



Sweden  
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# **BUSINESS CLIMATE SURVEY FOR SWEDISH COMPANIES IN THE NETHERLANDS 2025**

A REPORT FROM TEAM SWEDEN IN THE NETHERLANDS

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# FOREWORD

The 2025 Business Climate Survey is conducted at a time when the Dutch business environment is shaped by cautious optimism. The current Dutch economy presents a mixed picture as it navigates both global and domestic uncertainties. While GDP is showing signs of growth, inflationary pressures remain persistent, influencing business strategies. In response, many companies are adopting a cautious approach, balancing growth ambitions with the need for stability. Ongoing economic challenges, coupled with regulatory and geopolitical pressures, are prompting businesses to adjust to a more unpredictable market environment.

In July 2024, a new independent prime minister was sworn in to lead a four-party coalition consisting of the Party for Freedom (PVV), the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), New Social Contract (NSC), and the Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB). While the coalition agreement marked a turning point after months of uncertainty, negotiations on key policy issues are expected to continue in 2025, maintaining a degree of political caution.

Swedish companies continue to see the Netherlands as a key market, but concerns about the broader business climate are becoming more pronounced. Despite relatively stable levels of business activity, a growing number of companies report frustration with factors such as regulatory complexity, inconsistent implementation of rules, and a perceived lack of long-term policy clarity. Respondents also highlight challenges related to the availability of skilled talent and strains on energy infrastructure. While the Netherlands continues to hold a strong position internationally, addressing these structural issues will be crucial for sustaining its competitiveness and appeal in the years ahead.

Political and economic ties between Sweden and the Netherlands remain strong, reinforced not least by a high degree of like-mindedness on key EU issues. The two countries share common positions on economic and trade policy, including support for free trade and deeper harmonisation of the internal market. The Netherlands has also been a firm advocate of a strong European foreign and security policy and actively participates in the EU's defence and security cooperation frameworks, including PESCO. Economically, the Netherlands maintained its position as Sweden's sixth-largest trading partner in 2024, with Swedish exports exceeding 105 billion SEK. According to a Team Sweden estimate, around 200 Swedish subsidiaries are currently active in the Dutch market. These companies employ more than 735,000 people and generate a combined turnover of over 350 billion EUR. As this figure includes only wholly owned subsidiaries, the actual depth of business ties is likely even greater.

The Netherlands continues to offer a dynamic base for a wide range of Swedish companies. As one of Europe's most interconnected and innovation-driven economies, the country remains an important partner in Sweden's international business landscape. This 2025 Business Climate Survey captures the voices and experiences of Swedish business leaders operating in the Netherlands. We extend our sincere gratitude to all participants for sharing their insights, which contribute to our shared efforts in deepening the strong and forward-looking relationship between Sweden and the Netherlands.



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# 64 respondents in the Netherlands

## Current business climate

# 53%

of Swedish companies say the business climate is good/very good

## Industry turnover

# 73%

of Swedish companies expect their industry turnover to increase

## Future investments

# 53%

of Swedish companies plan to increase their investments slightly or significantly in the next 12 months

## Globally valued success factors

1. Sustainability
2. Collab-/feedback from clients
3. Sales competence

## Brand Sweden

# 83%

of Swedish companies abroad consider Brand Sweden beneficial for business

## Local conditions with high satisfaction

1. Personal safety
2. Physical infrastructure
3. Distributors

## Local conditions with least satisfaction

1. Licences
2. Labour market
3. Specialists

## Environmental considerations

# 15%

of respondents believe the environment is a considerable factor in their customers' purchasing decisions

## Corruption

- The Netherlands ranked eighth globally in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2024
- Only two per cent report having been exposed to corruption

## Human rights violation and labour rights abuse

- No respondents report having perceived violations in human and labour rights



# ABOUT THE SURVEY

## Five years of insights into the Dutch market

The Business Climate Survey was first launched in 2020 as a joint global initiative by Team Sweden. The survey aims to capture insights into the challenges and opportunities companies encounter in local business environments. Since its inception, the survey has grown into a vital tool for understanding how Swedish companies navigate an increasingly complex and competitive global landscape. This year, the survey was conducted across 40 markets globally. The findings presented in the Business Climate Survey offer valuable perspectives on the conditions shaping business climates for Swedish enterprises around the world.

