European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

ISSN: 3094-6263 EN

SPOTLIGHT ON JOBS AND SKILLS SWEDEN

2026

Introduction

Drawing on its rich country-level skills intelligence, Cedefop develops its Spotlights on jobs and skills for EU-27 Member States, Iceland and Norway. The Spotlights provide insights into the current labour market landscape, future trends, and skills anticipation in each country. The analysis is based on Cedefop's skills intelligence online tool, its skills forecast, the European Skills Index (ESI), online job advertisements, sectoral and occupational skills intelligence, and country-specific skills anticipation reports.

Recent employment developments

The employed population increased by 10 % between 2015 and 2023, above the EU average of +8 %. In 2023, the health and social care sector ([1]) was the largest employer (14 % versus 11 % in the EU). Professional services follow with an employment share of 12 % (7 % in the EU-27), education with 11 % (7 % in the EU-27), and wholesale and retail trade with 10 % (13 % in the EU-27) (see Figure 1). These employment trends reflect a policy focus on skills and education. Even though Sweden's population is ageing, it has an above-average share of people aged 15-24 among the employed (10 % compared with the EU average of 8 %), partly because of relatively high immigration.

The occupations with the highest employment shares are office associate professionals (9 % versus 7 % in the EU-27), care workers (8 % versus 3 %), and office professionals (8 % versus 5 %). Further, with 15 % of employees in so-called high-tech occupations (science, engineering, and ICT occupations) in 2023, Sweden ranks among the leading countries in the EU (10 % the EU-27) when it comes to technology.

Historically, Sweden has also been one of the frontrunners in promoting female labour market participation, which in 2023 remains slightly above the EU average (47 % of the employed population compared with 46 % in the EU-27). Imbalances remain across sectors, however. Male-dominated sectors are construction (88 % of employment compared with 90 % in the EU-27), agriculture, forestry and fishing (78 % versus 70 %), transport and storage (77 % in Sweden and in the EU-27), and manufacturing (75 % versus 70 %). Conversely, the health and social care sector (76 % women compared with 78 % in the EU-27), education (72 % versus 73 %) and the public sector and defence (62 % versus 49 %) are female dominated.

Even though Sweden's economy has recovered well from the COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment rate remains above the EU average in 2023 (8 % compared with 6 % in the EU-27) and has not yet returned to the 2019 level of 7 %. At 24 %, the unemployment rate for those with low or no educational attainment remains double the EU average of 12 %. This particularly concerns low-skilled people who were previously employed in elementary jobs or as service and sales workers and who lost their jobs up to two years ago.

Similarly, youth unemployment has remained noticeably above the EU average, affecting 22 % of those aged 15-24 (15 % in the EU-27). Youth unemployment is also high because many full-time students in Sweden who are looking for part-time work are counted as unemployed. In 2023, only 5 % of the 15-24 age cohort were not in employment, education or training (NEET), which is substantially below the EU average of 9 %. The long-term unemployment rate, although considerably lower than the EU average (35 %), has increased significantly from 14 % in 2020 to 21 % in 2023.

Recent skills and learning developments

Cedefop's analysis of online job advertisements (OJAs) underlines the importance of service sector jobs in the country. In 2023, 63 % of OJAs were for business services (51 % in the EU-27), 16 % in distribution and transport (14 % in the EU-27) and 12 % in non-market services, a share similar to the EU average. In terms of occupations, health professionals (6 % compared with 3 % in the EU-27),

([1]) To learn more about the classification of sectors, occupations, and qualification levels discussed in this report, see Annex 2 of Cedefop's skills forecast methodological framework (April 2023).

care workers (7 % versus 3 %) and office associate professionals (8 % versus 9 %) accounted for the highest OJA shares in the Swedish labour market. In contrast, compared to the EU average, relative few online job advertisements target occupations linked to manufacturing. In Swedish manufacturing, relatively few OJAs are for low-skilled roles such as assemblers (1 % compared with 3 % in the EU-27), elementary workers (7 % versus 12 %), or clerks (5 % versus 7 %).

Sweden is among the top-performing countries in Cedefop's European Skills Index (ESI) (Figure 2). It ranked second out of 31 countries in 2024. Sweden's ranking is particularly strong in the skills activation pillar (ranking 4th), with high labour market participation rates and a well-functioning education-to-work transition. This aligns with the country's historically strong orientation towards active labour market policies. Further, ranked 8th, Sweden shows satisfactory performance for the ESI skills development pillar.

The high political and societal importance placed on education and skills, and the country's strong adult learning system are reflected in the share of employed individuals participating in education and training. At 38 % in 2023, Sweden had the highest share of Member States and far surpassed the EU-27 average of 14 %. The country's adult learning system has been strengthened with the transition study support (Omställningsstudiestödet) launched in late 2022. This provides financial support for mid-career professionals to retrain or upskill and directly targets skills mismatches in sectors facing shortages. While participation in initial upper secondary vocational education and training remains relatively low, the provision of higher VET is growing.

