



National report on social impact evaluation practices

Forum for Social Innovation Sweden



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1. Introduction

In all sectors of society – the public sector, civil society, business, and academia – a wide range of initiatives are undertaken to address current societal challenges, such as poor health, poverty and segregation. This has led to a need of understanding whether – and how – these initiatives generate real and sustainable benefits for individuals, organisations and society as a whole. In this context, the concept of social impact evaluation is increasingly used both nationally and internationally. Social impact evaluation broadly refers to measuring, monitoring and understanding the actual difference a particular initiative or project makes to society, people and the environment.

Within the field of social innovation (SI) – that is, innovative efforts to improve society with social goals and means – impact evaluation is often seen as a challenge. Impact and effects of SI are often followed up through anecdotal descriptions and good examples, which may indeed spark public interest, but do not necessarily contribute to a deeper understanding of what societal value has been created and how this has come about¹. Capturing and understanding social and societal impact is also a subject of debate in academic literature². This is because societal challenges are often complex, with multiple factors and varying local conditions and contexts influencing the outcomes of different measures. This means it is hard to ensure that it was the studied intervention that generated the desired effect. This challenge is commonly referred to as the “impact problem”.

This report aims to provide an overview of how social impact evaluation is understood and carried out by various actors in Sweden. It also seeks to describe what the ecosystem for social impact evaluation looks like in Sweden in general, with a particular focus on social innovation. Here, the term ecosystem refers to the structures, norms, functions, and roles that affect the possibilities for conducting social impact evaluation³. The report also includes a description of how social impact evaluation is generally financed in Sweden. Finally, we give an overview of a variety of education and support structures for social impact evaluation in Sweden.

The report is based on a mapping exercise carried out by Forum for Social Innovation Sweden at Malmö University during 2025, as part of its role as the Swedish competence centre for social innovation in the implementation of the European Social Fund+ (ESF+). The competence centre operates within the framework of ESF+ operational program for social innovation, which aims to develop new solutions to meet the challenges we face in social inclusion, the labour market, and education through social innovation. The report is part of the project Boosting Initiatives & Resources to Develop Social Innovation (BIRDS), a transnational collaboration between national competence centres for social innovation in ESF in France, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden. The Swedish report, together with those from the other countries, will form the base for a joint report as well as a guide on social impact evaluation, to be produced in 2026. The report is intended for anyone interested in existing practices for understanding and following up the social and societal impact of innovative initiatives.

¹ Gustavsson, Netz (2018)

² We will introduce a different examples of this research in chapter three.

³ Tengqvist, Lindberg, López (2022).



Conducting the study

The mapping was carried out during the period February to October 2025. It consists of the following parts:

Desk Research on Social Impact Evaluation in Sweden

To gain an overview of the various practices applied in social impact evaluation, an initial desk research was conducted. The search focused on literature concerning methods on evaluation related to social impact measurement. The terms (in Swedish and English) *utvärdering/evaluation*, *effektmätning/impact measurement/impact assessment*, and *effektutvärdering/impact evaluation* were used. Based on the abstracts/summaries, we selected methodological literature on evaluation design focusing on impact evaluation on social interventions in general and social innovation in particular. The search was conducted using a so-called snowball method, i.e. through relevant reports we found new reports via references. We also used literature recommended by the researchers and experts involved in the assignment (see the section on quality assurance). In our work, we used evaluation literature, scientific articles, as well as so-called grey literature, i.e., literature published without having undergone a scientific publication process, or literature published outside traditional scientific distribution channels. The search was conducted both in scientific databases such as Swepub, Scopus AI, Google Scholar, and on Google.

Mapping of Key Actors in Social Impact Evaluation in Sweden

Based on the above overview, we mapped key actors in Sweden who conduct, fund, educate, and claim to measure social impacts in general, and within social innovation in particular. It should be noted that there is great variation in how assessment and evaluation of social impacts are designed, both in terms of study design and the methods applied. What some actors choose to call “impact evaluation” may be dismissed by others as insufficient or not meeting adequate requirements. As this is a mapping rather than an evaluation of the quality of different studies, we have chosen to present how the various actors themselves describe their approaches. In addition, we attempt to provide an overview on how the academic discussion around social impact evaluation has developed over time in Sweden and which perspectives have been particularly prominent in this discussion. We use previous research, mappings, and methodological support material to get an overview of how the practice of assessing social impact in Sweden looks like today and how it has developed over time. Also, searches were conducted both on Google and in scientific databases using the snowball method, based on recommendations from our network of experts and specialists as well as references in relevant reports. This is an overall mapping, and we make reservations for not having captured all actors in the field.

Survey to a Sample of Swedish Actors in Impact Evaluation

During 2025, the Swedish Institute for Standards (SIS) formed a committee for the assessment of social and environmental impacts. The participants in the committee were given the opportunity to participate in a survey as part of our mapping. In total, the survey was sent to 35 respondents, of whom 9 responded. The survey mainly consisted of open questions aimed at capturing how the actors work with social impact evaluation today, which models and methods they apply, and what opportunities and challenges they meet. It should be noted that this committee consists of actors who have actively chosen to participate in a context for social impact assessment. The survey does not capture the full breadth of actors engaged in social interventions.



Quality Assurance of the Mapping and the Report

To guide our mapping, interviews were conducted with individuals with long experience in assessing social impact, particularly within social innovation⁴. For ongoing support throughout the process, experience exchanges have also taken place with the other competence centres within BIRDS. During these occasions, delimitations, definitions, and methods have been discussed. The authors have also received input during the writing process from researchers with expertise in evaluation, social work, organisation and change management within the public sector, as well as social innovation⁵.

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1. Definitions of Key Concepts

To map the ecosystem for social impact evaluation in Sweden, we must begin by defining what is meant by "impact". In this report, we refer to a definition used by the Swedish National Financial Management Authority, which describes it as "a change that has occurred as a result of an action taken and which otherwise would not have occurred"⁶. It is important in this context to distinguish between *altered state* and *impact*. The fact that conditions have altered after an intervention does not necessarily mean that it was the intervention that caused the change. The impact can, in other words, be explained as the difference between the change that occurred as a result of the intervention and the change that would have occurred without it. An impact can also be negative, meaning that the state without the intervention is better than with the intervention. In an article examining research on societal impact, it is shown that research results vary and that there is a need for a clearer definition of social impact⁷. In this report, social impact refers to a measurable change in social conditions, such as improved quality of life, reduced social vulnerability, or increased social integration. The concept of social impact can also be applied more generally and refer to changes that social interventions or policies bring about for individuals, groups, and society as a whole.

In this report, *social intervention* is used as a collective term for actions, treatments, methods, or measures carried out to create the impact we intend to measure. It refers to a deliberate action aimed at achieving change and intended to reach a specific goal for an individual, family, school, or society (e.g., to reduce or prevent psychological or social problems). In the context of evaluating and assessing, it is important that the intervention can be formulated as *transferable knowledge*, either in writing or orally, and can be made available through education, instruction, supervision, or self-study. This is important since the intervention cannot be disseminated to other professionals without it⁸.

The type of social interventions we focus on in this report are *social innovations* (SI). The term "innovation" refers to the development of new ideas and solutions that are realised and create value in society⁹. SI, in turn, has the primary focus of addressing societal challenges and improving people's living conditions, using social means – that is, they are developed in collective processes where new social relationships, practices, or structures are created. At Forum for Social Innovation Sweden, the following definition of SI is used, based on international research:

Social innovations are innovations that are social in both their goals and means, that is, new ideas in the form of products, services, or models that simultaneously meet social needs more effectively than alternatives and create new social relationships or collaborations¹⁰.