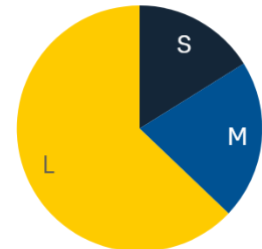
In the Netherlands, 2025 marks the fifth consecutive year of conducting the survey. This edition was developed through a collaborative effort between Business Sweden, the Swedish Embassy in the Netherlands, and the Swedish Chamber of Commerce, which together constitute Team Sweden in the Netherlands. The report explores the economic outlook and market conditions based on the responses gathered from participating companies. The survey consists of questions about success factors for competing in the Dutch market as well as the challenges companies have encountered. Important topics examined in this year's report are, among others, sustainability, labour market conditions, and the impact of the political climate on business operations.

This year, the survey was distributed to a selective sample of 116 Swedish companies operating in the Netherlands. Data collection took place between February 3<sup>rd</sup> and March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025, resulting in 64 completed responses. Although the sample size was smaller than last year's, when the survey was sent to 155 companies, the response rate this year is significantly higher in both absolute and relative terms. This is a positive indicator which reflects a willingness of Swedish companies to contribute to the mapping of the Dutch business climate.

Most participating companies represent mature and large enterprises with more than 1,000 global employees, while the remaining responses were relatively evenly split between medium-sized and small enterprises. Companies were grouped into three overarching sectors: professional services, industrial, and consumer. The largest share – 45 per cent of respondents – represent the professional services sector, followed by companies in the industrial and consumer segments. Within these broad categories, companies operate in diverse areas such as IT and electronics, construction, automotive, retail, and healthcare.

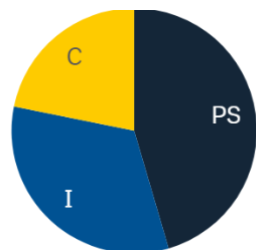
It is important to note that the analysis presented in this report is based primarily on the responses of the participating companies, supplemented by qualitative interviews with 10 companies to provide expert insights and deeper analysis. As such, the report does not claim to be fully representative of the entire Dutch market or all Swedish enterprises operating in the Netherlands.

### SIZE OF COMPANIES



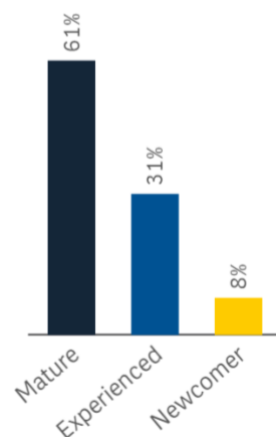
NOTE: Global employees.  
Large >1000. Medium 250-1000. Small 0-249

### MAIN INDUSTRY



NOTE: Industrial 33%.  
Professional services the %.  
Consumer 22%

### AGE OF COMPANIES



NOTE: Mature (-2003).  
Experienced (2004-2019).  
Newcomer (2020-)

# ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

## From shifting winds to steady currents

The Netherlands has a strong legacy of innovation and has long been a cornerstone of international trade. This legacy translates to various tangible advantages for businesses, such as access to global markets, a skilled and multilingual workforce, and world-class infrastructure. As pointed out by a representative for the automotive sector, “The Dutch are opportunistic, entrepreneurial, and as traders, they know how to get ahead of things.” These traits contribute to a dynamic business culture where companies can quickly adapt and pursue new opportunities.

Strategically located, the Netherlands hosts major hubs like Rotterdam and Amsterdam, which provide direct access to the most lucrative markets in Europe. These gateways make the country an attractive base for international expansion. The Dutch market, already home to many well-established Swedish brands, continues to attract Swedish companies thanks to its extensive distribution networks, advanced digital and physical infrastructure, and strong financial system.

International rankings consistently place the Netherlands among the world’s top performers for competitiveness, innovation, and sustainability. Their success is driven by a unique combination of utilising their strategic location and trade experience with a highly skilled and educated workforce. As the top non-native English-speaking country and a leader in digital literacy, the Netherlands offers a smooth and accessible entry point for Swedish businesses who are looking to expand internationally.

