

The logo for Forte, consisting of the word "FORTE" in a bold, white, sans-serif font inside a white rectangular box. The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of stylized human figures in various poses, rendered in a light purple color against a darker purple background.

**FORTE**

Swedish Research Council for  
Health, Working Life and Welfare

# RESEARCH FOR SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Forte's submission to the Government's  
research policy from 2021 onwards

“Science is our great ally in the efforts to achieve the Goals” **António Guterres, Secretary-General of the UN**



## Foreword

Based on our remit in the fields of health, working life and welfare, Forte has been commissioned by the Government to conduct analyses and submit recommendations for the Government's research policy (U2019/01906/F). This report presents Forte's view of urgent and long-term research needs in our fields. We also present an assessment of the progress of current targeted initiatives and how these can be developed, and of how new initiatives could help to identify solutions to the societal challenges we face.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda set out where we need to be heading in order to make the transition and ensure we have everything in place to attain sustainable societal development. Achieving the SDGs demands both financial investment and progress on the environmental front. However, this transition also entirely depends on our capacity to carry out and gain acceptance for societal reforms. Forte's input to the Government's research policy therefore asserts the importance of socially sustainable development, both because the social goals are important in their own right and because achieving them will also make us better placed for success in other sustainability areas.

Stockholm, October 2019



*Joakim Palme*  
Chairperson of the board, Forte

Health, working life and welfare, Forte's fields of responsibility, are cornerstones of socially sustainable societal development. Sweden has come a long way in many respects but there are still shortcomings and obstacles in Forte's areas that stand in the way of attaining an equal and sustainable society. Many of the challenges are also global.

Climate change is the most urgent issue on the global agenda. It is clear that humanity faces a tough challenge; a challenge in which we ourselves are not merely the problem but also the solution. At the same time, we have to tackle major challenges in work, health and welfare. Swedish research is particularly well placed to promote our capacity to work together to reform society in a more sustainable direction. However, this will take a concerted effort on research and societal innovation. This report sets out the direction such a concerted effort should take.

Forte's working group comprised Inger Jonsson (project leader), Tommy Dahlén, Antonia Hallberg, Tove Hammarberg and Thomas Jacobsson. We would like to thank everyone who has contributed their expertise and valuable points of view.



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# SUMMARY

With this submission, Forte stresses the value of the social dimension of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We highlight urgent knowledge needs in health, working life and welfare and propose research initiatives that can contribute to the transition to a more sustainable society.

Humanity's opportunities for survival in the face of a changed global climate are the most urgent issue of our age. The SDGs in the 2030 Agenda set out the direction of the transition to sustainable development but despite greater awareness of the need for comprehensive transformation of society, progress is slow. There are many inhibiting factors that have more to do with how our societies work and how people behave than with the need for technological advances and innovations. Citizens need to see the benefit of changes before they are willing to get on board and become actively involved. This demands a public trust that the cost of the transition will be divided fairly and that everyone will share in the benefits it brings. Societies that encourage equal access to resources and agency, and which create opportunities for influence and participation, provide a good basis for this. The social dimension of work to attain the SDGs therefore needs to be afforded greater scope in public debate and politics, and in research and innovation initiatives.

People's opportunities to earn a living and enjoy good health are fundamental to socially sustainable welfare. The research that Forte funds in the fields of health, working life and welfare produces important insights that enable

us to better tackle the shortcomings in welfare affecting individuals and the health and welfare systems themselves. However, this demands that research policy takes a long-term approach. The development of today's society calls for further research investments to meet the extensive knowledge needs that exist. Forte has identified three such urgent initiatives that will be important complements both to ordinary calls for proposals in Forte's fields of responsibility and to previously established national research programmes. We also propose a continuation and reinforcement of ongoing initiatives.

## New initiatives

### **NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH PROGRAMME**

There is a need for a concerted effort and a new holistic approach to mental health research. The research is expected to enhance understanding of the increase in mental illness and develop methods to reduce the extent and mitigate the consequences of mental ill-health and various mental illnesses. It is important to draw attention to the many interacting factors, including social, biological and economic factors, that contribute towards mental illness. The programme should seek to finance interdisciplinary research based on prioritised knowledge gaps, collate the research, create platforms for disseminating and applying the results and stimulate strategic collaboration between funding bodies, researchers, relevant agencies and other users of the research results.

### **NATIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME TO REDUCE INEQUALITY**

Forte proposes a research programme that facilitates cohesive study and analysis of inequality as a dynamic interaction between conditions and opportunities in different areas of life. The structures and the processes behind

growing inequalities are complex and intertwined. Neither the drivers nor the consequences are entirely understood at the moment. There is a need for research that moves the research front forwards and focuses on the development of inequalities over different phases of life, the impact of inequality on social cohesion, etc. The aim of the research programme will be to produce new knowledge that can be used as a basis for policy and practice to reduce inequalities and improve conditions, especially for people who lack important basic resources and agency. There should be a focus on linking research on the processes that create inequality to measures capable of reducing inequality and its consequences.

### **NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH PROGRAMME**

The challenges that exist in terms of applying research results in policy and practice have long been underestimated. With this programme, Forte seeks to encourage a concerted effort to develop implementation research in Sweden. At the same time, we aim to promote greater use of evidence-based knowledge. It is well known that many policy areas have high ambitions in response to the societal challenges we face today, but that at the same time there is an implementation gap. There are implementation problems in every aspect of our society, from translating political intentions and policies into action to individual teachers, social workers or doctors working face to face with citizens and their shifting needs for healthcare, social care and support. The programme's ambition is to tackle this entire complex chain, with the ultimate aim of improving the quality and effectiveness of the services our society provides. To have as great an impact as possible, questions concerning implementation and practical application of research results will be integrated in all the initiatives Forte carries out.

## Ongoing and reinforced initiatives

### **TEN-YEAR NATIONAL PROGRAMME ON APPLIED WELFARE RESEARCH**

Forte proposes that the current ten-year national programme on applied welfare research continue as planned. The programme is to strengthen high-quality practice and client-oriented research of use for the social services. This concerns research that can contribute towards developing and improving both services and the situation and conditions of users. The programme also seeks to increase the proportion of people working in social services who have a PhD, so that their expertise can help to build knowledge in the social services sector. As part of this, the programme has been commissioned to finance a research school. Another goal is to increase collaboration and communication in research between researchers, the profession, users and relatives.

### **TEN-YEAR NATIONAL PROGRAMME ON WORKING LIFE RESEARCH**

Forte proposes that the current ten-year national programme on working life research continue as planned. Forte further proposes that the programme's funding be expanded with the aim of enabling additional investments in research and innovation for working life as an arena for social sustainability. Both structural changes and digitalisation have major consequences for the way the labour market functions, with changed occupational structures, for the way work is organised and the work environment. This is a trend that involves many challenges, where research can provide important contributions for appropriate interventions. There is also a substantial need for knowledge on the effects of segregation, inequality and differences in accessing education

and jobs. Questions about accessibility, participation and the opportunity to be active in the world of work without discrimination and harassment are central.

### **NATIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME FOR SUSTAINABLE HEALTH AND WELFARE SYSTEMS**

Forte proposes a cohesive, long-term research initiative with a focus on the capacity of the health and welfare system to cope with pressures and contribute towards a sustainable society in a global context. The research programme builds further on the experiences of the earlier initiative on research into the quality, organisation and processes of welfare (Government Bill 2016/17:50), which was commissioned to Forte. Here the health and welfare system refers to health and medical care, education and care, plus the social insurance systems. The aim of the research programme is to produce new knowledge that can be used as a basis for policy and practice with the aim of attaining a sustainable health and welfare system.

### **NATIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME FOR HEALTHY AGEING**

Forte proposes that the current mandate to finance research in the field of ageing continue as a cohesive and long-term programme. Such an initiative would provide a basis for further strengthening this field while simultaneously enabling research to contribute to development at policy and practice level. The initiative would also serve as a platform for a concerted effort in international collaboration, not least in the EU's framework programmes. It is also important that the work that has begun to develop ways of identifying and prioritising knowledge needs in care of the elderly can continue and be explored in depth in collaboration with relevant actors and target groups.

## **Ensuring that research is able to meet societal challenges**

If research and innovation are to be able to meet the ambitious expectations made of them, we need to ensure that these sectors have what they need to succeed. Forte has several proposals in this respect, covering general criteria such as freedom of research, equal conditions for women and men, open access, internationalisation, etc. We also highlight areas where challenge-driven research would benefit from additional support. This concerns the need to support collaboration and communication with practitioners and users throughout the research process, but also the need to develop infrastructures that support research for social sustainability.

The Government's 2016 research bill introduced ten-year national research programmes as a new element in the Swedish research policy landscape. The crucial advantage is that these can act as platforms, not least for collaboration and communication between different types of actors both nationally and internationally. The national programmes can work together to clearly define research needs, initiate and conduct new research, encourage the spread of knowledge and facilitate the practical application of research results. Forte has excellent experiences of this form of financing and has therefore taken the programme format as the starting point for the initiatives we propose.





# 1. INTRODUCTION

From a global perspective, it is clear that we need to change to a more sustainable way of living. The structures of society need to be reformed to enable all people to lead safe and good lives without using the planet's resources in a way that is unsustainable for future generations. The need to make the transition to a society that is sustainable in the long term is also clear from a national perspective. The consequences of climate change for nature are becoming increasingly obvious even at our latitudes, but the social climate also stands out as being problematic in a number of respects.

Despite greater awareness of the need for a comprehensive transition of society, the pace of development is glacial. There are many inhibiting factors that have more to do with how our societies work and how people behave than with the need for technological advances and innovations. It is difficult to envisage the consequences of a long-term transition to a sustainable society for existing social and power structures, as well as knowing beforehand how individual lives will be affected. If we are to succeed in making the transition, it is therefore vital that actors in every sector of society, and us as citizens, recognise the benefit of the changes and are on board and keen to play a part. To create such acceptance, it is important that the instruments introduced do not increase gaps and inequalities between different groups

in society, between urban and rural areas or between countries. We must find ways of sharing the costs as well as the benefits of the transition equally and in solidarity.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 2030 Agenda set out where we need to be heading in order to make the transition and to ensure we have everything in place to attain sustainable societal development. We need a concerted effort at national level and international collaboration to achieve the SDGs and the Government's ambition is for Sweden to play a leading role in implementing the 2030 Agenda, at home and on the global stage. The economic and ecological dimensions of sustainability often dominate the sustainability debate. The conclusion from the social protest movements in the wake of climate policy is that if we are to succeed in the transition to sustainable development in line with the 2030 Agenda, the social dimension needs to be afforded greater scope and attention in policy as well as in research and innovation.

