

FAQs about Social Assistance

Short answers to frequently asked questions

For more detailed information, please contact the Social Services (*Socialtjänsten*) in your municipality or read the "Further questions" below.

Who should I contact?

Contact the Social Services office (*Socialtjänsten*) in the municipality where you live. If you are temporarily in another municipality and need help urgently, you can contact that municipality's Social Services.

How do I apply for social assistance?

Call and make an appointment. At your visit, you submit an application form and any details about your financial situation that the case worker needs.

Is the information kept on file by the Social Services?

Yes. The information is normally kept on file for five years, after which it is destroyed.

How is the application processed?

Each application for social assistance is assessed individually. The case worker looks at your financial situation, and also at what you or the Social Services can do to help you become self-supporting.

What can I do if I don't get social assistance?

You can demand a written decision that you can appeal against. Ask the case worker for information on how to appeal.

Can I be forced to repay social assistance?

Yes. This might happen for example if the assistance is some kind of advance payment or if you have received too much money by mistake.

What can I receive social assistance for?

You can receive assistance for your upkeep and other items that you need to have a reasonable standard of living.

Further questions

Who should I contact for information?

If you have questions, please contact the Social Services (*Socialtjänsten*) in the municipality where you live. The Social Services are responsible for administering social assistance under the Swedish Social Services Act ([brochure](#)).

You can also contact the County Administrative Board (*Länsstyrelsen*), which is the supervisory authority, i.e. it monitors the work of the Social Services in the county's municipalities. You can also contact the County Administrative Board if you have a complaint about how the Social Services have treated you or dealt with your case. However, if you have a complaint, try raising it with the Social Services first.

The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen*) does not review, or give advice on, individual social assistance cases. We are a central government agency that works on overall issues such as follow-up, development, knowledge dissemination and coordination. You will find general information about social assistance in our general advice (*allmänna råd* (SOSFS 2003:5)) on social assistance and in our handbook (*handbok*) on social assistance.

How do I apply for social assistance?

Who should I contact?

Contact the Social Services in your municipality and make an appointment. The Social Services will usually want to know something right away about why you are calling. You must state your name and address. The Social Services will usually send you some written information, including details of what to bring with you to your appointment. Often, you will also receive an application form in advance, which you should fill in and bring with you.

Remember to say whether you will need an interpreter.

What information do I need to provide?

An assessment on social assistance is voluntary and cannot be performed without your consent. You can ask the Social Services to stop the assessment at any time. However, if you want a decision that is based on a thorough assessment, you must submit information to the Social Services. This information may include details about your housing and family situation, as well as all financial details that are important in the processing of your application, such as income, assets and expenses.

What happens to the information that I submit to the Social Services?

The Social Services are obliged to write down (document) the information that is important in processing your application. For example, the documentation must state what came to light when the case worker checked information with other government agencies and authorities, and what decisions were made. You must give your consent to the case worker's contacting other government agencies and authorities; this is usually done on the application form.

The documentation must be correct and neutral and is not allowed to include information that may feel offensive. The Social Services are only allowed to document information that is relevant for their assessment and decision. You are entitled to read what has been written about you and are also entitled to have a written notation inserted if you think that an item of information is wrong, or if you have a different opinion. The documentation is normally kept on file for five years, after which it is destroyed.

The information you submit to the Social Services is confidential; in other words, it cannot be shared with anyone else. There are exceptions to this however; for example, in certain cases when the police request it during a criminal investigation.

What happens if I have provided incorrect information?

You will be forced to repay any social assistance that you have received on the basis of incorrect information. If you have intentionally deceived the Social Services, this is regarded as suspected fraud and may be reported to the police.

What do I need to bring with me to an appointment with the Social Services?

You must bring identification with you that shows who you are, and a tenancy agreement, rent invoice or other document that shows where you live and how much you pay for your housing. To provide an overview of your financial situation, you can bring a copy of the appendix to your latest tax return. If you have any income, you should bring salary statements and notification slips for payment of e.g. pension, sickness benefit, parental allowance, maintenance support or housing benefit for the past 2–3 months. You can also bring other documents with you that you think may help the case worker get an idea of your financial situation.

