Svalbard archipelago, while giving citizens and companies of all contracting states equal rights of residence and economic activity. More than 40 parties from around the world have acceded to the Treaty. Swedish researchers have as much right as Norwegian researchers to conduct scientific research on the archipelago. The Svalbard Treaty proscribes using Svalbard for purposes of war. This is of major security policy significance. The Government emphasises the importance of compliance with the Treaty for the preservation of peace and security in the region.

Several binding agreements have also been concluded within the framework of the Arctic Council: the Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic (2011), the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (2013), and the Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation (2017).



The Swedish Polar Research Secretariat operates the Wasa and Svea research stations in Queen Maud Land in Antarctica. The image shows the Wasa research station, which opened in 1989 and only operates during the Antarctic summer. The station is designed to be highly energy-efficient, with solar energy as its main energy source. Each season, support is adapted to current research projects.

Image: Ninis Rosqvist.

Sweden's interests and role in the Antarctic

Both the Arctic and the Antarctic are the subject of growing geopolitical interest and strong research interests, have significant natural resources, and have experienced clear effects of climate change and increasing human impact on sensitive ecosystems. What distinguishes the Antarctic is its status as a demilitarised area reserved for peaceful purposes that is freely accessible for scientific research according to the Antarctic Treaty of 1959. Extraction of minerals or fossil fuels in the Antarctic is prohibited. Commercial fishing takes place in the Antarctic Ocean and is regulated under international agreements.

Since 1984, Sweden has been a Consultative Party to the Antarctic Treaty. This makes Sweden one of only five countries that is both a member of the Arctic Council and a Consultative Party to the Antarctic Treaty, which is a privileged position. Sweden is a Contracting Party to the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources and contributes to ecosystem-based management and the establishment of Marine Protected Areas. Sweden is also a Contracting Party to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, which entered into force in 1998, also known as the 'Madrid Protocol'. Within the framework of the Antarctic Treaty, Sweden monitors specific issues that may have consequences for the fundamental elements of the Antarctic Treaty, particularly territorial claims, sovereignty aspects and research issues.

The Antarctic Treaty is increasingly being challenged due to an increasingly strained international cooperation climate, and against the backdrop of climate change that is making the continent more accessible. At the same time, global interest in minerals, hydrocarbons and fisheries is increasing, which underscores the need for effective inspection mechanisms.

The Antarctic is home to over 70 research stations with the presence of more than 30 countries, including Sweden with its two research stations. Several countries are expanding their research activities in the Antarctic, and China is one of the states most clearly enhancing its presence. Ensuring that the peaceful and scientific purpose of the presence in Antarctica is maintained is a priority for Sweden. Through its polar research, Sweden has a thorough knowledge of both the Antarctic and the Arctic and will contribute to the overall analysis of risks and opportunities in international cooperation.

4. Focus areas of Sweden's Arctic policy

The Government's Arctic policy comprises five primary focus areas: i) peace, security and stability, ii) economy and trade, iii) climate and the environment, iv) sustainable, thriving and resilient communities, and v) strategic resources.

Peace, security and stability

As an Arctic state and NATO Ally, the changing situation in the Arctic presents Sweden with challenges and responsibilities, but also opportunities. It is in Sweden's national interests that developments in the Arctic are characterised by security, stability and peaceful collaboration.

The Government's investments in the area of defence policy contribute to strengthened deterrence and defence in the Arctic. Sweden's security and defence policy is being formulated in line with our responsibility for NATO's deterrence and defence in the High North.

National military capabilities

The Total Defence Bill 2025–2030 states that one of Sweden's primary tasks within NATO is to facilitate and effectively participate in the deterrence and defence of Northern Europe based on NATO's operational planning. Sweden is therefore developing its national capabilities in line with NATO capability targets.

Sweden prioritises its Arctic and subarctic capability, i.e. its ability to operate on and from the North Calotte. Sweden continues to build on its defence and operational capabilities, as well as its sensor and surveillance capabilities. These capabilities enhance the Alliance's situational awareness of the North Calotte and thus contribute to NATO's early warning capability, which is also valuable for the air defence of North America. Together with infrastructure investments in existing defence units, Sweden's military peacetime organisation in northern Sweden is also being strengthened.

Military mobility is essential for national security and military operations in the Arctic, including the North Calotte. The ability to move troops, equipment and military capability components swiftly and flexibly, and to defend and operate over long distances on and to the North Calotte should be strengthened based on national and allied operational plans. This includes capabilities such as fighter aircraft, strategic air transports, air-to-air refuelling and the use of command and control and information systems to achieve strategic objectives.

Military mobility is an essential component of NATO defence capabilities in the Arctic and the High North, making north-south and east-west connections important. Civilian and military needs amplify each other and create a new dynamic in discussions on infrastructure to and across the North Calotte and in Sweden's Arctic region. Enhanced military mobility requires a total defence approach with support from civilian and private actors. The EU is also making substantial investments to strengthen military mobility. EU financial instruments for capability development, reinforced infrastructure and harmonisation of regulatory frameworks are important factors in this regard.

International defence and security cooperation

Sweden's and Finland's accession to NATO has brought about transformative changes in our security and defence cooperation with other states – bilaterally and multilaterally. Enhanced cooperation with the Nordic NATO Allies and other Allies makes Sweden, and the Alliance as a whole, stronger. Having seven of the world's eight Arctic states as NATO Allies creates good opportunities for information-sharing, coordination and policy development within the Alliance, in and around the Arctic. In conjunction with the meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs in May 2026, the seven Arctic states (A7) – Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the United States – agreed on a deepened dialogue on security challenges in the Arctic.

With Sweden and Finland as Allies, the Arctic, the High North and the Baltic Sea Region are joined



Conscripts from the K 4 Norrland Dragoon Regiment conduct combat training with live ammunition in Arvidsjaur.

Image: Antonia Sehlstedt/Swedish Armed Forces



Sweden is contributing Gripen 39 fighter aircraft to the Arctic Sentry NATO activity in the area around Iceland and Greenland. Arctic Sentry is an umbrella activity under which several ongoing and future NATO activities in the Arctic region are coordinated. It aims to contribute to security in the Arctic and the High North.

Image: Nato

together as a single strategic and operational whole. Sweden contributes to effectively linking these areas in NATO's analysis, planning, exercises and training, and operations.

Together with Arctic Allies, Sweden will work to strengthen NATO's role in the Arctic. Establishing NATO's Forward Land Forces Finland (FLF Finland) is important for strengthening security in our neighbourhood and in the High North. Sweden has assumed responsibility as the framework nation for FLF Finland. It is in Sweden's interests to strengthen Arctic and subarctic capabilities within NATO. It is also in Sweden's interests that the whole Alliance engages in the High North to enhance security, expertise, institutional capacity, a common situational overview and strategic communication.

The Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) is important for its five member countries' defence and capability to implement joint military operations. NORDEFCO aims to contribute to NATO's deterrence and defence in northern Europe and to the security of the Alliance as a whole. Sweden works to ensure that NORDEFCO remains strong. The Nordic Defence Concept (NDC) aims to harmonise operational planning between the Nordic countries and, in the event of crisis and war, enable seamless integration into NATO's Regional Plans.

Sweden also prioritises cooperation within the framework of the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), which comprises the five Nordic countries, the three Baltic countries, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The JEF, which can be quickly activated in response to crises in northern Europe and the Arctic, underscores the status of the Arctic, the High North and the Baltic Sea as a contiguous strategic area.

As a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, security and defence policy developments in the EU have accelerated. The EU is strengthening its role as a security and defence policy actor and is developing its Arctic policy. Because parts of the Arctic lie within the borders of Sweden, Finland and Denmark, developments in the Arctic are a key concern for the EU's common foreign and security policy, as well as its internal political and economic work.

The EU also has an important role to play in Greenland. The inhabitants of Greenland are EU citizens, and Greenland both acknowledges and values the increased interest of the EU. Sweden supports strong and proactive EU engagement in Greenland, taking into account Danish and Greenlandic interests and maintaining close dialogue with Denmark and Greenland.

Strengthened European engagement in the Arctic is important for peaceful developments in Europe. The Government wants to see a stronger EU role in areas such as increased military mobility and a more ambitious approach to society's preparedness, resilience to hybrid threats and space capability. It is also in Sweden's interests that the EU strengthens its cooperation with strategically likeminded partners such as Norway, Iceland, Canada, the UK and NATO.

National total defence capability

The Government is now implementing the greatest build-up of Sweden's total defence since the 1950s. Sweden's total defence consists of military and civilian activities that are mutually reinforcing. The overall objective of Sweden's total defence is to have the capability to defend Sweden and its population against armed attacks, assert Sweden's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and contribute to the defence of Allies.

Total defence operations can be undertaken independently and together with other actors, within Sweden's borders and beyond, and in accordance with Sweden's undertakings as a NATO Ally. In NATO, work to strengthen resilience involves the Allies enhancing their capability to prepare for, resist, respond to and quickly recover from crises arising from threats and risks targeting the Alliance's security. Sweden's NATO accession impacts, inter alia, demands on industry, infrastructure and transportation in Sweden.

The Arctic is a complex risk environment in which climate change, geopolitical tensions and limited infrastructure meet. It requires coordinated planning, command and control, preparedness and resources. This work must be implemented at intergovernmental, national, regional and local level, in various forums, and by military and civilian actors.

Together with actors at regional and local level, the Government is working to maintain and strengthen Sweden's total defence and presence in the Swedish Arctic region. Sweden also has strategic interests in maintaining a strong presence in the Arctic and independent access to the High Arctic, particularly in light of a new security situation and Sweden's NATO accession.

International rescue operations

Joint preparedness is key to protecting people and the environment in the Arctic. Sweden will continue to contribute to cross-border cooperation on civilian crisis management and rescue services in the Arctic, including within the Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF). The ACGF promotes secure and environmentally responsible maritime transport through information-sharing, exercises, common procedures and operations during search and rescue operations and in the event of oil spills. Important work also takes place in the cross-border rescue cooperation between Finland, Norway and Sweden. This cooperation focuses on preventing, preparing for and operating in emergency situations and is implemented primarily in the form of joint exercises.

In the Arctic Council, Sweden actively takes part in projects, operations and exercises concerning wildfires, oil pollution incidents in line with the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (MOSPA), simulated search and rescue operations and radiological preparedness. The Swedish Coast Guard also provides vessels and aircraft for the identification and assessment of oil spills. Climate change and increased maritime transport in the Arctic underscore the importance of these forms of cooperation and the need to continue to prioritise them.