Humanity's opportunities for survival in the face of a changed global climate are the most urgent issue of our age. Research has helped to make us aware of the scale of the problems and the necessity of acting quickly. Sweden has taken the climate threat seriously and decided to lead the way on the transition. This demands an active policy with extensive measures with potentially major repercussions for the whole of society. Research into what will be needed to bring about socially sustainable development can improve opportunities to implement an effective climate policy.

There is no generally adopted definition of the concept of social sustainability, but the 2030

Agenda highlights factors that contribute towards an inclusive and equal society. Forte wishes to draw attention to the interactions and circumstances in society that create opportunities to earn a living, enjoy good health and exert influence, and ensure that everyone can participate in society. Preventing the occurrence of systematic differences between people's access to resources and agency, and preventing these differences from growing, are central to socially sustainable development. The time aspect also has a role to play in terms of the level and distribution of welfare – at individual level and across generations. The welfare systems also need to work in times of change and be capable of withstanding various stressors. Forte's fields of responsibility: health, working life and welfare, are paramount when talking about the social dimension of sustainable development. This is also reflected in Sweden's action plan for the 2030 Agenda, in which two of the six focus areas are Sustainable society and Social equality and gender equality. Knowledge and innovation is a third area. Forte therefore has a responsibility to point out urgent research policy initiatives that make it possible to meet the societal challenges that transition in line with the 2030 Agenda brings.

In section 2, we describe current societal challenges in Forte's fields of responsibility that Sweden must urgently tackle. These involve complex problems in which a large number of different factors interact. Good health, a sustainable working life and high welfare in general are fundamental conditions for social sustainability and cannot be entirely separated from each other, as will become clear below. Social inequalities risk becoming obstacles to

attaining sustainable development not only regarding the social dimension.

Research and innovation play an important role in our ability to attain the SDGs in the 2030 Agenda, but in order to meet the ambitious expectations, good conditions for research need to be in place. What this might involve is discussed in section 3.

To conclude, in section 4 we present proposals for initiatives that, in Forte's opinion, are particularly pressing if Swedish research is to make an effective contribution in the transition to socially sustainable development.

## 2. CHALLENGES ON THE PATH TOWARDS A SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

This section draws a picture of current societal challenges and knowledge needs in Forte's remit. We begin by addressing the question of social inequalities as obstacles to socially sustainable development. This is a challenge that runs through all of Forte's fields of responsibility: health, working life and welfare. We then describe the problems we face in the field of working life and health, and questions where a concerted effort is particularly called for. Finally, we discuss health and welfare systems in more depth, highlighting current questions surrounding the systems' readiness to handle growing pressures.

### 2.1 Growing inequality – an obstacle to socially sustainable development

In recent decades, many of the countries in the West have experienced a trend of growing socioeconomic inequality even as economic standards in general have risen. Sweden is one of the countries in which income disparities

have increased the most. Inequalities in health in working life, in terms of access to a good physical environment and access to welfare, are also important and increasing in many cases. Inequality can mean that some people have lessened opportunities to influence both their own development and the development of society in general. This is due to the unequal allocation of resources and agency.

Inequality arises in a complex interaction between different forms of resources and people's opportunities to make use of these. These processes affect people throughout their lives, but with inflection points along the way, such as in the early years of life, when different school choices are made, and at entry to and exit from the labour market. Inequalities are created in a process where those who have more resources and opportunities from the start also have greater opportunities to gain even more. Outcomes for different population groups thus become different, which in turn places people in different circumstances for the future.

Inequalities in health, work, the physical environment and welfare concern both graduated differences in the entire population, and individuals and groups in particularly vulnerable positions with limited resources. In both cases, differences in people's opportunities and circumstances are compensated for by welfare services and transfer systems. The capacity of these different systems not only to deliver good education, healthcare, care and income protection across the different phases of life, but also to additionally combat inequalities, has changed over time.

Although Sweden is still a relatively equal country, the increasing differences constitute a problematic trend for social sustainability. Examples include reduced trust in society, reduced social cohesion and lower social mobility, as well as growing conflicts and a deterioration in public health. There is also

research that indicates a link between growing inequality and poorer economic growth.

Although greater inequality particularly affects groups that are weak in resources, this may also have negative repercussions for the population in general.

The fact that growing inequality risks hindering socially sustainable development is clearly reflected in today's public debate. Questions of integration and segregation, vulnerable residential areas, growing exclusion, differences between urban and rural areas, jobs and working conditions, conditions for women and men, the conditions in which children and young people grow up, an ageing population and clear health differences between different population groups are at the top of the agenda. The consequences of weak social integration are increasingly strongly linked to gang criminality, violence and shootings to poverty and homelessness.

In Sweden, the incomes of high earners have rapidly increased in recent decades in the form e.g. of capital income. Trends in the housing market have played a part through rising house prices, mainly in Sweden's city regions. In parallel, the rise in income among the lowest earners in the population has been slower compared with the population in general. This group has also grown as a proportion of the population, which has led to incomes becoming increasingly polarised. The trend has been exacerbated as levels of payments in the social security system have failed to keep pace with income growth. The trend is going in the same direction in the health sector and in working life, as is described in more detail in the following sections.

Inequality affects different population groups in various ways and some key challenges in terms of conditions, outcomes and crossroads in life where greater knowledge may provide guidance in shaping various interventions are listed here.

### **2.1.1 UNEQUAL CONDITIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

The conditions in which people grow up affect their future opportunities and are crucial for reducing inequality in the long term. Lower socioeconomic status is related to other living conditions of young people and young adults, including an increased risk of physical and mental illness, poor relationships with friends and parents, criminality, vulnerability to crime and insecurity, overcrowded living conditions, low academic achievement, unemployment, dependency on benefits and interventions by children's social services. Developing measures that can compensate for differences in living conditions is therefore essential.

There are increasing differences in school results between students from different socioeconomic groups and between schools. This trend ties in with segregation, as students with a similar socioeconomic background and ethnicity are increasingly attending the same schools. At the same time, the education system is facing the challenge of safeguarding its compensatory responsibility and it is clear that today's system is not capable of creating equal terms for all students irrespective of background. The lack of social mobility that this leads to not only brings consequences for individuals, but also means that society is unable to benefit from the inherent potential of many young people.

### **2.1.2 DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS**

The proportion of older people is growing in Sweden and in the world as a whole. The impact of this demographic trend on society is a key issue from an equality perspective. There is a tendency to talk about older people as if they were a homogenous group. In actual fact, there are major socioeconomic differences that can increase as the proportion of older people in the population increases. How the distribution and transfer of resources between different generations works has

repercussions for trust in society. This links to sustainability questions of a systemic nature, for example healthcare and pensions. How a stable generational contract can be maintained amid the pressure that arises from ageing populations is an important question for research.

### 2.1.3 GENDER EQUALITY

Despite major improvements in gender equality, significant inequalities between women and men remain. More women than men still risk finding themselves in a vulnerable economic and social situation. This is seen, for example, in the fact that the economic standard of living of single women with children today is worse than it was in 1995. Other examples include women still earning significantly less than men who perform similar jobs and the working environment in sectors dominated by women being worse on average than in sectors dominated by men. In other words, there is still reason to tackle gender equality as a general challenge in order to attain socially sustainable development and there are knowledge needs in a number of different areas.

### 2.1.4 MIGRATION, INTEGRATION AND SEGREGATION

In Sweden, which has a large group of recently arrived refugees, part of the growing inequality can be explained by new arrivals running a greater risk of unemployment, financial problems and social exclusion. Differences in income between people born in Sweden and people born outside Sweden have increased in recent decades. Housing segregation has been consolidated with a concentration of people with similar socioeconomic, and often ethnic, backgrounds in the same residential districts. The number of areas with limited resources has increased and in these areas there are frequent reports of inadequately maintained properties, overcrowding, unemployment and gang crime. This contributes towards the development of

more unequal living conditions and circumstances in which young people are growing up, including safety and access to a good education. There is a need for knowledge of how increased segregation and its effects can be combatted in working life and in civil society.

## 2.2 Good health – not a given for everyone

In general, health is very good in Sweden. We are living longer than before, and the extra years of life are predominantly healthy ones. Infant mortality is among the lowest in the world. Survival rates for cardiovascular disease and cancer, for example, have seen a marked increase. A cancer diagnosis is no longer automatically a death sentence. From a global perspective too, major progress has been made in the field of health in recent decades.

Nevertheless, Sweden faces major health challenges. The number of people contracting non-infectious diseases is increasing rapidly across the globe. Average life expectancy in countries like Sweden means that the number of cases of age-related diseases such as cancer, dementia and arthrosis is soaring, although the number of new cases is decreasing in every age group. Mental illness is a growing problem in Sweden and in other parts of the world, especially in groups in particularly vulnerable positions. An additional challenge is health inequality, between socioeconomic groups, between the sexes and between different parts of the country. The average life expectancy after the age of 30 for women with lower levels of education, for example, has dropped by almost a year since 2010.

Here we focus on health challenges that are particularly relevant to the transition to socially sustainable development. The overarching national objective of Sweden's public health

policy, adopted by the Riksdag in 2018, is to create societal conditions for good and equitable health throughout the population in order to end avoidable health inequalities within a generation. This is to be achieved through strategic work in eight cross-sectoral target areas. This work relies on there being relevant research and evaluation-based knowledge to underpin decisions on what measures to take.

The health challenges described below are derived from the situation in Sweden, but are far from unique to Sweden. SDG 3 in the 2030 Agenda, Good health and well-being, and its targets show the global urgency to act quickly. We should see the 2030 Agenda as a reason to launch targeted research initiatives and collaborative partnerships to help improve the health situation in Sweden and across the globe.