Another term to operationalise in this context is *impact evaluation*. Initially, it needs to be noted that the concept of evaluation is considerably broader than impact evaluation. An evaluation can have several other purposes than just measuring impact. For example, to assess whether the implementation of an intervention meets the requirements for a good process (process evaluation). An evaluation can also be carried out based on the perspectives, needs, and criteria of the stakeholders affected by the intervention, and let these perspectives guide how the intervention should be valued (interactive evaluation). Impact evaluation is not only about showing that an intervention works, but also to verify that it was the intervention that caused the observed change – in other words, causality. To deduce this, we need to know both what happened after the intervention and what would hypothetically have happened if the

⁶ Ekonomistyrningsverket (2006:8)

⁷ Rawhouser, H, M Cummings and S L Newbert, (2019)

⁸ Sundell et al. (2012:25)

⁹ Benner 2005, Fagerberg et al. (2005)

¹⁰ Mulgan & Pulford (2010), p 17-18



intervention had not been carried out. This is sometimes called the “impact problem.” Swedish evaluation researcher Evert Vedung has argued that “there is no indisputable solution to the impact problem”¹¹. Depending on context, purpose, performer, and client, the requirements for how and by whom an impact evaluation should be conducted vary. There are advocates, for example within Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, who argue that the only way to reliably verify that a social intervention has an impact is when *researchers* conduct a study based on a *counterfactual approach*, preferably through *randomised controlled trials*¹². Such experiments are often difficult to carry out, partly because it can take several years before potential impacts arise. Partly because social interventions often address complex problems where there are several different factors that can affect individuals which are difficult to isolate in a controlled experiment. Many times, especially when it comes to SI, evaluations can also have a broader purpose than merely generating impact – the purpose of evaluation can also be to generate a broader learning about *what* in the specific intervention that generated the identified effects, *under what circumstances*, and in relation to which *individuals*. For this reason, alternative evaluation designs have been developed. We explore these evaluation approaches further in the next section.

Finally, a brief introduction to the term “*evaluation design*”, which can be explained as a clarification of *which questions* are to be answered, *what data* is to be collected, *how the data is to be analysed* to answer the questions, and *how the results of the evaluation are to be used*¹³.

¹¹ Vedung (2014) p. 45

¹² See among others, Sundell and Olsson (2020)

¹³ Svensson m.fl. (2018)



2. Impact evaluation practice in Sweden

This chapter begins with an overview of how impact evaluation has been applied in practice in Sweden throughout history with a brief overview of the academic discussion around different evaluation approaches on how to assess impact. The chapter also describes various movements in Sweden that have influenced the practice and demand for impact evaluation in different ways, and the types of actors that have been driving forces in these movements.

Evaluation in the 1950s

Firstly, it should be mentioned that research on the development of evaluation in Sweden is not comprehensive and has several gaps¹⁴. The first documented evaluation research in Sweden took place in relation to the major school reforms in the early 1950s. Comparisons were made between field trials in certain school districts with traditional methods from the old system in other districts in order to assess the results and impact of the reforms. These evaluations were carried out by academics, mainly professors. The term "evaluation", however, did not come into use until the 1970s, when it was introduced into Swedish dictionaries¹⁵.

1960-1980 – evaluation plays a less prominent role

During the 1960s and 1970s, evaluation was less common than it is today. This relates to how public activities in this period were largely regulated by rules. Today, the public sector has more of a performance management approach. A characteristic feature of Swedish political culture is that most changes and reforms, regardless of size and nature, are always preceded by extensive discussions at many different levels and with a variety of stakeholders on the topic concerned. When a consensus is reached among the stakeholders, the government formulates a motion, which is presented to parliament, and later adopted and published¹⁶. Since the reform in question during this period had already been assessed and tested in the investigation process, evaluation was considered somewhat unnecessary after the implementation. Instead, priority was given to internal follow-ups and audits with the aim of ensuring that rules and resources were not being misused. The few evaluations that were carried out during this period thus did not focus on impact, but rather on whether the political process followed the steps considered to constitute a good, inclusive and democratic political process.¹⁷

The development of New Public Management and increased demand for evaluations

¹⁴ Vedung et al (2000) Evaluation in the Swedish political system [1950-2000] Eight observations

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Karlsson (1999)



In connection to the political reforms that led to New Public Management (NPM) in the public sector in the late 1980s and early 1990s, evaluation as a practice became institutionalised to a greater extent in Sweden. This was at a time when the efficiency and flexibility of the public sector in Sweden were being questioned. Implementation as a phenomenon was now being problematised to a greater extent and political reforms and regulations were perceived as increasingly complex to translate and interpret in practice in an unambiguous manner¹⁸. This led to an increased amount of goal and performance management within the public sector, where local officials were given a greater mandate to translate policy into practice. The development of NPM in the Swedish public sector also meant that organisational development and reforms were increasingly organised within projects¹⁹. Due to this, there was also an increased demand for evaluations, not least as a democratic tool for gaining better control over how political decisions were implemented in practice and whether promises to citizens were being fulfilled²⁰. During this period, impact evaluation became a way of monitoring the government's goal and performance management, as well as an important tool for increasing the efficiency within the public sector.²¹

The evidence movement and counterfactual experiments

One development that increased the demand for impact evaluation in Sweden is the so-called "evidence movement", placing greater focus on efficiency and evaluation within the social services. The concept of evidence-based practice (EBP) is based on three pillars: research, the profession and the user's perspective.²² Impact evaluation within this context is *research* conducted with the objectives of *supporting professionals* in making *well-informed decisions* based on *scientific knowledge* in order to provide the right kind of interventions, under the right circumstances, to the right type of client, taking into account the client's individual characteristics²³. The concept was introduced in Sweden in the late 1990s²⁴, but gained greater attention after the publishing of the report "Evidence-based practice in social services – for the benefit of the user", in 2008²⁵. EBP in Sweden was inspired by the USA, but with a different practical application. In the USA, the initiative was driven primarily by the profession itself (bottom-up), while in Sweden development was driven by the state, via the National Board of Health and Welfare (top-down)²⁶.

The type of evaluation model advocated within the social services and what is considered most reliable in this sector is *randomised controlled trials (RCTs)* and *non-randomised controlled trials (CTs)*.²⁷ This evaluation approach is inspired by scientific research, where researchers use experimental studies to compare the group that receives the intervention with another group, a control group, that does not receive the intervention in order to demonstrate counterfactual results. Sundell and Olsson have mapped the prevalence of this type of evaluations over time in a study funded by Forte, focusing on Swedish impact evaluations of behavioural, psychological and social interventions between 1990 and 2019. The evaluations included in the study were carried out by researchers, and the evaluations had to be published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. The study found that very few of the social interventions provided today have a proven impact, since there have historically been few scientifically conducted impact evaluations within this area. However, the number of impact evaluations has increased significantly since the turn of the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Abrahamsson and Agervall (2009)

²⁰ Karlsson (1999).

²¹ National Financial Management Authority (2006) p. 6

²² Bergmark et al. (2011), ref. in Embretsen (2015)

²³ Sundell and Olsson (2021)

²⁴ Embretsen (2015)

²⁵ SOU 2008:18

²⁶ Bergmark et al (2011) ref in Embretsen (2015)

²⁷ Sundell ed. (2012)



millennium. During the first five-year period of the study, 1990–1994, 11 impact evaluations were published, i.e. an average of two per year. This can be compared with the period 2015 to 2019, when a total of 196 impact evaluations were published, corresponding to an average of 39 impact evaluations per year²⁸.

There is much to indicate that evaluations focusing on the effectiveness of interventions within the social services will increase in the future as a result of a new Social Services Act that came into force in July 2025. Among other things, the Act entails a move towards more knowledge-based social services, where activities are conducted in accordance with science and proven experience²⁹ and where systematic and ongoing follow-ups are needed and apply to all areas of social services. One example of this is the City of Stockholm, which has been tasked by the Social Welfare Board with increasing amounts of evaluations of social services' efforts because of the new act. As part of this, the city has developed methodological support and guidance on how impact evaluation can be carried out in practice within the municipality³⁰.