Hybrid threats

The fact that the Arctic is a high political priority for Russia elevates the threat scenario in the region with regard to hybrid activity. Russia conducts hostile activities against NATO and EU countries and has the capability and intention to escalate its hybrid attacks without crossing the threshold for an armed attack. The aim is to weaken societies, sow discord within and between Allies, and undermine support for Ukraine. Russia's military-strategic and economic interests in the Arctic, in combination with the presence of critical infrastructure, underscores the risk of sabotage, cyberattacks, espionage and foreign information manipulation and interference.

Swedish security policy needs to place greater emphasis on the links between hybrid activities in the Arctic and in the Baltic Sea Region. Together with Allies,



Image from the Arctic Guardian 2025 exercise, which was conducted outside Tromsø, Norway with the participation of the United States, Canada and all Nordic countries.
Image: Norwegian Coast Guard

Sweden will develop the capability to identify, manage and counter hybrid threats in the Arctic. One resource in this work in the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE), consisting of 35 Participating States, the European Union and NATO. The Hybrid CoE provides expertise on hybrid threats and offers training programmes on countering them. The objective of this hybrid work is to limit the scope for antagonistic hybrid activities and create incentives for responsible action. This should be achieved by bolstering resources and through closer cooperation within the Nordic region and with the Baltic states and other likeminded countries around the Baltic Sea and in the Arctic – particularly within NATO, the EU and NORDEFCO.

Underwater infrastructure

The Arctic is a geopolitically important area in which underwater infrastructure such as subsea cables and pipelines is essential to communications, energy and security. This infrastructure is difficult to monitor and protect, particularly in the Arctic due to its climate and long distances. As activity in the Arctic increases, so too does the risk of sabotage, intelligence activities and accidents. Protection of underwater infrastructure is therefore part of Sweden's total defence and a prerequisite for operational capability in the region.

Sweden will work to better protect underwater infrastructure in the Arctic through existing forms of cooperation. Sweden will also promote effective collaboration on maritime surveillance and more effective sharing of maritime situational information via established systems and networks, such as NATO's Critical Undersea Infrastructure Network.

Economy and trade

The Arctic is a region with major economic potential due to its wealth of natural resources, expanding trade routes and developments within industry and infrastructure. The Government also takes a positive view of the Arctic's economic potential and intends to harness it in a manner that ensures long-term sustainability and which is in compliance with international law, as part of a peaceful, secure and stable Arctic.

Economic development and security

Climate change brings challenges for Arctic communities and the Arctic environment, but it also brings economic opportunity. Arctic natural resources are become increasingly accessible, and the Arctic Ocean is becoming increasingly navigable, even if large parts of the Arctic environment remain challenging. The economic potential of natural resources on land, in the sea and on the seabed has boosted global interest in investing and seeking business opportunities in the Arctic. Increased economic activity entails opportunities for Sweden and the European Arctic, but also has security consequences.

The Swedish part of the Arctic features growth factors such as abundant natural resources and stable access to fossil-free electricity production, robust basic industries, innovative sectors, and successful research and development in higher education and businesses. The potential of industry's transition in northern Sweden depends on these strategic conditions. Sectors that are specialised in the Arctic climate or have had particularly beneficial conditions in the Swedish Arctic include mining, forestry, energy generation, motor vehicle and aircraft testing, the space industry and tourism. Investments in fossil-free steel production, electrification, battery value chains, hydrogen solutions and fossil-free electricity production are changing the industrial landscape in northern Sweden and contributing to Swedish and European security, increased self-sufficiency in critical raw materials and enhanced competitiveness.

Academic freedom, international research cooperation and the ability to successfully commercialise research results have been, and continue to be, beneficial to Sweden. Sweden will continue to ensure openness and international cooperation, but at the same time actively counter the risk of their improper exploitation by foreign powers. There is a need to protect both emerging technologies and critical supply chains.

Sweden has several instruments at its disposal to strengthen its economic security, such as control over exports of dual-use products and limits on foreign direct investments. These instruments can be used to address technology leakage or investments that can harm national security interests.

Sweden must protect its economic security and will actively monitor, protect against and counteract tampering with and sabotage of critical infrastructure in the Arctic. It is important that digital and physical connectivity infrastructure is secure and trustworthy. Space-based infrastructure is equally important to Sweden's ability to operate in the Arctic. Sweden has good expertise for operations in the Arctic. In collaboration with likeminded states, particularly the Nordic countries, and as a NATO Ally and EU Member State, Sweden can promote Swedish interests in the region.

The Arctic consists of parts of sovereign states' mainland, internal waters, territorial seas and international waters (economic zones and high seas). Resources on the continental shelves below the water column mostly belong to the Arctic coastal states. International law must be applied fully in the exercise of all activities. Trade and investment must be compatible with international trade agreements, EU law and Swedish legislation.

Critical metals and minerals

The world's need for critical metals and minerals is driven by the electrification and digitalisation of societies, industries and vehicles. Critical raw materials are also essential for the production of technical solutions for climate transition and for the defence and space industry. Global demand for critical metals, which can be found in the Arctic, has increased dramatically in recent years. In much of the Arctic, however, these raw materials are difficult to access, and their extraction is associated with extensive logistical challenges and costs.



In the future, mines will be carbon-free, digitalised and autonomous. Electrified and autonomous vehicles can eliminate emissions in mines and improve safety.
Image: LKAB

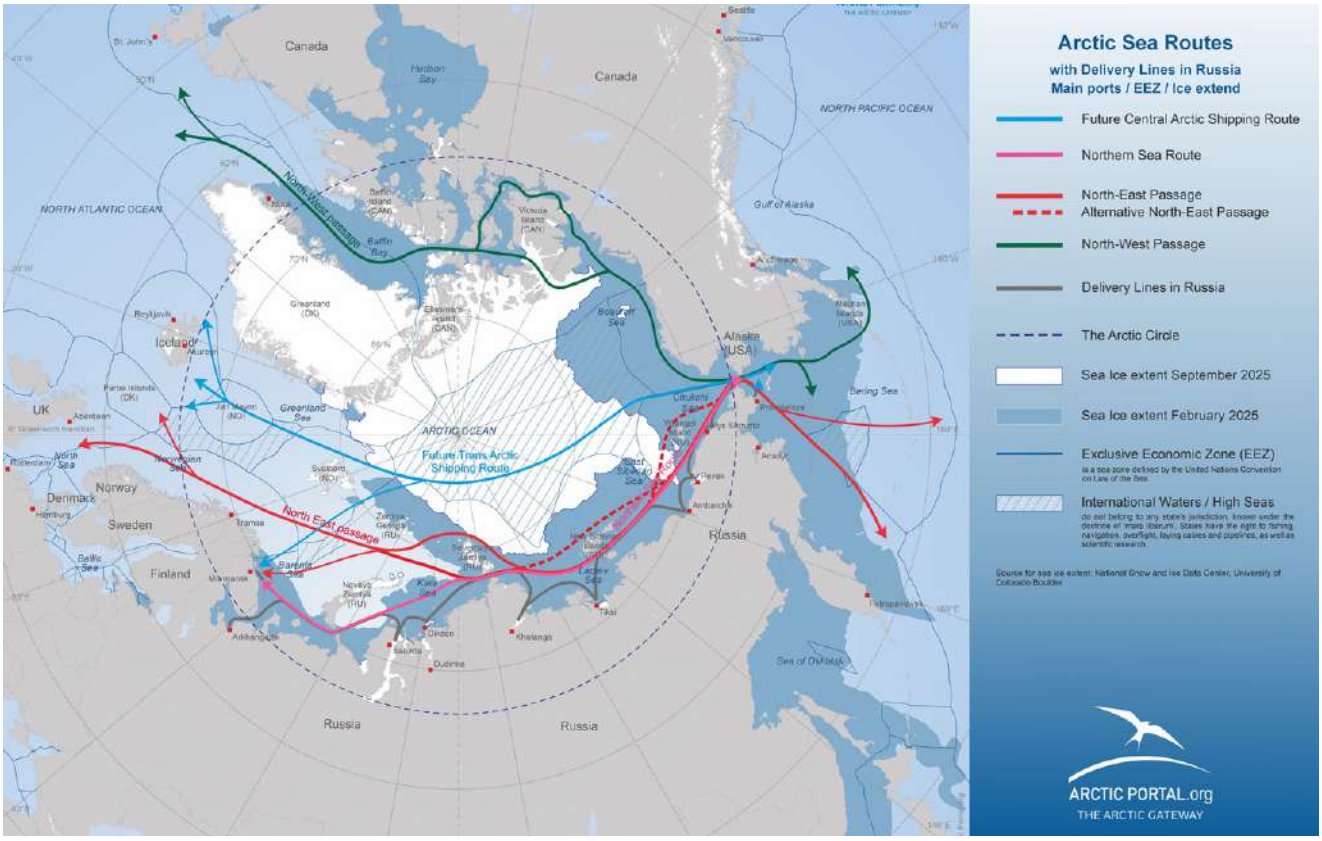
There is also a stated ambition of strengthening possibilities in Europe regarding access to and supply chains for strategic minerals, with the aim of strengthening European competitiveness and reducing dependencies on potentially antagonistic actors. In the prevailing security context, access to strategic metals and minerals has become a matter of power, security of supply and independence. Sweden and Europe need to reduce high-risk dependencies on external actors for these raw materials and at the same time secure regional development and resilience in the European Arctic. This requires a more coordinated and strategic approach. Therefore, extraction and processing of critical raw materials should also be considered from a security and sovereignty perspective.

The Government welcomes the European Critical Raw Materials Act and the objective in the RESourceEU Action Plan to accelerate its implementation. The aim is to strengthen European production of primary and secondary critical raw materials, build up resilience, diversify supply chains and reduce dependency on individual countries outside the EU.

Mining is an important part of Sweden's economy. As a world-leading mining nation, Sweden has the experience, know-how and modern technology to responsibly utilise and refine both primary and secondary raw materials. Sweden has the capacity to pursue sustainable extraction that contributes to new value chains around metals and minerals.

In particular, the Government is endeavouring to improve the conditions of the critical raw materials industry through regulatory simplification and quicker permit processes. A competitive critical raw materials industry is vital to Sweden's growth, defence capability and climate transition. The Government is also working to reform environmental assessments. The primary aim is to simplify and shorten assessment processes while maintaining a high level of environmental protection.

Through innovation and sustainable environmental technology, Swedish companies can stimulate economic activity in the Arctic. Sweden will push for joint initiatives in the EU, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Arctic



Map of the North Pole showing Arctic shipping lanes and the extent of sea ice in September and February 2025, respectively.

