

# The image of Sweden abroad 2023

Annual report from the Swedish Institute

Registration number: 00045/2024



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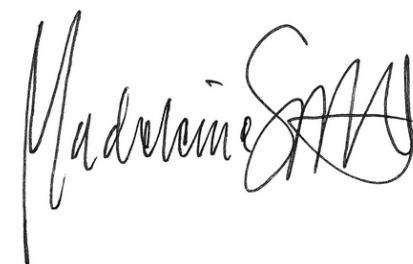
# Preface

Since 1945, the Swedish Institute (SI) has worked to increase the world's interest and trust in Sweden. We do this because trust between countries, organisations and individuals is a necessity for cooperation, trade, development and security. The events of 2023 have proven this to be true.

In many respects, 2023 was a challenging year for Sweden. The Swedish path towards NATO membership, burnings of the Qur'an, the LVU campaign and the terrorist attack against Swedish citizens in Brussels coloured the international reporting on Sweden. In some countries in the Middle East and North Africa, Sweden's reputation has been damaged. The situation is alarming.

Simultaneously, we can confirm that the image of Sweden is strong and stable in large parts of the world. Sweden is associated with creativity and advanced research, especially in regard to environmental issues and the green transition.

In order to build resilience going forward, we need to continue to develop relationships and dialogues with the countries where Sweden's image is damaged and knowledge of Sweden is lacking. SI needs to continue to highlight Sweden's many strengths and emphasise what it is like to live in Sweden and in a democratic society. Swedish companies that operate globally have a particularly critical role to play here. The importance of a local presence should not be underestimated. Knowledge and personal experience of a country are two fundamental aspects of building trust, which should thus guide actions going forward.



*Madeleine Sjöstedt*  
*Director-General*



# Introduction

A good reputation is crucial for international success. The fact that Sweden evokes positive associations around the globe is important on many levels: to attract investment, visitors, students and labour, as well as to gain political influence and to create markets for products and services. In this way, the image of Sweden contributes to the Swedish economy and welfare.

2023 was marked by several major events of different kinds. Burnings of the Qur'an and Sweden's path towards NATO membership made international headlines, as did Loreen's win in Eurovision and the Swedish national team's bronze medal in the FIFA Women's World Cup.

But what impact did this and other events have on the image of Sweden? And is the image of Sweden changing?

The Swedish Institute (SI) is tasked with increasing the world's interest and trust in Sweden, as well as promoting Swedish interests internationally. It promotes Sweden, fosters international cooperation and creates various opportunities for the exchange of ideas. SI works for Sweden's long-term sustainable development and growth, as well as to strengthen its influence.

One of SI's main tasks is to monitor and analyse the image of Sweden abroad and to follow information flows about Sweden.

The purpose of this annual report is to provide a summary description of how Sweden is perceived abroad and whether the image of Sweden has been affected in any way.

The annual report on the image of Sweden abroad in 2023 is based on studies conducted by SI and reflects the following:

- Published articles about Sweden in international news reporting and on social media, i.e. how Sweden is portrayed, how published articles are spread and what provokes engagement.
- The perception of Sweden by the general public or a specific target group that can be geographically, thematically or periodically delimited.
- How Sweden performs in relation to other countries within themes relevant to the promotion of Sweden and which are manifested in international comparisons, surveys or published indexes.

# Five overarching conclusions

**1** The image of Sweden is stable and positive in large parts of the world. The image has remained stable for several years.

**2** There are parallel and contradictory images of Sweden. In Western countries, the image has improved. Yet, in some Middle Eastern countries, it has deteriorated.

**3** Sweden's nation brand is strong. Sweden is attractive for trade and investment, the green transition, as well as democracy and strong governance. Through our attractiveness, we compete for talent and investment with some of the world's strongest economies.

**4** There are groups who deliberately want to damage the image of Sweden by linking events in Sweden and Sweden's position to global areas of conflict. Disinformation about Sweden is a challenge.

**5** Sweden's strong nation brand, attractiveness and relations with the rest of the world form a basis for resilience against disinformation. It is important to continue to have an international presence as well as a dialogue and exchange of experiences with other countries.



# The media image of Sweden

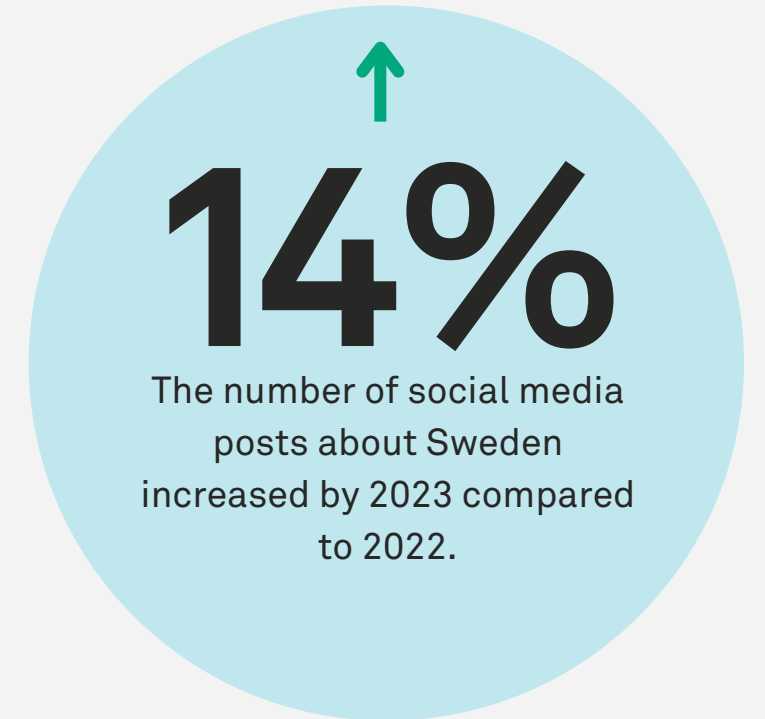
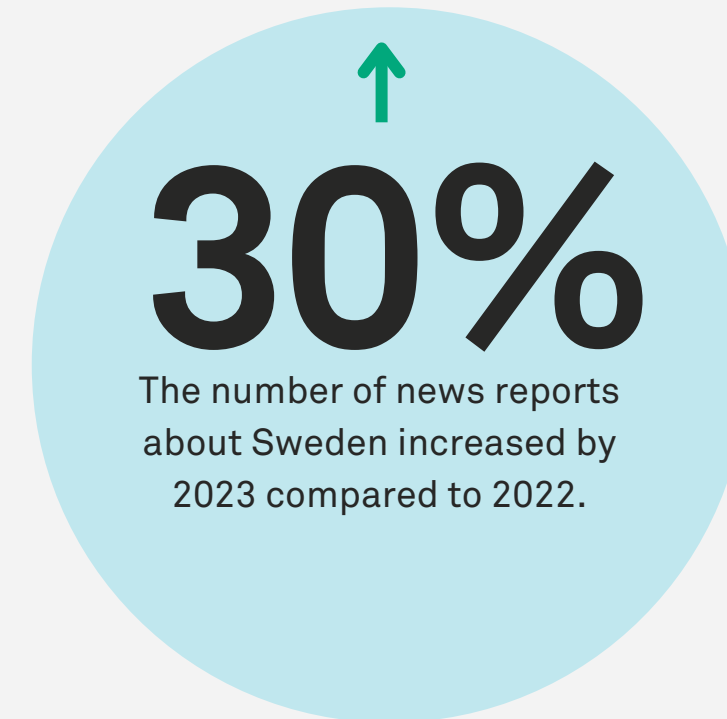
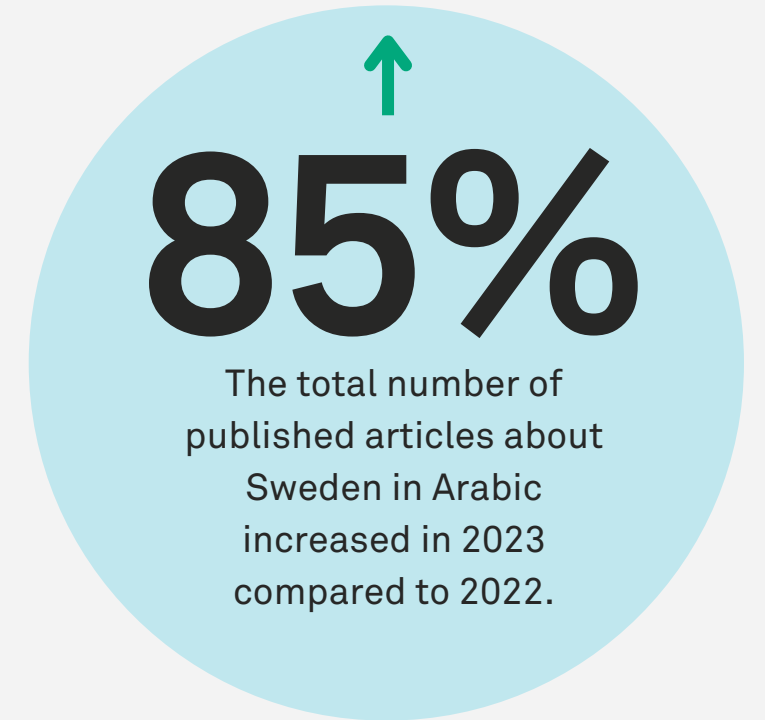
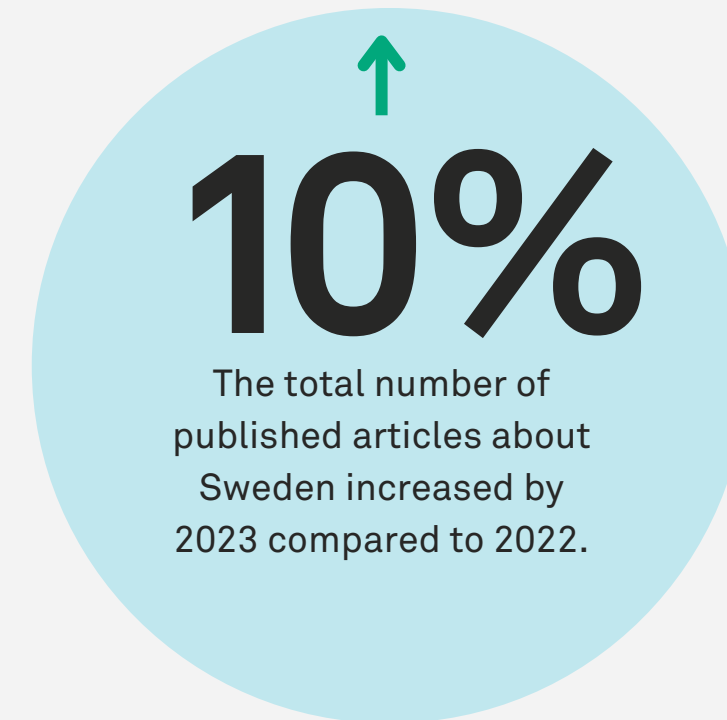