Alternative approaches to the evidence movement

Parallel to the evidence movement gaining increasing influence during the 1990s and early 2000s, critical voices were raised within Swedish evaluation research community and alternative perspectives on how to measure impact were discussed. The criticism is based on the idea that social interventions often address complex social problems where there are several different factors that can influence the outcome. These factors are often difficult to isolate in a study. Creating accurate control groups can also be very difficult, as there are large numbers of variables that can influence whether an effect occurs. This limits the possibilities for investigating the counterfactual relationship. Morén and Blom³¹ for example, argue that it is not possible to determine impact of social interventions through controlled experiments. They believe that in these types of interventions, only 15% of the effect can be related to the method. The remaining factors that influence the outcome include, for example, the personal chemistry between the therapist and the client, the client's motivation, and so on – factors that cannot be isolated in controlled studies. The use of control groups can also be questioned from an ethical perspective, for example when patients in need are denied access to an intervention because of their participation in a study. As measuring impact often requires a reduction of complexity, it can also lead to important aspects of the activity being overlooked. It can also create a bias towards making the measurable important, rather than focusing on what is most relevant or valuable within the practice of the organisation³².

A number of alternative approaches for measuring and evaluating impact have been developed. Swedish evaluation researcher Evert Vedung describes the most common ones: ³³

- *Generic control*, which involves assessing outcomes before and after an intervention and comparing them with average or typical outcomes in a larger population to which the group belongs.
- *Shadow control*, which involves assessing outcome results before and after an intervention, where the participants themselves, or experts, are asked to estimate the situation before the intervention.

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ Social Services Act 2025:400

³⁰ City of Stockholm (2022)

³¹ Morén and Blom (2020)

³² Fred and Nordesjö (2018)

³³ Vedung (2013) in Svensson, Brulin, Jansson and Sjöberg (2013)



- *Process tracking* (explanatory process evaluation, case studies), which involves carefully studying the process between the outcome and the intervention.

Another approach is to collect outcome data during the project process and then use this to form a so-called *impact narrative*. This is a form of evaluation that requires less resources to perform and is closely following the project and its operations. One approach in this area is development-oriented evaluation, sometimes referred to as *on-going evaluation*³⁴. This is a form of evaluation in which the evaluator provides ongoing input to the project by for example analysing how different factors contribute to different results. This way, the evaluator in a way influences the project. In this approach, it is important to argue out of a counterfactual reasoning, using, for example, a theory of change. Ongoing evaluation was the most demanded type of evaluation by projects funded by the Swedish ESF council and the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth in the 2010s. It was launched in Sweden as a new way of thinking about evaluation with a strong learning perspective. It was intended to serve as a tool to support projects in achieving long-term effects and sustainable development.

A central tool within on-going evaluation, which has also become a valuable tool in the type of impact evaluations in social innovation, is *Theory of Change*³⁵. It is a tool for explaining the impact narrative and helps to explain the logic behind how a social intervention leads to the desired effects. Sometimes other terms are used to describe a similar kind of logic, for example programme theory, logical framework approach (LFA), impact chain, and intervention logic. The concept has its origins in the field of programme theory and evaluation, which was developed in the 1970s and 1980s and gained greater attention in the 1990s³⁶. Within a Theory of Change, the terms *resource*, *activity*, *outcome*, *result* and *impact* are used³⁷. To exemplify the model, we use a specific training programme offered to achieve a certain impact. In this case, the training sessions are *activities*. *The resources* could be the competence of the lecturers and the hours spent on the training sessions. *The outcome* is the new knowledge the individuals achieve taking part in the training programme. *The result* of the programme is the desirable new behaviours that individuals apply because of their new knowledge. And finally, *the impact* is the intended utility that these new behaviours will generate, for the individuals, the organisation or the society at large. In other words – the main objective with offering the training programme in the first place. A theory of change will be useful for developing indicators for how impact can be assessed. Thus, Theory of change is a valuable tool as part of an impact evaluation³⁸. Sometimes evaluators compare the intended/desirable theory of change, *normative theory of change*, with what the evaluator has observed them actually doing, or *applied theory of change*. This is a way of understanding and gain explanations of why, or why not, the expected impact occurs.

Another alternative evaluation design with an interest in social impact is called Social Return on Investment (SROI). It estimates the costs to society of, for example, unemployment and sick leave and compares these with the savings that a social intervention or innovation can contribute to. A limitation of this design is that the calculations made are only approximate and that social values cannot be fully translated into economic values³⁹.

³⁴ Svensson, Brulin, Jansson and Sjöberg (2009)

³⁵ See, for example, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth's Handbook for EU Projects 2021–2027; Sida's evaluation handbook 2020; Vinnova (2024): Theory of change and impact logic Support material.

³⁶ See, for example, Chen, H.-T., & Rossi, P. H. (1983)

³⁷ The terms used may vary in practice, but the logic is the same

³⁸ See, for example, <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/contribution-analysis>

³⁹ Lindberg (2021)



A completely different way of approaching the impact problem is to start from research on the area of the intervention (i.e. research on exclusion, unemployment, integration, social innovation etc.) and then assessing or evaluating *the conditions* for achieving impact within the project in question⁴⁰.

The purpose of impact studies of social interventions can often be broader than simply establishing that a certain impact has occurred. Within the *realistic evaluation* approach, it is argued that to be relevant to decision-makers, an evaluation needs to investigate more than just whether an intervention works. Instead, the evaluation should explain *what works, under what circumstances and for whom*. Evaluation researchers Pawson and Tilley⁴¹ argued that evaluations should therefore generate context–mechanism–outcome statements, such as: “in this context, this mechanism arose for this type of actor, which gave rise to these outcomes. In another context, a different mechanism was triggered, which gave rise to these other outcomes”⁴².

The 2010s – social investments and social impact bonds

A completely different type of movement that has influenced how impact evaluation is understood and practised in Sweden is the work with so-called *social investments*. This movement took off in Sweden around 2010 and involved various attempts to increase the focus on and follow up on outcomes and effects. One of the main arguments in favour of a social investment perspective is to work preventively – to take action early in people's lives to avoid future costs⁴³. The aim of the social intervention is to counteract reactive measures and work more proactively addressing issues such as short-termism, lack of incentives, silo organisation and unclear or conflicting objectives. In countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia, social investments have mainly been financed through private capital, as part of philanthropic initiatives, through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or social enterprises⁴⁴. The Swedish model, on the other hand, draws its funding mainly from regions and municipalities. This approach has no equivalent in other countries⁴⁵ and is a result of Sweden having an unusually high degree of local self-government in an international comparison, where regions and municipalities have a great deal of responsibility for setting their own goals, financing and implementing welfare services. Around 2018, approximately 100 of Sweden's 290 municipalities had one or more so-called social investment funds, which ranged in size from SEK 2 million to SEK 500 million⁴⁶. These were used to finance projects with social investment ambitions. Impact assessment can be said to be an integral part of the very idea of social investments. However, research shows that many municipalities lack both resources and knowledge to carry out this type of assessment, and many of the initiatives that have been undertaken have been more traditional social projects where the evaluations have also been more traditional in nature⁴⁷.

In 2010, the United Kingdom launched something called a Social Impact Bond (SIB). Unlike Swedish social investment funds, SIBs involve private and/or venture capital being introduced into the public sector/public services. Contractors are procured based on outcome-based agreements, which means that they are only paid if, and when, the desired outcome has been achieved. This work has inspired several actors in Sweden as well⁴⁸, and around 2015, the country's first SIB was launched in the city of Norrköping, a translation and

⁴⁰ Fred and Nordesjö (2018)

⁴¹ Pawson and Tilley (1997)

⁴² *ibid*

⁴³ Hultkrantz et al. (2020), Balkfors et al. (2020)

⁴⁴ Hultkrantz et al. (2020)

⁴⁵ Balkfors et al. (2020)

⁴⁶ Fred (2025)

⁴⁷ Nordesjö (2025), Fred & Nordesjö (2025)

⁴⁸ see SKR, RISE, Kommuninvest



Swedish version of the British model. Here too, impact is in focus because investors want to know whether the investment will lead to the intended impact and whether a return can be made. The outcome focus in SIB leads to an increased need for transparent evaluations. An *intermediary* mediates between the actors involved and assists with needs analyses prior to and during the establishment of the bond. An external evaluator, then, will assess the project based on predetermined indicators. In practice, the situation is somewhat different in Sweden, as the intermediary is often also the one who performs the evaluation⁴⁹.