Image: Arctic Portal

Council to contribute at global level to sustainable extraction of ore and minerals. Sweden can also help improve knowledge of circular and sustainable utilisation of resources.

Melting sea ice may put additional pressure on the exploitation of natural resources from the seabed in the form of minerals, oil and gas. It is possible that more states will consider deep-sea mining. This makes it important to uphold the law of the sea and the exclusive mandate of the International Seabed Authority concerning the seabed beyond the continental shelves under national jurisdiction. The Government's position is that deep-sea mining in areas beyond national jurisdiction, including those in the Arctic, must not commence until the environmental impact on organisms and ecosystems in the deep sea has been adequately studied and the ISA has a adopted a deep-sea mining regulatory framework; this is referred to as a 'precautionary pause'. The Government urges more states to commit to a precautionary pause in deep-sea mining in order to avoid harming the marine environment.

Shipping

The melting ice sheet opens up new opportunities for commercial shipping via the Arctic Ocean. The Northern Sea Route may become an alternative trade route from Asia to Europe and North America. There are potential advantages to this route, even if it is generally associated with geostrategic challenges and difficult Arctic conditions. The Northern Sea Route could reduce dependency on the Suez Canal and save time and reduce costs, as it is an estimated 40 per cent shorter. Several countries, particularly those with ports in the northern Pacific region, such as China, Japan, Russia and South Korea, may have a long-term interest in developing the Northern Sea Route for maritime transport due to its geographic proximity to the Bering Strait.

Nevertheless, developing the Northern Sea Route poses security risks. The Northern Sea Route largely follows the Russian coastline in the Arctic and is served by Russian ports, icebreakers and sea pilots. This gives Russia major influence over the route and the trade along it. Development of the Northern Sea Route and Russian energy exports would generate

increased revenues for the Russian state. Increased use of the Northern Sea Route would also reduce Russia's dependency on the Baltic Sea for its energy exports.

Increased maritime transport in the Arctic also entails a greater risk of emissions from vessels and other pollution, as well as negative effects of increased underwater noise levels. The vessels in Russia's shadow fleet also pose an environmental threat. The Northern Sea Route is in a sensitive environment and still lacks adequate infrastructure for search-and-rescue operations. Sweden will continue to work for good collaboration between the Arctic Council and the OSPAR Commission (implementing the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, or OSPAR Convention). The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has adopted a number of rules that have bearing on the Arctic Ocean, particularly the Polar Code, and it is important to continue to participate in the development of the IMO's work. Sweden will also continue to further develop its cooperation with partner countries and the EU with a view to constrain Russia's shadow fleet.

It is in Sweden's and Europe's interests that freedom of navigation is maintained, with full respect for maritime regulations. Reduced risks and transport costs are generally beneficial for trade and advantageous for countries that are dependent on foreign trade, such as Sweden. The Government intends to help improve knowledge of how state and commercial actors operate in the Arctic Ocean, and to act jointly with likeminded countries in addressing challenges and opportunities. This involves strengthening cooperation and technical methods, including with the use of AI and satellites, to streamline search and rescue operations, improve maritime forecasts and identify and track vessels that may be involved in activities that are in violation of international regulatory frameworks, such as illegal fishing or pollution.

Fishing

Melting sea ice and warmer waters are putting pressure on fish stocks in the Arctic. Certain species are migrating north, and fishing grounds for fish and krill in international waters are changing. There is a need for increased knowledge of the region's marine ecology and fish stocks. Research is also being conducted on future ocean-based foods such as seaweed and algae, which have major potential in the Arctic Ocean. An increased presence for extraction as well as for research can be anticipated. In the long term, interest in future foods can contribute to conflict in the Arctic between states. China, in particular, is showing considerable interest in ocean-based resources in both the Arctic and the Antarctic. For this reason, Sweden advocates international, responsible cooperation and common rules.

Since 2017, an international agreement has been in place to prevent unregulated commercial fishing in the high seas of the central Arctic Ocean. It has been signed by the EU, the US, Russia and China, whereby the parties have undertaken to prevent commercial fishing in the high seas of the Arctic. The Government backs the fishing agreement and will work to ensure that commercial fishing does not commence in the area until it can be ensured that it can take place without negative effects on the sensitive ecosystem.



Underwater image of Arctic char in Greenland. Arctic char are extremely resistant to the cold, and live along Greenland's entire coastline and in its inland.

Image: Dan Bach Kristensen

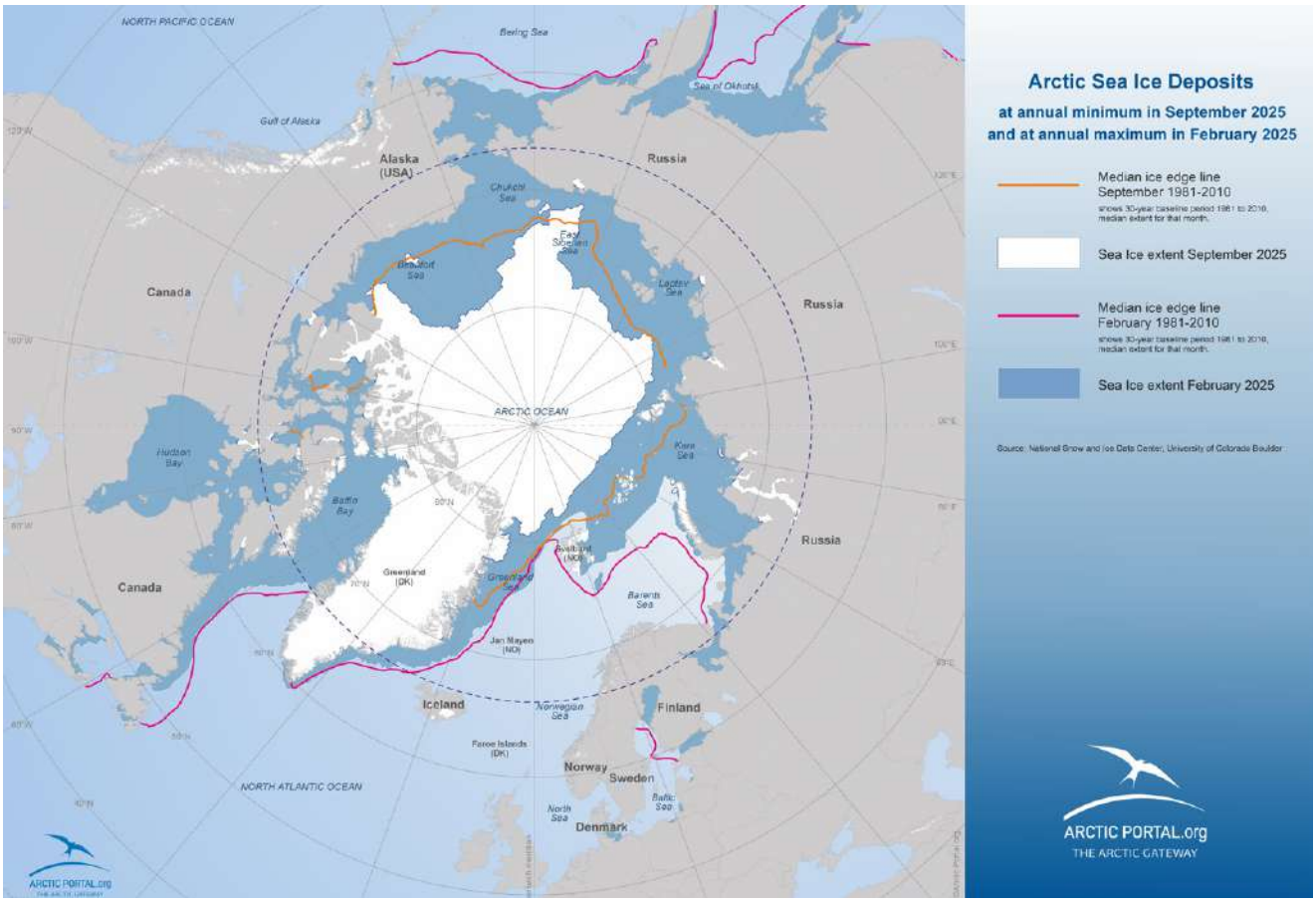
Climate and environment

The rapid warming of the Arctic has regional and global consequences. Climate change affects people and the environment, and is closely related to the security developments and economic opportunities in the Arctic. The Government prioritises initiatives to limit warming of the Arctic in line with the 1.5 degree target of the Paris Agreement, increase capability to manage the effects of climate change, conserve and sustainably use biodiversity, including strong protection of marine areas, and reduce pollution in the Arctic, with the support of Swedish and international environmental monitoring.

Climate

Rapid and dramatic climate change has extensive consequences for human health, living conditions and ecosystems in the Arctic region. Climate change in the Arctic also has consequences for Arctic security and impacts both operational and strategic conditions over time in the High North.

The ongoing warming of the Arctic can only be limited by quickly reducing global greenhouse gas emissions. Emissions must be halved by 2030 from 2010 levels to have reasonable prospects of achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. Emissions must then continue to decrease, primarily through reduced use of fossil resources. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris



Map of the North Pole showing the extent of sea ice in September and February 2025, respectively. The map also shows the median limit of sea ice during summer and winter months in 1981–2010.

Image: Arctic Portal



The Arctic fox is currently classified as critically endangered in Sweden. Despite being protected since 1928, the species has struggled to recover. However, the past 20 years have shown that measures taken to conserve the Arctic fox have had the desired effect.

Image: Patrick Kuschfeld

Agreement should serve as a basis for Sweden's international climate work. The three goals of the Paris Agreement – emissions reduction, adaptation and financing – should be overarching objectives. The climate agreement from the UN Climate Change Conference COP28, according to which the states of the world are to transition away from fossil fuels, should serve as a guide.

Most countries need to do more to phase out coal, oil and gas and to achieve net zero emissions. Sweden is active in its international climate efforts. The Government is working to raise the ambition and accelerate the pace of global climate work in line with the three aspects of Swedish climate diplomacy: policy dialogue, financing and innovative technology. Swedish actors can offer support in these areas, and Swedish companies' climate solutions can help accelerate the pace of global climate work.