# The media image of Sweden in 2023 – overall trends

Media attention (i.e. depictions in news media and on social media) for Sweden increased in 2023. The number of published articles in 2023 increased by 10 per cent compared to 2022 and 37 per cent compared to 2021. The increase is most visible in the number of news articles about Sweden, but posts on social media also increased. Published articles about Sweden increased mainly in Arabic (85 per cent) and Turkish (58 per cent).

A strong contributing factor to the increased media interest in Sweden was the extensive reaction abroad to the incidents of Qur'an burnings in 2023. Sweden's progress towards NATO membership, which was the focus of the media image during 2022, continued to be a clear factor in 2023, but to a diminished degree. It is also worth noting that the LVU campaign, an information influence effort against Swedish social services that has been ongoing for several years, also continued in 2023 to a lesser extent than before.

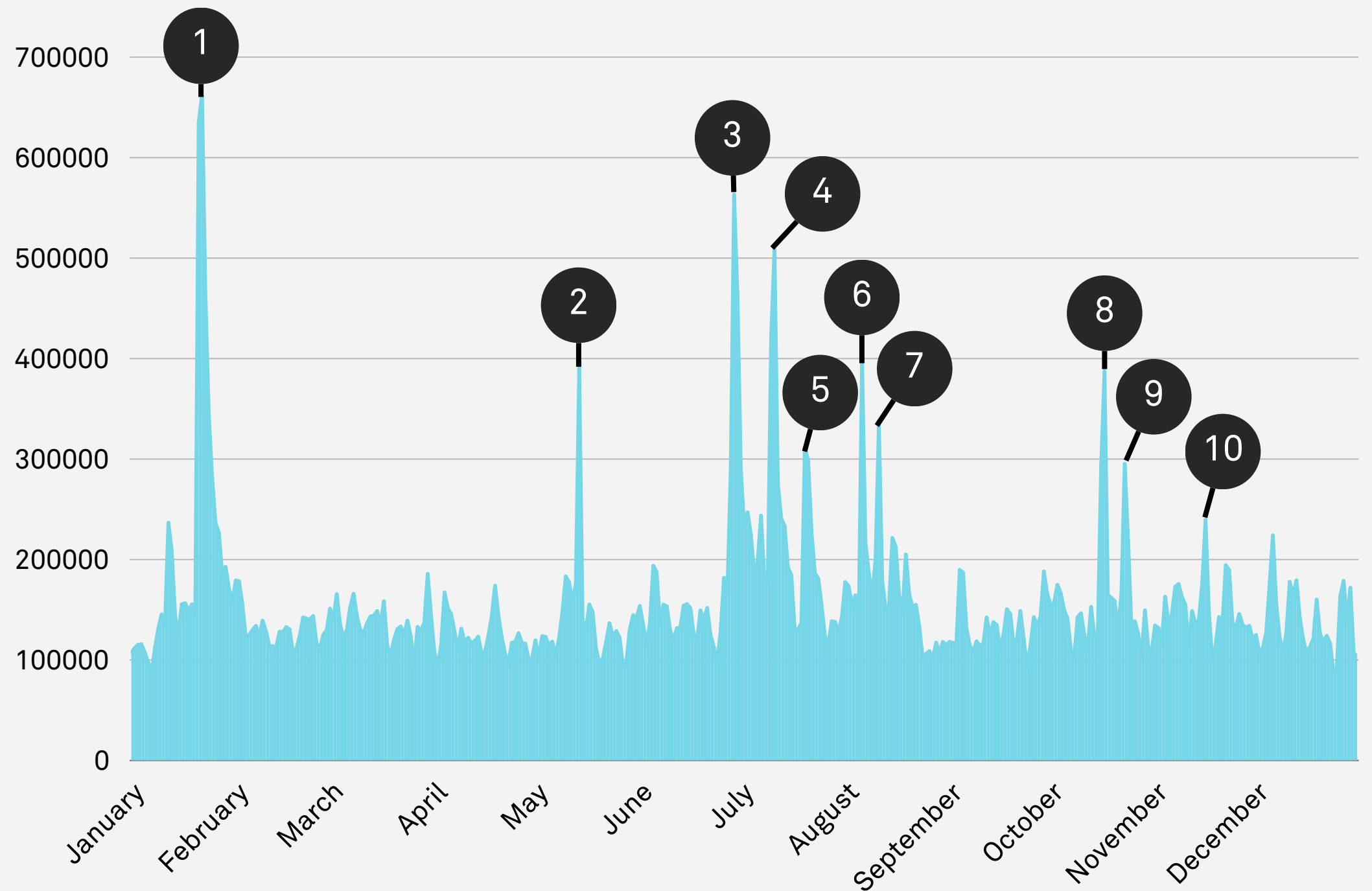
In 2023, Sweden thus continued to be the focus of major international issues. There have also been more indirect links between Sweden and major conflicts in the world, such as various forms of support for Ukraine and actions linked to the conflict between Israel and Hamas.



# Biggest media events of the year

- 1** Qur'an burning outside the Turkish embassy (21/1)
- 2** Loreen wins the Eurovision Song Contest (13/5)
- 3** Qur'an burning at Stockholm's Grand Mosque (29/6)
- 4** Türkiye announces that it plans to ratify Sweden's NATO application (11/7)
- 5** The Swedish Embassy in Baghdad is attacked (20/7)
- 6** Sweden beats the US in the FIFA Women's World Cup (6/8)
- 7** Sweden beats Japan in the FIFA Women's World Cup (11/8)
- 8** Two Swedes killed in a terror attack in Brussels (17/10)
- 9** President Erdogan signs off on Sweden's Membership to NATO (23/10)
- 10** Film clips from a bunker in Sweden claim to be pictures from Hamas tunnels in Gaza (16/11)

The graph shows the number of news articles and posts on social media, blogs and forums about Sweden per day in 2023 in 53 languages. The peaks in volume explained in the graph point to shorter periods, usually linked to individual events when Sweden was mentioned in particular.