In Sweden, there has been a strong focus on matching and adapting SIBs to the Swedish context, and here, as in the literature on SIB, there has been much talk of high transaction costs. The experiences are largely that it has been fairly resource-intensive to set up and run SIBs⁵⁰.

The 2020s – Criteria and standards for impact evaluation

As the demand for impact evaluation in politics and within social innovation and social entrepreneurship has grown, numerous efforts have been made with the purpose of improving the quality, transparency, and comparability of the evaluation practice. One example is a study conducted by the Swedish National Audit Office, where criteria for what constitutes an adequate impact evaluation were formulated⁴³:

- The evaluation has a counterfactual approach
- Statistical considerations are justified
- The choice of methods and assumptions are satisfactorily justified

Here, the Swedish National Audit Office does not go as far as the National Board of Health and Welfare, which advocates randomised controlled studies, even though a counterfactual approach is a criterion. Based on these criteria, impact evaluations on economic policy were then reviewed to assess whether they met the criteria for adequate quality. The result of the study was that evaluations of economic policy by government agencies' generally do not meet the National Audit Office's criteria to be considered reliable as impact evaluations (only two of 37 reports reviewed met the agency's criteria). In one respect, the investigation has influenced impact evaluation practice in Sweden. However, the criteria in this approach have been questioned. For example, a response from the government pointed out that the Swedish National Audit Office's standards "are not the only way to assess whether impact evaluations of economic policy can be considered adequate"⁵¹. This is an objection that the evaluation researchers Sandahl and Petersson agree on, advocating for other theories of causality that are not based solely on counterfactual⁵².

During the 2020s, many activities to increase the quality and transparency of impact measurements have been carried out within social innovation and social entrepreneurship. In 2018, the Swedish government at the time formulated a strategy to promote social entrepreneurship and social innovation, in which support for social impact evaluation was one of the prioritised activities. Since then, several reports have highlighted the need to develop best practices and practical applications for measuring impact of social innovation and social enterprises⁵³. This because "the evaluation designs often appears inaccessible and too academic to be applicable in practice"⁵⁴. In recent years, there has been a movement within the Swedish Institute for

⁴⁹ See, for example, RISE's offer at: <https://www.ri.se/sv/expertisomraden/expertiser/sociala-utfallskontrakt-0>

⁵⁰ Fred (2025)

⁵¹ Government communication 2020/21:178:7.

⁵² Sandahl and Petersson (2016)

⁵³ See, for example, Gustafsson and Netz (2018), Forum for Social Innovation Sweden (2018)

⁵⁴ Effektfullt, RISE, Social & Health Impact Centre and Örebro Municipality (2023) p. 3.



Standards (SIS), where 26 organisations from different sectors have collaborated over a three-year period on the development of how to assess social and environmental impacts in a practical way, for example by actors within social enterprises, projects or municipal activities. The work has resulted in a standard that was launched in 2025⁵⁵. The standard consists of a terminological section that provides a common vocabulary and a process description of how impact assessment can be carried out. The purpose of this initiative has been to raise the quality, increase transparency, and improve the comparability of various impact assessments in the field.⁵⁶ In parallel with the development of the standard, a written guidance has been developed to complement the standard. The guidance aims to bridge the gap between "ideal impact assessment" in strictly scientific terms and the practical context in which many actors within social work and social entrepreneurs operate. This is achieved by grounding the standard on scientific and established approaches, while at the same time providing examples of methods practically applicable in the relevant sections.⁵⁷ The criteria for the standard can be summarised as follows, largely following the criteria highlighted by the Swedish National Audit Office:

- The objects of measurements must be clearly described and defined
- The intervention must be described, as well as how it is expected to affect what is being measured. Assumptions about causal relationships should, as far as possible, be based on experience or research.
- Indicators for measurement must be described and linked to what is being measured.
- For each indicator, the methods used must be specified, along with a reasoning on how they actually assess the right thing, preferably with support from scientific studies.
- The method for estimating causal relationships between activity and outcome should be described, preferably with a counterfactual scenario.
- At least one measurement before and after the intervention should be made, unless a control group is used.
- It should be clear how the measurement will be carried out in practice, and any uncertainties in the methods used should be described.⁵⁸

Evaluation of social innovation – an international perspective

When mapping the development of evaluation practices in Sweden, we were particularly interested in how SI evaluations have been conducted over the years. We were unable to find any studies that specifically mapped SI evaluations in Sweden. However, we did find an American article that included a systematic review of 28 empirical, peer-reviewed articles in English in which SI had been evaluated⁵⁹. The article examined evaluations of SI and the factors that influenced the evaluation design in these evaluations. It included evaluations of SI in several countries, most commonly from North America and Europe. The authors concluded that, since SI is characterised by complex processes, experimentation, cross-sector collaboration and systemic change, there is a great need for a focus on processes and support for learning rather than strict measurement of results and effects. They also highlighted the need for evaluations to be adaptable and able to change over time in line with the needs of social innovation.

⁵⁵ SS 29000 and SS 29001.

⁵⁷ Effektfullt, RISE, Social & Health Impact Centre and Örebro Municipality (2023)

⁵⁸ SS 29000 and SS 29001

⁵⁹ For more information, see the committee's website: <https://www.sis.se/delta-och-paverka/tksidor/tk600699/sistk-6262/>



These conclusions are interesting to bring into the Swedish context, where we often talk about "impact measurement" in relation to SI, rather than evaluation in a broader sense. However, the report's historical overview has shown that what several actors refer to as impact measurement/impact assessment or impact evaluation is often somewhat broader and even somewhat different from impact evaluation in strict scientific terms. A systematic overview of the evaluations carried out on social innovations in Sweden would therefore be interesting in order to broaden our understanding of what Swedish practice looks like today. Particularly so after all the various initiatives that have been taken to increase knowledge and support on impact evaluations aimed at SI and social enterprises.



3. Social impact evaluation stakeholders in Sweden

This section provides an overview of the main actors in social impact evaluation in Sweden and their role in the ecosystem. It should be noted that there is extensive evaluation work going on within the public policy sectors. We do not intend to cover all of these in this report, but rather provide an overview of practices, networks, support structures and educational actors with a particular focus on actors within SI and the social entrepreneurship in Sweden.

3.1 Public Authorities

This section provides an overview of how the Swedish government has organised the evaluation of public activities. It aims to show how these authorities influence the norms and practices for how evaluation is conducted within the Swedish context. It also describes the efforts made by the Swedish government to strengthen social entrepreneurship and social innovation in various ways, where impact evaluation is one example.

All authorities have a duty to report on their activities. Evaluation and impact measurement are carried out both across sectors, by authorities with purely analytical and evaluative tasks, and by sector-specific authorities⁶⁰.

The cross-sectoral analysis authorities consist of the *National Audit Office*, the *Swedish Agency for Government Employers* and the *Swedish National Financial Management Authority*, as well as *Statistics Sweden*. The Swedish National Audit Office is the overall audit body under the Riksdag, whose tasks include reviewing whether the Government and the authorities are implementing the policies decided by the Riksdag, where impact evaluation of political reforms being an important part. The Swedish National Audit Office is independent of the Riksdag, the Government and the state authorities. Both the Swedish Agency for Government Employers and the Swedish National Financial Management Authority (ESV) have cross-sectoral evaluation assignments and analyse the effects of public initiatives⁶¹. ESV has also developed support material on how impact evaluation can and should be carried out.