Some 48 % of the employed population holds a high-level qualification (38 % in the EU-27), 41 % have a medium level (46 % in the EU-27), and only 11 % are low-qualified or have no formal qualification (16 % in the EU-27). While the share of highly educated employees is high, the overqualification rate remains relatively low. Only 14 % of graduates aged 25-34 were overqualified compared with 23 % in EU-27. Workforce digital skill levels are significantly above the EU average (33 %), with 42 % of employed people possessing above-basic digital skills.

Future employment trends

Cedefop's Skills Forecast shows employment is expected to grow annually at a rate considerably above the EU average (+1 % versus +0.4 % in the EU) between 2022 and 2035. The labour force is expected to increase by 11 % between 2022 and 2035, surpassing the EU growth rate of just under 8 %. This is linked to relatively high population growth of +10 % between 2022 and 2035 (EU +3 %), driven by Sweden's comparatively high net migration rates. Only the 25-34 and 50-54 age cohorts are projected to decline, while all other age cohort are projected to grow, thanks to upward trends in younger age cohorts in preceding periods.

Total employment is projected to grow by 11 % over the period 2022-2035. While employment in manufacturing is expected to grow by only +4 %, non-marketed services (+15 %), business and other services (+12 %), distribution and transport (+12 %), and the primary sector and utilities (+12 %) are expected to grow significantly in the years leading up to 2035.

The top three occupations in terms of employment growth between 2022 and 2035 are legal, social, cultural and related associate professionals (+61 %), science and engineering professionals (+40 %), and health professionals (+37 %). The growth rates of these occupations are above the EU average. Over the same period, automation and AI implementation are expected to drive relatively large declines in employment for general and keyboard clerks (-68 %), customer service clerks (-39 %), and stationary plant and machine operators (-21 %).

In the period 2022-2035, most new job openings are expected for business and administration professionals, business and administration associate professionals, and health professionals, which account for around 9 % of total job openings. Because of shrinking employment, far fewer job openings are projected for general keyboard clerks and customer service clerks. A high replacement demand linked to an ageing care workforce will lead to substantial job openings for personal care workers (5 % of total job openings) in the coming years.

Future skills and learning trends

Future labour market changes are strongly shaped by high-skilled occupations, as 71 % of projected job openings over the 2022-2035 period are expected to require a high qualification. This is well above the EU average of 59 %. Cedefop's forecast shows that 23 % of job openings will require a medium-level qualification, and only 5 % a low or no qualification.

The composition of the labour force in terms of qualification levels is projected to change considerably over the 2022-2035 period. The share of highly qualified people is set to increase from 45 % in 2022 to 55 % in 2035, and the annual growth rate of the high-skilled labour force (+3 %) is projected to be slightly above the EU average. In contrast, the share of medium-qualified people will decrease to 32 % in 2035, compared with the 45 % EU average and the 41 % level in 2022. The share of low-skilled labour will decrease only slightly, from 14 % to 12 % up to 2035, and will remain above the EU average of 10 %.

The tasks of an occupation, rather than just the skills level, can often give insight into the impacts of technological change and innovation. According to Cedefop's skills forecast, employment in high-tech occupations will grow by +10 % in the 2030-2035 period, exceeding on average the EU-27 +7 % growth rate. The expected sectoral and occupational trends during the same period show high employment growth in high-technology manufacturing (+5 % compared with the +2 % EU average).

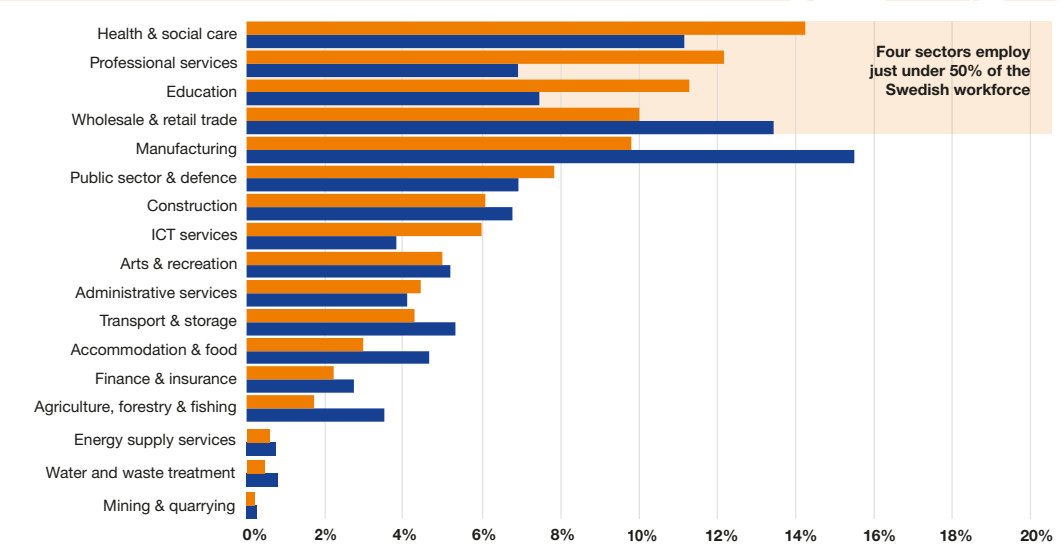
Expected skill shortages

The Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index predicts that skills shortages will be most severe for employers recruiting for skilled manual occupations and elementary occupations (Figure 3). However, occupations with high shortages can be found across all occupation groups. Among high-skilled occupations, the largest shortages are expected for health professionals and health associate professionals. These shortages have demand and supply dimensions, because high employment growth and high replacement needs linked to retirement and job mobility arise simultaneously. For employers recruiting staff for medium-skilled non-manual occupations, shortages are expected to be high for personal service workers and sales workers, and relate to mismatches between job requirements and qualifications. Other occupations where employers are likely to face shortages are drivers and mobile plant operators, handicraft and printing workers, skilled agricultural workers and forestry workers, and fishery and hunting workers.