### 2.2.1 HEALTH INEQUALITIES

Differences between people's living conditions, lifestyles and capacities lead to different conditions for good health. There is knowledge about the processes that link different forms of inequality to each other and which mean that social inequalities become embedded in the body, generating inequality in terms of health and life expectancy. However, the precision and the level of detail in these findings must be increased for them to lead to interventions that produce more equal conditions. The differences we see in circumstances, opportunities, health and life expectancy between different population groups are also reinforced by systematic differences in access to and the result of different welfare services, including healthcare and medical interventions. To tackle health inequalities, a broad, systematic and long-term approach is needed, spanning many sectors of society. Action is needed both to ensure good conditions for everyone growing up and to ensure equal access to care, healthcare and rehabilitation. However, this not only demands more knowledge about how work on specific

initiatives can be better run, but also on how management and steering can be improved across several sectors and levels of society. Comparative research, evaluation and socio-economic analysis contribute important knowledge about the measures that work and how the costs and benefits of investments are distributed.

### 2.2.2 HEALTH SYSTEMS AND THE ORGANISATION OF CARE

Although the medical quality of care in Sweden is generally good, many people are dissatisfied with the care provided. Waiting times are long and it is difficult to make an initial contact with the health service. Attempts to reform and improve the Swedish health system, bringing with them different terms such as primary care, a general practitioner system or front-line care, have proved difficult to implement. New models for the system that compensates care providers have been trialled in different county councils and the example of the new Karolinska University Hospital in Solna has demonstrated the fragility of trialling new models of governance and compensation without a detailed impact analysis and adequate compensatory payments. It is necessary to carefully evaluate different methods and approaches in order to ensure that resources are spent in an equitable and cost-effective way within the framework of a publicly funded health system and that care and preventive interventions reach citizens in a way that meets basic needs.

### 2.2.3 MENTAL HEALTH

*Mental health* is often used as an overarching term for everything to do with mental functions. In a research and intervention context, the term is used for more health-promoting initiatives or broader directed interventions, where the focus is on prevention and early intervention and with a clear public health perspective. *Mental illness* is used to cover a number of different conditions, partly serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, other

chronic psychoses and severe depression, and partly milder mental illnesses such as anxiety and less severe forms of depression. Although there has been no increase in the incidence of serious mental illness, we have seen a major rise in milder mental illness.

Children and young people's mental health, participation and engagement as members of society are increasingly seen as one of the major societal challenges of our age. Even milder mental illness in young people has spiralling effects on their capacity to cope with education and work. The Riksdag's decision to approve the Government's proposal to incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into Swedish law and the establishment of the SDGs under the UN's 2030 Agenda have helped to increase the focus on the mental health of children and young people.

The increase in reported mental illness in young people still awaits an explanation. More research is needed to identify and prioritise the right initiatives for children and young people with mental problems. Problems are consistently reported to a higher degree among young women than young men. Here too, the question of which interventions are most adequate at the level of society and at individual level applies.

Mental problems are now the most common reason for sick leave and sickness benefit. Stress-related problems, anxiety and depression are common. As commissioned by the Government, Forte has surveyed the problem, announced funding for research into returning to work after sick leave due to mental health problems, and demonstrated the need for long-term research initiatives.

Depression and anxiety conditions are common in all age groups, also among the elderly. In the later stage of life, many of the risk factors for

mental illness increase, including loss of family members and deterioration in capacity, which means that depression and anxiety, among other conditions, are common in the older section of the population. In the healthcare sector, mentally ill older people are often an overlooked group, and their treatment varies considerably in different parts of the country.

Tackling mental illness is a complex undertaking, partly because a large number of different actors are involved in the issue – different agencies, regions and municipalities and private and charity providers. Adequate interventions, however, demand knowledge of where the causes of the problems lie, and which measures can be expected to lead to better interventions for individuals and families affected and to a reduction in problems in society in general.

A better understanding is needed of how different actors can work together to promote mental health and best help individuals and groups with mental problems. The roles of different agencies need to be made clearer so that collaboration can be developed in an appropriate way, and carefully followed up and evaluated.

Better knowledge is needed of how the circumstances in which people grow up, family, school and work can boost and impair mental health. Examples and models of preventive initiatives at school, at work and in health and medical care and social services, do exist, but these often rest on a poor scientific footing. Methods for evaluating interventions need to be developed. The inquiry on mental health interventions (SOU 2018:90) has stressed the need for better indicators to measure patient and user-oriented results and quality.



#### **2.2.4 ALCOHOL, NARCOTICS, DOPING, TOBACCO AND GAMBLING**

Alcohol, narcotics, doping, tobacco and gambling are a major factor for ill-health and poor welfare. The first clause in the overarching objective of Sweden's ANDT (alcohol, narcotics, doping and tobacco) strategy for 2016–2020, “A society free from narcotic drugs and doping...” should be seen as utopian, but the following clause “...with reduced alcohol-related medical and social harm and reduced tobacco use” is highly achievable and here research has an important role to play. Successful implementation of the strategy is largely dependent on effective and knowledge-based preventive work.

Sweden's traditionally strong epidemiological research and register research has added very valuable knowledge, but in a society undergoing rapid change, greater understanding of the results of the initiatives carried out is also needed. There is a need for a concerted focus on research that sheds light on the consequences of the care, healthcare and preventive/supportive work carried out. There is also a need for research that explores and analyses the forms of the interventions, with the aim of developing collaboration between schools, sports organisations, health and medical care and social services.

#### **2.2.5 AN AGEING POPULATION**

A growing average life expectancy is evidence of a positive trend in terms of health in the world, but the growing proportion of older people in the population is in many ways a challenge for the majority of countries, not least in the field of health. How can we ensure more healthy and active years of life into old age? The fact that older people are just as heterogeneous a group as the population in general, with varying circumstances, wishes and needs, is a central challenge that needs to be addressed.

Research into age-related illnesses has made important contributions, but there continue to be major knowledge needs, not least in terms of preventive interventions and drugs, and the treatment of dementia.

A growing proportion of older people with poor health also means challenges for the welfare system. More knowledge is needed to develop good care and support in daily life with dementia. There are great hopes of innovative use of new technologies in everyday life, and of the development of new methods and services to encourage engagement, activity and independence. As yet, we know far too little about the extent to which such hopes are realistic; for example how people with dementia diseases can be supported by digital technology.

## 2.3 A changing working life

Working life has a central importance in attaining the SDGs. Working life creates opportunities for people to earn a living, attain agency in life and feel that they are contributing to society. It also creates a greater sense of community, and increases inclusion and trust. This is reflected not least in SDG 8 of the 2030 Agenda, *Decent work and economic growth*. Well-functioning working life underlies growth, the financing of welfare systems and the transition to greater sustainability. However, there are extensive risks associated with the challenges in the workplace and the ongoing transformation taking place there. Research and innovation can pave the way for effective work on measures to respond to the different types of challenges identified.

### 2.3.1 GLOBALISATION AND EUROPEANISATION

Globalisation processes affect the circumstances in which work is performed in individual countries through the establishment of global value chains and production. Globalisation also brings tensions and power shifts between multinational companies and national regulations. This is also true of continued European integration, with free movement of capital, labour, goods and services as its guiding principle. In recent years we have simultaneously seen this trend challenged by powerful political tendencies: anti-globalisation, protectionism and a rise in nationalism. Migration flows in Europe, mainly labour immigration and refugee migration to Europe from war-torn areas, place questions about integration and discrimination at work under the spotlight. The successful inclusion of migrants in the workplace can be an important component for countries experiencing the challenge of fewer people having to support more people. There are important knowledge needs regarding how

these processes affect Swedish opportunities to encourage a sustainable working life.

### 2.3.2 STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND DIGITALISATION

Structural changes in the form of technological development, e.g. automation, digitalisation and robotisation of work processes, are expected to continue to lead to jobs and occupations disappearing, while new occupations are created and grow in importance. The climate transition is part of this and we need to know more about how these processes affect developments in work, and about how the way work is organised affects opportunities to conduct a sustainable climate policy. Occupations that remain will also change. Changed skills requirements and changes in job content emerge as both an opportunity and a challenge for working individuals. There is therefore a greater need to safeguard skills supply and lifelong learning.

Urbanisation is changing the way work is structured in urban and in rural areas. Socio-economic, demographic and ethnic segregation in towns and around the country affect where and in what environmental and social circumstances people live and work. The situation in parts of the countryside and in small towns, which have been affected by shutdowns and depopulation as well as growing urbanisation and structural transformation, is an example of how revolutionary social changes have contributed to differences between urban and rural areas. There are major knowledge needs surrounding how a sustainable regional employment and welfare policy can be designed to tackle these trends.

There are also major needs for knowledge regarding both entry to and exit from the labour market. Making work more inclusive is an important area for research; this can include integration of people with disabilities and

young people not in education or training, for example. The demographic changes, with a growing proportion of older people in the population, has generated the need to extend retirement age. One important aspect concerns the consequences that changing the conditions in the pension system have for different groups working in sectors and occupations with very different terms of employment. We need to know more about both the problem scenarios and how an inclusive, extended period of working life can be encouraged.

Overall, both structural changes and digitalisation have major consequences for the way the labour market functions, with changed occupational structures, and for the way work is organised and the work environment. This is a trend that involves many challenges, with research potentially able to provide important contributions as a basis for appropriate interventions.

### 2.3.3 SUSTAINABLE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

There is growing inequality in the working environment and working conditions between different sectors, and the labour market has become polarised. Polarisation is evinced in the use of different forms of employment in different sectors, opportunities to boost income, the uneven spread of work-related ill-health and the risk of unemployment. Temporary employment and casual labour contracts are increasing somewhat, although this trend varies between different sectors. There are also indications that newer forms of employment and hire, such as self-employment and digital platforms, are increasing. For certain groups, these new forms of employment may go hand in hand with poorer terms of employment and working environment, coupled with limited opportunity to exert influence.

Knowledge about physical and mental strain and exposure, including to new materials, and

methods to measure exposure and differing outcomes are significant for a sustainable and health promoting working life. Although major efforts have been made to improve the chemical and physical working environment, this is still a major cause of ill-health. Psychosocial problems account for a substantial part of work-related ill-health and are a major contributory factor to sick leave. On average, the working environment in female-dominated sectors is worse than in male-dominated sectors and this needs to be addressed.

There are shortcomings in the implementation of existing knowledge on risk factors, including psychosocial and chemical risk factors, as well as beneficial factors at work. The knowledge that exists is not currently being applied to a sufficient extent in the management and organisation of workplaces. We therefore need to know more about how making use of this knowledge can be encouraged in different sectors and businesses.