When you apply for social assistance for purposes other than upkeep, you will usually have to show what the item(s) cost by bringing receipts, written quotations or similar documents. This applies to social assistance for things such as medical care, medicine, dental care, spectacles, furniture or other household items and removal expenses. If you are unemployed, you must bring your stamped visiting card from the employment office (*Arbetsförmedlingen*) or other documents that show that you are trying to find a job. If you are on sick leave you must bring a doctor's certificate with you.

Who can receive social assistance?

What qualifies me for social assistance?

Social assistance is intended to act as a last-resort safety net for people who have temporary financial problems. You are the one with primary responsibility for sorting out your own situation. The Social Services can demand, for example, that you look for a job and agree to take part in the municipality's or employment office's programmes or measures for the unemployed.

The Social Services assess each application individually. As a rule, you are not entitled to social assistance if you have money in the bank or other assets. In other words, you must totally lack financial resources of your own to be entitled to assistance. You must also first apply for any general benefits and compensation to which you may be entitled such as sickness benefit, parental allowance, housing benefit and maintenance support.

Can I get urgent help?

Yes, if you otherwise risk ending up in an emergency situation. There is no precise definition of an emergency situation. The Social Services will assess the situation in each individual case.

What applies if I am unemployed?

You must have registered with the employment office and be actively looking for a job. You must also show that you are available for work by being prepared to accept the jobs or employability measures that you are offered. Employability measures may consist of employability training, work experience, work rehabilitation measures and Swedish language classes for immigrants (SFI). Measures provided by the municipality may also be classed as employability measures.

The primary requirement is that you look for, and accept, a suitable full-time job. If you cannot find a full-time job directly, you must apply for and accept a suitable part-time job in the meantime. You must also be prepared to apply for jobs outside the professional field or geographical area in which you have previously worked.

What applies if I am ill?

As a rule, the Social Services require that you are on sick leave and can show a doctor's certificate if you cannot work or look for a job due to illness. If your sick leave becomes long-term, the Social Services can also demand to see your doctor's rehabilitation plan. It is also possible that the Social Services will want to contact your doctor, the Social Insurance Office and the employment office to find out what help you need.

What applies if I am studying?

The Social Services do not usually grant social assistance to students during term time. You are assumed to be able to manage on study allowance or other study assistance. The alternative for students who cannot manage on study allowance is usually to get a job. If there are special reasons, the Social Services may make an exception; for example, if you find yourself in a situation that you did not expect.

Study allowances are calculated according to the length of the term, and the study allowance notice states how long the money is supposed to last. During breaks in studies the same requirements apply as for other unemployed people. If you have actively looked for summer jobs but have not succeeded, you may be entitled to social assistance if you meet other requirements. (See also the question about young unemployed people.)

What applies if I am young and unemployed?

The same requirements apply as for other unemployed people (see the question about unemployed people). The Social Services can also set a special requirement on young unemployed people that they are to take part in work experience or other knowledge-building activities. This applies to

- young people under 25 years old,
- people over 25 with a special need of knowledge-building activities and
- students who need social assistance during a break from their studies.

If students apply for social assistance during breaks in their studies, the Social Services can require them to take part in some sort of work experience, even if it is not necessary for their studies.

The Social Services can reject an application for social assistance if you turn down practical experience or other knowledge-building activities without an acceptable reason. In such a situation, the Social Services may also reduce the level of social assistance.

What applies if I am young and have dropped out of upper secondary school?

If you are under 18, your parents have a duty to support you. If you have turned 18, you can apply for social assistance and will have to demonstrate to the Social Services that you are looking for work. The Social Services may require you to take part in work experience or other knowledge-building activities (see the question on young unemployed).

The Social Services cannot demand that you start upper secondary again to be entitled to social assistance.

What applies if I am young and want to move out of the family home?

Under the law, parents have a duty to support their children until their 18th birthday. If you are still at school (upper secondary) when you turn 18, this obligation is extended. It then applies until you have left school, but not after your 21st birthday.

This means that young people aged 18–20 who have left school can apply for social assistance on their own behalf. Young people have no automatic right to assistance with the cost of their own home however. Young people who want to move out of the family home can only receive assistance with their housing costs when there are strong reasons for the move, such as health problems. The usual assumption is that young people will not move out until they can pay for their home themselves.

What can I receive social assistance for?

What is social assistance?