The Government stresses the EU's role in the climate transition and the importance of closer cooperation with other high-emissions countries. Closer and stronger cooperation in Sweden's neighbourhood, not least with our Nordic neighbours and in the Arctic Council, will help accelerate the pace of climate transition. Sweden will continue to push to strengthen environmental and climate work within the Arctic Council. The Arctic Council Observers, i.e. non-Arctic states, account for the majority of global greenhouse gas emissions. The Arctic Council is therefore a platform for dialogue between those countries on emissions reductions and the consequences of climate change in the Arctic.

Biodiversity

Arctic ecosystems are unique, with forests, wetlands and mountain landscapes forming large-scale mosaics together with marine ecosystems. Climate change has dramatic effects on this unique biodiversity. Arctic species and habitats are at risk of disappearing altogether, or only remaining as isolated fragments. The current species composition in the Arctic is changing, partly due to southerly species crowding out Arctic species as mean temperatures rise. Other influential factors are pollution, physical exploitation and other habit changes, and invasive foreign species.

The marine ecosystems that are protected under sea ice and species that are dependent on sea ice are becoming increasingly vulnerable. Due to the low temperatures, these ecosystems have a very limited capacity to recover if they are disturbed by human activity. For this reason, it is necessary to increase their resilience. Arctic biodiversity and ecosystems must be protected, but it must still be possible to sustainably utilise the resources of the sea and nature.

The Government is working to limit disturbances of and negative impacts on Arctic ecosystems resulting from various types of human activity, and will continue to work constructively with a long-term perspective for increased marine protection in the polar regions. The Government also intends to work to protect sensitive areas, areas of high natural and cultural value and biodiversity in the Arctic. Loss of biodiversity must be avoided, minimised and compensated for. Initiatives should be informed by the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The Government will support these efforts with a representative, ecological, cohesive and functional Arctic network of protected areas corresponding to 30 per cent of sea and land areas, in line with Target 3 of the Framework.

The law of the sea obliges all states to cooperate to protect the marine environment. The central parts of the Arctic Ocean should be protected within the framework of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction. The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic may also be an important instrument in implementing this protection. The Government also supports the precautionary pause in deep-sea mining to protect organisms and ecosystems in the deep sea.

Pollution

Harmful substances and materials such as plastics spread via air and water currents and gather in the Arctic environment. The majority of such pollution comes from sources beyond the Arctic, but local emissions also occur. The spread of plastics and microplastics to the Arctic is a major problem for the local population and animal life. These persistent materials remain in the natural environment for thousands of years. The Government is actively pushing for an ambitious global agreement to end plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. In the Arctic Council, the Government intends to contribute to work on marine litter, including a regional plan for how to manage litter in the Arctic. Negotiations on harmful substances, plastic pollution and waste are taking place within the framework of numerous international conventions and bodies.

Due to atmospheric conditions, the Arctic is also exposed to precipitation of mercury and other heavy metals that have negative health impacts on the Arctic population. Environmental toxins, soot and black particles transported in the air are also a problem in the Arctic. The Government intends to continue to actively work within Arctic Council working groups to reduce emissions of soot and methane.

The Government will continue to push at regional and global level for the transition to a circular economy, sustainable waste management, reduced pollution and phasing-out of particularly hazardous chemicals such as mercury and persistent organic environmental toxins.

Nuclear safety and radiation protection

Nuclear safety and radiation protection are becoming relevant issues, as radioactive substances and nuclear materials are regularly transported in the Arctic region. Traffic by reactor-powered vessels such as icebreakers and container ships has increased, and the establishment of new floating nuclear power plants along Russia's northern coast is underway. These floating nuclear power plants represent a new type of sea transport in the region. The nuclear power plants will be transported by sea at regular intervals to replace nuclear fuel and perform any necessary maintenance. In addition to this, there is historical radioactive waste in the Arctic stemming primarily from military activities, nuclear weapons testing and dumping of nuclear fuel by submarines and icebreakers.

Sweden will assume a clear role in the Arctic Council to highlight the cross-border risks associated with an increased presence of nuclear material and other radioactive substances in the Arctic. The Swedish Radiation Safety Authority actively contributes to Arctic Council working groups. The Government will work to prevent and limit negative consequences that can arise in radiological and nuclear emergencies involving the transportation of radioactive substances and nuclear material, nuclear-powered maritime transport, floating nuclear power plants and existing radioactive waste in the Arctic.

Environmental monitoring

Environmental monitoring is based on scientific, systematic and recurring analyses of air, soil and water, biodiversity and land and marine environments. These observations are conducted at sea, at land-based stations, via satellites and using drone technology. They provide clear early warning signals regarding issues such as climate change and pollution in the Arctic. Polar research expeditions such as those conducted by the icebreaker Oden are a prerequisite for observations of the sea, sea ice and atmosphere in the Arctic, which are essential for satellite measurements.

Environmental monitoring enables early identification of risks and the improvement of climate and weather models, which makes it an important component of research and decision-making data for sustainable societal development. Access to this data also strengthens Sweden's capacity to act in international forums.

The Arctic Council plays an important role in compiling international research and observations. It is also an important platform for sharing, analysing and transforming countries' environmental data into joint initiatives. The Council's working groups build their analyses and recommendations on continuous and quality-assured environmental monitoring, and produce results that are used by states, researchers, the business sector and international organisations.

By contributing high-quality data and expertise, Sweden can push for adequate measures and evidence-based development in the region. A high level of ambition in monitoring and analysis is important to identifying and addressing risks to people and ecosystems and as a basis for international cooperation.



A researcher collects water samples during the Synoptic Arctic Survey 2021 research expedition, which was carried out in the Arctic Ocean with the Swedish icebreaker Oden.

Image: The Swedish Polar Research Secretariat

Sustainable, thriving and resilient communities

The difficult security situation and the effects of environmental and climate change are placing greater demands on society's resilience, particularly in the Arctic. In addition, social and demographic changes mean local communities need to be further strengthened. Resilience in Sweden's Arctic region is security policy: local and regional development, attractive living environments and sustainable use of Sweden's substantial natural resources contribute to Sweden's overall security, stability, economy and prosperity. The Government emphasises the importance of an integrated approach and the broad participation of stakeholders to promote sustainable, thriving and resilient communities.

Regional development and dynamic communities

Sweden's Arctic region and local communities are characterised by a good quality of life and a strong research and innovation climate. Towns and smaller urban areas in Sweden's Arctic regions play a key role as regional power centres. The region's natural resources and raw materials are an important foundation for business development and industrial transition, which creates jobs and competitiveness and improves conditions for a good life for the people who live and work there. The region's economy also includes knowledge-intensive sectors, such as space operations, testing and demonstration environments, and data storage, all of which contribute to a more diversified regional economy. The combination of Sweden's geographical location, natural resources and raw materials, industrial transformation, polar research environments and nature- and adventure-based industries creates a development profile that is unique in Europe.

The ability to provide essential services in the event of crisis or war is crucial to our country's resilience. Robust infrastructure, security of energy supply, functioning logistics, connectivity, food security, access to public and commercial services including education, and thriving local communities create conditions for society to function even in difficult conditions. Cultural life, associations and civil society contribute to social cohesion. A populated and viable Arctic with an institutional presence is strategically important and strengthens local resilience.

Thriving and attractive local communities with access to functioning commercial and public services are crucial for retaining and attracting expertise, and for maintaining population levels in Sweden's Arctic region. They provide long-term opportunities to develop the region's economic, social and environmental strengths to meet challenges such as sparse populations, long distances, demographic imbalance, low and declining populations in certain areas, small labour markets and limited skills supply, and the consequences of climate change. In addition, conditions in Sweden's Arctic region place high demands on land and water planning, well-functioning transport infrastructure for business, including commuting and freight traffic, and conditions for housing construction and regional development.

In order to prevent, resist and manage crises and war at all threat levels, the work of municipalities and regions on crisis preparedness and civil defence is crucial. This includes the protection, maintenance and repair preparedness of essential infrastructure such as roads, railways, electricity grids and connectivity, including fibre optic and mobile networks, and food and drinking water supply. In addition, psychological defence, including the ability to identify, analyse and respond to foreign information manipulation and interference, and a strong will to defend, are vital to maintaining society's resilience. Cross-border planning and cooperation between the Arctic regions of Sweden, Norway and Finland, and collaboration between state, regional and local actors, and cooperation with civil society and business actors across national borders, are crucial for safe, functioning and attractive communities, especially in border municipalities.

Providing the business sector with good conditions to improve its competitiveness, develop digital and green



Northern lights over Umeå.
Image: Fredrik Larsson/imagebank.sweden.se

innovations and create jobs is a priority. It is also important that labour markets and public services can be developed across national borders without impeding the competitiveness of the business sector, so as to contribute to sustainable regional development. Government investment, for example through regional business subsidies, transport subsidies, support for commercial services and project-based activities, plays an important role in promoting sustainable growth and strengthening companies' competitiveness, offsetting cost disadvantages and promoting access to basic commercial services in areas where they are sparse.

The status of sparsely populated regions is of central importance to Sweden in EU programmes concerning the Arctic. The Government is prioritising the participation of Swedish actors in initiatives funded by the European Regional Development Fund, including the EU's Interreg programmes in the Arctic. These funds support projects and companies that develop location-based solutions for competitiveness, investment, innovation, infrastructure, education and the green and digital industrial transition. This is crucial for regional and rural development and improves the capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises and innovation systems in particular. These programmes also contribute to increased growth, more jobs and skills development, and a better quality of life in northern Sweden.

Business development, industry and societal transformation

Sweden's Arctic region plays an important role in Europe's economy, energy supply and technological development, and strengthens Swedish and European competitiveness. As a mining nation with metal and mineral deposits, Sweden can contribute to reducing both its own and the EU's dependence on strategic raw materials from third countries. Meanwhile, a societal transformation is underway that is making new demands on, among other things, infrastructure, housing, educational opportunities and access to culture and services.

The Government has identified seven key target areas to support business development and societal transformation in Norrbotten and Västerbotten Counties:



Aerial view of Svartön in Luleå. Svartön is currently part of an established industrial area with actors such as LKAB, SSAB and the Port of Luleå.

Image: Patrik Öhman

a fast pace through innovative forms of work, more efficient environmental permit processes, secured fossil-free energy supply, enhanced transport infrastructure, improved supply of labour and housing, increased capacity and flexibility in education and better skills supply, and better conditions for municipal capacity.

To support strategically important industrial investments, the Government has established an acceleration office to facilitate for industry and strengthen the competitiveness of companies participating in societal transformation. The Government has also tasked the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth with clearing obstacles to industrial competitiveness and climate transition. In addition, investments are being made to improve railways for both freight and passengers in northern Sweden. Initiatives are also underway to accelerate permit processes and make them more predictable, helping to facilitate business start-ups and expansions and streamline the climate transition for Swedish companies.