## 2.4 Health and welfare systems under pressure

Safeguarding people's welfare in the long term is an important prerequisite for socially sustainable development. Our health and welfare systems play a central role in counteracting the type of systematic inequalities and gulfs in society that we have highlighted and discussed in earlier sections. Being able to meet the shifting and changing needs that can arise during a person's life is a major challenge in its own right for health and welfare policy. In order to attain the SDGs, national health and welfare systems also need to be sustainable in a global context, since all countries are affected by global trends and phenomena such as climate change, structural transformations, trade wars, political and economic unrest, refugee movements, etc., to varying extents. Sustainable health and welfare

systems are a direct response to several of the SDGs in the 2030 Agenda, including SDG 1. *No poverty*, SDG 3. *Good health and well-being*, SDG 4. *Quality education*, Mål 5. *Gender equality*, SDG 10. *Reduced inequalities* and SDG 16. *Peace, justice and strong institutions*.

The collapse of health and welfare systems is associated with major risks and the question of how we can promote good and equitable health and welfare with the resources available is a challenge we share with many other countries. Major demands are made in terms of quality and efficiency alike, in order to maintain an acceptance of costs that are allocated fairly and in a spirit of solidarity. At the same time, our demand for health and welfare services is growing, both because needs are increasing with an ageing population, but also because our expectations are growing in line with a generally higher standard of living and new research findings. Even in times of major change and under great pressure, sustainable health and welfare systems must, however, be able to provide equal access to healthcare, care and education, with good provision, and offer income insurance or a safety net throughout people's lives.

#### **2.4.1 THE SWEDISH WELFARE STATE**

The Swedish welfare state emerged gradually through a number of reforms in the twentieth century with the aim of levelling out systematic inequalities and differences between people's opportunities to meet their fundamental needs. Well-functioning healthcare accessible to all, free and equal education, childcare and care of the elderly, and other welfare services are central functions of this system. The social insurance system, which is to act as a buffer when circumstances change during life and when unpredictable events occur, is at least equally important part of the welfare state. This includes sickness insurance, pension insurance, unemployment

insurance, parental insurance and other types of cash benefits such as child benefit.

The expansion of the health and welfare system has continued based on prioritised needs and scope for reform. As a result, today we have a complex system that spans all sectors of society and policy areas. Many different factors have played into this greater complexity. One is the changes of recent decades, with a growing market element, which have led to new types of actors (providers) entering a range of health and welfare sectors. Various reforms have also increased individual freedom of choice. Today there are completely different opportunities than before, for example to seek care abroad or gain access to welfare services financed other than by public funding.

#### **2.4.2 TODAY'S CHALLENGES**

The challenge of being able to offer equitable healthcare, care and education across the country despite differing circumstances in terms, e.g. of taxation income and population make-up is not new, but has become increasingly pressing. Staff shortages, high staff turnover and concern about skills supply are often highlighted as emergencies. Another relevant question is how education can fulfil its vital role in giving all children a good start in life and how care of the elderly can cope with the growing need for care. Although the medical quality of care is overwhelmingly good, many are dissatisfied with the care provided. Waiting times are sometimes long and it is difficult to access an initial point of contact in the health system. Attempts to reform and improve primary care, for example, have proved difficult to implement. The social insurance system also faces difficult questions when it comes to balancing people's needs and the resources available. Another challenge concerns how the different parts of the insurance system, intended to fulfil different purposes, can

operate without significant conflicts of interest while being centred around the individual.

Many of our health and welfare services are organised and funded at municipal (local government) and regional level. However, democratic control is exercised at national, regional and local level. The balancing act between providing an equal service across the whole country on the one hand and municipal and regional self-governance on the other creates tensions. The demographic trend, with an ageing population, poses a particular challenge as it not only leads to a greater need for healthcare and social care, but also disrupts the balance in the welfare system, with a shrinking proportion of people of working age paying in. There are huge and growing differences between urban and rural areas, between different regions and between municipalities of different sizes and in different geographical locations.

As a response to the challenges faced by the welfare sector as early as the 1970s, the 1980s saw new forms of governance and monitoring introduced. Over time, the models that go by the umbrella term New Public Management have been found to have a number of less desirable consequences. The problems have been expressed in different services, including education, healthcare and social care, reporting a growing administrative burden which takes time away from face-to-face work with the people for whom the service is designed. In practice, this has ended up involving micro-management, which has been felt to undermine the role of professionals and is perceived as failing to recognise the skills and expertise of different service categories.

Nor do management models seem to have provided useful support for tackling the complexity that today's welfare society involves. Interaction and coordination between the different parts of the system have instead

proved to constitute a growing challenge. For individuals, the boundaries between different parts of the health and welfare system, including the social insurance system, create major problems. Having to navigate the interface between health and medical care, social services and education, sickness insurance and the unemployment insurance system when in a vulnerable situation can be an overwhelming task.

The difficulties in organising the services within the welfare sector with the citizen in focus are found on many different levels and concern legislation, the mission, organisation and governance of government agencies. There are major needs for knowledge at system level, organisation level and practical level, and here research can play an important role and contribute towards evidence-based policy. The major challenges that the health and welfare system faces, and the shift we are seeing towards more trust-based management, greater digitalisation, etc., mean that there will continue to be a need for targeted initiatives in this area in the future too.

The Swedish health and welfare system has often been highlighted as a role model in international contexts, citing its guiding features of gender equality and diversity, inclusion and participation, high quality and accessibility. This is a role that comes with obligations and it is therefore very important that a country like Sweden, with good finances, shows that we can tackle the many challenges that the health and welfare system faces. Addressing the social dimension at national level in order to attain the SDGs is an important effort in its own right, but this work needs to be placed in a global context. International collaboration to identify and prioritise knowledge needs, and collaboration for research and innovation, and to spread and implement knowledge, are therefore highly relevant.

# 3. PREREQUISITES FOR RESEARCH TO MEET SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

## 3.1 Introduction

Research and innovation are often afforded a central role in societal development, as is also expressed in the objective of the Swedish research policy. Investments in high-quality research, higher education and innovation are expected to strengthen the development of society, the welfare of individuals and the competitiveness of the business sector, so responding to societal challenges in Sweden and across the globe. In working to attain the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, challenge-driven research and innovation play a central role in collaboration with different actors in society and the business community. It is also important “...that more academic areas... are involved and used to identify synergies and conflicts between goals in different parts of the 2030 Agenda” (SOU 2019:13, p. 107).

The emphasis of previous research policy bills on strategic areas for research, knowledge building and practical application are characterised by both governance and autonomy. Developing institutional solutions and other prerequisites to create a balance between society’s demand for relevant and applicable knowledge and the freedom and autonomy of researchers and the research community poses a challenge for research policy.

Like universities and higher education institutions, government research funding bodies have a responsibility to stimulate critical, questioning and innovative research. This does

not conflict with the requirements to also meet practical knowledge needs and increase capacity to monitor and derive benefit from advances being made in other countries and in other research policy environments.

Often, two models are set against each other when it comes to initiating publicly funded research. On the one hand, the bottom-up model is emphasised, in which researchers independently choose their questions and focuses. On the other hand, there is the top-down model, in which research funding is earmarked for areas that have been identified as being particularly relevant to society. In practice, the difference between these models is not that great. What both models have in common is that they assume researcher independence and that the research community is responsible for quality control of research applications. Nevertheless, it is important that there is a balance between funding for research initiated by researchers themselves and funding for targeted initiatives of high societal relevance. However, targeted initiatives can embrace everything from basic research to applied research.

## 3.2 Long-term investments in challenge-driven research

The challenges that society faces are both local and global, and research for socially sustainable development demands different types of initiative. The most recent research policy bill, *Collaborating for knowledge – for society’s challenges and strengthened competitiveness* (2016/17:50) introduced a new element in the Swedish research policy landscape – ten-year national research programmes to address designated societal challenges. The government

research funding bodies Formas, Forte and the Swedish Research Council were tasked with developing such programmes. As far as Forte was concerned, two ten-year national research programmes were set up in the fields of *Working life research* and *Applied welfare research*.

The purpose of the ten-year national research programmes is to concentrate research efforts in relevant areas to create sustainable social development. Based on Forte's mandate, the national research programmes fall in the interface between researcher-initiated and needs-based research.

One key advantage of national research programmes is that they enable a holistic perspective in relevant research areas, both in terms of identifying the knowledge needs that exist and of prioritising research issues, while also providing a basis for links to be forged between research, higher education and practice in the welfare systems. The programmes' strategic agendas strengthen opportunities for multi- and interdisciplinary research, for strategic collaboration and communication between researchers and other actors, and for coordination between different areas of operation/sectors. Furthermore, the programme format provides a framework for analysing how new knowledge can be intertwined with existing knowledge. It also enables critical and creative research environments to be built up, in which the complexity of the issues can be illuminated using different types of grant. This also makes it easier to collaborate internationally, which is important in understanding and finding solutions to the global impact of societal challenges, which can create synergies with initiatives being carried out in the EU and in other countries.

Programmes in Forte's fields of responsibility also constitute platforms for being able to forcefully assert the social dimension of the SDGs. This is an important task in which

Sweden can make a significant contribution in research and innovation collaboration and partnership programmes within the EU's framework programmes. Forte funds high-quality research on several of the challenges described in the 2030 Agenda and the Government's 73-point programme, and the ten-year national research programmes give Forte an opportunity to focus on further development of challenge-driven research and innovation in collaboration with relevant actors.

The final evaluation carried out by Forte in autumn 2018 of nine ten-year Forte research centres showed a number of positive results, with the following factors highlighted as being particularly significant:

- Long-term approach to research
- Collaboration across subject and faculty boundaries, and between seats of learning
- Creation of a critical and creative research environment
- Link between high-quality research and education, primarily at PhD student level
- International collaboration and mobility

These factors are also found in the national research programmes and the experiences from the research centre initiative can be used in designing the national research programmes. Forte takes a very positive view of the Government's investment in ten-year national research programmes to resolve the societal challenges and seeks to emphasise the importance of the programmes continuing and being developed in different spheres.

### 3.3 Collaboration and practical application

Collaboration and communication between researchers, decision-makers, professionals and

users make it more likely that knowledge will be transferred in practice. Incorporating the experiences and knowledge of stakeholders and users in the research process both increases the relevance of the research and improves the likelihood that evidence-based knowledge will be effectively put to use in practice. It is important to promote and create opportunities for such working methods.

