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## Summary

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# Central government efforts to adapt the built environment to climate change

## Summary

As the climate has warmed, extreme weather events have become increasingly common. The changing climate leads to a higher risk of climate-related damage caused by events such as torrential rains or storms, at high cost to our societies. By adapting our societies to these changing climate conditions, we reduce our vulnerability to climate-related events. As those responsible for physical planning at local level, municipalities have a central role in climate adaptation efforts.

The Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) has audited whether central government efforts to support municipalities' climate adaptation of the built environment are efficient. The audit covers the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute (SMHI), the Swedish Geotechnical Institute (SGI), the Geological Survey of Sweden (SGU), and all county administrative boards' efforts on climate adaptation of the built environment. We have also audited the Government's governance and follow-up in this area. Central government efforts to support municipalities' climate adaptation of the built environment mainly consist of planning documents, guidance and financing through government grants. Governance is mainly driven by legislation, ordinances, instructions and appropriation directions, as well as allocation of funds for climate adaptation.

The audit shows that central government efforts to support municipalities' climate adaptation of the built environment are partly effective. The Swedish NAO considers that a large proportion of central government efforts for climate adaptation contribute to the municipalities' ability to work effectively on climate adaptation. At the same time, there are some deficiencies in the design and implementation of the efforts. The Swedish NAO also assesses that there is a risk that the current governance of the municipalities is not sufficient for the implementation at local level of actual climate adaptation measures for existing built-up areas.

### **Shortcomings in the Government's follow-up and clarity of governance**

The assessment of the Swedish NAO is that there are shortcomings in the Government's governance of climate adaptation efforts of the built environment. In particular, there is a lack of an overall national follow-up of municipalities' climate adaptation efforts and of whether vulnerability to climate-related risks in municipalities is diminishing.

The Government's governance has been unclear in some respects. The Swedish NAO notes that the Ordinance on Agencies' Climate Change Adaptation is unclear in terms of how broadly the agencies are to work with the tasks in the Ordinance. As a consequence, the scope and level of ambition of agency efforts vary.

Furthermore, for a long time the Government's control of government grants for natural disasters has not been clear. The Swedish NAO assesses that there is a risk that funds from the government grants for natural disasters therefore have not been used for the most important projects, from a national perspective. MSB has awarded grants for measures that have already been implemented, but the Swedish NAO assesses that it is more cost-effective to give priority to funds for measures that may not be realised without support. However, the Government has not yet taken a position on whether the overall aim of the government grants is to provide incentives to municipalities to implement measures, or merely to compensate municipalities. The Swedish NAO also notes that many municipalities, including several of the most vulnerable municipalities, have not applied for grants. Further efforts by the State may therefore be necessary to get more municipalities to apply.

### **Expert agencies' efforts are mainly effective but there are some deficiencies**

The assessment of the Swedish NAO is that responsible expert agencies, in a largely effective way, have created a good foundation for climate adaptation of the built environment, but some deficiencies have been identified.

The Swedish NAO notes that the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning has delayed producing important guides to the municipalities on how they are to assess climate risks in comprehensive plans and detailed development plans. This may have had a negative impact on municipalities' prospects of effective climate adaptation. During the time that these guides have been missing, the county administrative boards have had to devote extra resources to investigating how they should guide the municipalities.

The Swedish NAO assesses that the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning supervisory guidance to the county administrative boards does not fully meet their needs. The audit shows that, despite the guidance, many county administrative boards are not sure what requirements they can place on municipalities' assessment of climate risks in detailed development plans. This means there is a risk that county administrative boards' supervision of municipalities' detailed development plans are not equal across the country.

The audit shows that access to and the quality of certain central government planning documents that are important for assessing climate risks vary between areas in Sweden. For example, mapping of geological conditions for landslides is missing for parts of northern Sweden. The Swedish NAO notes that, as a consequence, some municipalities need to produce, and thereby bear the costs of, more planning documents themselves.

As regards the government grants for natural disasters, in which the Government's governance has been weak, the audit also shows that MSB's priorities concerning which projects should be allocated funds is not transparent. For example, there are no documented assessment criteria. The Swedish NAO considers that this may have contributed to the fact that municipalities refrained from applying for grants.

## **County administrative boards' conditions for supporting municipalities are inadequate**

The assessment of the Swedish NAO is that county administrative boards' support to municipalities' climate adaptation of the built environment has mainly been effective.

The Swedish NAO assesses that the county administrative boards are working actively to support municipalities in the planning process, but notes that the county administrative boards have inadequate conditions for setting equal requirements on municipalities' detailed development plans, since there are no national guidelines and guides on risk assessment.

Finally, the county administrative boards have worked differently on producing planning documents and guides. This means that the amount of support to

municipalities in different counties has varied. The county administrative boards' circumstances in terms of resources for this work vary, which may explain the differences. Another explanation may be that it is not clear from the Government's management which planning documents the county administrative boards should prepare within their remit.

## **Recommendations**

The Swedish NAO makes recommendations to the Government, the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning and MSB.

### **To the Government**

- The Government should ensure that a follow-up system is put in place that can be used to assess whether central and local government efforts lead to a reduced risk and effect of flooding, landslides and erosion. As part of this, the Government should review the possibilities to regulate municipalities' reporting obligation in this system. Such a follow-up should be done on a regular basis and in good time ahead of each revision of the national strategy on climate adaptation.
- The Government should investigate whether, and if so how, governance of the municipalities needs to change so that more concrete climate adaptation measures for existing buildings are implemented.
- The Government should ensure that government grants for natural disasters are given to the most important projects at the national level.
- The Government should task relevant expert agencies with drawing up clear guidelines for the requirements that county administrative boards can place on municipalities in the planning process. This is particularly important for ensuring equivalent supervision of detailed development plans across the country.
- The Government should ensure that it is made clear which planning documents the relevant expert agencies and county administrative boards should prepare and which documentation should be prepared by the municipalities themselves.
- The Government should task an appropriate government agency with following up whether the problems of old detailed development plans that can lead to new construction in risk areas are reduced, in order to assess whether a control measure is needed.

## To the government agencies

- The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning should further develop its supervisory guidance for natural disasters to provide clearer guidance concerning the requirements that county administrative boards can place on the municipalities.
- MSB should produce transparent criteria to assess what measures for the prevention of natural disasters are most important and should thereby be given priority when deciding on grants.