Infrastructure

Distances in Sweden's Arctic region are vast, and a robust and well-functioning transport system with cross-border functionality is important for both civilian and military purposes. Climate-related risks, such as increased precipitation and changing ground frost, increase the vulnerability of the transport network, which needs to be adapted to a changing climate.

Good capacity, accessibility and reduced vulnerability of transport infrastructure are important for the population's mobility and access to public services, for tourism, industrial transition, total defence, security of supply, trade and Swedish and European competitiveness.

Dynamic communities in northern Sweden depend on access to adequate health and social care infrastructure, skills supply, commuting, housing construction and robust local and regional economies. Infrastructure also plays a central role in research and space activities in the Swedish Arctic.

The transport corridors in the North Calotte connect Sweden, Finland and Norway. In recent years, the Government has developed Nordic cooperation with Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland on transport preparedness and cross-border transport infrastructure, with a focus on total defence, military mobility and security of supply. Due to the current serious security situation, Nordic cooperation needs to be deepened further, which could also help to strengthen cohesion among the Nordic countries.

Digitalisation

Digitalisation is a key factor in increased benefit to citizens, greater prosperity, improved competitiveness and increased security in Sweden's Arctic region. Digital services depend on access to connectivity. The objective of the Government's digitalisation strategy is to ensure continuous, reliable domestic and international connectivity so it is possible to reside, live and work throughout the country. Digital infrastructure must also be resilient and secure. Robustness and redundancy are important for connectivity within Sweden and internationally.

The need for increased redundancy in underwater infrastructure has come into sharp relief in the wake of incidents in our neighbourhood in recent years. The expansion of underwater infrastructure in the Arctic can enhance global connectivity. The Government continues to push for improved connectivity between the Nordic and Indo-Pacific regions, and North America via the Arctic. Collaboration with Nordic and other countries in the Arctic is an important part of strengthening the robustness of digital infrastructure and digital integration.

Forestry

Forests are a strategic resource for a robust Sweden, and for jobs and growth. The emergence of a circular, bio-based economy in Sweden's Arctic region contributes to sustainable development, new companies and more jobs. Forests provide an important renewable raw material that can contribute to maintaining energy supply and building and repair preparedness in times of crisis and war.

Furthermore, effective, active and sustainable forestry plays a crucial role in enabling Sweden and Europe to achieve climate and energy objectives because forests with good growth capture large quantities of carbon dioxide. Valuable natural and cultural environments are preserved and protected so that biodiversity is maintained. Adaptation of forests and forestry methods is necessary so that the forests of the future can withstand damage caused by climate change.

Food security

Maintaining food security throughout the country in the event of crisis or war is a priority for Sweden. The specific conditions in Sweden's Arctic region are challenging and require a specific approach.

The food supply in northern Sweden is dependent on long-distance transport, which presents logistical challenges for domestic and international food chain flows. At the same time, Sweden's Arctic region is important for the food supply to southern Sweden via Norwegian Atlantic ports in the event of crisis or war. Sweden's Arctic region is also strongly characterised by its Arctic and subarctic climatic conditions, with a short growing season and varying day length. Climate change is already noticeable in northern Sweden and requires adaptation.

Despite major challenges there is also potential, which is reflected in the investments the Government is making to strengthen agriculture in northern Sweden. A cornerstone of Sweden's National Food Strategy 2.0, which is crucial for achieving the goal of increased food production, is increasing profitability and competitiveness at the primary production stage. This applies to agriculture and reindeer husbandry, as well as fishing and aquaculture. National support for agriculture in northern Sweden contributes to open farmland, a thriving countryside and strengthened livelihoods.

Emergency grain stocks and other agricultural inputs, including at later points in the food chain, will be built up in northern Sweden to safeguard the food supply in the event of crisis and ultimately war. Emergency stocks are the ultimate insurance to safeguard access to food. Within the framework of building up civil defence, the Government is investing in measures to improve the robustness of the food chain, including an assessment of measures for shops and central warehouses for the food retail sector, as well as advisory support and investment funds to strengthen primary production in agriculture and fisheries The food supply is most vulnerable in northern Sweden, mainly due to the actual conditions for food production. It is important to safeguard access to food throughout the country, but the four northernmost counties are therefore of particular importance from a military-strategic perspective.

Traditional livelihoods such as pasture-based reindeer husbandry, fishing and hunting form part of the Arctic's cultural and livelihood base. These ways of managing the land and water in the Arctic are based

on the sustainable use of naturally occurring renewable resources and are adapted to the ecological conditions of the region. This also makes them important for resilience and local food security from a preparedness perspective.

The food systems of the Arctic's Indigenous Peoples are unique. For the Sami people, reindeer husbandry, fishing, hunting and gathering form the basis of the cultural and economic bond to land and water and are therefore of great importance in terms of culture, identity, values and way of life.

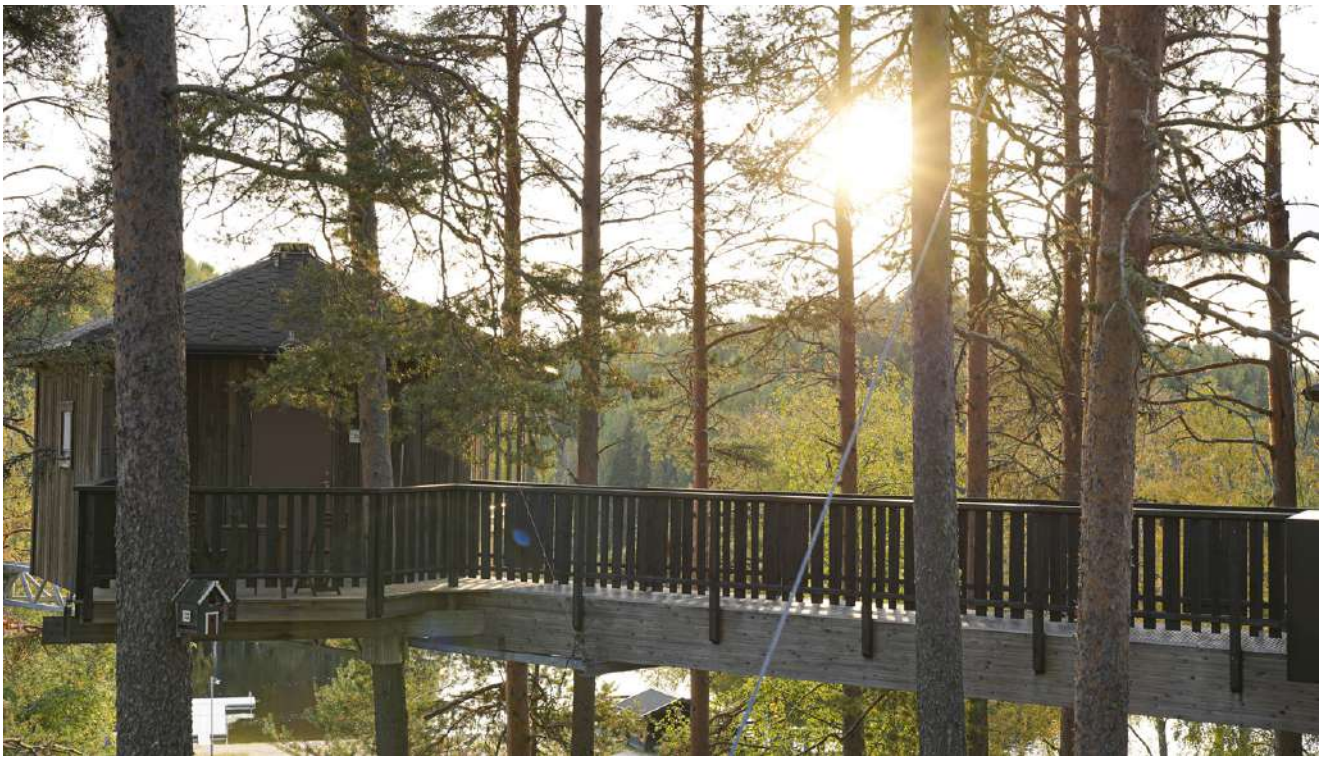
Health, medical and social care

It must be possible to maintain health, medical and social care during peacetime crises, times of heightened alert and war. In line with low birth rates, increased life expectancy, demographic imbalances and long distances, Sweden's Arctic region is particularly vulnerable when the supply of staff to the local labour market shrinks. This affects the public sector's ability to meet the needs of recipients of various welfare services such as health and medical care, care of older people and other social services. Resilience also decreases in the event of crisis or war when, for example, staff and the right skills are not available in health, medical and social care. To continue to ensure sustainable and resilient communities in Sweden's Arctic region, initiatives are required for good skills supply. Sweden participates in the Arctic Council's work on health issues to improve the well-being of the inhabitants of the Arctic region through improved living standards and public health.

Tourism and hospitality

With its shifting seasons, Sweden's Arctic landscape offers unique destinations and experiences. When international visitors meet communities in the Swedish Arctic, it becomes apparent how sustainable development, culture, cultural heritage, innovation and local identity can be brought together in practice. Increased domestic and international tourism in Sweden's Arctic region strengthens local industries and creates jobs, but must be developed carefully in view of the Arctic's sensitive environment and in relation to local conditions.

Tourism in the Swedish Arctic region creates jobs, promotes entrepreneurship and innovation, contributes to the preservation of culture and identity, and heightens locations' attractiveness. Tourism in Sweden's Arctic region is increasing and there is growing interest in indigenous culture and a long-term sustainable way of life. Tourist activities owned and operated by Sami are increasing in significance. Experiences such as Norrbotten's and Västerbotten's food culture, nature and hiking trails, hunting and fishing, woodwork and handicrafts contribute to both tourism and Swedish exports.



Ecotourism is a growing part of northern Sweden's tourism industry, providing sustainable, small-scale and nature-based experiences.
Image: Emmie Bolmstedt/imagebank.sweden.se

The tourism industry depends on cooperation between multiple actors with the aim of developing sustainable and attractive tourist destinations. There is considerable potential to further develop cross-border tourism, work that is actively being pursued at both municipality level and business sector level.

Culture

A free and independent cultural life is a key characteristic of democratic societies. Vigorous cultural exchange across national borders also strengthens the foundations for joint initiatives in other areas. In the current complex geopolitical situation, the importance of cultural exchange in Arctic cooperation is increasing. Respect for the cultural expressions of Indigenous Peoples and national minorities and cultural exchange between Arctic countries and populations are important for dialogue and cohesion in the region.