Social assistance is financial support under the Social Services Act. You can receive support for your upkeep and for other items that you need to have a reasonable standard of living.

Help with your upkeep is called *income support* and consists of a standard (the national standard) plus reasonable costs for other common needs such as housing and household electricity.

Items not included in income support are *other living expenses*. These are things that are not part of income support but which are necessary (see also the question about other assistance than help with upkeep).

What does income support consist of?

The national standard includes expenses for food, clothes and shoes, leisure and play, health and hygiene, insurance of children and young people, consumables, and a daily newspaper, telephone and TV licence fee. If there are special reasons, the Social Services can decide in individual cases to calculate costs at a higher or lower level than the national standard. The national standard is based on calculations from the National Council for Consumer Affairs.

Income support also includes *reasonable expenses* for housing, household electricity, work-related travel, home contents insurance and membership fees for a trade union and unemployment benefit fund. What is calculated for these needs is assessed individually, but the usual procedure is to count your actual expenses if they are reasonable. "Reasonable expenses" means costs at a plausible level.

What is the national standard to cover?

Food: The calculation is based on a four-week menu with common, healthy dishes for breakfast, lunch, dinner and a snack. Both fresh and processed food are included, but things like sweets, snacks or wine are not. The cost for a one-person household is somewhat higher, because they buy smaller packs and have more waste.

Clothes and shoes: Usual clothes and shoes for various seasons, types of weather and situation. The cost of shoe repairs, dry cleaning and accessories such as a bag, watch and umbrella are also included.

Leisure and play: Common leisure activities, outdoors and indoors, including exercise and culture. This includes for example membership in an association/sports club, going to the cinema/renting a video, listening to music, reading books, cycling, swimming and going skiing or skating. For younger children, things like toys and games are also included. More expensive leisure interests, holidays, pets and the cost of computer and TV games are not included.

Health and hygiene: Personal hygiene items such as soap, toothpaste, a toothbrush and skin cream. Costs for haircuts, shaving apparatus and sanitary protection are included. The cost of nappies is included for children up to the age of three. Health and medical products, visits to the doctor and dentist, and medicines, are not included (see also the question on other assistance than help with upkeep).

Insurance for children and young people: Group insurance covering illness and accidents.

Consumables: Items that are necessary to look after the home and clothes and shoes, such as washing, dishwashing and cleaning agents, vacuum cleaner bags, light bulbs and shoe polish. Toilet and kitchen rolls, paper napkins, plastic film and freezer bags, tape etc. are also included.

Daily newspaper, telephone, TV licence etc: A subscription to a daily newspaper, the TV licence fee and the cost of a phone, including some costs for a mobile phone. The cost of writing paper, envelopes, postcards and stamps is also included. Costs for cable TV, the Internet and a computer are not included.

How are the sums in the national standard determined?

The national standard is set each year by the government. The amounts in the standard are based on calculations from the National Council for Consumer Affairs, and are to represent a normal level of consumption – neither the minimum nor luxury. The amounts are divided into various types of household and age groups.

The National Board of Health and Welfare provides information every year in an Information Sheet (Meddelandeblad) about the amounts in the national standard.

Can I get more assistance if my costs are higher than those of the national standard?

Yes. The Social Services may in some cases use a higher standard. The Social Services will make such an increase in individual cases and after individual assessment. Examples of situations in which the standard can be raised are if you need to eat more expensive food or are in extra need of telephone or leisure activities. You must be able to demonstrate to the Social Services that your needs entail higher costs than those included in the standard.

The opposite also applies, i.e. that the Social Services may in individual cases grant a lower standard if there are particular reasons for this.

Can I get social assistance with my housing costs even if I live in my own house or tenant-owner's apartment?

Yes. What is decisive is that the cost is at a reasonable level. The National Board of Health and Welfare recommends that the cost of living in a house should include interest payments and necessary running costs such as costs for water, heating, refuse collection, property insurance and leasehold rent. The cost of living in a tenant-owner's apartment includes interest payments and the monthly charge. Help is not usually provided to repay mortgages.

What are reasonable housing costs?

There are no clear and simple rules for what are reasonable housing costs. According to the government, the Social Services must make an assessment of what is reasonable in each individual case and compare with what someone on a low income can afford.