One authority to be highlighted in this context is Statistics Sweden (SCB). Sweden's ability to carry out impact evaluations is greatly facilitated by this authority, which is responsible for developing, producing and disseminating official statistics and other government statistics, as well as coordinating the official statistics system in Sweden. In addition to SCB, there are 20 authorities responsible for European statistics, with SCB as the coordinating authority. Sweden is one of the few countries in the world where citizens have unique personal identification numbers, which, in an international comparison, offers great opportunities to link data from different registers at the individual level thereby being able to track the social effects linked to various interventions.⁶²

⁶⁰ SOU 2025:13

⁶¹ The government has proposed that these authorities be merged under the joint name Statskontoret (the Swedish Agency for Government Employers) as of 1 January 2026. See, for example: <https://www.statskontoret.se/om-oss/sammanslagning-med-esv/>

⁶² <https://snd.se/sv/datahantering/registerbaserad-forskning>



In addition, there are a number of authorities with *sector-specific analysis and evaluation tasks*, such as the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the Swedish Forest Agency, the Swedish National Agency for Education, the Swedish Agency for Health and Care Services Analysis, the Swedish Health and Social Care Inspectorate (IVO) and the Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services (SBU). These are authorities that measure the impact of interventions within their respective sectors. A sector-specific authority with longest tradition of impact measurement is Sida, which is responsible for Sweden's international aid and which evaluates the impact of aid efforts, often with the support of the Expert Group for Aid Analysis (EBA) and the Swedish Agency for Public Management.⁶³

As mentioned earlier, the Swedish government launched a national strategy for social entrepreneurship and social innovation in 2018.⁶⁴ One of the strategy's focus areas was to support social impact evaluation in order to highlight the value of the social interventions made by social enterprises and social innovations. As a result of the strategy, the authorities Vinnova and the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth developed support for social impact measurement. An overarching evaluation of the initiative found that work following the strategy had generated a number of pilot models for impact assessment in collaboration with the research institute RISE, a self-assessment model inspired by the Micro Fund, and a framework for impact assessment directed to non-profit organisations⁶⁵.

3.2 European Social Fund+ managing authority

Within the framework of this survey, we have a particular focus on the European Social Fund+ (ESF) and its managing authority, the Swedish ESF Council. This section provides a more detailed look at the perspectives of the ESF+ and the Swedish ESF Council on evaluation and impact assessment.

ESF+ works to help more people enter the labour market or acquire the skills needed by the labour market. The Swedish ESF Council is the managing authority of ESF+ in Sweden. During 2021-2027, the Swedish programme will comprise five programme operations in which local, regional and national actors in all sectors of society can apply for funding to run projects that contribute in various ways to an inclusive labour market. One of these programme operations (Program Area E) focuses specifically on social innovation as a means of developing new solutions that can meet existing challenges in social inclusion, the labour market and education. The aim of ESF+ is to contribute to a well-functioning labour market in Sweden, in line with the EU's objectives for the Union as a whole.

The ESF Council and evaluation

The ESF Council has historically been an authority with a major influence on the evaluation practice in Sweden, as it has been a major procurement officer of evaluation services over the years. Within the ESF Council, evaluation is carried out at different levels: project, programme and thematic. Depending on the level in question, the purposes, conditions and evaluation designs differ. The demanded evaluation types

⁶³ <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2025/07/nytt-uppdrag-ska-starka-sidas-utvardering-av-effekter-oka-larandet-och-forbatta-bistandet/>

⁶⁴ Government Offices (2018)

⁶⁵ Sweco (2021)



have changed over time. During the previous programme period (2014-2020), project evaluations were a requirement and the evaluation approach requested at that time was on-going evaluation, with the purpose of supporting the project process.

In the current ESF+ programme period (2021–2027), there is no general requirement for project evaluation, only in specific calls for proposals. In some cases where there is a requirement, the ESF Council, together with the project, is the recipient of the evaluation. In cases where there is no requirement, but the project nevertheless chooses to carry out an evaluation, it is primarily the project that is the recipient. In these cases, the evaluation is financed within the framework of the project budget ⁶⁶. To gain a better understanding of how the authority works with evaluation in general, and impact measurement in particular, two individuals working in the ESF Council's analysis department were interviewed as part of this assignment. They note that impact evaluations are carried out at an aggregate level in particular. At the project level, it is usually more difficult to formulate counterfactual arguments. In these cases, the evaluation approaches are often theory-based, where an impact narrative is formulated and the implementation of the project is then compared with how the project was intended to work. This type of evaluation is often of great value to the projects, but, according to the respondents, is less useful to the authority. This is because the projects often operate within a local context that is difficult to translate into general conclusions and best practices. The Swedish ESF Council has an analysis department mainly working with impact evaluation at an aggregate level. The analysis department is responsible for designing the calls for tenders and formulating the requirements for tendered evaluations. Respondents note that the quality of procured evaluations has increased in recent years. This is partly due to that there are high requirements for tenderers to justify methodological considerations, make relevant operationalisations, and give a detailed motivation on which empirical data will be used and how it will be collected. Furthermore, tenderers must present a strategy for learning in the recipient organisation. In addition, during this programme, higher competence requirements have been placed on the evaluating teams by having at least one recognised expert, usually a researcher, in the relevant field.

We asked respondents to reflect on the opportunities and challenges of measuring impact within the ESF+. One major opportunity they identify is the access to register data via Statistics Sweden, which is not possible in several other countries (see section 4.2). Another is that the agency has gained greater procurement expertise through evaluation experts who contribute to the design of calls for proposals and programme formulations. Among the challenges they face, the respondents highlight that the evaluation perspective is not always included in the class, which risk resulting in broad calls with vague impact targets that are difficult to evaluate. Another challenge highlighted is how to measure the individuals progress towards the labour market. There are no clear definitions of what such progress might look like and there is no existing statistics available to capture this progress.

In October this year (2025), a comprehensive impact evaluation of the Social Fund's priority area 1 (2014-2020) was reported, which aimed to give individuals better opportunities in working life through competence development initiatives, while helping employers meet their needs for the right skills⁶⁷. This evaluation is the first of its kind for the Swedish Social Fund, involving a comprehensive analysis of what the projects have meant for the participants. The analysis was based on individual data from Statistics Sweden (see section 4.2 for a description of the agency), combined with the ESF Council's data on the participants. The evaluation used a counterfactual study design, where first step was to estimate each participant's probability of being included in an ESF intervention. Participants were then matched with a control group consisting of people who had the same estimated probability, but who had not taken part in

⁶⁶ ESF (2023)

⁶⁷ Ramböll Management Consulting (2025)



any interventions. In the next step, differences between participants and the control group were analysed year by year around the start of the initiative. This was done to ensure that the groups had similar conditions prior to the initiative thereby isolating the part of the outcome that can be attributed to participation itself. This evaluation has given an overall picture of the effects of the Social Fund's investments in competence development for the first time in history.

3.3 National Competence Centre Social Innovation

The Swedish NCCSI is coordinated by Forum for Social Innovation Sweden (FfSIS), situated at Malmö University, with regional nodes at four additional universities throughout the country. The NCCSI has developed and tested various forms for providing knowledge, methods and learning on social innovation for ESF-funded projects, the Swedish ESF Council and other key actors in the Swedish ecosystem of social innovation. A key challenge addressed by the NCCSI is how to measure impact of social innovation initiatives, funded by the ESF and others. Part of this work is a model for impact evaluation, which is currently under development. The model is based on a model of the social innovation process, see Figure 1 below. The model was developed by FfSIS based on Swedish and international research on social innovation[1], as well as practical experiences from FfSIS.