The Arctic Arts Summit – an international meeting place that operates at the intersection of art, cultural policy and research – has been established to increase cultural exchange in the Arctic. It is both the world's only Arctic cultural policy summit and a catalyst for artistic development for cultural creators, academics and policymakers.

Indigenous Peoples and national minorities

The Sami people have lived in an area that stretches across Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia from time immemorial. In Sweden, the Sami are recognised as both an Indigenous People and a national minority. Parts of northern Sweden have also long been populated by the Tornedalian national minority, which also includes the Kven and the Lantalaiset.

Both Sami and Meänkieli are endangered languages with declining numbers of speakers. The Government is therefore striving to promote increased use of these languages and to strengthen individuals' conditions for reclaiming them.

Throughout history, the Sami and the Tornedalians have been subjected to abuses, violations and forced assimilation. These injustices still affect the relationship with the Swedish state. The Government is working for redress and reconciliation with these groups. Racism directed against the Sami is one of the forms of racism included in the Government's action plan against racism and hate crime.

Under the Swedish Constitution and in accordance with international conventions, the Sami People have the right to maintain and develop their own cultural and community life, and the right to self-determination on internal issues. National minorities also have the right to influence and participation on issues that concern them. For the indigenous Sami people, the Act on Consultation on Matters concerning the Sami People also applies, which means that Sami representatives must be consulted before decisions are made on issues that are of particular importance to them.

The Sami People, the Tornedalian national minority and other peoples and groups in the Arctic who have lived in symbiosis with nature throughout history possess deep traditional knowledge of the landscape, ecosystems and living conditions in the Arctic environment. This knowledge is of considerable value to society as a whole, not least in issues relating to the environment, biodiversity, management of natural resources and circularity. In addition, Sami action at times of crisis and war have been particularly significant in Swedish history. In the current security environment, the Sami, the Tornedalians and others with local knowledge of areas where few others have year-round experience can also play an important role in total defence through their traditional knowledge, food supply, land use and presence in the landscape.

If the climate and natural environment, and thus the conditions for grazing and reindeer husbandry, change, the basic conditions for Sami culture also change. This makes the Sami culture particularly vulnerable to climate change. Research shows that reindeer grazing can counteract overgrowth of, for example, bare mountain environments, which are particularly sensitive habitats. The Government is working to protect the Sami cultural landscape from the negative impacts of climate change.

The overall objective of Sami policy is a thriving Sami culture based on ecologically sustainable reindeer husbandry and other Sami livelihoods. The Sami Parliament plays an important role in these efforts, both as an elected body representing the Sami people and as a state administrative authority with special responsibility for language, culture and reindeer husbandry. National minorities policy aims to protect national minorities, enhance their opportunities to exert influence and help keep long-established minority languages alive. Sami and Tornedalian civil society also plays an important role in the work for a thriving Sami and Tornedalian culture in the Arctic.



In Sweden, the Sami are recognised as both an Indigenous People and a national minority.

Image: Per Lundström/imagebank.sweden.se

Gender equality

Regional development in Norrbotten and Västerbotten is taking place at the same time as the emigration of young people, especially women, is creating demographic challenges in some municipalities. Efforts to ensure good conditions for both women and men to live and work in Sweden's Arctic region are important for good living conditions and the resilience of society.

Gender equality is a Swedish core value and a prerequisite for equal rights, freedom and democracy. A gender perspective should be applied to Arctic issues. The Government is working to promote gender equality and non-discrimination in Arctic forums. Within the Arctic Council, Sweden is engaged in gender equality issues at project level, with a focus on gender-disaggregated statistics, for example. The Government emphasises the importance of women's economic empowerment and participation in political decision-making processes, and women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights.

In its Policy on Women, Peace and Security (2024), NATO highlights the cumulative impact on women and girls of gender inequality, conflict and climate change, which has consequences for human security. Sweden contributes knowledge and experience to NATO's work on women, peace and security in order to integrate these issues into the Alliance's core tasks. In the context of NATO's deterrence and defence, Sweden believes that gender equality work strengthens the collective will to defend and defence capability, and contributes to resilient societies. The Swedish Armed Forces routinely include a gender perspective in all operational planning.

Young people in the Arctic

Many municipalities in northern Sweden are facing demographic challenges as young people choose to leave their home municipality. Many indicate that this is due to lack of work, higher education, meaningful leisure time activities and public services. Creating an attractive place for young people to live and remain in is an important part of comprehensive efforts to ensure a resilient society. It is therefore essential to have a cross-sectoral perspective on young people's living conditions in the Arctic. In several contexts, including the Arctic Council and the EU, important efforts are being made to amplify the voice, perspective and interests of young people in the Arctic.

National interests

In northern Sweden, many geographical areas are designated as areas of national interest with particular value for society as a whole, such as nature conservation, energy production and total defence. These areas of special importance or national interest are often overlapping and covered by special regulations.

The management provisions in Chapters 3 and 4 of the Environmental Code are the primary regulations on how land and water areas are to be used and preserved at national level. The aim is to prevent areas that are of national importance for a particular use from being used for other purposes. The provisions state that areas of special importance, for example for forestry, mining, reindeer husbandry, or natural or cultural values, must be protected as far as possible against measures that may significantly harm the values or impede the operation of these industries.

Areas that are deemed to have nationally important values can also be designated as national interests. As a national interest, the area must be protected against measures that may significantly harm the values on which the designation is based. National interests may include nature conservation, valuable substances or materials, communications, total defence, energy production, industrial production, commercial fishing and reindeer husbandry.

If an area is of national interest for incompatible purposes, priority is to be given to the purpose or purposes that are most likely to promote sustainable management of land, water and the physical environment in general. If the area or part of the area is needed for a total defence facility, the defence interest should be given priority.

Strategic resources

Sweden has a number of strategic resources that enhance our foreign and security policy role and relevance and importance as a partner in an Arctic context. They include Arctic research and the icebreaker Oden, advanced space capabilities and infrastructure, and cutting-edge expertise in digital infrastructure. These capabilities are central parts of Swedish Arctic policy to promote peace, security and stability, economy and trade, climate and environment, and sustainable, thriving and resilient communities.

Polar research

Swedish polar research provides strategic support for Sweden's actions in the Arctic region and enables independent access to the Arctic Ocean and other Arctic sea areas. Sweden's long history and prominent position in polar research confer a responsibility and entail opportunities for long-term and knowledge-based drive. As an Arctic country, Sweden's geography, institutional experience and technical capabilities provide special conditions for contributing to research and societal benefit in the polar regions. Swedish expertise in autonomous systems, sensors, ice management and technology for cold climates, including Arctic testbeds, accelerates method development and innovation.

Swedish research in the Arctic began back in 1758, with a Swedish expedition to Spitsbergen with a focus on fisheries. In the late 19th century, Swede Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld had considerable influence on international polar research as an explorer of the Arctic Ocean and the first person to cross the Northeast Passage. Sweden was also an early participant in the exploration of Antarctica through the Swedish Antarctic expedition of 1901–1903. Sweden's experience and position as a maritime nation, combined with scientific ambitions, laid the foundations for Sweden's leading role.

Today, Swedish polar research has a broad scope in the natural sciences, technology, medicine, humanities and social sciences that gives Swedish engagement in the Arctic a holistic perspective and relevance. It produces valuable scientific results, contributes to innovation, prosperity and societal benefit, and constitutes a major security policy asset for Sweden and Swedish influence. Efficient and secure data management facilitates the utilisation of research results

Polar research also contributes to stability, transparency and confidence-building measures through scientific collaboration and science diplomacy, and should be conducted based on the guiding principles of academic freedom and responsible internationalisation.

Sweden will continue to deliver world-class polar research, contribute to climate and environmental action and at the same time strengthen security, resilience and prosperity. The Government therefore intends to establish and provide long-term funding for a cohesive national polar research agenda, and strengthen a national polar research programme and a national polar research school. For example, polar research has been established as a strategic research area, with strategic research initiatives and excellence-driven tenders that strengthen Swedish cutting-edge environments. These initiatives contribute to strengthening the chain from observation and data collection to forecasts of future environmental and climate conditions. The Government emphasises the importance of promoting research security, science diplomacy, international partnerships and collaboration in polar research with Arctic and non-Arctic countries.

The Swedish Polar Research Secretariat plays a key role in achieving Sweden's research ambitions by organising and coordinating Swedish polar research. Through the Secretariat, Sweden has land-based research stations in Arctic, subarctic, Antarctic and marine environments that provide long-term infrastructure primarily for climate and environmental research. With the support of this research, Sweden can strengthen measures to reduce climate impacts, and for environmental protection and marine management, and contribute to improved maritime safety with knowledge of safe sea routes and management of emergencies in ice.



Abisko Scientific Research Station is located in the northernmost part of Sweden. The station is a key part of Sweden's research infrastructure, enabling researchers to work in a subarctic environment with diverse nature.

Image: Jann Lipka/imagebank.sweden.se

In 2024, the Centre for the Arctic and Antarctic was initiated as a collaborative initiative between Luleå University of Technology (Centre for Arctic and Antarctica), Umeå University (Arctic Centre) and the Swedish Polar Research Secretariat. The aim is to gather and strengthen the Swedish polar research community and streamline research results for the benefit of society. Such coordination amplifies Sweden's voice in international Arctic research associations such as the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), in networks of Arctic universities such as Arctic Six and the University of the Arctic (UArctic), and in corresponding Antarctic research organisations such as the Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research (SCAR).

International Polar Year (IPY5), which will be held during the 24-month period 2032–2033, is another example of international research cooperation on the polar regions. The initiative also has value in supporting Sweden's activities within the Arctic Council and at meetings under the auspices of the Antarctic Treaty. Sweden's hosting of the secretariat of the European Polar Board (EPB) until 2034 increases the international visibility of Swedish polar research and strengthens Sweden's ability to influence European cooperation. Such initiatives are important for strategic cooperation and national capacity for long-term, high-quality international research, observation and research data collection.

Swedish polar research makes a major contribution to European research programmes and research infrastructures. It also contributes to Sweden's work within, for example, the Arctic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers for Science, Environment and Sustainable Development with local participation and indigenous perspectives. The collaboration between research institutions and the work of government agencies in the Arctic Council is important and constitutes a significant contribution to Sweden's Chairship of the Arctic Council in 2027–2029.