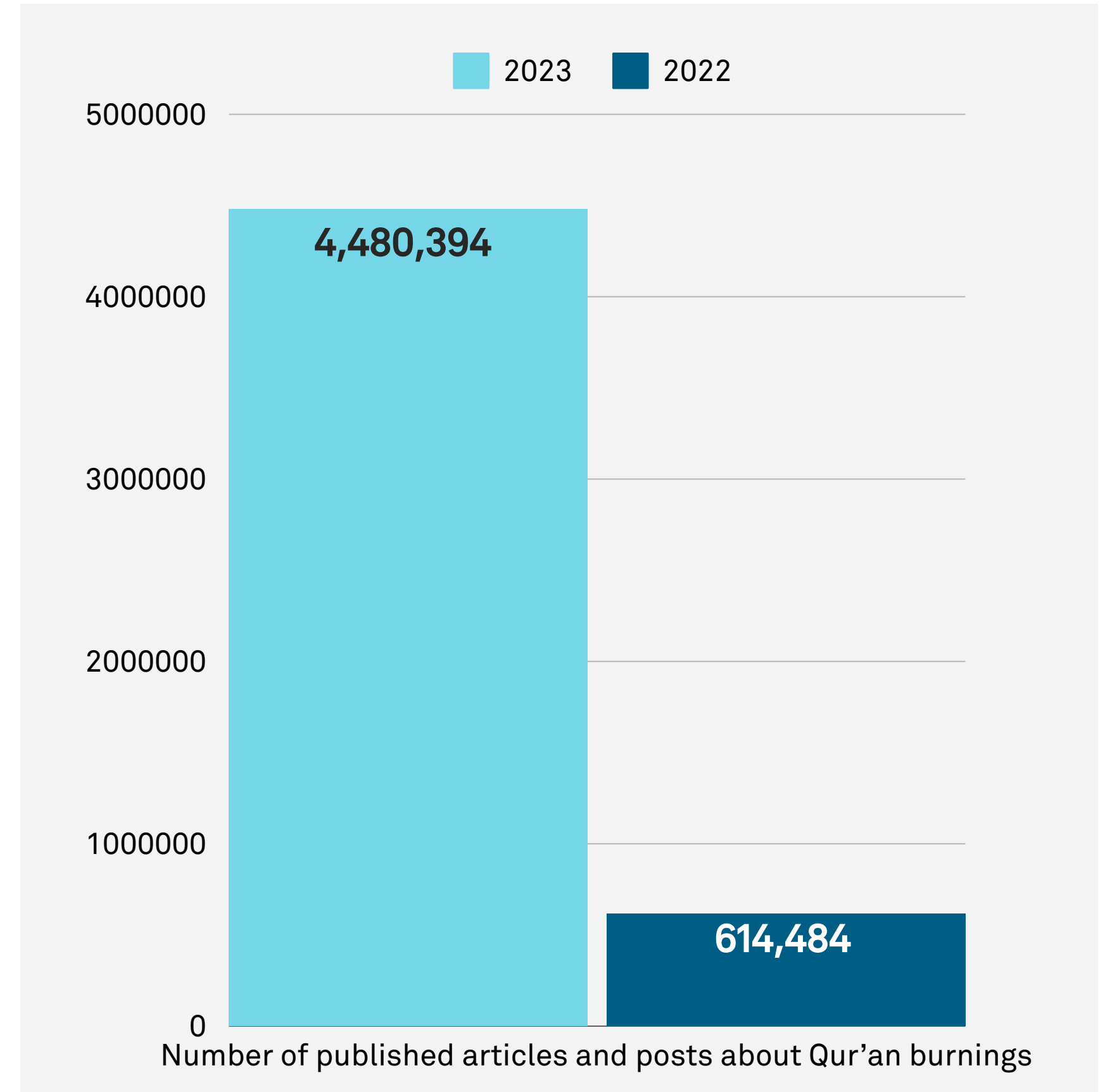


# Burnings of the Qur'an attracted global attention

In 2023, there were several Qur'an burnings in Sweden. The media attention was so extensive that this is the biggest reason for the increase in the number of published articles and posts about Sweden in 2023. In Turkey and Saudi Arabia, the Qur'an burnings represented about 40 per cent of the content related to Sweden.

The differences compared to the portrayal of similar Qur'an burnings in 2022 are several. Media attention was significantly more extensive in 2023, and the information reached a wider audience, especially in Turkey, the Middle East, North Africa and Asia. The portrayal was more unambiguous, and the dominant narrative was that Sweden is Islamophobic. It differs from the Qur'an burnings in 2022, which were followed by the so-called Easter riots, in which further narratives about migration and criminality emerged.

The fact that Sweden is portrayed as Islamophobic is not something new but has appeared in a number of events in recent years in Arabic and Turkish. If this media image continues to spread, there is an increased risk that people will perceive Sweden as Islamophobic. SI can conclude that the image of Sweden has become more negative in countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Turkey as a result of, among other things, the Qur'an burnings.



# Sweden's path towards NATO membership

Sweden's path towards NATO membership has continued to characterise the media image of Sweden in 2023, even though the number of published articles about Sweden and NATO has decreased by 20 per cent compared to the previous year. During the first half of 2022, before and in connection with the Swedish government's announcement to join NATO, a lot of analytical content was published on what was described as a shift in Sweden's previous stance on non-alignment.

In 2023, the focus has been on developments in the NATO membership process. In particular, the actions of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, as well as those of other political representatives.

Attention has been drawn to the issue, including that of US President Joe Biden. Sweden's progress towards NATO membership has also been part of the reporting on other events, not least linked to the Qur'an burnings that have taken place in Sweden.

Just like in 2022, there was a clear division in 2023 between the positive view of the Swedish NATO membership in Western countries and evident critical reporting in countries such as Russia. However, Sweden's stance is considered to have strengthened the image of Sweden as part of the Western community.



# 20%

**decrease of published articles  
about Sweden and NATO  
compared to 2022**

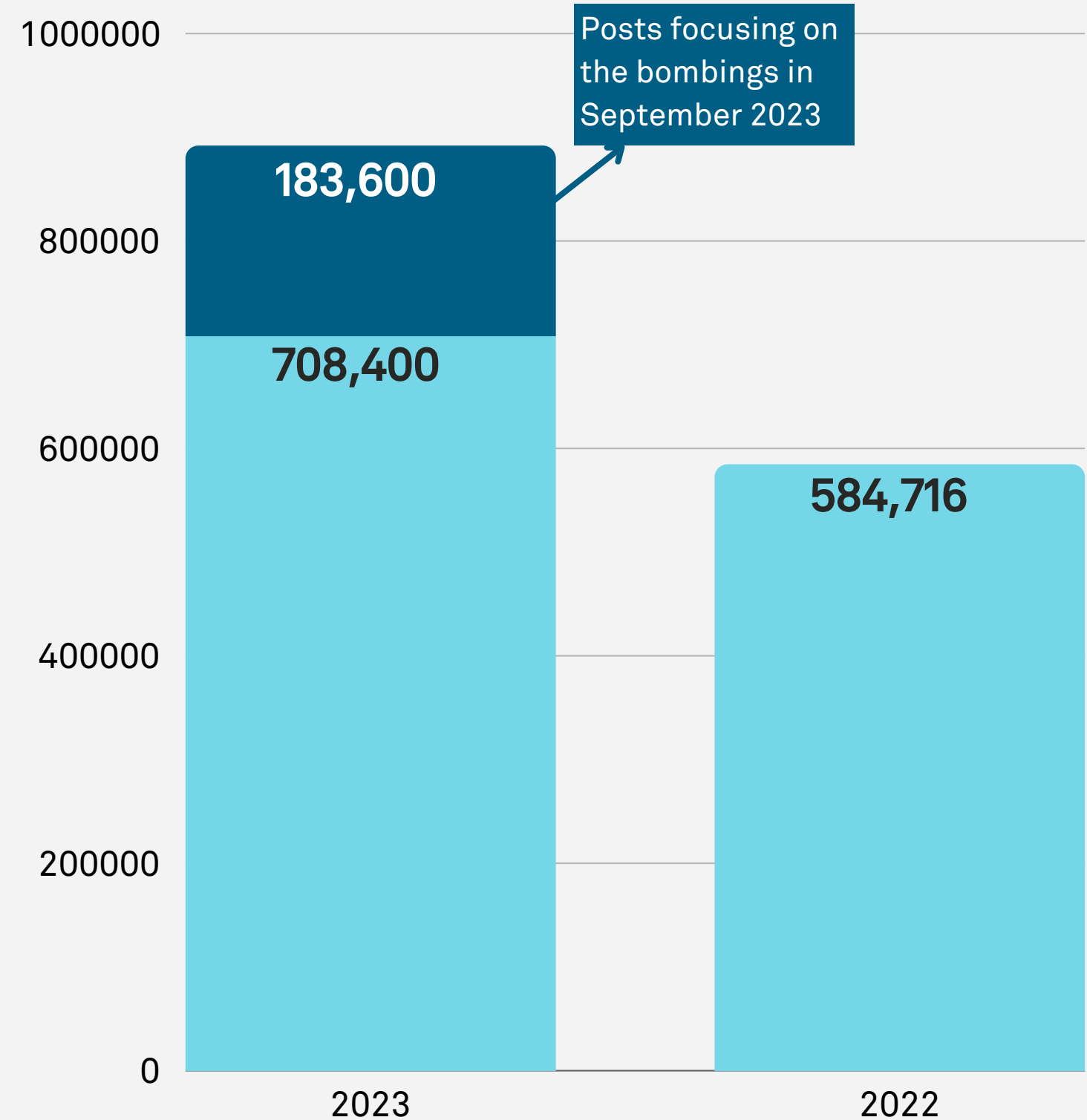
# Gang-related crime in Sweden remains an issue abroad

Gang-related crime in Sweden is an issue that regularly receives media attention, but it has not affected the large volume increases in publications about Sweden abroad. The issue is mainly highlighted in the news media in countries close to Sweden, such as the Nordic countries and Germany. The issue, however, has also attracted attention on social media in countries such as the US, where it is becoming part of a larger conversation about migration.