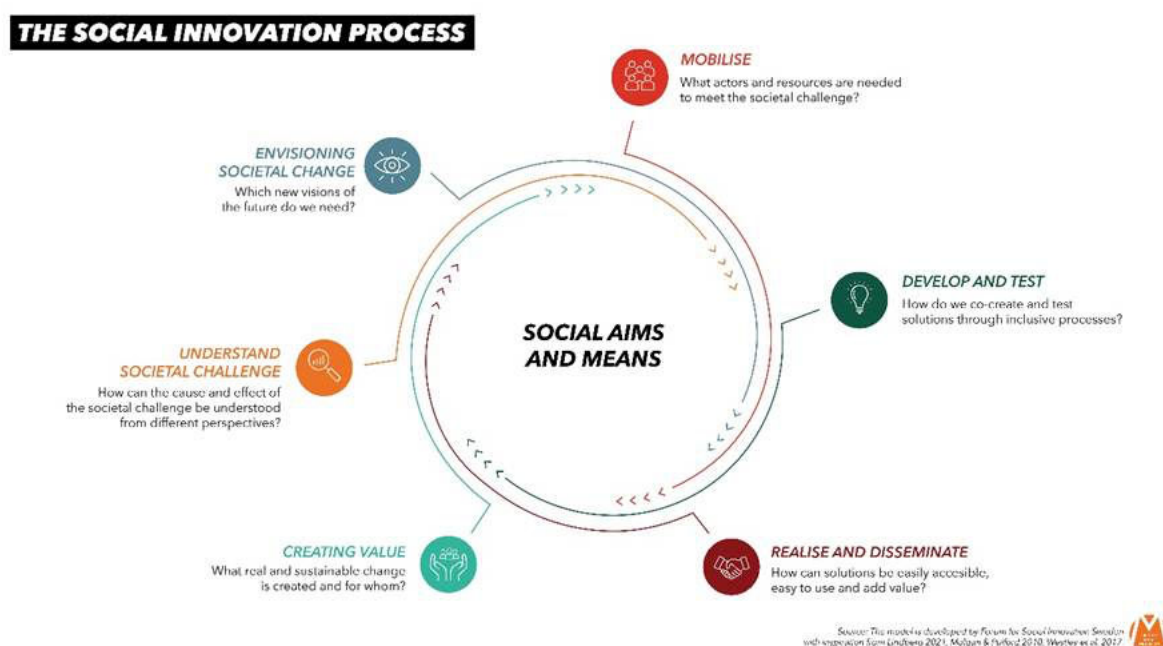


Figure 1. The social innovation process (Forum for Social Innovation Sweden 2021, with inspiration from Lindberg 2021, Mulgan & Pulford 2010, Westley et al. 2017).



The social impact evaluation model is being developed to capture and understand the value generated by the projects funded within the ESF's programme area for social innovation, the programme area itself. The model aims to measure value and impact on the individual level, as well as on the macro level. During 2026 onwards the NCCSI is developing indicators on how to capture value and impact to be used and tested within the authority and by funded projects. The model is under development, in close dialogue with the ESF-council, with the hope of making it accessible for all ESF-funded projects the coming years.

Parallel to the impact evaluation model, the NCCSI develops cluster analyses in relation to social innovation calls in the ESF. The cluster analyses can be said to be qualitative analyses of social innovation in the projects funded in the programme area of social innovation, in the ESF+.

Social Enterprises

Social entrepreneurship refers to business activities conducted for the benefit of society, for example to create jobs for people who are far from the labour market. Social entrepreneurship refers to practical action to create social benefits through innovative activities⁶⁸. However, there is no uniform definition of social entrepreneurship in Sweden today, something that several actors argue would be desirable⁶⁹. This is to prevent arbitrariness and lack of transparency in, for example, the allocation of funds and procurement, and to facilitate the measurement, monitoring and compilation of statistics in this area⁷⁰.

In 2021, the prevalence of social enterprises in Sweden was mapped⁷¹. The mapping, which was based on statistics from Swedish regions, was complicated by the lack of a uniform definition and varying methods for identifying social enterprises within the regions. However, some patterns could be discerned: The most common forms of association for social enterprises are limited companies, economic associations and non-profit associations. Most were started after 2010, although there are also examples of organisations with roots dating back to the early 1900s. The enterprises operate in more than 30 different sectors, the most common being health and social care, education, and research and development, followed by industry, employer and professional organisations. The survey also showed that the social impact that social enterprises in Sweden primarily seek to achieve are work integration and local collaboration and development for a locality or place. Environmental improvements and alternative energy production are also common areas of focus.

Forum for Social Innovation Sweden has captured the current state of impact evaluations among social enterprises in Sweden in a survey conducted as part of the European Social Enterprise Monitor (ESEM) 2024⁷². Of the total of 110 social enterprises that responded to the survey, half (50%) stated that they evaluate the social impact of their efforts. The purposes of evaluation social impact stated by the enterprises are mainly internal. The most common purposes are said to be to gain an understanding of whether the company is achieving its goals, to make better decisions, to strengthen the brand, and to motivate employees. Evaluating due to external requirements from donors, investors or authorities is not

⁶⁸ <https://socialinnovation.se/socialt-foretagande/>

⁶⁹ Policy in Practice (2021)

⁷⁰ Sweco (2020)

⁷¹ Policy in Practice (2021)

⁷² Forum for Social Innovation Sweden (2024)



reported to be as common in the survey. One possible explanation given in the report is that this may be because there are no systematic requirements for this when purchasing from social enterprises.

The other half of social enterprises that state that they do not measure social impact indicate that this is because impact evaluation is considered too complex and time-consuming, that it is not considered reliable, and that there is a lack of knowledge about impact measurement within the organisation. The survey also sought answers to what are the biggest challenges with impact measurement for these companies. The most common responses were difficulties in measuring and isolating impacts, lack of resources for data collection and personnel, and challenges in reaching the target group⁷³.

3.4 Support structures, networks and intermediaries

There are a number of networks and support structures that aim to develop social impact evaluation practices in Sweden, aimed at supporting municipalities, regions, social enterprises and social entrepreneurs, as well as consultants in the field.

Effektfullt is one example, a member organisation that contributes to knowledge acquisition and cross-sectoral exchange of experience in impact measurement.⁷⁴ Effektfullt was founded in the summer of 2019 with funding from Vinnova, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and the Swedish Postcode Foundation. Effektfullt currently consists of over 120 organisations from the business sector, public sector, civil society and academia, and offers advice, lectures and support on impact assessment, among other things. Another example is the committee working on the national standard for measuring social and environmental impacts mentioned earlier, under the Swedish Institute for Standards (SIS). The standard is directed towards social enterprises, projects, and municipal and regional activities.⁷⁵ The research institute RISE is another example, which among other things acts as an intermediary for the establishment of social outcome contracts and the measurement of social impacts⁷⁶. Giva Sverige is another organisation, a trade association with members consisting of non-profit organisations that in various ways strive to achieve social benefits. The organisation provides support and guidelines to help actors demonstrate how their efforts and interventions lead to concrete outcomes and potential impact. It also motivates impact evaluation activities by awarding the "Tryggt givande" (Safe Giving) quality label to member organisations that meet Giva's criteria⁷⁷.

There are also a number of foundations, non-profit organisations, cooperatives and innovation partners that work in various ways to promote social impact measurement⁷⁸.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ <https://www.oeffektfullt.se/>

⁷⁵ For more information, see the committee's website: <https://www.sis.se/delta-och-paverka/tksidor/tk600699/sistk-6262/>

⁷⁶ For more information, see: <https://www.ri.se/sv/shic/shics-case/effektmatning-for-hallbar-valfard>

⁷⁷ Read more here: <https://www.givasverige.se/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/riktlinjer-for-effektmatning-och-rapportering.pdf>

⁷⁸ See, for example: Social initiative (<https://socialinitiative.se/effekt/>), Idéer för livet (<https://www.ideerforlivet.se/om-kunskapsbanken/effektmatning/>) Coompanion (<https://coompanion.se/coompanion/mallar-verktyg/>) The Swedish National Advisory Board on Impact Investing (<https://www.swedishnab.se/work/>), Giva Sverige (<https://www.givasverige.se/effektmatning-i-praktiken/>)



3.5 Business

In the business sector, impact evaluations are carried out for learning purposes and also to demonstrate results to external financiers and customers. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has increased the demand for monitoring and communicating companies' social responsibility. This is a way for companies to show the outside world that they take responsibility for their social, environmental and economic impact.

