

Please hold, the agencies are going digital –
service for individuals who cannot or do not
want to be digital (RiR 2021:8)

Summary and recommendations

The Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) has audited the ability of 22 government agencies to provide service with good availability and quality for individuals who cannot or do not want to be digital, and how this has changed over the past ten years. The overall conclusion of the audit is that in several cases, the availability of the agencies' service by phone and physical customer service needs to be improved, as does follow-up of how people who do not use digital channels experience the service offered to them. It is important that the agencies are available and offer satisfactory alternatives to digital service, so that the interests of people who cannot or do not want to be digital can also be met in their contact with government agencies.

Audit findings

The audit shows that a number of agencies have unreasonably long waiting times and reduced availability by phone and that only a few of the agencies that are open for physical visits follow up waiting times at their offices. There is no indication that the quality of the service provided in non-digital channels has deteriorated, but most of the agencies could be better at monitoring service quality in non-digital channels and analysing the target groups' need for complementary service.

One third of the audited agencies have unreasonably long phone queues

The audit has assessed three aspects of availability. The agencies' availability by phone is good in most cases, but a number of agencies have unreasonably long waiting times and reduced availability in their staffed telephone customer service. Seven agencies have average waiting times in excess of ten minutes. These are the Swedish Migration Agency, Swedish Public Employment Service, Swedish Pensions Agency, Swedish Tax Agency, Swedish Enforcement Authority, National Land Survey and National Archives. The Swedish Board of Agriculture does not have information on average phone waiting times, which we consider to be a shortcoming. It is also a shortcoming that only a few of the agencies that receive physical office visits follow up waiting times at their offices.

The agencies' availability in terms of opening hours is generally good, but has deteriorated, particularly when it comes to telephone customer service. A number of

agencies could also improve access to service by means of more phone functions, such as callback and alternatives to digital identification.

The quality of service does not appear to have deteriorated, but follow-up is poor

In order to assess service quality, the Swedish NAO has studied the audited agencies' own customer surveys of how their service is perceived. These are insufficient to be able to draw general conclusions as to whether or not the quality of service in the audited agencies' non-digital channels is of a reasonable standard.

Based on available information, with the exception of the Swedish Pensions Agency's phone service, we cannot see any signs that users' experience of service quality in the agencies' non-digital channels has deteriorated in the period audited. In several cases, the agencies' customer surveys of service quality are conducted via a web survey, which means that non-digital users' service experiences are not represented.

Only a few agencies have conducted studies that provide a clear picture of individuals' need for service in alternatives to digital channels. There are important lessons to be learned from these studies to understand when it is not a problem to digitalise agencies' service, and when contacts with individuals are better managed through alternatives to digital service channels.

Digitalisation of agencies' services is fundamentally a positive development. But the need for support alongside the digital channels is likely to remain for the foreseeable future. All agencies have an obligation to be service-oriented and provide the help required in a flexible, simple way so that the interests of private individuals and companies can be met. Ultimately, the Government has overarching responsibility for making an overall assessment and, if necessary, establishing clearer service and availability requirements for the agencies in question.

Recommendations

The Swedish NAO makes the following recommendation to the Government:

- Set clearer requirements for good service in non-digital channels, so that the agencies fulfil their obligation to provide the help required in a flexible, simple way so that the interests of individuals who cannot or do not want to be digital can be met.

The Swedish NAO makes the following recommendations to the government agencies:

- Ensure that follow-ups of service quality also capture feedback from users who cannot or do not want to use digital service channels.
- *The Swedish Migration Agency, Swedish Public Employment Service, Swedish Pensions Agency, Swedish Tax Agency, Swedish Enforcement Authority, National Land Survey and National Archives* – improve the availability of telephone service by ensuring that the average waiting time is reasonably short.

- *Swedish Board of Agriculture* – follow up waiting times for telephone service and ensure that they are reasonable
- *Swedish Migration Agency* – improve the availability of physical service by ensuring that the average waiting time is reasonably short.
- *National Government Service Centre* – together with cooperating agencies, follow up waiting times at the offices and ensure that they are reasonable.