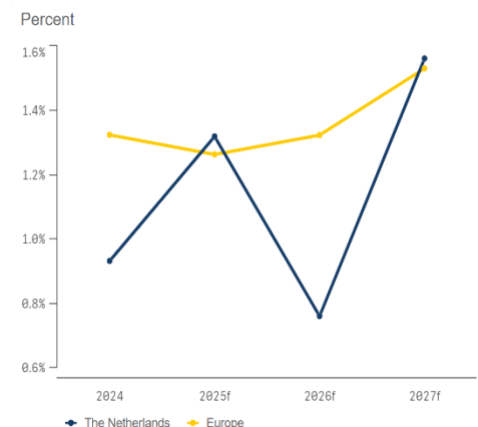
Last year, we reported on the potentially shifting winds in the Dutch business climate as economic recovery slowed and inflation rose in 2023. Despite these concerns, GDP growth was stronger than expected in 2024, with an average of 0.9 per cent, compared to the previous estimate of 0.5 per cent. The growth was largely driven by household consumption, government spending, and strong net exports. Growth is expected to continue, with this year’s projection being at 1.4 per cent. However, inflation remains high, reaching 3.5 per cent in February 2025. While inflationary pressures persist, the stronger-than-expected GDP figures suggest a more resilient economy. Still, survey responses indicate a cautious outlook: businesses are neither notably optimistic nor pessimistic but increasingly adopt a neutral stance toward the current business climate.

The uncertainty in current political decision-making seems to partially explain the cautious approach of respondents of this survey. Following political turmoil after the 2023 elections and the collapse of the governing coalition, a new coalition took office in July 2024. The new budget presented cuts in aid, migration, and education while spending has been expanded for, among other things, nuclear energy. Negotiations will be held this spring between coalition partners over key unresolved issues, including the defence budget, aid to Ukraine, and climate spending. The outcome of these talks will shape the economic playing field ahead and affect energy prices, taxation, and regulatory conditions.

Another challenge companies face in the Netherlands is finding skilled labour. The Netherlands has one of Europe’s lowest unemployment rates, and although the unemployment rate increased for the first time in five months in January this year, reaching 3.8 per cent, the labour market remains tight. Many companies struggle to find the most competent people to meet their needs.

To fully capitalise on the opportunities in the Dutch market and continue thriving, these issues must be addressed with clarity. Despite these hurdles, responses indicate that the Netherlands continues to offer a strong and attractive business environment for Swedish companies.

### PROJECTED GDP GROWTH



NOTE: Constant prices.  
SOURCE: Oxford Economics 11 March

## Swedish companies adapt to tighter margins – remain resilient but cautious

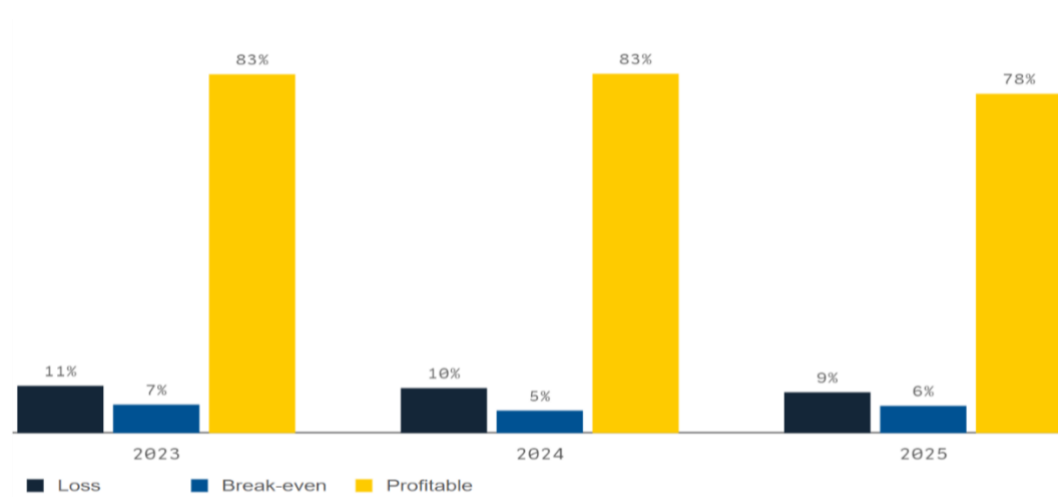
The 2025 survey shows that the majority of the companies remain profitable. However, this year's responses indicate a slight decline in overall profitability compared to the previous year, continuing a gradual downward trend observed in recent years. At the same time, the share of companies reporting losses has also decreased slightly over time. The results suggest a narrowing of profit margins rather than a shift into negative performance. This trend may be attributed to rising costs of labour, as well as a recently turbulent political climate which motivates companies to focus on resilience and stability rather than increasing profits this year.

Company size played a role in financial performance. Large companies account for the highest proportion of profitable businesses, followed by medium-sized companies. In contrast, small firms make up the largest share of those reporting break-even results, while medium-sized companies are the most likely to report losses. These patterns could partially be explained by the fact that large enterprises benefit from economies of scale and greater resource efficiency which enables them to better adapt to market fluctuations. Medium-sized companies, on the other hand, may be navigating the challenges of scaling up and associated “growing pains” that can temporarily impact profitability. Meanwhile, small firms tend to take a more cautious approach, which may explain why they are more likely to break even than incur losses.