In 2023, the issue received increased attention compared to 2022. The increase is mainly visible on social media and specifically on X, formerly Twitter, where the number of posts has increased by more than 20 per cent. However, we have noticed there are fewer original posts and more sharing of other people's content. This is a sign of increased attention but less personal involvement. Most attention is noted in connection with the explosions that took place at the end of September and the subsequent discussion about deploying the military to manage gang-related violence.

Although there has been an increased spread of content linked to gang-related crime in Sweden, we have not seen any new target groups or new narratives emerging on the topic. The perception of Sweden is, therefore, not considered to have been significantly affected in 2023.

Number of posts and published articles on crime and criminality



## Culture and sports had an increased impact

Sweden was not only associated with certain political events and societal challenges. 2023 was also characterised by Swedish achievements in culture and sports. This is an uptick for these themes since major sports and cultural events were less prominent in Sweden's media image between 2020 and 2022.

In 2023, the Swedish women's national team's success in the FIFA Women's World Cup, in particular, attracted great interest. When it comes to culture, one event stands out, and that is Loreen's victory in the Eurovision Song Contest. It received a lot of attention all over Europe, as well as in the US, India and Australia.

There were immediate reactions to the events in media, mainly opinions and reviews, but the comments were not necessarily about Sweden. The reactions were more about the World Cup game against the US and how badly the US had played, as well as discordance over Loreen's win.

However, it is difficult to determine what impact such events have on the image of Sweden. Sports and cultural events mainly drive the visibility of Sweden but usually do not contribute to any deeper knowledge.



# 105,200

**Number of posts and articles  
about Loreen in one hour between  
23:00–24:00 on 13 May, 2023**

# The world's perception of Sweden



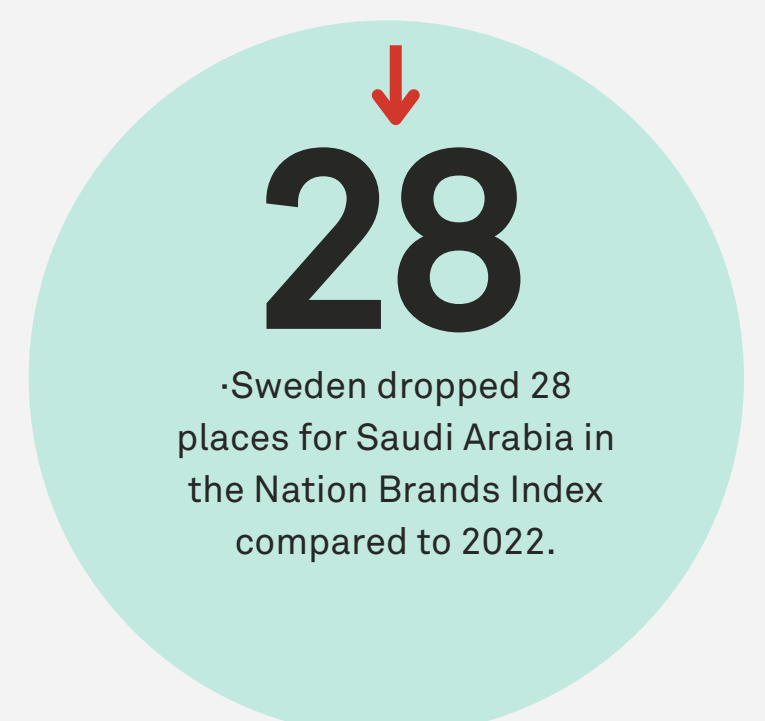
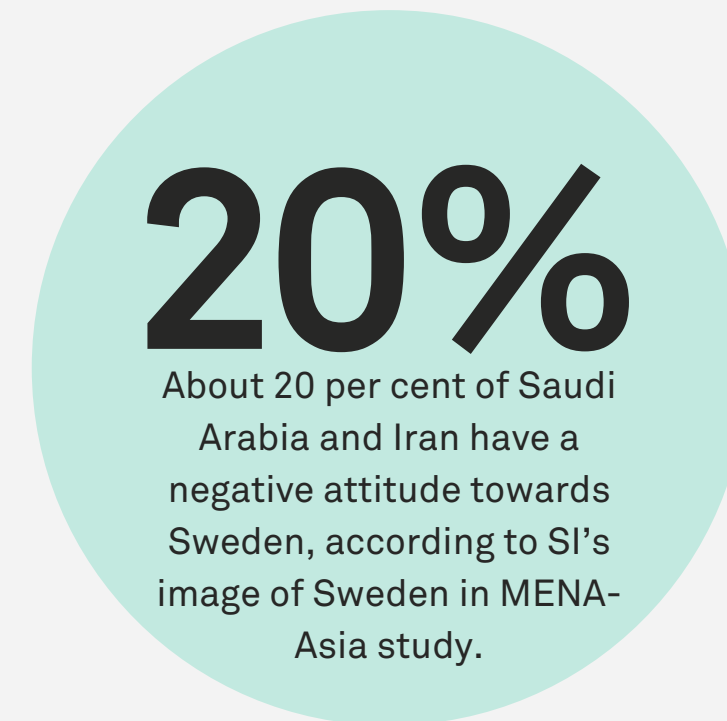
# Stability and change in the image of Sweden

The progress towards NATO membership and the Qur'an burnings created great media visibility in 2023 and resulted in strong reactions in some parts of the world.

The past year also showed clear differences in how Sweden is perceived in different parts of the world. Western countries have generally become more positive, while some countries in the Middle East have had a deteriorating perception of Sweden. The increased polarisation affects how events and decisions in Sweden are perceived in other countries.

On an overall level, however, the image of Sweden is positive and stable. Areas of strength such as strong governance, high quality of life and contributions to the green transition remain the same as in previous years.

This section is based on perception data from three studies on the public's perception of Sweden: the Nation Brands Index, the Global Soft Power Index and SI's own study, the image of Sweden in MENA-Asia.



10

# Sweden – one of the world's strongest nation brands

Sweden, along with some of the world's strongest economies, ranks very high in international surveys. A majority of people in most countries have a positive opinion of Sweden.

In 2023, Sweden was ranked 10th out of 60 countries in the Nation Brands Index and 11th out of 121 countries. These standings are in line with rankings in previous years, which shows that Sweden's national brand is stable.



Image of Sweden 2023

## The ten strongest nation brands according to two indexes

### Nation Brands Index 2023

2022 ranking and direction of shift within parenthesis

1. Japan (2 ↑)
2. Germany (1 ↓)
3. Canada (3)
4. United Kingdom (6 ↑)
5. Italy (4 ↓)
6. United States (8 ↑)
7. Switzerland (7)
8. France (4 ↓)
9. Australia (10 ↑)
10. Sweden (9 ↓)

### Global Soft Power Index 2023

2022 ranking and direction of shift within parenthesis

1. United States (1)
2. United Kingdom (2)
3. Germany (3)
4. Japan (5 ↑)
5. China (4 ↓)
6. France (6)
7. Canada (7)
8. Switzerland (8)
9. Italy (10 ↑)
10. United Arab Emirates (15 ↑)