The EU's new directive on corporate sustainability reporting – the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) – sets new standards for companies' work on sustainability and requirements for documenting their social responsibility, which is likely to promote the use of social impact measurement.

In Sweden, there are also a number of consulting firms that carry out social impact measurement on behalf of, for example, companies, municipalities, regions and civil society. Many of these companies are also active in developing impact evaluation practices by offering not only actual evaluation services but also training and methodological support.

3.7 Financing actors

The main funding of social impact evaluation are mainly government agencies, which finance research that includes social impact evaluation as well as larger development programmes and initiatives. Some authorities allocate specific funds for impact evaluations, while others require that evaluations are part of the overall funding of projects and programmes. Some of the funding authorities do not impose any requirements for impact evaluation. The list of guides and manuals in Table 1.1 provides several examples of how public sector activities have funded the development of support and guidance for impact evaluation in Sweden.

Despite Sweden's comprehensive welfare system, philanthropy⁷⁹ has come to play an increasingly important role in financing social interventions. In 2017, a study was conducted on Nordic philanthropists and their perspectives on impact measurement⁸⁰. The study revealed that there is an interest in impact evaluation, but also an awareness of the complexity for individual organisations to carry out evaluation in practice. The study points out that evaluations focus on processes and activities rather than societal impacts, which has received some criticism from researchers, due to the large sums donated to these types of social initiatives⁸¹.

There are examples of funds with a particular focus on financing social interventions where measuring impact is highlighted as an important parameter. The Outcome Fund is one example of such an investment fund, working with SIBs (see section 3.1), which is largely focused on measuring the outcomes and impacts of social interventions. The Micro Fund is another example of an actor, a venture capital cooperative for the civil society which specialises in financing social innovations and social enterprises. They are managing investment capital from both the private and public sectors, both nationally and regionally. Their annual report does not indicate that they specifically finance impact evaluation, but through EU support they have

⁷⁹ The Swedish National Encyclopaedia describes philanthropy as activities aimed at selflessly helping people in need, see charity.

⁸⁰ Braunerhjelm, P and J Palmberg (2017)

⁸¹ Palmberg J (2021)



been able to collaborate with researchers to develop an evaluation model based on priority indicators for their activities⁸².

In the survey conducted as part of this project, respondents stated that it is often a challenge to carry out high-quality impact evaluations being a project or social enterprise, with no allocated budget for that. They argue in favour of more long-term financing models for this work, as impact measurement often requires both time and resources.

⁸² For more information, read their annual report, available at <https://mikrofonden.se/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Mikrofonden-Effektberattelse-2024.pdf>



4. Education and Training

In this chapter, we provide an overview on education programs, courses and trainings on impact evaluations offered by universities and other providers.

Most academic programmes offer methodology courses as part of the programme, which include impact evaluation in disciplines such as in political science, sociology, social work and anthropology. There are also a number of courses focusing on various aspects of evaluation in general. To get an idea of the number of individual courses, we did a search on studera.nu, a website with all university courses available in Sweden. The search showed that 20 (out of 31) universities have courses focusing on evaluation. We found a total of 60 courses on both basic and advanced levels⁸³. Examples of higher education institutions with dedicated evaluation courses are Luleå University of Technology, Mälardalen University, Umeå University, Uppsala University and Lund University. Common subject areas are evaluation of public health work, socio-economic evaluation, public administration/policy and criminology.

In addition to academia, there are also courses offered by other providers specifically directed towards professionals, practitioners and entrepreneurs with an interest in impact evaluation. Example of courses on impact evaluations directed towards professionals are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of training courses in impact measurement

Authorities	
National Board of Health and Welfare	The National Board of Health and Welfare offers training and support in impact measurement. The National Board of Health and Welfare has also been involved in training projects within the framework of the R&D Forum, where training in impact evaluation has been provided for method developers and operations developers within social services.
SIDA	SIDA offers training related to impact measurement, particularly within the framework of global development issues and sustainable development.
National Financial Management Authority	The Swedish National Financial Management Authority (ESV) offers training and guidance in impact measurement, aimed specifically at government agencies. Among other things, they offer online training in theory of change and provide targeted guidance for impact assessments.
Civil society organisations	
The Swedish Fundraising Council (FRIL)	Offers three types of courses in impact measurement each year: a basic course, a course on developing a measurement plan, and a more in-depth course with the possibility of earning university credits. Conducted in collaboration with Social Initiative.

⁸³ On 16 September 2025, a search for impact assessment was conducted on the Studera.nu website, which is run by the Swedish Council for Higher Education. There were 130 search hits. We then removed courses that fall outside the field of social impact measurement, such as medicine, climate and environment, energy systems, radiation, etc. We also removed courses that do not directly focus on evaluation (but which are likely to include elements of impact measurement), such as School in Change. Historical and Sociological Perspectives on Education, Democracy Issues, Sociology A-C, Sociology of Law, Adult Education, Physiotherapy, etc. This left a total of 60 courses focusing on evaluation.



Effektfullt	Offers training in impact measurement regardless of sector, e.g. civil society, business or the public sector. You can choose between shorter courses on specific topics, full- or half-day training courses, or an Impact Master Class which, according to Effektfullt, has the aim of laying the foundations for impact measurement and impact evaluation in your organisation.
Skandia Ideas for Life – in collaboration with Örebro University and the consulting firm Serus	Training in theoretical and practical knowledge about concrete tools for measuring impact and value creation – socially and economically. Focuses on measurement based on the new Swedish standard for impact measurement. Training courses in impact measurement include a basic course, a course on developing a measurement plan, and a more in-depth course that can earn university credits.
Social initiatives	Offers training in the Theory of Change and Outcome Map tools.
Kind Impact	Offers training and skills development in impact measurement, such as problem mapping and change theory, impact measurement plans and measurement instruments, data collection, processing and analysis, interviews and impact stories, compiling results and writing impact reports.
Companies	
Ramböll management	Conducts training initiatives – both open, such as via webinars, and targeted in customer assignments – to strengthen general understanding and competence in impact measurement.

5. Literature on impact evaluation

In this chapter, we provide examples on evaluation literature selected to suit a broader group of actors who are not necessarily trained researchers. We also provide examples of some guides and guidelines aimed at facilitating the practical work of measuring the impact of social interventions. The books are largely focusing on the Swedish context and is written in Swedish.

Table 2. Examples of evaluation literature

Sandahl och Petersson (2016) : Kausalitet: i filosofi, politik och utvärdering Studentlitteratur	An introduction to the most influential theories of causality and how they can be used to track the effects of public interventions or the causes of social problems.
Blom, Larsson, Klockmo, Snellman, Zimic (2025): Utvärdering, uppföljning och granskning i socialt arbete: förutsättningar, tillvägagångssätt och kritisk reflektion	An anthology by researchers who convey basic knowledge in the field based on Swedish conditions. They discuss different perspectives, approaches and methods.



Sandberg och Faugert (2020): Perspektiv på utvärdering Studentlitteratur	An introduction to different evaluation designs and models, as well as accounts of how evaluations can be planned and carried out in a systematic way.
Svensson, Brulin, Jansson, och Sjöberg (2013): Att fånga effekter: av program och projekt Studentlitteratur	A book that discusses the challenges and opportunities for capturing the effects of large projects. The book also presents the results of several analyses of development work in large projects and programmes – in organisation, at regional level, in national programmes, etc.
Jannesson, Liljekvist, Hök och Hahn (2022): Så mäts socialt hållbart värdeskapande Studentlitteratur	A book that explains the concept of SROI and the so-called value creation chain to show how it is possible to capture social, environmental and economic values. The book also presents practical examples from various organisations and provides concrete tips on the role that the different parts of the value creation chain can play in an organisation.
Vedung (2009): Utvärdering i politik och förvaltning	A qualified textbook on evaluation in the public sector that has become a frequently cited classic among literature on evaluation.

Examples of guidelines and guides on impact evaluation

As mentioned earlier, there is a need for practical support in order to be able to carry out impact evaluation of social initiatives, including social innovations. To facilitate implementation, several actors have produced various types of guidelines. Table 3 below provides some examples.