Performance has also varied across industries. With households having increased real incomes and stronger purchasing power, the consumer sector is the most profitable, followed by the industrial sector. In contrast, companies offering professional services report the highest share of losses. Businesses see increasing costs and, in times of cautionary measures, often choose to focus on their core business rather than innovating. This is also reflected in lower R&D expenditure among this year's respondents.

To conclude, a large majority of respondents report profitability in the Dutch market. Nevertheless, the share of companies reporting profitability has decreased slightly in the past years. However, as mentioned earlier, this does not necessarily point to a downturn but is more likely to have tighter margins and a more cautious business environment. The findings underscore the importance of monitoring the evolving market conditions to understand what factors are influencing growth strategies and financial performance.

### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR COMPANY'S FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE IN THE NETHERLANDS IN THE PAST YEAR?



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 64. "Don't know/Not applicable" responses are included but not shown in this figure.

SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.

## Forecasted growth fuels business confidence

The data reflects a positive outlook for Swedish companies regarding future turnover. More than 70 per cent of companies anticipate growth, a trend that has been consistent for the past three years. This optimism is further underscored by a drop in the number of companies expecting a decline in turnover, falling from 12 per cent last year to just five per cent this year. The results suggest growing confidence in companies' ability to remain resilient and adapt amid recent political and economic turmoil. However, there is a slight rise in the number of companies expecting no growth in turnover, with large companies making up the majority of this group – indicating a more neutral outlook among some businesses despite overall optimism.

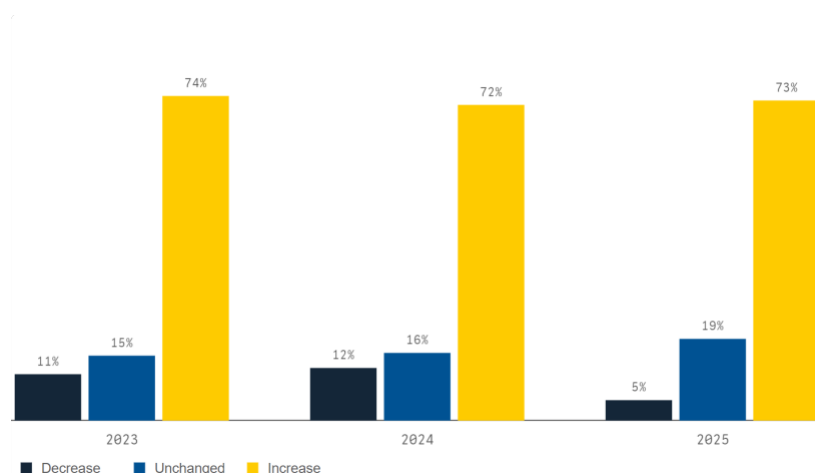
In 2024, newcomers were the group that most frequently reported losses. However, they remain optimistic about their future turnover as all newcomer companies anticipate either slight or significant increases in turnover moving forward. Early-stage losses are often linked to initial investment and setup costs. The expectation of improved turnover this year suggests that these companies still view the Dutch market as a strong opportunity for strategic growth.

Economic forecasts for 2025 and 2026 suggest moderate growth, driven in part by rising real wages as inflation begins to ease while nominal wages remain elevated. Increasing purchasing power is expected to boost household spending – an important factor influencing sector-specific business expectations.

Respondents within the consumer sector appear most optimistic, with the highest proportion of companies anticipating increased profits. This outlook likely reflects stronger consumer demand linked to improved household finances. Interestingly, despite having reported the highest share of losses in recent years, the professional services sector ranks just behind companies in the consumer sector in terms of profit expectations. This may be due to anticipated growth in business investment, as increased consumer activity drives demand across supply chains, including for advisory, IT, and consulting services.

However, despite this optimistic outlook for future profits, companies remain cautious in their current spending and investment strategies. This theme is further explored in the next section.

### COMPARED TO THE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS, WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR THE COMING 12 MONTHS FOR YOUR INDUSTRY IN THE NETHERLANDS REGARDING TURNOVER?



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 64. "Don't know/Not applicable" responses are included but not shown in this figure.

SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.



