



# Focus on Sweden



# Research and innovation are crucial for competitiveness, sustainability and resilience

As part of the Swedish Ministry of Climate and Enterprise, Vinnova is the government agency charged with promoting sustainable growth through innovation and thereby strengthening the capacity to achieve the sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda adopted by the United Nations. Vinnova invests around SEK 3 billion (EUR 2.7 bn) in research and innovation each year, helping to build Sweden's innovation capacity and enabling organisations to address challenges together. Its headquarters is in Stockholm with affiliate offices in Brussels, Silicon Valley and Tel Aviv. Vinnova's Susanne Liljeblad and Jessica Svennebring explain the role the Swedish agency plays in promoting international collaboration for research, development and innovation, with particular reference to market-oriented Cluster projects like ITEA.

### Advanced digitalisation

The focus of Cluster projects is international collaboration between large and small companies, institutes and academies to strengthen both Swedish and European competitiveness as well as contribute to societal benefits and sustainable development in Sweden. Within this landscape, Susanne is responsible for coordinating the ITEA programme for Vinnova and Jessica is Head of Digital Transformation. Jessica explains where the land lies in terms of Sweden's current strategy: "One of the main spearheads is Advanced Digitalisation. We have asked ourselves the questions: Do we have resilience in the different parts in the value chains? Who controls the chips? Who owns the data? Where should we have the focus? For a number of years that focus has been digitalisation, and that is now being coupled with the use of AI and cybersecurity resilience. A report submitted by Vinnova and other authorities published two years ago showcased the need to invest a lot more money in digitalisation, and the Swedish government has really recently given us an assignment to increase our investments in this initiative which also involves major Swedish companies like ABB (see the partner article below), Ericsson and Saab as well as small, medium and large-sized companies in the technology and industrial component. Vinnova's spending on advanced digitalization will amount to SEK 300 million in 2023, SEK 500 million in 2024, and SEK 500 million in 2025, resulting in a total of SEK 1300 million over the three-year period, with industry investing the same amount, too."

### Gender equality and lifelong skills

Vinnova's decision to co-fund participation in Cluster projects is based not only on the potential for a return on that investment in terms of potential products, economic boost, employment and so on, but also 'equality'. Vinnova follows up and assesses whether both women and men take part of the grant in an equal manner, participate in and have influence over the projects. Gender equality is found in Agenda 2030, as a goal in itself, but also as a perspective that is a prerequisite for sustainable development. "Equality is a separate criterion when assessing Swedish project proposals or applications, accounting for 10% of the final decision," says Susanne. "We would like to see how the project result can contribute to more gender equality."

"Of course, applicants also have to demonstrate what the benefits will be for Sweden as a whole and also to the competitiveness of the participating SMEs or companies in the consortium. The proposal should be industrydriven and offer the possibility of lifelong learning for the participants within the project. It's a way of connecting with other engineers and researchers in other universities in

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other countries and of continuing to expand your competencies."

"For Vinnova achieving the sustainability goals is really key," says Susanne. "We measure all projects that we invest in by how sustainable they are. At Vinnova we organise our work around different areas we consider important to create a sustainable society: sustainable industry, sustainable food systems, sustainable mobility, sustainable precision health, sustainable built environments.. The digital transformation and ecosystems for innovative companies and emerging innovations play a key role in this."

### International cooperation

Government and industry are on the same page in Sweden when it comes to their collaboration on the various programmes, with industry matching the investment made by the government. This approach extends to the funding schemes in international research and innovation platforms such as Horizon and Eureka. "We participate in nearly every Eureka Cluster and ITEA is certainly one of the key areas for Vinnova in promoting and strengthening international cooperation. The feedback I hear from participating companies is that they value the support and the reviews they get from the evaluators. The ITEA PO matchmaking days are appreciated too – the open atmosphere and opportunities to talk about your project ideas with partners from many different countries."

Susanne and Jessica emphasise how strategically important international collaboration projects that focus on the needs of the industry and have a strong industry commitment are for Sweden's business community. The successful collaboration between committed innovative large and small companies and strong active universities and research institutes that is central to the ITEA Cluster's work is essential to facilitating Vinnova's effort to promote internationalisation. "In the long term, participation in projects of this nature contributes to demonstrating or developing sustainable solutions to societal challenges."

### More information:

<https://www.vinnova.se/en/>