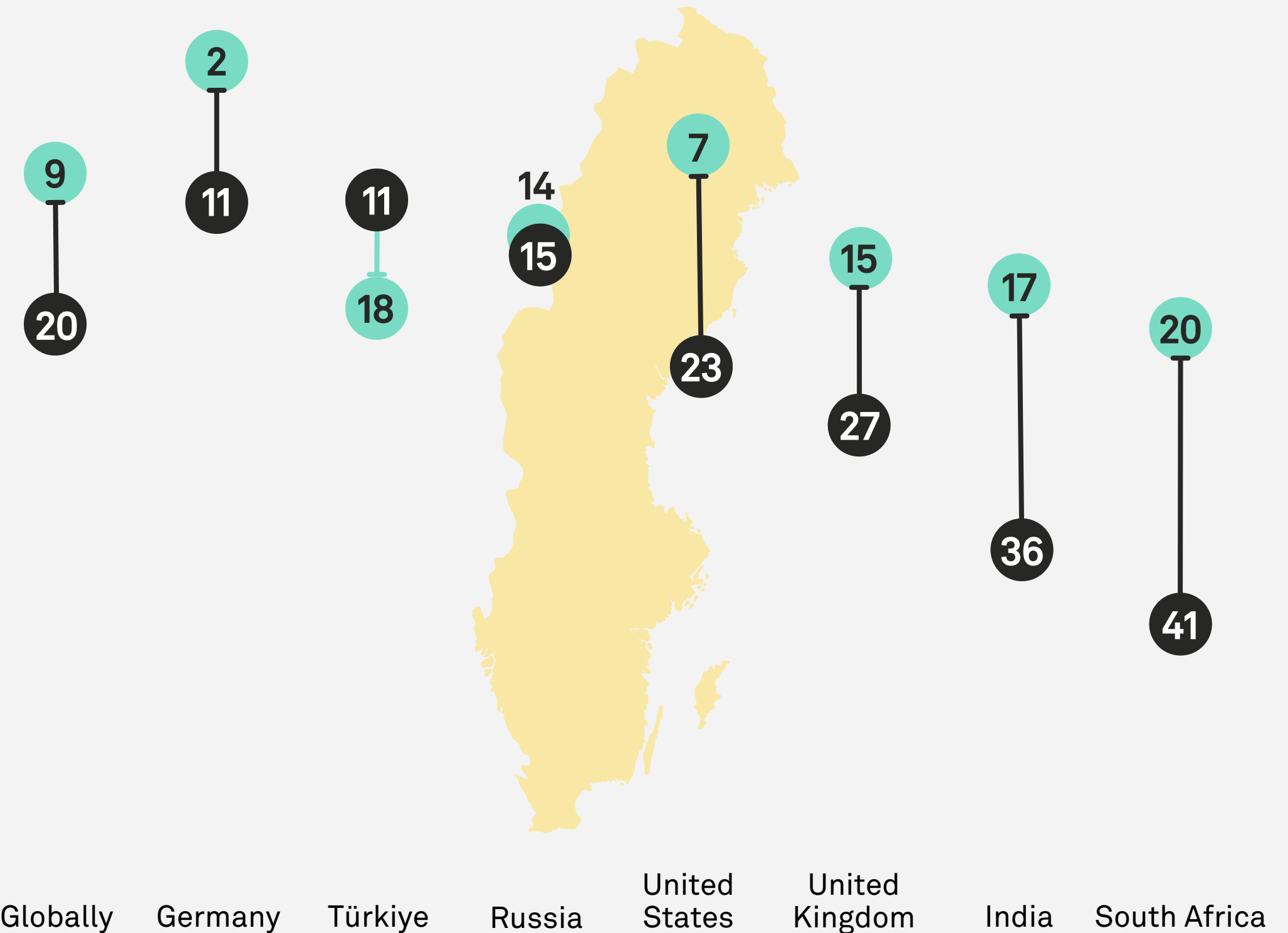
# Awareness of Sweden fluctuates

Awareness of Sweden varies greatly between countries and is generally relatively low outside our immediate area. In the Nation Brands Index, just over one in ten respondents stated that they have a high level of knowledge about Sweden, but Sweden is still ranked 20th out of 60 countries. The image of Sweden seems to be stronger than the knowledge of Sweden.

The Global Soft Power Index study shows that awareness of Sweden is highest in Europe and North America. It is lowest in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

Among countries outside the Nordic region, awareness is highest in Germany, Türkiye and Russia – when Sweden is compared with other countries. In India and South Africa, awareness of Sweden is low.

Sweden's ranking in the Nation Brands Index 2023 within the 'Familiarity' and 'Favorability' categories





# Sweden has a distinct international profile

Sweden's strengths include things that are important for our competitiveness, such as the willingness to visit and invest in the country, a high quality of life, equality and responsibility for the environment.

Sweden is generally also considered to contribute internationally to peace and security and to be a secure country with a strong sense of governance.

Culture and tourism are not among Sweden's main strengths, but Sweden is considered to be able to offer nature experiences and contemporary culture such as music, film, art and literature.

## Sweden's ranking in Nation Brands Index by sub-area 2023 (2022 ranking and direction of shift within parenthesis)



**Export**  
8 (8)



**Governance**  
3 (4 ↑)



**Culture**  
14 (13 ↓)



**Tourism**  
13 (13)



**Immigration & investment**  
4 (4)



**People**  
6 (5 ↓)

# Positive and negative trends within the image of Sweden

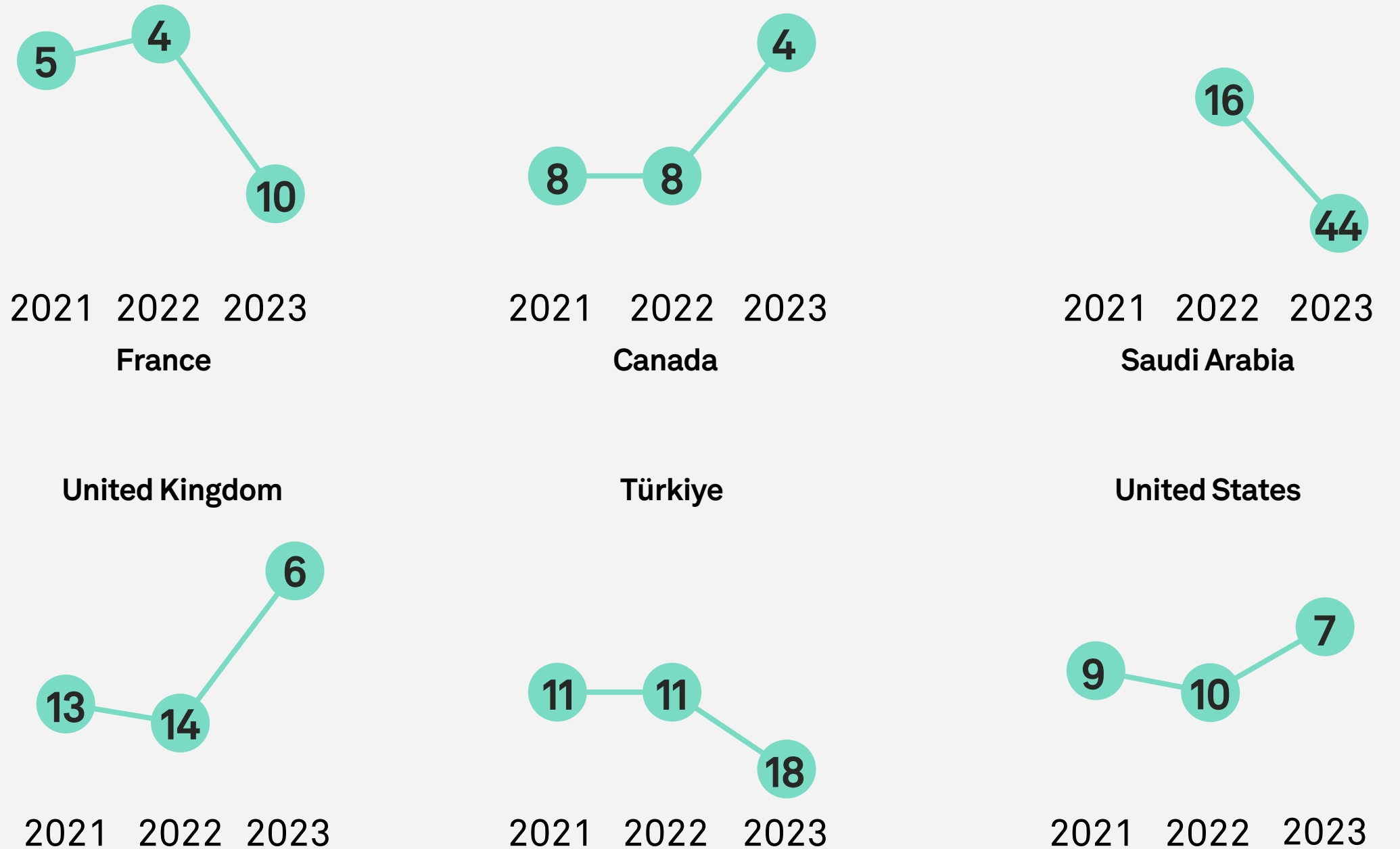
The perception of Sweden is consistently positive in Western countries and other democracies. The US, Canada and the UK had a more positive view of Sweden in 2023 than in 2022.

In some countries, however, Sweden's image deteriorated, including Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. Thus, in other countries, more people are positive than negative towards Sweden. However, the fact that between 15 and 20 per cent are negative stands out. This is due to the Qur'an burnings and the LVU campaign, but also the general attitude towards the West and our liberal secular values.