The EU's framework programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe, contributes to advancing research in and on the Arctic in areas such as



Image of the Swedish icebreaker Oden during the Canada-Sweden Arctic Ocean 2025 expedition, one of three expeditions carried out together with the Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker Louis S. St-Laurent. The aim is to map Canada's extended continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean.

Image: Adam Andersson

ocean and water restoration as well as climate adaptation. Horizon Europe also promotes excellent Arctic research by supporting researcher mobility and young researchers. EU-funded projects are coordinated through the EU-PolarNet collaboration. The Government's goal is to increase Swedish participation in Horizon Europe and it has taken measures to strengthen incentives for Swedish actors' participation.

Swedish icebreaking capacity in the Arctic

Sweden has a strategic interest in a strong presence and independent access to the Arctic Ocean and other surrounding sea areas to monitor and influence what is happening in the Arctic. Without an Arctic Ocean coastline, Sweden's presence at sea in the Arctic is ensured through advanced icebreaker capability. The security policy situation underlines the importance of Swedish polar capacity.

The Swedish icebreaker Oden has been central to Sweden's ability to navigate and conduct research in the extreme environments of the polar regions and to Sweden's standing in international polar cooperation. There is a global shortage of powerful icebreakers capable of operating in the polar regions, with the exception of nuclear-powered Russian icebreakers. Oden is thus a unique resource globally and has been one of the world's foremost infrastructures for research in the polar seas for several decades. However, Oden is approaching the end of its estimated lifespan as a research infrastructure for polar research.

Sweden has a strategic interest in maintaining a strong presence in the Arctic region, particularly in light of the new security policy situation and accession to NATO. The Government considers that Sweden's leading position in polar research and independent access to the Arctic region must be secured. Our capacity to deploy and repair underwater infrastructure must also be considered. The Government intends to investigate in more detail how Sweden can secure cost-effective access to a research icebreaker.

Connectivity infrastructure in the Arctic region

Society's dependence on digital communication and services means that connectivity constitutes critical infrastructure. Critical infrastructure refers to technical and physical systems, facilities and equipment that are necessary to provide services that are essential to society and meet society's basic needs. Connectivity infrastructure needs to be robust, resilient and redundant. In order to improve Sweden's connectivity with the rest of the world, it is crucial to have strong international cooperation within the Nordic region, the EU and NATO, but also collaboration with private actors. Of particular importance is collaboration regarding fibre optic subsea cables, including increased cable-laying, maintenance and repair capacity.

The Government intends to support the expansion of land-based cables and fibre optic subsea cables in the Arctic that link the Nordic region to the Indo-Pacific region and North America. Sweden therefore has an interest in maintaining access to heavy icebreakers and icebreaker capability from a connectivity perspective. The Government intends to investigate in detail how Sweden can secure cost-effective access to a research icebreaker. Our capacity for expansion and repair of underwater infrastructure should thereby be taken into consideration.

The existing Swedish capability has created the conditions for scientific and operational participation in Arctic subsea cable projects such as Polar Connect, a key initiative to improve Sweden's digital security and global connectivity. Polar Connect is a Nordic initiative under Swedish leadership that involves the expansion of a commercial fibre optic subsea cables across the Arctic Ocean to create conditions for fast and secure global communication. The proposed sensor-equipped cables will deliver climate and environmental data in real time. The route through the Arctic is the shortest to the Indo-Pacific region, resulting in significantly faster data transfer speeds. The initiative could thus have a positive economic impact and promote cooperation between Europe and partner countries in Asia.

Space

Space-based systems provide unique advantages for navigation and communication, for example in defence and security contexts in the Arctic, and for global surveillance and reconnaissance. Sweden's geographical location is thus a geostrategic resource in a space context. With a near-polar location that is ideal for controlling and monitoring satellites that pass over the poles and for downloading satellite data, the Esrange space base outside Kiruna, which is owned and operated by the state-owned Swedish Space Corporation (SSC), is a strategic resource. As a platform for research and innovation – both military and civilian – and for the EU's independent access to space for Sweden and our Allies, Esrange's importance will increase. This applies to both the national and European space industries.

Sweden intends to develop the North Calotte as a strategic space region, with safe, resilient and redundant capabilities for Allies, partners and the European space industry. This can preferably be achieved within the framework of strong Nordic cooperation. Through Esrange in particular, Sweden will contribute to the EU's and NATO Allies' access to space. Through activities involving the downloading of satellite data, for example, Esrange can contribute important capabilities for an improved national and allied Arctic situational awareness. As an Arctic Ally, Sweden intends to manage the space-based geostrategic opportunities that the region offers, and take greater responsibility for security in the region. This also means opportunities for the Swedish space industry.

Sweden contributes to NATO's situational awareness within the framework of the Alliance Persistent Surveillance from Space (APSS). Sweden has also signed letters of intent regarding NATO initiatives STARLIFT, which aims to develop more responsive launch capabilities within the Alliance, and NORTHLINK, which is intended to provide more resilient satellite communications in the Arctic.

The Government is investing considerable resources in strengthening military space capabilities for increased intelligence-gathering and long-range combat. This also improves conditions for protecting Sweden's own combat forces through capabilities such as situational awareness and real-time monitoring. Swedish space capabilities strengthen Sweden's strategic independence and value as an Ally and partner in the international space arena.

The geostrategic location and the development of the Swedish space sector entails an elevated threat level, as foreign actors conduct security-threatening activities against Swedish space actors to gain influence in the Arctic. The multifaceted nature of these threats, as well as the opportunities that come with the development of the space sector, require a total defence perspective on



The Esrange space base is a strategic resource for Sweden for both civilian and military purposes.
Image: SSC Space

the North Calotte space region, with close collaboration between the relevant public and private actors.

Sweden is an active partner in European space projects that are important to Arctic capabilities. One example is the flagship project Destination Earth, which aims to create a digital model, or digital twin, of the Earth to model, monitor and simulate natural phenomena, risks and human activities, including in the Arctic. The project is funded through the Digital Europe Programme, while actors such as the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute and the Research Institutes of Sweden contribute Swedish cutting-edge expertise for advanced AI and large-scale data analysis.

5. The Arctic in international cooperation

Sweden will pursue Arctic priorities in all relevant forums, multilaterally and regionally, and in bilateral cooperation. As an Arctic state, Sweden is well placed to exert influence and safeguard strategic interests. Sweden must adopt a coherent approach to the situation in the Arctic based on the Government's long-term objectives. Sweden has strategic resources and capabilities at its disposal that increase its attractiveness as a partner. Sweden will act in Nordic and Nordic-Baltic contexts, within the EU, the Arctic Council, NATO, the Arctic 7 (A7) and other forms of bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation.

NATO

As a NATO Ally, it is in Sweden's interests that the Alliance continues to strengthen its role in the High North and the Arctic. Sweden's Allied status provides opportunities to safeguard Swedish interests and pursue Swedish priorities regarding the Arctic, as outlined by the Government in this Strategy. For the Government, cooperation with other Arctic NATO Allies is a particular priority, and transatlantic unity must be safeguarded.

Sweden will actively contribute to strengthening NATO's role in the Arctic and to developing NATO's deterrence and defence in the region, with a particular focus on security, skills and capability development, institutional capacity, joint situational awareness and policy development in the High North.

Given the strategic link between the Arctic, the High North and the Baltic Sea Region, Sweden will pursue closer cooperation between the Allies that are part of NATO's Joint Operation Area Northwest and Joint Operation Area Centre. Sweden will also work to strengthen the operational capability of NATO's operational headquarters in these areas – i.e. Joint Force Command (JFC) Norfolk in the United States and JFC Brunssum in the Netherlands. Increased coordination with the United States, Canada and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and with the United Kingdom is desirable for the defence of North America, the North Atlantic and Northern Europe.

NATO's Forward Land Forces Finland (FLF Finland) are important for reinforcing NATO's deterrence and defence along the northeastern flank. Sweden is the framework nation for FLF Finland and has contributed a battalion battle group that forms the core of the multinational force. FLF Finland will serve as a platform to test new technologies, procedures and methods for this purpose.

Due to the unique and demanding Arctic and subarctic environment in the region, it is in Sweden's interests that NATO's defence capabilities for operating in the Arctic and subarctic environments are strengthened in the land, sea and air domains. Through the NATO Defence Planning Process, Sweden is working to ensure that NATO's Capability Targets are adapted to the climatic and geographical conditions in the High North.

Nordic and Nordic-Baltic cooperation

Nordic cooperation is particularly close in the area of defence as well as in broader security policy terms. Although Sweden's bilateral cooperation with Finland is uniquely close, Nordic cooperation has also consistently intensified in recent years as a result of the deteriorating security situation in our part of the world. The need for coordination in areas such as defence, crisis preparedness and security of supply has increased. The geopolitical situation, especially the increased interest in the Arctic globally and the fact that the Arctic constitutes a significant proportion of the Nordic region, makes this cooperation an increasingly important priority. Sweden will work to further strengthen Nordic cooperation, both bilaterally and multilaterally. The Nordic countries'



The Three-Country Cairn is where Sweden, Norway and Finland meet. It is Sweden's northernmost point, as well as the world's northernmost international tri-country point.

Image: Jerker Andersson/imagebank.sweden.se

common values and emphasis on respect for international law in the Arctic are a unifying force and strength.

Increased cross-border cooperation between the Arctic regions of Finland, Norway and Sweden is a prerequisite for a more integrated and secure Nordic region. Cross-border cooperation is already very dynamic at different levels: municipalities, regions, universities, industry and border committees. Sweden will work for increased coordination of existing cooperation and an even deeper trilateral cooperation in Nordic Arctic regions based on local, regional and national needs.

This includes the Barents cooperation to date. The Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) has changed in recent years due to the suspension of Russia following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and Finland's withdrawal in 2025, and thus the cooperation in its previous form does not reflect the security situation in Europe. However, the areas of cooperation within the BEAC that remain a priority for the Arctic regions of Sweden, Finland and Norway should be safeguarded and developed.

The Government believes that Nordic total defence cooperation should continue to be deepened within the framework of, and in support of, NATO. Nordic cooperation should be developed to encompass a greater degree of integration and collaboration. A strong Nordic region strengthens NATO. The Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) complements and contributes to European and transatlantic security and deterrence and defence within NATO. This also applies to Nordic cooperation on transport preparedness and cross-border transport infrastructure, with a focus on military mobility and security of supply.

The Nordic Council of Ministers operates through the Arctic Co-operation Programme, whose projects support economic, social and climate-related resilience. The Government welcomes concrete efforts to increase cooperation between the Nordic countries' Arctic regions, as a complement to activities in other forums such as the Arctic Council.