In order to seriously address the challenge whereby research is utilized in to far too limited an extent, Forte has launched an implementation research initiative. The initiative will generate new knowledge on the problem of implementation while simultaneously making a contribution to increasing the societal benefit of research. Implementation research will thus be an important element in all of Forte's research initiatives.

In today's society it is a challenge to ensure that people trust research-based knowledge. There is a need to create meeting places for communication, dialogue and collaboration between researchers, actors in society and users of research. Research funding bodies bear a great deal of responsibility for communicating research results and contributing towards research results being spread more widely and benefiting society.

### 3.4 International collaboration and mobility

These societal challenges and research questions are not unique to Sweden but are shared with many other countries, and in many cases are global. International collaboration strengthens both Swedish research and the resulting interventions. The opportunity for international collaboration and exchanging information must

be valued highly in strategic initiatives. Linking Swedish research initiatives to the 2030 Agenda paves the way for international collaboration within these initiatives.

In national coordinated research initiatives, a budget needs to be set aside for mobility and transnational projects, not least when global perspectives are being addressed. Initiating and supporting collaboration and communication between researchers, institutions and organisations in different countries means that the collaboration also facilitates an exchange of knowledge and experience when implementing and applying research results in practice.

Here, particular attention should be paid to the importance of research collaboration with developing countries, a point also made by the Swedish delegation for the 2030 Agenda in their report: "In the next research bill, the Government should also promote research collaboration and exchange with the countries facing the biggest challenges in implementing the 2030 Agenda, especially developing countries" (SOU 2019:13, English summary).

Much of the challenge-driven research in the EU's forthcoming framework programme, Horizon Europe, is planned to be channelled through different types of partnership programmes and missions. The new missions and partnership programmes are expected to be broader and encompass greater investment and partnership than in previous framework programmes. Forte's view is that it is of the utmost importance that our national efforts are capable of interacting with these common European initiatives to attain the greatest possible impact. In this context, the EU coordination function (EU-sam) performs a central function by enabling and supporting common Swedish priorities in the European arena. It is essential that a budget continues to be earmarked for EU-sam.



## 3.5 Infrastructure

Much of the research conducted within Forte's fields of responsibility is built on different types of research infrastructure. This involves both register data and surveys, as well as contextual data (often as policies) at national and/or regional level. In the fields of health, working life and welfare, there are also opportunities to link these extensive databases, giving researchers extremely powerful tools to produce policy-relevant analyses. For example, researchers work with linked databases to connect background data on upbringing, residential environment, etc. to different health outcomes or social outcomes. Many researchers also build up their own databases from survey studies, interviews or samples, and when these are connected to national registers, long-term outcomes and comparison populations can be analysed. Despite a great deal of work and high ambitions, however, access to register data still remains the bottleneck for research, particularly when data about incomes and social circumstances is to be linked to data on health and healthcare.

The international collaborations that have been established on individual and contextual data, predominantly at European level, have created new opportunities to analyse connections between policy and different outcomes that can be related to the SDGs in a broad sense. Comparative studies also make it possible to analyse how social and labour market policy interacts with (or counteracts) climate policy in a 2030 Agenda context, for example. One area that has long been neglected when it comes to contextual infrastructure is data at municipal or regional level (cf. SOU 2000:3). Difficulties studying links between people's differing conditions and the initiatives carried out by welfare services at municipal level are a clear example of this. Particularly if we wish to

better follow up and evaluate different forms of intervention (methods or policies), the lack of collected data that is made available is a serious drawback (see SOU 2017:47, pp. 274–281). Forte would like to see the systematic development of a national infrastructure in this field. The proposed national programme on implementation research could be capable of contributing an essential component.

Given the fact that the costs of Sweden's involvement in European and other international research structures have increased considerably due to exchange rate fluctuations, it would appear vital that access to and the quality of relevant national research infrastructure is safeguarded and reinforced through long-term financial and organisational undertakings in the research bill.

## 3.6 Equal terms for men and women

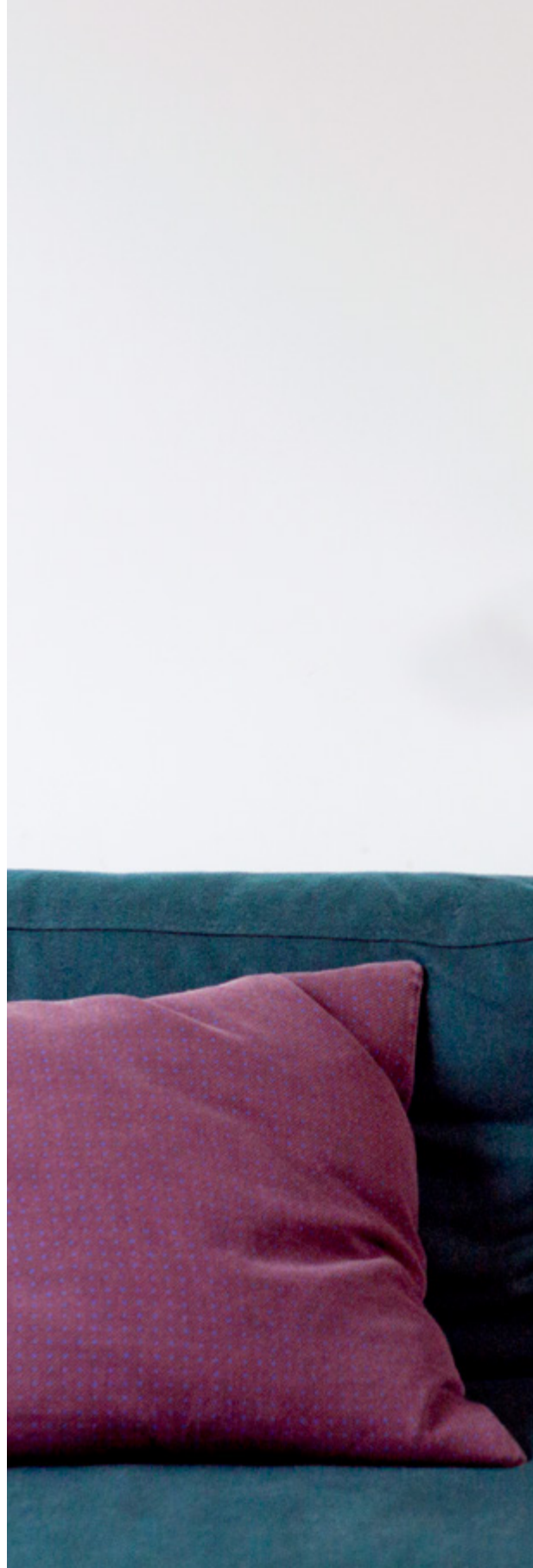
One central factor in Sweden's position as a leading research nation is equal terms for women and men at universities and higher education institutions. The best researchers must be given opportunities to contribute their expertise irrespective of their sex. Research funding bodies have an important role to play here, in the form of gender equal application processes and continued monitoring of funding allocation outcomes.

## 3.7 Open access to research results

One important aspect in terms of opportunities to conduct research of a high scientific quality is that research results are disseminated as widely as possible. In the past 15 years, the question of open access to research results has

attracted greater attention in Sweden and on the international stage. To encourage the spread of knowledge and the implementation and practical application of research results, they need to be openly accessible to everyone and not locked away behind paywalls. In the most recent research policy bill, *Collaborating for knowledge – for society's challenges and strengthened competitiveness* (2016/17:50), the Government writes that open access encourages high-quality research. The vision is for all research data and scientific publications that are the result of publicly funded research to be openly accessible as soon as they are published.

Together with a number of other Swedish and international research funding bodies, Forte is part of cOAlition S, which works for open access to scientific publications. There is close collaboration with the work of the National Library of Sweden and the Bibsam Consortium to find new routes to finance scientific publication. Openly accessible research data is already common practice in many disciplines, partly to improve the efficiency of the use of large infrastructures. Development work is in progress to also enable databases containing personal data to be made accessible without the identity of individual subjects being able to be traced.





## 4. FORTE'S PROPOSALS

The transformation of society that is required if we are to attain the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda presents us with major challenges. Above, we have highlighted the importance of the social dimension for tackling existing and anticipated problems, but also for gaining acceptance of the far-reaching changes needed. Research and innovation play a guiding role as we embark on the transformation. Initiatives that seek to fill the major knowledge gaps are therefore strategically vital.

The challenges on the path towards socially sustainable development are many, and in section 2 we provided a picture of current problems and knowledge needs within Forte's fields of responsibility – health, working life and welfare. Forte's proposals for research policy initiatives are based on the assumption that particularly urgent questions demand prioritisation and concerted effort.

The Government's 2016 research bill introduced ten-year national research programmes as a new element in the Swedish research policy landscape. The decisive advantage of national research programmes is that they act as platforms in different respects, not least collaboration and communication between different types of actors in Sweden and internationally. A cohesive programme is expected to be able to clarify research needs, initiate and conduct new research, encourage the spreading

of knowledge and help to ensure that research results are applied in practice. Forte has excellent experiences of this form of financing and we have taken the format of programmes as the starting point for the initiatives we propose.

It is important that the individual research programmes are able to operate as open and dynamic meeting points for multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research relevant to the theme of the programme. Encouraging collaboration between different initiatives to exploit synergies will therefore be an important task for Forte.

### 4.1 New initiatives

The challenges in the broad areas of society described in section 2 are many and some knowledge needs are being met by the ongoing initiatives listed below in section 4.2. However, there are several burning issues that call for investment in research capable of making a significant contribution to our ability to encourage socially sustainable societal development. Forte therefore proposes three new programmes. The first is a programme on mental health. This is an urgent health challenge and there are strong arguments for a concerted research effort in this field. The second is a targeted initiative on questions of inequality which seeks to produce underlying data for policies and practical work to increase trust and cohesion in society. Forte's third proposal is a programme for implementation research. This is an important element for developing tools that will make it easier to move from objectives to actual results, i.e. closing the implementation gap. If research, irrespective of the field, is to improve our ability to tackle societal challenges, the knowledge that is generated must inform education, policy and practice.