In summary, personal experiences of Sweden contribute to a continued positive or unchanged image of Sweden and constitute a resistance to disinformation and negative portrayal.

## Sweden's ranking in Nation Brands Index 2021–2023 in a selection of major countries: France, Canada, Saudi Arabia\*, the UK, Türkiye and the US

\*Saudi Arabia's participation as a panel country in the Nation Brands Index began in 2022, so there is no data from previous years.



# Sweden's competitiveness



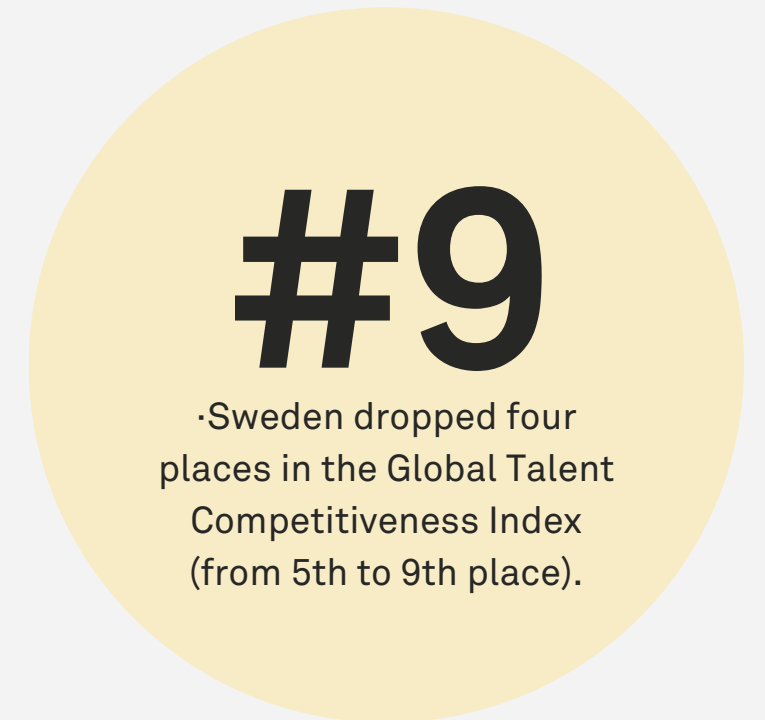
# Sweden's brand is a strategic asset, but competition is heating up

Sweden is an export-dependent country that needs to have good and well-established relations with the rest of the world. The fact that Sweden is competitive in areas such as investments, exports and talent attraction is crucial for the economy to grow. An important part of this is that Sweden-based players in global business see the Swedish brand as an asset and competitive advantage.

Sweden's nation brand is characterised by sustainability, innovation, economic stability, high quality of life and democratic development. This has long been at the core of Sweden's global attractiveness. The Swedish brand continues to be a strategic asset in an increasingly competitive world.

Sweden's brand remained strong in 2023. However, our review of international indexes indicates that Sweden is losing ground in some respects as other countries intensify their efforts in areas such as research, innovation and the green transition.

This section aims to provide an overview of some important areas for Sweden's competitiveness: the view of Sweden in regard to the green transition, the view of Swedish goods and services, the view of Swedish research and innovation, and the view of Sweden as a magnet for talent.



# The importance of a positive 'nation brand'

The perception of Sweden's brand is created by the associations that people have when they think of Sweden. Whether the view of Sweden is positive, neutral or negative depends on a combination of feelings, knowledge and experiences.

If Sweden's brand appears to be clear, positive and well-known, it creates curiosity, trust and attractiveness. This applies not only to Sweden as a whole but also to experiences, products and services that come from Sweden. A positive 'nation brand' gives Sweden an advantage in the global market and thus contributes to Sweden's prosperity and economic development.

Sweden is one of the few countries that ranks in the top ten of many rankings and indexes. This indicates that the global public has associations with Sweden that are positive, well-established and resistant to change.

In order for Sweden to have a positive brand, Sweden and Swedish organisations need to be considered relevant in globally significant areas. Our review and analysis of Sweden's perceived and actual strengths shows that this usually is the case.

## The ten most competitive countries according to two indexes

### World Competitiveness Ranking 2023

2022 ranking and direction of shift within parenthesis

1. Denmark (1)
2. Ireland (11 )
3. Switzerland (2 )
4. Singapore (3 )
5. Netherlands (6 )
6. Taiwan (7 )
7. Hong Kong SAR (5 )
8. Sweden (4 )
9. United States (11 )
10. United Arab Emirates (12 )

### Global Talent Competitiveness Index 2023

2022 ranking and direction of shift within parenthesis

1. Switzerland (1)
2. Singapore (2)
3. United States (4 )
4. Denmark (3 )
5. Netherlands (6 )
6. Finland (8 )
7. Norway (7)
8. Australia (9 )
9. Sweden (5 )
10. United Kingdom (10)

# Sweden has a high level of credibility within the green transition

Sweden's main strengths lie in the areas of the environment, climate and the green transition. In the Nation Brands Index 2023, Sweden ranks first in almost all issues related to the area. This is also shown in the Global Soft Power Index and Best Countries surveys.

The world's associations with Sweden and the green transition is a strong competitive advantage for Swedish exports and for being able to attract investments and talent.

## #1 Environment and climate

Sweden's ranking out of 60 countries in the Nation Brands Index 2023

## #3 Sustainable future

Sweden's ranking out of 121 countries in the Global Soft Power Index 2023

## #1 Green living

Sweden's ranking of 87 countries in Best Countries 2023



# #1

## Sweden's ranking in the Nation Brands Index 2023 out of 60 countries in the attributes:

- 'This country is taking action to combat climate change.'
- 'This country is working hard towards affordable and clean energy.'
- 'This country is focused on access to clean water and nutrition for all.'
- 'This country encourages more responsible industries that do not damage the environment.'

# Sweden is considered one of the most reliable countries in business relations

Sweden performs well in exports and in terms of Swedish products and services. Sweden ranks 8th in the Export category in the Nation Brands Index and 10th in the 'Business and Trade' category of the Global Soft Power Index.

Most positive associations with Sweden are associated with openness to the world as well as transparent and reliable business relations and products.

## #9 Buy products

Sweden's ranking out of 60 countries in the Nation Brands Index 2023

## #11 Products the world loves

Sweden's ranking out of 121 countries in the Global Soft Power Index 2023

## #9 Reliable products

Sweden's ranking out of 60 countries in the Nation Brands Index 2023

A person is holding a brown Fjällräven Kånken bag on a wooden pier. The bag has a circular logo with a red fox head and the text 'FJÄLLRÄVEN KÅNKEN'. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with water and a railing.

# #4

Sweden's ranking in the 'Open for Business' category out of 87 countries in the Best Countries 2023 survey

# Positive associations with contemporary Swedish creativity

Sweden's weaknesses lie within the area of culture. These mainly concern the world's associations pertaining to Swedish cultural heritage. At the same time, the view of Swedish contemporary culture – such as music, film, art and literature – is positive, according to the Nation Brands Index 2023.

There is also a positive view of Sweden as a creative place. However, that view differs depending on where the person is in the world. Swedish creative industries are competitive.

## #19 Influential in arts and entertainment

Sweden's ranking out of 121 countries in the Global Soft Power Index 2023

## #10 Contemporary culture

Sweden's ranking out of 60 countries in the Nation Brands Index 2023

## #7 Creative place

Sweden's ranking out of 60 countries in the Nation Brands Index 2023

## Top ten nations in the 'Culture and heritage' category in the Global Soft Power Index 2023. Sweden ranks 16th out of 121 countries.

1. France
2. United States
3. Italy
4. Spain
5. United Kingdom
6. Japan
7. Germany
8. Greece
9. Brazil
10. China





# Sweden is innovative, but it's not the strongest association

Sweden is considered to be one of the world's ten most innovative countries. This is shown by both studies that measure the perception of Sweden and indexes that measure how Sweden performs in comparison. Sweden is often seen as innovative, but it is not the first thing that the world associates with Sweden. For example, in the Nation Brands Index, Sweden ranks 10th in the 'Science and technology' category. However, Sweden performs very well in international comparisons in a number of global indexes that measure innovation capacity and maturity.

## #10 Science and technology

Sweden's ranking out of 60 countries in the Nation Brands Index 2023

## #10 Innovative

Sweden's ranking out of 87 countries in the Best Countries 2023 survey

## #14 Leader in innovation

Sweden's ranking out of 121 countries in the Global Soft Power Index 2023



# #2

Sweden's ranking in the  
Global Innovation Index 2023  
out of 132 countries

# Sweden is considered to have a strong tradition of education and a well-educated population

Sweden is largely perceived as a country that invests in education. The Nation Brands Index indicates that a Swedish higher education is considered to provide good qualifications. Sweden, like all countries in the Nordic region, is considered to have a well-educated population and a skilled workforce, which is an important factor in attracting investment. Sweden is also considered to be a prominent nation in research.