Arctic-related issues are discussed within the framework of the N5 Nordic cooperation format, involving Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland. Similarly, the NB8 format, involving the five Nordic countries and the three Baltic countries, contributes to interlinking the situation in the Baltic Sea Region and in the Arctic

in terms of analysis and policy response. Sweden's geographical location – an Arctic nation with a Baltic Sea coast – provides added value in these contexts.

Since Russia's suspension in 2022, cooperation within the framework of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) has been conducted between the Nordic and Baltic states, Germany, Poland and the EU. At the Council's 2025 foreign ministers meeting, it was decided, with Sweden's active support, to reform the organisation to better meet common security challenges. By strengthening dialogue and cooperation on security issues, the CBSS can develop into a regional security forum. Many of the security challenges affecting the CBSS and the Baltic Sea Region, such as hybrid threats and Russia's shadow fleet, are also relevant in the Arctic region.

The European Union

The Arctic is both a geographical part of the EU – parts of the European Arctic are located in Swedish, Danish and Finnish territory – and an area beyond the EU's borders that is managed within the framework of the EU's external instruments. The two dimensions are intertwined and both are of the utmost importance from a Swedish perspective.

The EU has a wide range of tools for implementing its Arctic policy, both within the EU and in its external policy – financial, legal, foreign, security, defence and trade policy tools. These tools should be integrated coherently and strategically into EU Arctic policy. EU financial instruments for capability development, reinforced infrastructure and harmonisation of regulatory frameworks are especially important in strengthening European Arctic policy. Use of the EU's entire toolbox and processes is key to achieving strategic and long-term priorities, promoting the EU's interests and pursuing an effective and coherent Arctic policy based on the security of Europe and the Arctic EU Member States.

For northern Sweden, the EU's cohesion policy provides significant added value. In Sweden's Treaty of Accession to the EU, the northern and sparsely populated parts of Sweden were given a special status, Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA). That sparseness criterion applies to the allocation of financial support through the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund. This funding is intended to contribute to innovation, digitalisation, green investments and support for small businesses, as well as to employment, education and social inclusion. Northern Sweden also benefits from support from the EU's cross-border regional and transnational Interreg programmes, which promote cooperation between countries and regions across national borders. The Government attaches great importance to ensuring that the natural and structural conditions that characterise northern Sweden continue to be taken into account in the EU budget. Sweden's northern regions have a joint office in Brussels, which conducts important awareness-raising and networking work to improve EU institutions' understanding of northern Sweden.

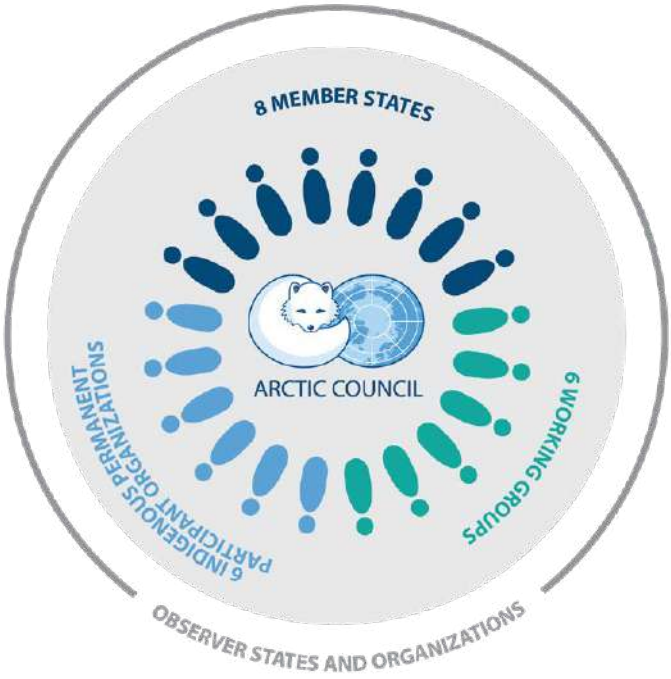
Russia's aggression against Ukraine poses the greatest security threat to Europe and the EU, with consequences for the Arctic as well. Developments in the Arctic are a key concern for the EU's common foreign and security policy, and the Arctic is becoming increasingly prominent in the EU's external relations.

The EU is an important partner in the Arctic, and the Government welcomes the fact that the EU is developing its Arctic policy to address the complex challenges facing the region. This is being done through the European Commission's and the European External Action Service's update of the Arctic Communication in 2026, and through the development of a European Security Strategy. The Government is actively working to ensure that Arctic dimensions are taken into account in all relevant policy areas of EU cooperation. The EU's role should complement the work of other organisations, such as NATO and the Arctic Council.

The Government supports the EU's overall strategic priorities for the Arctic with the aim of maintaining security and stability through continued international cooperation, climate and environmental protection measures and the promotion of sustainable development. The EU's support for upholding international law, including the law of the sea, in the Arctic, and the emphasis on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Arctic countries, is of particular importance.

The Arctic Council

The Arctic Council is the Arctic states' forum for cooperation, dialogue and knowledge-building on common Arctic-related matters. The cooperation includes key areas such as protection of the Arctic environment, the impacts of climate change, living



The Arctic Council consists of the eight Arctic states and six organisations representing the Arctic indigenous peoples. The Council has six working groups. It also has around 40 observers from non-Arctic states and organisations.

Image: The Arctic Council

conditions of Indigenous Peoples, economic and social development, and maritime transport, crisis preparedness and sea rescue. The Arctic Council affords a unique voice and influence to Indigenous Peoples' representatives, gathers broad Arctic expertise at working group level and is responsible for impressive scientific research on conditions in the Arctic. Many of the Council's observers – states and organisations – make significant contributions to its work. The EU is a de facto observer in the Arctic Council.

The Arctic Council reflects and underlines that developments in the Arctic are to be governed by the Arctic states in accordance with international law. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, some aspects of the Arctic Council's work have been on hold, meaning that joint meetings at ministerial and senior official level are not taking place. Nevertheless, the Council retains an important role. For the Government, it is a priority that the Arctic Council is dynamic, influential and productive in relation to cross-border challenges in the Arctic.

Sweden will hold the Chairship of the Arctic Council from May 2027 to May 2029, succeeding Denmark and preceding Canada. Coordination with outgoing and incoming Chairs and dialogue with Indigenous Peoples' representatives and observers are important elements of the implementation of the Chairship. A programme including priorities and activities for the two years will form the basis of Sweden's Chairship. Swedish government agencies such as the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management, the Swedish Civil Defence Agency, the Swedish Coast Guard, the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority and the Swedish Polar Research Secretariat actively participate in the work of the Arctic Council and contribute to its important results.

Cooperation with non-Arctic states

In recent years, interest in the Arctic has increased markedly among non-Arctic states and actors. Many countries want to explore the economic potential in areas such as natural resource extraction, maritime transport and connectivity, while expanding their research to include Arctic issues. The deteriorating security situation and intensifying major power rivalry also motivate countries to follow events more closely, and tactically and strate-

gically respond to developments in the Arctic. In addition, research-related purposes, such as the importance of the Arctic for the global climate, can drive the increased involvement of non-Arctic states. A growing number of non-Arctic countries have a comprehensive Arctic policy or specific Arctic priorities, and many have dedicated diplomatic envoys for the Arctic or for the Arctic and Antarctic.

In general, the Government welcomes increased interest from non-Arctic states, as long as such interest rests on a solid foundation of international law and full respect for the sovereignty, rights and responsibilities of the Arctic countries. Greater interest can pave the way for better understanding among non-Arctic actors of fundamental conditions in the Arctic, especially legal and environmental conditions. Sweden will seek benefits from increased international engagement insofar as it contributes to Sweden's priorities for the Arctic. Greater opportunities for cooperation exist both near, with countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany and France, and far, with countries such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. China has observer status in the Arctic Council, and China's central role in the areas of climate and global environmental cooperation is relevant in an Arctic context. The Government is open to developing cooperation with China where it is possible and serves Swedish interests and values. However, the Government stresses the importance that China and other non-Arctic states operating in the Arctic region recognise the sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction of the Arctic states in the Arctic and respect international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Sweden expects full respect for the rights of the Arctic countries. At the same time, it should be emphasised that all states have rights and obligations that apply in the Arctic under international law, including UNCLOS. The Government intends to engage in and strengthen such forms of international cooperation that can contribute to achieving its long-term objectives for the Arctic.

Parliamentary Arctic cooperation

The parliaments of the Arctic countries have a well-developed circumpolar cooperation. Every two years, the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (CPAR) brings together members of the Arctic parliaments to discuss developments in the Arctic. The conferences provide an important forum – currently without Russia's participation – for issues of common importance in an Arctic context. Nordic parliamentarians also discuss Arctic issues in the Nordic Council and in the European Parliament.

The Swedish parliamentary delegation to CPAR is active in international contexts. At the conference in Kiruna in 2024, the Swedish delegation particularly highlighted the need to improve waste management in the Arctic countries and also to draw the attention of non-Arctic states to the fact that waste, especially plastic, causes considerable harm in the Arctic. At the 2026 conference in Fairbanks, attended by the Swedish CPAR delegation, the conference statement underlined the importance of infrastructure development and energy security in the Arctic. Another priority area that was highlighted was space, security and situational awareness in the Arctic, along with the importance of strong cooperation in a number of areas, including education and research. Finally, it was highlighted that climate change in the Arctic region must be taken into account in political decision-making. The Swedish CPAR delegation also contributes to increased knowledge of the Arctic in Sweden through seminars, for example.

Swedish Arctic foreign and security policy expertise

In Sweden, there are prominent research environments, expert authorities, local and regional actors, civil society organisations and private actors that contribute to the overall Swedish resource base with regard to the Arctic. Swedish Arctic expertise is an integral aspect of Sweden's position and influence internationally. The Government emphasises the importance of a strong Swedish resource base and effective Arctic networks within Sweden and with international partners. At the initiative of the Government, an Arctic programme at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs is being established in 2026 with the aim of contributing to Swedish foreign and security policy knowledge and analysis of the Arctic. The programme will contribute to Swedish policy development and Swedish action on Arctic issues. The Government also intends, in cooperation with relevant partners, to initiate an annual Arctic foreign and security policy conference in Sweden on themes of particular relevance to Swedish interests. Strategic projects will be developed that can strengthen Arctic expertise, policy development and international impact of Swedish Arctic priorities, and contribute to dialogue and peaceful cooperation in the Arctic.



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