The National Board of Health and Welfare recommends that the Social Services make their assessment with reference to the actual cost of the housing and the need for this particular house. The cost should be compared with rent in publicly-owned housing or other large housing companies where you live, or in the nearest urban area. The recommendation is based on the idea that this is a type of housing that those on low incomes can normally afford.

What rules apply to sub-let housing?

In principle, the same rules as for those who have their own tenancy agreement. You must be able to prove that you live at the address. You should be registered as resident at that address and be able to show a tenancy agreement. The agreement should contain the information that the Social Services needs to be able to assess whether the rent is reasonable. This applies e.g. to the size and standard of the home, whether it is furnished or not, and what the rent includes. What have you agreed about e.g. household electricity, and the phone? In the same way as with first-hand contracts, the housing situation in the town or the municipality can influence what is considered a reasonable rent. The Social Services can also, in its assessment, take into account your need of a home and your chances of finding another home.

If you are entitled to housing benefit, the Social Services may demand that you have a tenancy agreement that entitles you to housing benefit.

Can I receive other assistance than help with upkeep?

Yes. After individual assessment, you can receive social assistance for other living expenses. In the general guidelines on social assistance, the National Board of Health and Welfare brings up some examples of needs that you might have in addition to your upkeep. These are costs and fees for e.g.

- medical care,
- dental care,
- glasses,
- equipment for the home,
- moving house,
- equipment for a baby,
- travel to see your children,
- municipal service,
- application and brokerage charges,
- recreation and
- funerals.

This list only provides some examples and it is possible to receive social assistance for other things too, if you can show that you need them. If there are special reasons, you can in exceptional cases also get help with debts.

With respect to medical care and medicine, social assistance is normally granted for items that qualify for the health care system's payment ceiling. The cost of dental care should usually have been approved by the Social Services before treatment begins, with the exception of emergency dental care. If the treatment is expensive, the Social Services may require that the proposed treatment be assessed by another dentist.

There is no general right for people who get their own home to receive assistance for furniture etc. There must be special reasons for this. It might be the case for example that you have to move because you are in an emergency or threatening situation. You may also be a young person but forced to move out of your home to be able to find a reasonable situation. "Travel to see your children" means trips for parents or children to another place to exercise visitation rights. Recreation means e.g. travel costs or the cost of renting a cottage.

For funerals, the rule is that possible assets of the estate are to be used in the first hand to pay for the funeral. The funeral expenses are charged to the estate first, before e.g. unpaid rent, electricity, telephone or suchlike. If the Social Services provide assistance, it is to be sufficient for a dignified funeral. The Social Services are to take the wishes of the deceased and surviving relatives into account to a reasonable extent.

Can I borrow money?

No, but in certain cases you can receive assistance which is to be repaid – see the question on repayment.

How is social assistance calculated?

How is income support calculated?

Income support is usually calculated on a monthly basis.

First, it is determined who is a member of the *household*. In the Social Services' calculations, married couples, cohabiting and registered partners are normally included in the same household and regarded as having shared finances. After this, the national standard is calculated for the household. This is obtained by adding up the *personal expenses* of everyone in the household plus the *joint household expenses*.

By adding up the national standard and any monthly expenses for housing, household electricity, work-related travel, home contents insurance and membership in a trade union and unemployment benefit fund, we get a figure for what the household needs overall to manage for a month. These costs are to be reasonable. The household's need of income support is obtained by subtracting any income that the household has. The method of calculation can be described as follows:

Personal expenses
+ joint household expenses
+ reasonable expenses
- income
= need of income support.

Why do different people and households receive different amounts of income support?

Income support is assessed on an individual basis, as is other social assistance. This means among other things that it is calculated on the basis of what each person needs. An obvious example is that a family with children receives more in income support because it has larger monthly expenses than a single person does. But it also means that two people in the same situation can receive different amounts since the assessment of the Social Services is that their needs differ.

How do income and assets affect what social assistance I receive?

When the Social Services are calculating whether a household is entitled to social assistance, they usually take the net income (income after tax) of all members of the household into account. This applies for example to salary or severance pay, sickness benefit, parental benefit, unemployment benefit, pension, maintenance support, child benefit or housing benefit. This normally also applies to e.g. tax refunds, damages payments and payouts from insurance companies.