## #8 Educational qualifications

Sweden's ranking out of 60 countries in the Nation Brands Index 2023

## #9 Education

Sweden's ranking out of 87 countries in the Best Countries 2023 survey

## #11 Leader in science

Sweden's ranking out of 121 countries in the Global Soft Power Index 2023

Top ten nations in the 'Education and research' category in the Global Soft Power Index 2023. Sweden is in 12th place.

1. United States
2. Japan
3. China
4. Germany
5. Russia
6. United Kingdom
7. South Korea
8. France
9. Canada
10. Israel



# High quality of life is one of Sweden's strongest competitive advantages

According to the International Talent Map 2023 and the Nation Brands Index 2023 reports, quality of life is one of the key drivers of international talent when choosing a country or city.

Sweden is well placed to attract talent based on the world's associations of the country with a high quality of life. At the same time, there is a lot of competition with similar countries.

**#3 Quality of life**  
Sweden's ranking out of 60 countries in the Nation Brands Index 2023

**#4 Appealing lifestyle**  
Sweden's ranking out of 121 countries in the Global Soft Power Index 2023

**#1 Quality of life**  
Sweden's ranking out of 87 countries in the Best Countries 2023 survey

There is fierce competition with similar countries in terms of quality of life. The graph shows each country's ranking out of 121 in the 'Appealing lifestyle' category in the Global Soft Power Index 2023



# Sweden is considered to offer good career opportunities

Career opportunity is another key driver of talent. Sweden is considered to be a country where there are good opportunities to start a career.

According to the Nation Brands Index, Sweden is considered the fourth best country for investments and talent, and according to the Best Countries survey, the ninth best country to invest in.

## #9 A good job market

Sweden's ranking out of 87 countries in the Best Countries 2023 survey

## #6 Work and live

Sweden's ranking out of 60 countries in the Nation Brands Index 2023

## #7 Start a career

Sweden's ranking out of 87 countries in the Best Countries 2023 survey



# #2

Sweden's standing in the OECD's ranking of 38 countries that are best for global talent

# Sweden is seen as inclusive and safe

The Nation Brands Index 2023 showed that Sweden is perceived as very attractive for talent. In addition to a high quality of life and good career opportunities, it is based on the image that Sweden values equality.

Central to attracting talent is also the view that the country is safe, secure and welcoming, something that Sweden is largely considered to be. However, Sweden dropped from sixth to ninth place when respondents were asked if they'd want a Swede as a close friend.

## #7 Welcoming

Sweden's ranking out of 60 countries in the Nation Brands Index 2023

## #4 Tolerant and inclusive

Sweden's ranking out of 121 countries in the Global Soft Power Index 2023

## #4 Safe and secure

Sweden's ranking out of 121 countries in the Global Soft Power Index 2023



# #1

Sweden's ranking in the Nation Brands Index of 60 countries for the 'Equality in society' category

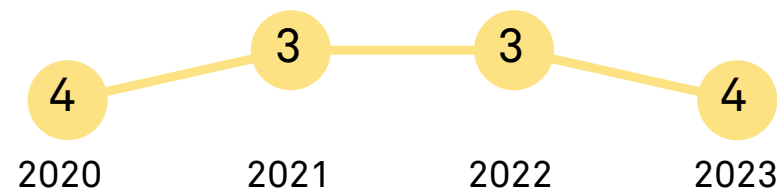
# International indexes

SI continuously monitors a number of international indexes in order to provide an overall picture of how Sweden compares with other countries, starting from areas that are important for the promotion of Sweden.

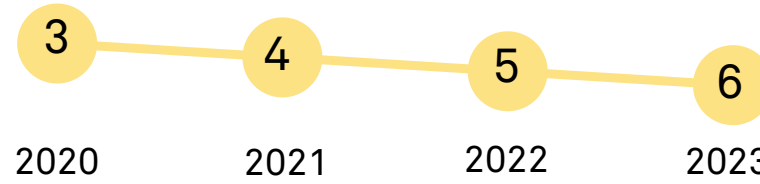
## Society and democracy

The areas of society and democracy are gauged by the World Press Freedom Index and the Corruption Perception Index, which both published 2023 editions. Sweden lost one place in the Press Freedom Index, specifically within the area of 'Security'. In the Corruption Perception Index, Sweden dropped one place from 2022 and had a slight downward trend overall.

World Press Freedom Index (180 countries)



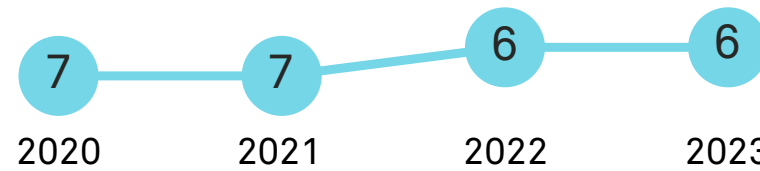
Corruptions Perception Index (180 Countries)



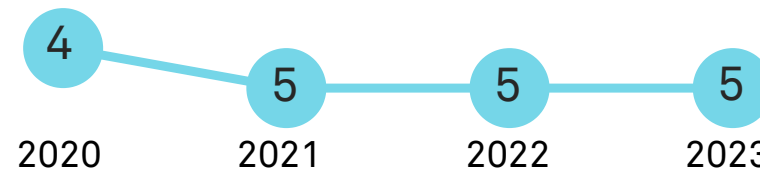
## Equality, development and international contribution

Three out of four indexes covering the areas of equality, development, and international contribution were published in 2023. Sweden maintained the same stable position in them as before.

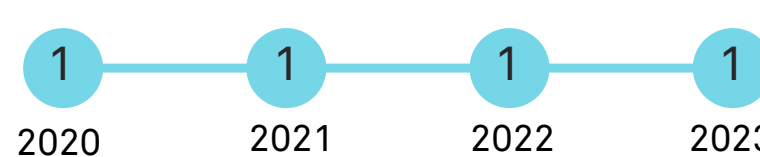
World Happiness Ranking (137–153 countries)



Gender Gap Index (146–153 countries)



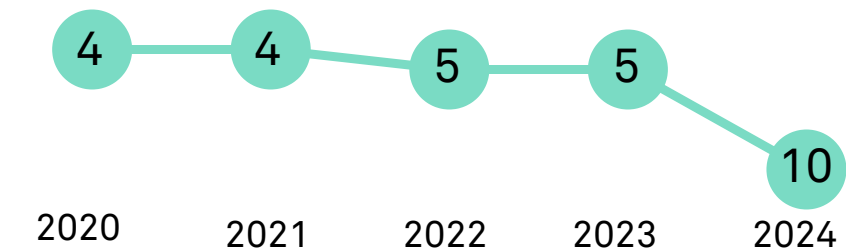
Gender Equality Index (27 countries)



## Climate and sustainability

Within climate and sustainability, three out of four indexes were released in 2023. Sweden maintained a stable position in the Sustainable Development Goals Index and in the Commitment to Development Index. However, the reports stated that Sweden has 'clear challenges ahead' and that Sweden's leadership alongside other countries has been 'shortened'. Sweden ranked fifth place in the Climate Change Performance Index 2023 yet dropped to 10th place in the latest edition (titled 2024 but released in 2023), with the comment: 'Ambitious goals but lack of implementation'.

Climate Change Performance Index (61–63 countries)\*

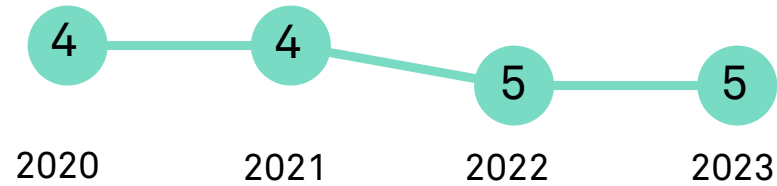


\*No countries are ranked in the first three places in the index. Sweden's ranking in relation to other countries: #1, #1, #2, #2. #7

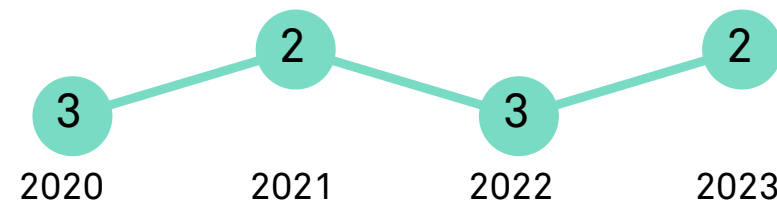
# International indexes

## Climate and sustainability

Commitment To Development Index (40 countries)



Sustainable Development Goals Index (163–166 countries)



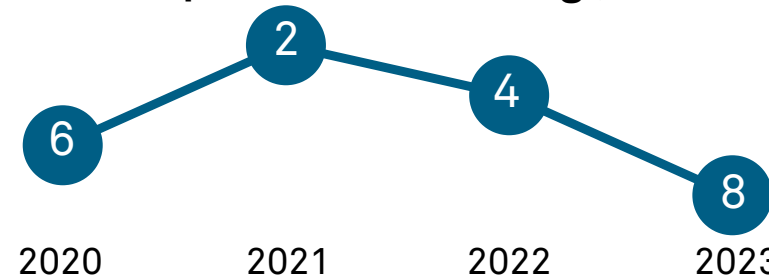
## Innovation, business and competitiveness

Five out of six indexes in this area were published in 2023. Sweden maintained a stable ranking in the Global Innovation Index. Sweden lost first place in the European Innovation Scoreboard to Denmark but still performed strongly and increased its lead compared to the EU average.