#### 4.1.1 NATIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME FOR MENTAL HEALTH

##### **Forte proposes:**

The establishment of a ten-year national research programme for mental health. It is proposed that the programme's budget gradually increase to SEK 100 million per year over a ten-year period.

##### **Focus of the programme:**

There is a need for a concerted effort and a new holistic approach to mental health research. The research is expected to increase understanding of the increase in mental illness and produce methods to reduce the extent and mitigate the consequences of mental ill-health and different mental illnesses. As there are many combinatory factors, e.g. social, biological and economic, that contribute to mental illness and span several disciplines, the proposed programme should be tasked with encouraging interdisciplinary research and innovation. The programme should seek to finance research in prioritised knowledge needs, collate the research, create platforms for disseminating and making use of the results and stimulate strategic collaboration and communication between funding bodies, researchers, relevant agencies and other users of the research results.

The programme will be designed and run in collaboration with the funding bodies Vinnova, Formas and the Swedish Research Council. Collaboration with other central actors such as the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, the Public Health Agency of Sweden, the Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services (SBU) and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), and user (patients, relatives and professions) engagement will be important in achieving good results. International collaboration needs to be an important part of the programme. The Government's document "Sweden's work on global health – implementing the 2030 Agenda" highlights mental illness as a global problem

that creates exclusion and often affects disadvantaged groups. In national work and in Sweden's work on the global stage, the quality of research and its practical application can be strengthened through international collaboration.

The proposed programme should encompass, but not be limited to, the following thematic focuses:

##### *Children and young people's mental health:*

The programme is to build on the initiative already in progress in collaboration between Forte, the Swedish Research Council and Vinnova. So far, the initiative has been focused on research on the rise in mental illness among vulnerable groups of young people and methods of prevention and treatment. Initiatives looking forward could have a clearer focus on intervention and implementing measures to improve mental health.

##### *Prevention of and early intervention in mental illness:*

Mental illness is defined as anxiety and depression, as well as certain other mental issues of a less serious nature. The programme may explore the incidence and causes of illness further, but resources will also be earmarked for developing and evaluating methods for preventing mental illness and for early intervention, or for contributing knowledge on how evidence-based methods can be implemented on the ground. The programme will address prevention and early intervention targeted at group and population level, for example in schools, in workplaces or for defined target groups. It may also involve initiatives directed towards individuals, e.g. in primary care, in social services or in corporate healthcare.

##### *Coordinated interventions for people with severe psychiatric problems*

Severe psychiatric problems include chronic psychoses and serious and persistent depression. The research will be focused on identifying

ways to achieve better and more coordinated interventions for these people, or on examining how evidence-based methods can be implemented in practice. The focus is on collaboration between different actors.

#### *Alcohol, narcotics, doping, tobacco and gambling*

Problems in conjunction with alcohol, narcotics, doping and gambling are also part of the field of mental health. Often such problems covary with mental problems, and the use of substances is also a strong risk factor for mental illness.

Sweden has a tradition of a restrictive policy in all these areas, although there is a wide amount of variation in the criteria and the implementation. At times, debates arise on specific issues such as sale of alcohol from farm shops, legalisation of cannabis, advertising gambling, etc. It is important that public debate is founded on research-based knowledge. It is also important that changes in regulations, e.g. new legislation on tobacco and gambling, are carefully monitored and evaluated.

It is important that initiatives at group and individual level in all these areas are run on good scientific evidence. There is a great deal of knowledge and many good examples available. However, in a changing society, with new demographic circumstances and a changing IT culture, forms of prevention and treatment must constantly be reviewed and developed. Changed organisational structures in healthcare and social services mean that new types of collaboration need to be developed and evaluated.

Forte has previously been tasked with coordinating research in this field, and has previously had specific instructions to set aside funds for this research in particular. Forte considers that it would be appropriate to integrate research into alcohol, narcotics, doping, tobacco and gambling in a coordinated programme for research into mental health.

#### **Justification:**

It is alarming that we do not know the full extent of young people's mental health problems. However, mental illness also affects people in other phases of life, people from various backgrounds and in different circumstances. There is a need for more knowledge about risk factors, consequences and treatment methods. There is also a need for research and knowledge to support the work of student health services on promotion and prevention, to combat bullying and to shape effective targeted initiatives for risk groups.

Over many years, the Government has introduced various national initiatives to combat mental illness, but often without particularly addressing research needs. In the report submitted by the government inquiry in 2018 (SOU 2018:90), however, research is highlighted among initiatives needed to meet the challenges in mental health. The report proposes a research programme in line with what we suggest here: a long-term, interdisciplinary, focused programme that addresses the problems from a broad system perspective and with cross-sectoral engagement. The inquiry highlights access to knowledge as being vital to Sweden's ability to take effective and appropriate action, not least to understand how different methods and initiatives work in the Swedish context.

#### **4.1.2 NATIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME TO REDUCE INEQUALITY**

##### **Forte proposes:**

Setting up a ten-year national research programme to reduce inequality. It is proposed that the programme's budget gradually increase to SEK 100 million per year over a ten-year period.

##### **Focus of the programme:**

The aim of the research programme is to produce new knowledge that can be used as a

basis for policy and practice to reduce inequalities in society and improve conditions, especially for people who lack important basic resources and agency. There should be a special focus on linking research on the processes that create inequality to research, development and evaluation of different types of measures capable of reducing inequality and its consequences.

The proposed research programme should build on the strong tradition of research into different kinds of inequality that exist in Sweden, but foster a more cohesive approach to analysing the structures and processes that create inequality across the course of people's lives. A cohesive programme will enable researchers to study inequality in greater depth than before as a dynamic interaction between conditions and opportunities in different areas of life (health, work, knowledge and skills, incomes, wealth, etc.), where both positive and negative spirals can be reinforced throughout the course of people's lives. The research programme should therefore start out by examining opportunities and risks in different phases and events in people's lives. How the services and institutions of the welfare sector act to mitigate or reinforce different types of inequality is also an important question. The different capacity of different groups in society to cope with these in a way that fosters good conditions and opportunities in their lives going forward deserves attention.

Critical stages around which such analysis should be organised:

- Conditions for children and young people
- Young adults' opportunities for education, work and forming a family
- Involvement in working life and access to housing in adulthood
- Participation in society and working life for the elderly, and retirement

Working conditions in the structure of the Swedish labour market raise key questions about exposure to inequality-related risks associated both with the physical work environment and with psychological strain. The research programme seeks to increase understanding of the different dimensions of inequality such as education, working life, housing, economic resources and health. It is important to analyse factors such as gender, class, ethnic background, migration status and the interactions between them.

Human capital building across the entire economic lifecycle is a critical area for research into inequality in the light of the growing importance of education and skills for people entering the labour market and their capacity to earn a living. However, the importance of human capital building needs to be analysed in relation to changes in the structure of working life and labour market regulation to provide more in-depth data to support reforms capable of counteracting the trend in inequality.

The consequences of changes in the tax transfer system in recent decades make this a central area for analysing factors giving rise to inequality. However, the consequences of the tax transfer system should also be analysed on the basis of its impact on incentive structures, e.g. creating poverty traps.

The proposed programme would reward multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research and take social, economic, biological and environmental aspects into account. The research programme is intended to stimulate international collaboration, as growing inequality is a global phenomenon. The initiative would be designed and run in collaboration with Vinnova, Formas and the Swedish Research Council.

**Justification:**

The structures and processes behind growing inequalities and increasing social exclusion are complex and intertwined. Neither the drivers nor the consequences are entirely clear at the moment. There is a need for research that moves the forefront of research forwards and focuses on the development of inequalities across different phases of life, the interplay between different causal processes and drivers, and the consequences at different levels of society. Further areas of interest are the impact of inequality on social cohesion and identifying opportunities for policy interventions to increase opportunities for social mobility and reduced inequality. One central challenge in Sweden is to better understand what the 2030 Agenda Delegation and others term the implementation gap, i.e. the difference between the national objectives that the Riksdag and the Government have set on equality and actual outcomes. Understanding why high ambitions are not realised and, on the basis of this, designing and testing new or changed ways of working in healthcare, education and care, is a key aspect of the proposed programme.

Forte has previously prioritised research on inequality, including through long-term building of research environments in ten-year Forte research centres and through contributions to European efforts on inequality channelled through the European NORFACE network (New Opportunities for Research Funding Agency Cooperation in Europe). Forte has also produced research overviews that clearly cover this field, e.g. on the conditions in which children and young people grow up from the perspective of equality.

There is now a need to produce a holistic picture of research into inequality and the conditions of people whose position is particularly vulnerable. The need should be viewed in the light of the growing societal problems that can be related to the consequences of growing

inequality and the social problems that are partly driven and reinforced by inequality of conditions and opportunities, e.g. gang crime and organised crime, shootings and severe violence, and the emergence of parallel and segregated societies.

Swedish research into inequality has a prominent position thanks to a long research tradition and access to unique register data. In the field of health, the programme can contribute with monitoring and evaluation of how different political measures affect people's living environments and health, to produce a better understanding of the mechanisms that create and uphold inequality and where measures produce the greatest benefit in turning around negative trends. This is particularly urgent given that the Riksdag has set the objective of reducing avoidable health inequalities within a generation. This is to be achieved through initiatives for more equal conditions and opportunities in terms of knowledge and competencies, work, incomes and lifestyles.

**4.1.3 NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH PROGRAMME****Forte proposes:**

Setting up a ten-year national research programme on implementation. It is proposed that the programme's budget gradually increase up to SEK 80 million per year over a ten-year period.

**Focus of the programme:**

With this programme, Forte seeks to make a concerted effort to build up and develop implementation research in Sweden. At the same time, we want to work to see greater use made of evidence-based knowledge. Besides increased research funding to the field, there is also a need for deeper collaboration and communication between academia and the areas of society in which research is to be usefully applied.



There are implementation problems in every aspect of our society, from implementing political intentions and implementing policies to individual teachers, social workers or doctors meeting individual citizens and their shifting needs for care, healthcare and support. There is a lot to be gained from optimising these processes. The programme's ambition is to tackle this entire complex chain, with the ultimate aim of improving the quality and effectiveness of the services our society provides.

The programme thus has a special focus on generating new knowledge surrounding the problem of implementation in a broad sense. To have as great an impact as possible, questions concerning implementation and practical application of research results will therefore be integrated in all the initiatives Forte carries out.