SWEDEN

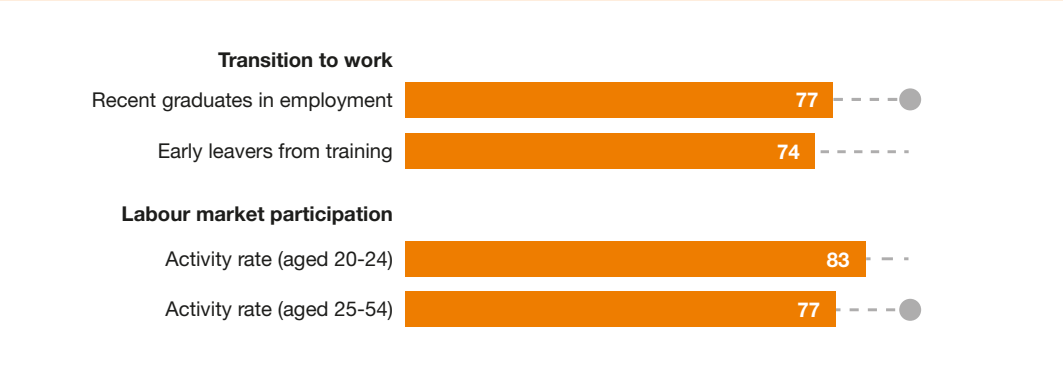
Jobs and skills in figures

Distribution of employment across sectors in Sweden and the EU, 2023 (%)



Source: Cedefop Skills Intelligence tool.

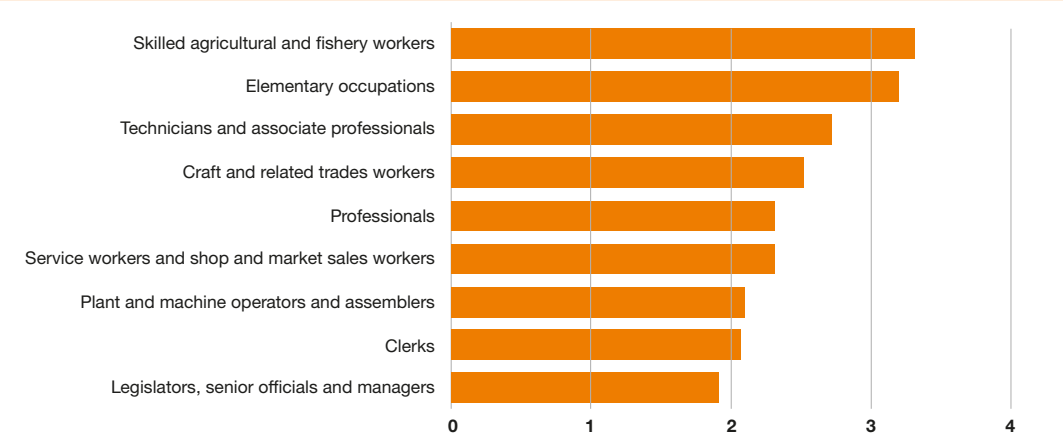
ESI skills activation pillar in Sweden, 2024



NB: The ESI measures countries' 'distance to the ideal' performance, i.e. the highest achieved by any country over a period of seven years. The ideal performance is scaled to 100, with national scores computed and compared to that. Example: a score of 65 suggests that the country has reached 65 % of the ideal performance, with 35 % (100-65) room for improvement.

Source: Cedefop ESI.

Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index, 2022-35, Sweden



NB: The Labour and Skills Shortage Index is the simple average of the quartiles in each of the three pillars: (1) employment growth; (2) replacement demand; (3) supply/demand imbalance (IFIOD). A score of 4 indicates a higher level of shortage, and 1 no shortage. The outcome of the pillars is based on the relative evaluation in quantiles of the occupation (here for all EU-27).

Source: Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index.

Further information

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Cedefop Skills intelligence tool

Cedefop Skills forecast

Cedefop Skills OVATE

Cedefop European Skills Index

Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index

This Spotlight was drafted by Cedefop's Skills intelligence and foresight team.

Cedefop would like to thank Stefan Quas from ReferNet Sweden for his valuable feedback. This Spotlight was validated by the National Representative of the Swedish ReferNet team, Jonas Vig.

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Publications Office of the European Union

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8167 EN – TI-01-26-024-EN-N – doi:10.2801/9593534 – ISBN 978-92-896-3974-3