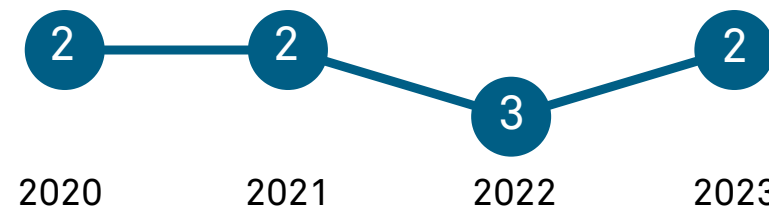
In IMD's World Competitiveness Ranking, Sweden dropped several places in all areas of the index.

Sweden also dropped two places in the Network Readiness Index from the Portuguese Institute and dropped in three out of four areas, yet was still described as 'performing strongly'.

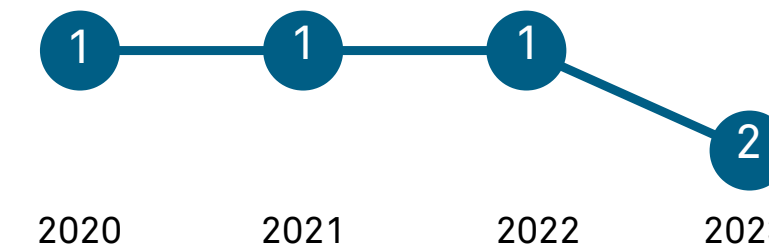
World Competitiveness Ranking (63–64 countries)



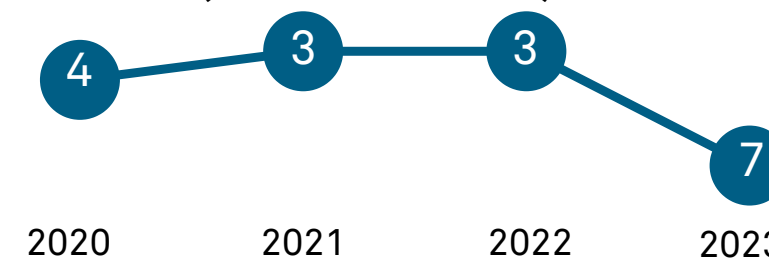
Global Innovation Index (131–132 countries)



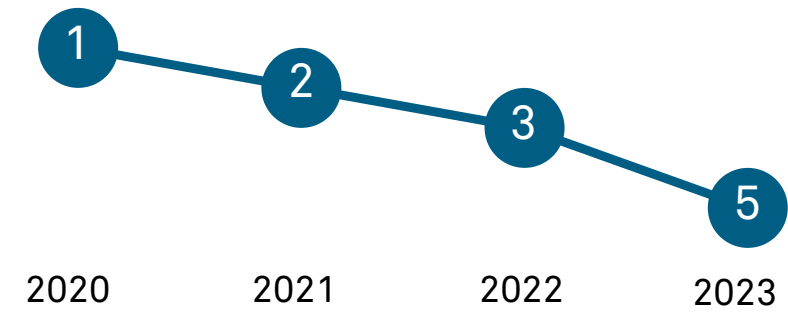
European Innovation Scoreboard (27–28 countries)



World Digital Competitiveness Ranking (131–132 countries)



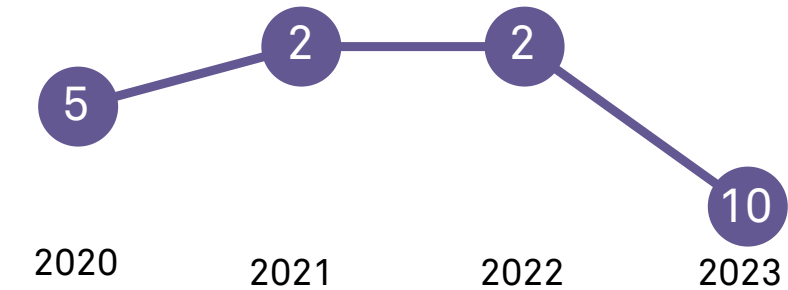
Network Readiness Index (130–134 countries)



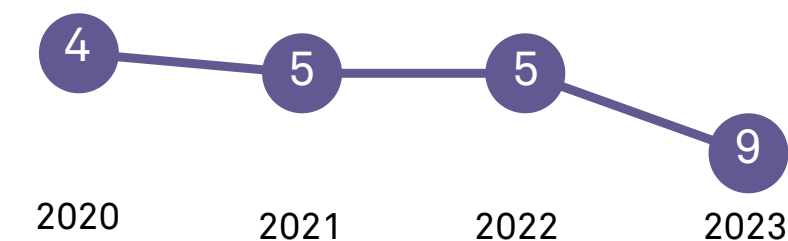
## Talent and work

In the talent and work area, Sweden dropped eight places in IMD's World Talent Ranking and was described as performing 'sluggishly'. Sweden also dropped four places in INSEAD's Global Talent Competitiveness Index, but the report described Sweden as 'continuing to perform well'.

World Talent Ranking (63–64 countries)



Global Talent Competitiveness Index (132–134 countries)



# References and methodology

## Perception indexes

Ipsos Anholt Nation Brands Index (NBI) is conducted by the research firm Ipsos and assesses the strengths of 60 nation brands. The survey was conducted from the end of June to the beginning of August 2023 and is based on questions answered by 60,000 respondents in 20 countries.

The Global Soft Power Index is conducted by Brand Finance and measures various factors that interact to determine how a country's brand is perceived in comparison to other countries. The survey was conducted in 101 countries at the end of 2022 and is based on the opinions of more than 100,000 people in 121 countries.

The Best Countries survey is conducted by U.S. News in collaboration with the WPP company and the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. The study is based on questions answered by over 17,000 people from 36 countries from 17 March to 12 June 2023.

## Studies conducted by the Swedish Institute

The image of Sweden in the MENA Asia study is based on responses from 9,000 respondents in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan. It was conducted in October and November 2023.

## Images

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## Swedish Institute's articles, reports and analyses during 2023 (in Swedish)

*Sverigebilden i MENA-Asien*  
*Positiv syn globalt på Sverige som partner för grön omställning – varierande syn i Asien*  
*Nation Brands Index 2023*  
*Omvärldens reaktioner på koranbränningar i Sverige sommaren 2023*  
*Sveriges dilemma – var går gränsen för yttrandefrihet?*  
*Gängkriminalitet ger uppmärksamhet i internationella medier*  
*Idrottens betydelse för bilden av Sverige*  
*Best countries 2023*  
*Mediebilden av Sveriges EU-ordförandeskap*  
*Bilden av Sverige på västra Balkan*  
*Loreens vinst i Eurovision 2023*  
*Sverige och Estland – en mer positiv syn på varandra*  
*Sverige och Schweiz: En jämförelse*  
*Under den finska valrörelsen: Sverige omnämns i en bredd av frågor*  
*Global Soft Power Index 2023*  
*Koranbränningen 2023*  
*Positiv syn på Sverige i Norden*  
*Sveriges Natoansökan – hur den påverkat bilden av Sverige*



# The image of Sweden abroad 2023

## Annual report from the Swedish Institute

A good reputation is important for international success. The fact that Sweden evokes positive associations in the world is important for several reasons: to attract investment, visitors, students and labour, to gain political influence and to create markets for products and services. In this way, the image of Sweden contributes to the Swedish economy and welfare.

2023 was a year marked by several major events of different sorts. Qur'an burnings and Sweden's path towards NATO membership made headlines internationally, as did Loreen's win in the Eurovision Song Contest, as well as the Swedish national team's bronze medal in the FIFA Women's World Cup.

But what impression did these and other events have on the image of Sweden? Is the image of Sweden changing? The purpose of this annual report is to provide a summary description of how Sweden is perceived abroad and whether the image of Sweden has been affected in any direction.