A common definition of implementation research is *the scientific study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice* (Eccles and Mittman, 2006). In the past decade, many studies in implementation science have involved identifying factors (obstacles and enablers) that affect the uptake of research and thus the desirable improvement of practice. These types of study continue to be highly relevant, but there are also many new research challenges. Leading researchers in the field today highlight the need for more knowledge in many areas. Some examples are:

- How can studies be designed that integrate knowledge from implementation science, improvement science and research on policy implementation?
- Which local and contextual factors have the greatest impact on implementation processes and their outcomes?
- Which challenges mean de-implementation, i.e. eradicating methods that lack a scientific basis, and what strategies can be used to succeed with this?

- What power dimensions exist in relations between researchers, decision-makers and practitioners when implementing research findings and what role do they play in successful implementation?
- How can end users and different stakeholders best be involved in the implementation process and how does this affect implementation outcomes?

#### **Justification:**

It is of the utmost importance that the services provided by society rest on an evidence-based foundation, that people receive as good a standard of healthcare as possible when they are ill, that schools are correctly designed to provide children with an optimal learning environment, and that the elderly receive as good a level of care as possible, to take just some examples. This requires that different professions in welfare services have a solid knowledge base underlying the working methods and processes that they use, but also that the organisation, financing and management of services is fit for purpose. The knowledge base needs to be improved and existing knowledge needs to be used more systematically. This is particularly true of questions concerning organisation, management and financing. The shortcomings that exist in this respect lead to unnecessary suffering, missed opportunities and wasted resources.

A lack of understanding of how knowledge that is produced is applied in practice contributes towards the implementation gap, i.e. the fact that the results of initiatives in society fail to lead to us attaining the national objectives laid down in political decisions. Here the proposed programme has a valuable role to play, both by contributing generic knowledge that can be used in different contexts, and through research in specific areas/sectors.

The challenges that exist in terms of applying research results in policy and practice have long

been underestimated, and many questions concerning implementation are insufficiently addressed in research as a result. Implementation does not fall within any one specific academic field and is instead studied in a number of different disciplines, including political science, medicine, business economics and psychology. This does not mean that research into implementation is less relevant; on the contrary, the subject's broad application makes it more relevant, as implementation challenges are found in virtually all areas of society. As yet, this research field is underdeveloped and needs to be seriously strengthened.

The need for implementation research has been highlighted in several public inquiries in a number of different sectors in recent years, e.g. education, social services and health and medical care. This programme will respond to this great demand and become a very important instrument in increasing societal benefit by working to ensure that more and more services provided by society rest on evidence-based grounds.

## 4.2 Ongoing and reinforced initiatives

In the field of working life and welfare, Forte was tasked with coordinating initiatives within the remit of the proposals in the Government's 2016 research bill. The ten-year programmes on working life research and applied welfare research respectively were a response to identified societal challenges. The problem scenario outlined at the time still largely remains and it is therefore important that the promising work being carried out in these programmes can continue as planned. The strategic agendas produced within the programmes have been valuable in updating the description of the challenges and have also specifically identified relevant knowledge areas. The strategic agenda

of the working life programme clearly sets out the central importance of working life for socially sustainable development and provides good arguments for increasing the investment in research in this area.

The ten-year programme in applied welfare research is primarily directed towards identified knowledge and development needs in the field of social services, and practice-oriented applied research. Forte was also commissioned to finance research on the organisation, quality and processes of welfare, with a focus on the systemic level within the remit of the specific research initiatives. The central functions of the welfare state that are vital to tackling challenges that impede development towards social sustainability are currently under great pressure and stress factors are only expected to increase. It is therefore highly relevant that the four-year investment made in the previous research bill is continued and expanded in a programme on sustainable health and welfare systems.

It is hard to ignore the challenges that go hand in hand with demographic change and an ageing population. Therefore, initiatives are also being carried out in research and innovation on healthy ageing, healthcare and social care and extending working life. Forte has a long-standing mandate to finance research in the field of the elderly and we plan to produce a strategic agenda for this ongoing work. Our proposal seeks to highlight the need for a long-term, consistent initiative in this area.

### 4.2.1 TEN-YEAR NATIONAL PROGRAMME ON APPLIED WELFARE RESEARCH

#### **Forte proposes**

That the financing of the ongoing ten-year national programme for applied welfare research continues as previously decided by the Riksdag and the Government, at SEK 100 million per year from 2020 onwards.

**Focus of the programme:**

The programme for applied welfare research is to strengthen high-quality practice and client-oriented research in the field of applied social services. This concerns research that is able to contribute towards developing and improving both services and the situation and conditions of users. The programme also seeks to increase the proportion of people working in social services who have a PhD, so that expertise can help to build knowledge in the social services sector on the ground. As part of this, the programme has been commissioned to fund a programme of PhD studies. Another goal is to increase collaboration and communication in research between researchers, the profession, users and relatives.

**Justification:**

Building up a partly new focus in research in the field of social services and research in collaboration between research and practice throughout the research process will be time-consuming and resource-intensive. There are also major research needs in this field. It is important that there is money specifically earmarked to prioritise this field of research, and long-term financing is essential to achieve the objective of the programme. It is therefore highly relevant that the work that has been commenced under the research programme can continue to be developed.

**Activities so far**

In launching the programme, Forte has worked to identify the most important challenges and research needs in social services from the perspective of researchers, practitioners and users. These are described in the programme's strategic research agenda. The agenda also describes the activities and strategies on which the programme's work is to be based so as to achieve its objectives. This mandate has also given Forte a unique opportunity to plan for

calls for proposals and different types of grant in the years ahead in an overarching plan, based on the budget allocated in the Government's research bill. The strategic agenda concludes that there is a need for different types of funding instruments and activities to stimulate the development of the research field and greater collaboration. A reduced budget would impact on Forte's ability to carry out the programme.

The research school set up under this remit has started and is being run by Malmö University and Lund University in partnership with the University of Gothenburg and Linnaeus University in the period 2018 to 2025. The research school has three annual intakes of students in 2019, 2020 and 2021, which also presupposes that funding will continue as planned. The students accepted at the research school will complete their licentiate exam over four years part-time while working in their ordinary posts part-time. The municipality is also investing in the initiative by financing half of the study time involved.

The programme for applied welfare research has already contributed towards research collaborations and dialogue between different actors in the field of social services. It has also contributed towards surveying research and research needs and financed research projects of different types and with different focuses. The programme has therefore proved to be an important platform for developing practice-oriented social services research and to building new contacts between research and practitioners in the field. The ongoing focus of the programme will be on internationalisation, including opportunities for Nordic and international collaboration.

**4.2.2 TEN-YEAR NATIONAL PROGRAMME ON WORKING LIFE RESEARCH****Forte proposes:**

- That financing of the ongoing ten-year national programme for working life research continues and is restored to the level previously decided by the Riksdag and the Government. The proposal is to restore basic funding to SEK 60 million per year.
- That the programme's funding be expanded with the aim of enabling additional investments in research and innovation for working life as an arena for social sustainability. The proposal is that financing of the programme be increased by SEK 40 million per year, making total financing of the programme come in at SEK 100 million per year.

**Focus of the programme:**

Forte's current mandate, with its ten-year national programme for working life research, constitutes a national platform for cohesive strategic work that promotes research and the dissemination of knowledge. In collaboration with different actors, the programme has identified prioritised challenges and research needs, issued calls for proposals and acted as a platform for research and disseminating results, etc. The continued activities of the programme will therefore be of central importance in tackling societal challenges, promoting research and helping to maintain Sweden's leading position in this field.

Working life has a central role in socially sustainable societal development. The research initiatives currently in progress provide important input for tackling the challenges in working life, but there are major research needs that justify expanding the national research programme. We would particularly like to highlight the research needs regarding the effects of structural transformation and digitalisation on the labour market, as well as segregation and differences in capacity to enter education and work.

*The effects of structural transformation and digitalisation on the labour market*

In addressing questions of inequality and inclusive workplaces, it is essential to study the effects of structural transformation and digitalisation on the labour market and how different groups in society and parts of the country are affected. More knowledge is needed not only about enterprise, innovation and entrepreneurship and the transition to a green economy, but also about the importance of policy measures for the growth of jobs. There are further major knowledge needs in relation to the underlying conditions for and consequences of innovations. This concerns digital tools and ways of improving the way work is organised, as well as impact on cognitive load and the physical working environment.

*Working life, segregation and differences in capacity to enter the labour market*

The risks of being excluded from earning a living are many and well-known. The ability to gain a foothold in the world of work is vital to increasing labour market inclusion and enables economically and socially sustainable societal development. There are many challenges in this area and the programme seeks to address the extensive knowledge needs that exist. Certain groups, such as new arrivals, people with disabilities and young people not in work or education, find it difficult to enter the job market. There is therefore a clear need for knowledge about the factors that would enable the inclusion of under-represented groups in working life.

Sweden has a world-leading position in working life research, partly thanks to a long research tradition, unique access to workplaces for conducting studies and access to world-class register data. The Swedish labour market model, with strong labour market partners and a shared interest in improving both efficiency

and the working environment, has also been significant for research. As the majority of the challenges in working life are shared by many countries, it is important that research is carried out in international collaboration, with the aim of comparison, increasing understanding and facilitating sustainable solutions.

### **Justification**

Working life is a key area of responsibility for Forte. Research has therefore been funded both in open calls for proposals and in calls for proposals of a more targeted nature. Among other things, specific funding has been allocated for research into the working environment in female-dominated sectors and research on methods for encouraging a return to work following sick leave. The national research programme for working life research has enabled research efforts to be concentrated on challenges in working life.

Forte shares the general view of leading voices among researchers and actors in society that working life is key for realising socially sustainable development and inclusion in society. Research and innovation have long been crucial to developing working life in a sustainable direction, but the rapid changes in the labour market mean that they will be more important than ever in the future. A long-term, cohesive initiative like the national programme for working life research therefore fulfils a strategic function. The programme's budget has so far been relatively limited in relation to the size of the challenges and the ambitions of the mandate. Unfortunately, more recent budget bills have cut the budget and it has not yet been restored to the level previously decided by the Riksdag and the Government. Forte therefore submits proposals and arguments for reinstatement of and an increase in the national research programme's budget.