If you have money in the bank, shares or another asset that is easily realised, you usually have to use it in the first hand. If your assets are more difficult to realise, such as a house or a tenant-owner's apartment, you can receive social assistance during a period in which you sell the asset or solve your financial problems in another way.

Can I receive social assistance if I have a car?

A car is often an asset that can be sold and bring in income, regardless of whether or not it is used. The Social Services will assess in each case however whether the car is to count as an asset. They will look at the value of the car, for example, and how long you need social assistance for. If your need of social assistance is temporary and you need the car in your work, the Social Services may accept that you keep it. The same applies if the car is so old that it will hardly bring in any income if it is sold.

The National Board of Health and Welfare recommends that running costs for the car (petrol, repairs etc.) be counted into your monthly financial needs if you e.g. need the car for your work or to get to work. In other events, you will have to meet these costs in another way.

Can I receive social assistance if I have a holiday cottage?

A holiday cottage is an asset that can be sold and bring in income. A condition is that the sale will yield a surplus, i.e. that there will be money left when you have paid off any loans on the house. Usually, the Social Services will accept that you may have a holiday cottage if you only need social assistance for a short period, i.e. no more than four months.

Can I receive social assistance if I have my own house or tenant-owner's apartment?

In principle, a house or tenant-owner's apartment is an asset that can be sold and which can therefore affect your right to social assistance. The National Board of Health and Welfare recommends that the house or tenant-owner's apartment is only counted as an asset if you have a long-term need of social assistance, meaning longer than four months. A condition for sale is that there will be a surplus, i.e. that there will be money left when you have paid off any loans on the house.

The Social Services must always make an assessment in the individual case. There may be reasons why you should not sell your home. Such reasons may be that it is difficult to find a new home, that the house is difficult to sell or that the move will in some way be unsuitable for you or your family. If you are still forced to sell the house or tenant-owner's apartment, the National Board of Health and Welfare recommends that you are given a reasonable time to do so, which is at least four months.

Can I be forced to repay social assistance?

Can I be forced to repay social assistance?

Yes. According to the rules in the Social Services Act, the Social Services can in some cases demand repayment of money that has been paid. This applies

- if the assistance was an advance payment on e.g. payment of salary, sickness benefit, pension or housing benefit,
- if the person who received the assistance has become involved in labour dispute such as a strike,
- if the person who received the assistance has money, but is temporarily unable to access it due to labour dispute, computer problems etc., or
- if the assistance was wrongly paid due to a mistake or incorrect information. This also applies if it was the Social Services that made the mistake and paid too much. It is therefore important to check payments from the Social Services, so that you do not become liable for repayment.

For the Social Services to be able to demand repayment of the money, a written decision is necessary. It is to show why the money is to be repaid and you are to be given a copy of the decision.

Alongside the regulations in the Social Services Act, the Social Services are entitled to reclaim money under the Public Insurance Act

- if the social assistance was an advance on a retroactive payment of a benefit that you had applied for from the Social Insurance Office. This might be e.g. a pension, activity compensation, sickness benefit, sickness allowance, housing benefit or maintenance support.

In these cases, the Social Services will demand the return of the money directly from the Social Insurance Office.

What can I do if the Social Services say I'm not entitled to social assistance?

What can I do if the Social Services say I'm not entitled to social assistance?

You are always entitled to submit an application and have it considered. The Social Services are obliged to help you with your application if necessary. You are also entitled to a written decision that you can appeal.

Can I appeal the decision of the Social Services?

Yes, you can appeal if you are not satisfied with the decision. This is possible even if only part of your application has been rejected. However, you must appeal within three weeks of having received the decision.

An appeal means that a court will consider whether the decision of the Social Services was correct. The court can change the decision, and the Social Services must comply with the court's decision. If you are still dissatisfied with the decision of the County Administrative Court, you can go on to appeal to the Administrative Court of Appeal and finally to the Supreme Administrative Court. In such cases, the court decides whether it is to consider the appeal (known as leave to appeal).

The Social Services must inform you about how everything works, and help you if you need help.

How do I appeal?

An appeal is to be in writing. No special form is needed and the appeal can be very simple. The important thing is that you describe what decision you are appealing and what you think is wrong. If you need help with your appeal, the Social Services are obliged to provide you with it.

Send the appeal to the Social Services office that has made the decision in your case. It must have been received no later than three weeks after you received the decision.