Table 3. Examples of guidance and guides	
SS 29000:2024 Measurement of social and environmental impacts – Terminology SS 29001:2024 Measurement of social and environmental impacts – Planning for data collection (2024)	Swedish Institute for Standards Available at: https://www.sis.se/produkter/terminologi-och-dokumentation/terminologi/ss-290002024/ resp https://www.sis.se/produkter/foretagsorganisation/arbete-sysselsattning/ss-290012024/
Effektmätning i praktiken - rapporteringsriktlinjer och vägledning (2023))	Effektfullt, RISE , Social & Health Impact Centre and Örebro Municipality Available at:



	OSF Impact measurement in practice – reporting guidelines and guidance.pdf
Guide för effektmätning av innovationsprojekt (2022)	Ramböll Management Consulting on behalf of Vinnova. Available at: https://swelife.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Guide-fo%CC%88r-effektma%CC%88tning-av-innovationsprojekt-version-1.0_RAMBOLL-o-VINNOVA.pdf
Att utvärdera effekterna av socialtjänstens insatser – rapportering av budgetuppdrag (2022)	Social Services Committee of the City of Stockholm, available at: https://insynsverige.se/documentHandler.ashx?did=2031978
Vägledande princip: Att mäta och rapportera Impact (2021)	Vägledande princip: Att mäta och rapportera Impact (2021)
Hur värdera tillsammans för att visa på värde? Redovisning av en förstudie rörande hur en modell för att redovisa effekter av företagsfrämjande i Gävleborg skulle kunna se ut. (2021)	WSP on behalf of Region Gävleborg Available at: https://www.regiongavleborg.se/globalassets/regional-utveckling/naringsliv-och-innovation/innovationsklivet/rapport-forstudie-modell-for-effektmatning-20211006-final.pdf
Planera en effektvärdering: steg-för-steg (2020)	Västra Götaland Region Available at: https://www.vgregion.se/siteassets/ovriga_webbplatser/innovationsplattformen/planera-en-effektutvardering-steg-for-steg.pdf
Alla pratar om det, men få gör det – en handbok i effektmätning (2018)	Forum for Social Innovation Sweden at Malmö University, available at: https://socialinnovation.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/MSI_Handbok_Effektma%C3%A4tning_Digital_181106.pdf
Guide för effektvärdering av sociala investeringsprojekt (2014)	Produced in collaboration between the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL) – now SKR Available at https://www.uppdragpsyiskhalsa.se/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Guide-f%C3%B6r-effektutv%C3%A4rdering.pdf



6. Summary and concluding reflections

Methods for evaluating impact of social interventions have been discussed in evaluation research for decades. Evaluation and impact assessment have in Sweden traditionally been carried out and financed within the public sector. In recent years, evaluation has also become common in other areas, such as social enterprises and social innovation. This is because social enterprises and social innovations, unlike traditional companies (which strive for financial gain), are driven by the desire to generate social utility. Impact evaluation is therefore an area that has undergone extensive development in the social enterprises and social innovation in recent years, largely due to an increased demand for transparency, improved opportunities for comparison and increased quality requirements. But also, with the purpose of demonstrating the utility generated in order to attract investment and establishing themselves in the market. The demand for impact evaluations comes from both financiers and investors, politicians and social enterprises.

There are many challenges associated with social impact evaluation, but new standards, methods, and collaborations have been initiated in recent years with the aim of increasing knowledge and improving conditions so that more actors can measure and understand the impact of their actions. Within the ecosystem for social impact evaluation, there are both actors who carry out and finance evaluations. Some actors evaluate their activities internally, while others choose to involve external evaluators, partly to gain access to evaluation competence, but also to obtain an outside and independent perspective of their activities. Sometimes the evaluations are carried out on the initiative of the organisation themselves, sometimes because of external requirements imposed on their activities.

This report has described a number of different evaluation approaches that in various ways aim to measure, understand, and explain social impact. It has also described various waves and movements that have influenced evaluation practice in Sweden throughout history. We have described counterfactual studies through randomised experiments inspired by natural science. This is an evaluation approach that requires considerable resources and places high demands on the scientific and methodological competence of the evaluator. We have also described how evaluation have been developed and adapted for practical application outside the academia. We have also described alternative perspectives on evaluation arguing that it is difficult to verify the impact of interventions in social science and social contexts. This is because it often takes several years before potential effects occur and because the interventions often focus on complex problems where there are several parallel influencing factors which are difficult to isolate in a controlled experiment. Furthermore, the problems that social innovation aims to address rarely have a single best solutions, but often need to be processed in networks based on multiple competencies and areas of responsibility – a form of collaboration that is also difficult to control in a study and draw general conclusions from.

At the same time, impact evaluation is highlighted as one of the important activities for developing social innovation. It is an appealing idea to be able to use impact evaluation to show that an intervention works – to generate “reliable knowledge” for both the social enterprise and the financier. But when it comes to social innovation, the risks of what we refer to as the “impact problem” are considerable. A prerequisite for impact evaluation is that the intervention must remain constant throughout the measurement period to determine the study object. However, actors in social innovation often emphasise that their process is



characterised by experimentation, iteration and interactive learning between different actors from different sectors as an important part of achieving social change⁸⁴. Ensuring that the intervention is the cause of the change is particularly challenging in this landscape. In many cases, evaluations may have a broader purpose than simply determining impact. The purpose may also be to generate learning about what it was in the intervention that generated the identified effects, under what conditions and in relation to which individuals. A combination of evaluation designs therefore appears to be valuable when evaluating SI, as previous research has shown⁸⁵.

At the same time, this mapping suggests that there are a variety of evaluation approaches in Sweden today that go under the name of "impact evaluation" and that there is considerable disagreement about which ones are considered reliable and which ones are not. The report shows the need to develop models and forms for measuring, monitoring, and understanding the actual difference a particular initiative makes to society, people and the environment. A combination of showing and explaining differences with scientifically proven methods, while making it accessible and possible for more to use.

Following the results in the report, the following suggestions are made for the continued work on impact assessment within the context of the National Competence Center for social innovation in Sweden:

- Continue the work on developing a concept/model for impact evaluation to be used in relation to the ESF+ funding of social innovations. The model should describe a combination of methods, tools and models that can show the value of social innovations funded by the ESF+ , to initiatives/projects as well as policymakers and the ESF Managing Authority. The model should be developed in close dialogue with responsible actors at the Swedish ESF-council. It should continue to build on existing methods on impact evaluation with specific knowledge of social innovation. It should be designed as concepts that can be used by projects as well as evaluators, to measure, monitor and understand the actual difference a particular initiative or project makes to society, people and the environment.
- Following the focus of the NCSSI in the coming years, the concept/model should be developed with a focus on combining experimentation with policy impact, to include mainstreaming and implementation of value creating innovations, making it possible for impact assessment to become a supportive function for initiatives and policy. The cluster evaluation approach that has been tested in the NCSSI can be further developed into analyses of clusters of experiments, in portfolio models, where accumulated learning between initiatives can create learning and evidence for policy makers.
- The concept/model should be developed in close parallel with the Swedish NCSSIs work on financing models for social innovation, in order to support possibilities for sustainable funding for social innovation. The model could by clarifying values created, making it easier to show the logic of combining European funds with philanthropy, private, public funding to support solutions to complex societal challenges.
- Make the model/concept available through possibilities of collecting, analysing and visualising data through a digital model. This digital form should also simplify the accessibility for initiatives to start collecting their data from early stages.
- The concept and model should include a focus on both the social ends and means of social innovation, where the values of the "means" are included, such as the co-creation, new

⁸⁴ Svensson et al. (2018)

⁸⁵ Ibid



relationships and the process of including the participation of underrepresented groups in the understanding and addressing societal challenges.

- Develop a strategy for what role the Swedish NCSSI can play in the ecosystem for impact assessment in Sweden, in dialogue with key actors within the ecosystem.



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