Under the national programme for working life research, Forte has announced funding to be

allocated to research on the inclusion of under-represented groups in working life, with a focus on workplaces and the role of employers. Forte appraises that the challenge is so extensive that additional initiatives are needed. The research currently in progress is still limited in scope. Therefore, an initiative is proposed to address working life as an arena for social sustainability, with a focus on segregation and disadvantaged areas, inequality and differences in capacity to enter education and work. Questions about accessibility, participation and the opportunity to be active in the world of work without discrimination and harassment are central. The research is to be carried out in close collaboration with users of research results.

### **Activities so far:**

The national programme for working life research has produced an overview of research currently in progress and has financed research to increase knowledge on prioritised challenges in working life. Research has been financed on challenges that were previously under-researched and which would have found it hard to obtain funding had the national programme not been in place. The following challenges have been prioritised for funding in the programme so far:

- Reduce the incidence of threats, violence and harassment in working life
- Increase the inclusion of under-represented groups in working life
- Adapt working life to the demographic changes and create a climate for sustainable engagement in the workforce
- Improve the terms and conditions for organising and performing work within different forms and patterns of employment

Forte has created long-term opportunities to tackle the extensive societal challenges in working life. A farsighted approach has been

ensured through a process in which actors in society, researchers and research funding bodies have been engaged in designing the programme. A long-term approach is vital in working life research because this is a broad and interdisciplinary research field which covers research and innovation activities spanning work organisation, the work environment and the labour market. The research programme has also contributed towards the structural development of the research funding landscape through greater coordination between funding bodies. This coordination has resulted in greater awareness of initiatives by different funding bodies, and reduced the risk of overlapping initiatives and splintering.

#### 4.2.3 NATIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME FOR SUSTAINABLE HEALTH AND WELFARE SYSTEMS

##### **Forte proposes:**

That a national research programme for sustainable health and welfare systems are initiated. The programme will be an extension of the four-year initiative launched in the previous research bill. Forte proposes that the budget gradually increases up to SEK 80 million per year over a ten-year period.

##### **Focus of the programme:**

Forte proposes a cohesive, long-term research initiative with a focus on the capacity of the health and welfare system to cope with pressures and contribute towards a sustainable society in a global context. Here the health and welfare system refers to health and medical care, education and care, plus the social insurance systems.

The aim of the research programme is to produce new knowledge that can be used as a basis for policy and practice with the aim of attaining a sustainable health and welfare system. To achieve this objective, the programme will be designed and run in collaboration with funding bodies such as Formas, the Swedish Research Council and Vinnova, but

also with other central government actors in the field, such as the National Board of Health and Welfare, SBU, the Public Employment Service, the National Social Insurance Agency and the Pensions Agency. Collaboration with SALAR and individual municipalities and county councils is also central.

The research programme builds further on the experiences of the earlier initiative on research into the quality, organisation and processes of welfare, commissioned to Forte (Government Bill 2016/17:50). Work within the Delegation for Trust-Based Public Management and the Commission for equitable health, and the recently presented report from the government inquiry on management for more equitable healthcare (*Styrning för en mer jämlik vård*) will also be important starting points in designing the programme.

Sweden has a long tradition of research that has taken an interest in different questions related to the welfare state and has played an important role by increasing knowledge of the health and welfare system and the social insurance system. There is thus good potential for further development here. International collaboration is also an important prerequisite for the initiative and the programme will therefore promote this. Forte already collaborates on questions that are highly relevant to the programme and these networks will be important starting points for future partnerships. These include the EU-funded project *TO REACH – Transfer of Organisational Innovations for Resilient, Effective, equitable, Accessible, sustainable and Comprehensive Health Services and Systems*, och ett samarbetsprojekt inom Nordforsk kring *Research and Innovation Programme on Digitalisation of the Public Sector*.

##### **Justification:**

The challenges faced by the health and welfare system today have highlighted far-reaching problems throughout the welfare sector and at

all levels, from system level to organisational level and in practice. Management, organisation and funding play a vital role in how well the services that are to promote our health and welfare are able to fulfil this undertaking. Major knowledge needs remain regarding questions such as how political governance is translated into local practice, how management can balance trust on the one hand and the need for monitoring on the other, and how roles are to be allocated between different actors. It has been said that if there were an ideal system for organising and paying for health and medical care, social care and education, all countries would already have one. Therefore, every country must carefully evaluate different methods and approaches in order to ensure that resources are spent in an equitable and cost-effective way within the framework of a publicly funded welfare system and that interventions reach citizens in a way that meets basic needs.

The complexity of the system also poses specific challenges in terms of coordination between different providers, and more knowledge is needed on the interface between social services, health and medical care and education. This is also particularly true of the social insurance system. One important question in this context concerns the central role of preventive work. What are the success factors and the obstacles to cross-boundary collaboration and co-organisation across provider boundaries and between different municipalities and different regions, and between different agencies? How can the obstacles be overcome? What legal and practical steps need to be in place for information to be shared between different organisations? Another knowledge area concerns the question of collaboration between the public sector, private sector and civil society.

The social dimensions of digitalisation and the introduction of different types of welfare technology in line with Sweden's life science

strategy are an important element of the development of the health and welfare system that should be highlighted. We need a better understanding of the impact new technology and new working methods have on people's well-being and on the functioning of the health systems, but also deeper insights into what existing structures mean for the implementation of innovations. This is an area where Forte notes particularly good conditions for international collaboration with exchanging of experience and shared learning, as there is a great deal of interest in many countries. This is also an important area for EU-wide initiatives.

The umbrella theme of the initiative is long-term sustainable health and welfare systems and it is therefore also important to gain greater knowledge about how health and welfare systems contribute to the social dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals. This may concern questions such as: In what ways and through which mechanisms do sustainable health and welfare systems improve our opportunities to attain the different Sustainable Development Goals? To what extent do we see a reduction in systematic inequalities and greater participation, and what consequences does this have? In what ways do the health and welfare systems contribute towards sustainability from a generational perspective; how are resources transferred between generations via the welfare systems? Questions on the role of health and welfare systems should also be linked to the more overarching problem area of building sustainable societies and the challenges identified in that context.

#### **4.2.4 NATIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME FOR HEALTHY AGEING**

##### **Forte proposes:**

That the initiative for research in the field of the elderly continue as a cohesive and long-term programme. Forte proposes that the budget





gradually increases from the current SEK 36 million per year up to a level of SEK 40 million per year in total over a ten-year period, and that the authorisation framework is extended to six years. Forte's current mandate to support research in the field of the elderly received funding of SEK 36 billion in 2019 from expenditure area 9, Healthcare, medical care and social care, appropriation 4:5 Stimulation grant and measures in elderly policy, budget line 12 Research in the field of the elderly.

### **Focus of the programme:**

A cohesive investment in research in the field of the elderly would provide a basis for further strengthening this field, while simultaneously enabling research to contribute to development at policy and practice level. The initiative would also serve as a platform for a concerted effort in international collaboration, not least in the EU's framework programmes.

It is also important that the work that has begun to develop ways of identifying and prioritising knowledge needs in care of the elderly can continue and be explored in depth in collaboration with relevant actors and target groups. The programme provides a framework for this.

One of the major challenges where major knowledge needs remain is dementia. The programme should thus pay particular attention to questions concerning dementia, the care of people with dementia and encouraging their engagement and participation. Another key area is research on the opportunities and limitations of digital technology. The programme is to be characterised by an understanding that the group termed elderly people is made up of individuals with different circumstances, wishes and needs. Diversity and LGBTQ perspectives are therefore examples of areas that particularly need highlighting.

### **Motivering:**

Forte has a specific responsibility to promote and support research in the field of the elderly and has been allocated funding for this purpose. Over the years, major efforts have been carried out through different types of grant, which have helped both to build strong research environments and to broaden the field of research. An evaluation of ten-year funding for research centres showed that the research not only upheld high academic quality in an international perspective, but was also highly relevant for addressing societal challenges.

Research in the field of the elderly is a very broad area covering many different disciplines. Central themes in the research funded by Forte include healthy ageing over a lifetime perspective, care and healthcare that promotes participation and independence, use of digital technology, etc. Different aspects concerning the growing problem of dementia have also been highlighted.

Questions concerning ageing are found in all of Forte's fields of responsibility: health, working life and welfare. A growing proportion of older people in poor health poses a particular challenge for the individual, the relatives but also for our welfare system. These are areas where there continue to be major knowledge needs. A unified initiative in this field is therefore justified and it is essential that this particular research initiative continues in a long-term and cohesive form.



## 5. CONCLUSION

Swedish research has great potential to contribute to more sustainable development across the entire breadth of issues set out in the 2030 Agenda. This is particularly true regarding the social dimension, where a concerted effort could afford research greater importance in fostering sustainable welfare development.

The three new ten-year initiatives proposed strategically complement previous programmes and the annual open call for research funding in Forte's fields of responsibility. The initiatives also complement each other and have points of interaction, derived from the fact that the societal challenges that present key threats and obstacles to socially sustainable development are linked. Focusing efforts and investing in research along the lines we have set out in this report will create momentum for innovative reforms.

Sweden now finds itself at a watershed in many significant respects. Inequality between different groups and parts of the country has grown, not least in terms of health, working life and income. The capacity of the welfare system to act as a buffer and compensate for differences in circumstances and opportunities

has gradually deteriorated. The task of employees in the welfare services sector has grown harder and more burdensome in many cases, with tougher working conditions and health problems as a result. Mental health problems among different groups of staff in this sector have a knock-on effect on the health and outcomes of students, clients and patients in a downward spiral. At the same time, various attempts to reform provision have not infrequently created new problems and difficulties for citizens and staff alike.

The difficulties and problems that Sweden has to tackle in terms of social sustainability are the result of a number of different factors and decisions, or a lack of decisions, over several decades. Addressing these challenges is therefore not achievable by one-off reforms within a limited timeframe but is likely to require well thought-out changes and reforms over a long period. As both the wider world and circumstances in Sweden are in constant flux, there is a need for both new and more coherent knowledge about the processes and mechanisms driving changes, and for innovative ideas on how new solutions are to be designed and implemented. It will be difficult to achieve a socially sustainable society otherwise. The initiatives proposed by Forte have the potential to create the knowledge base needed for this huge but essential task.

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Lisa Öberg, Jens Lindström, Elliot Elliot/Scandinav.  
ISBN: 978-91-88561-27-5**

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