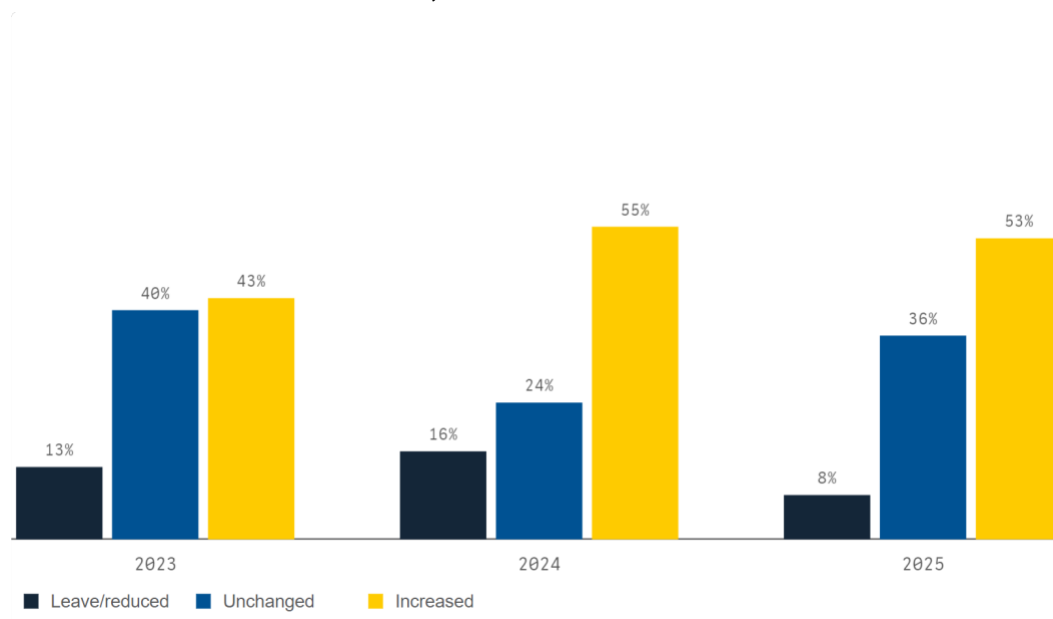
## Swedish companies adapt investment plans to navigate uncertainty

Compared to last year, fewer companies plan to increase investments over the next 12 months. At the same time, there has been an eight-percentage-point drop in companies planning to reduce investments, while a growing share intends to maintain their current investment levels. This shift toward postponing or stabilising investment decisions was echoed in several interviews. For instance, Johanna Westera, Business Unit Manager at Ecophon, noted that slow and unpredictable political decision-making makes it difficult to plan for long-term investments. Others pointed to policy changes, such as subsidies for electric vehicles being granted and later withdrawn, as contributing to a sense of uncertainty in the business climate.

Investment plans also vary by company sector. The industrial and professional services sectors show a greater intention to increase investments compared to the consumer sector, where most companies plan to keep investment levels unchanged. However, within the professional services and industrial sectors, there is a degree of divergence. While around 60 per cent of companies in these sectors plan to expand investments, a smaller but significant share are either considering reducing their investments or even exiting the Dutch market. This variation may reflect uneven profitability within these sectors, as previously noted, with some firms experiencing tighter margins than others.

Experienced, medium-sized companies are most likely to plan for investment increases. This aligns with the critical growth phase that most of these companies find themselves in, in which they have established market presence but still see room for expansion. With more resources than smaller firms and greater agility than larger corporations, they are well-positioned to capitalize on new opportunities.

### WHAT ARE YOUR COMPANY'S INVESTMENT PLANS FOR THE COMING 12 MONTHS IN THE NETHERLANDS, COMPARED TO THE PAST 12 MONTHS?



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 64. "Don't know/Not applicable" responses are included but not shown in this figure.

SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025

# THE MARKET

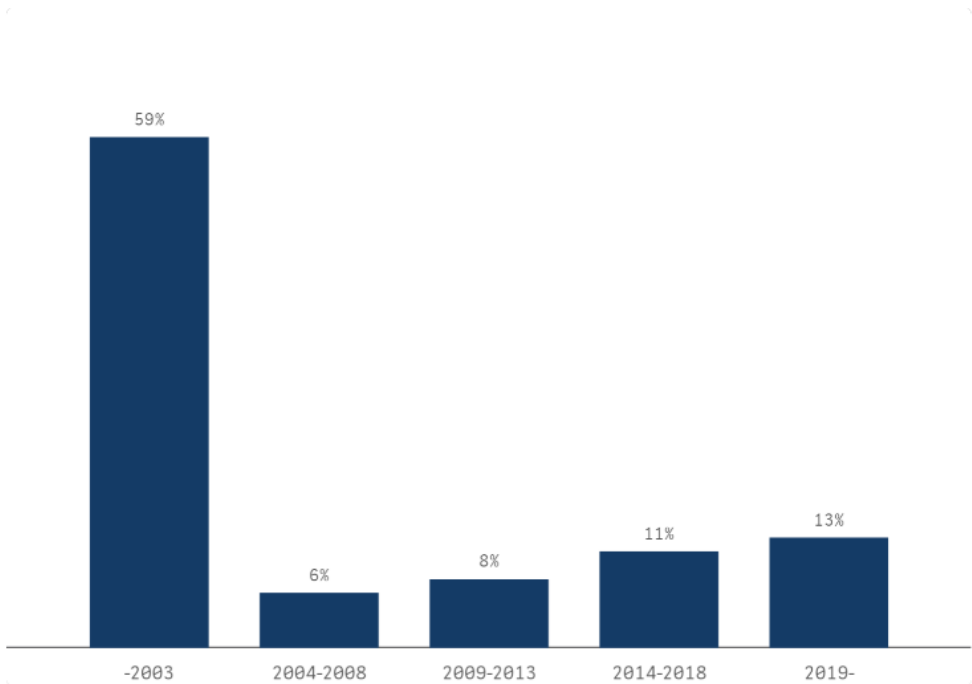
## The Netherlands: A strategic gateway to Europe

The Netherlands is often referred to as the “Gateway to Europe” because of its strategic location with access to 95 per cent of Europe’s most lucrative markets within a 500-kilometre radius. Situated at the core of the “Blue Banana” – a densely populated and economically vibrant corridor stretching from Northern England to Northern Italy – the Netherlands offers excellent connectivity, infrastructure, and a strong logistics network. These advantages make it an attractive hub for international companies looking to establish or expand their presence in Europe.

With historically strong beliefs in market forces and a long tradition of foreign trade, the Netherlands is an attractive destination for foreign investments. Swedish companies have long enjoyed the free trade liberal Dutch market, and the countries have a long-standing bilateral relationship dating back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Netherlands is currently Sweden’s seventh-largest export market and third-largest import market. The survey shows that 59 per cent of respondents have had operations in the Netherlands since before 2003, highlighting a strong, long-standing presence in the market. This year, the business services sector represents the largest share of respondents, reflecting its significant role in the Dutch business landscape.

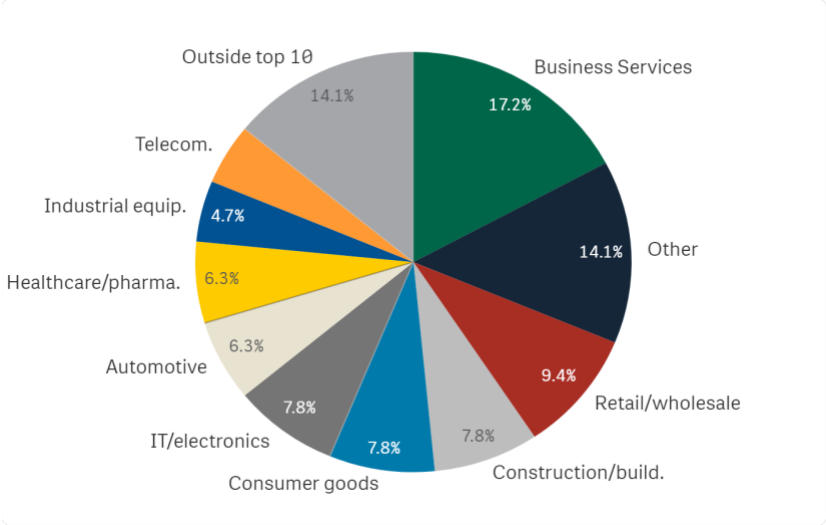
Most respondents this year are large multinational companies with over 1,000 global employees but relatively small local operations of up to 249 local employees. This reflects an approach among Swedish firms in the Netherlands to maintain locally oriented teams while drawing on the capabilities of their global operations. It also underscores the strategic role of the Dutch market for many Swedish companies – not necessarily as a high-volume market but as an important node within their broader international operations. The Netherlands’ business-friendly environment makes it an ideal hub for coordinating regional activities, testing new approaches, and supporting clients across multiple markets.

### IN WHAT YEAR DID YOUR COMPANY ESTABLISH OPERATIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS?



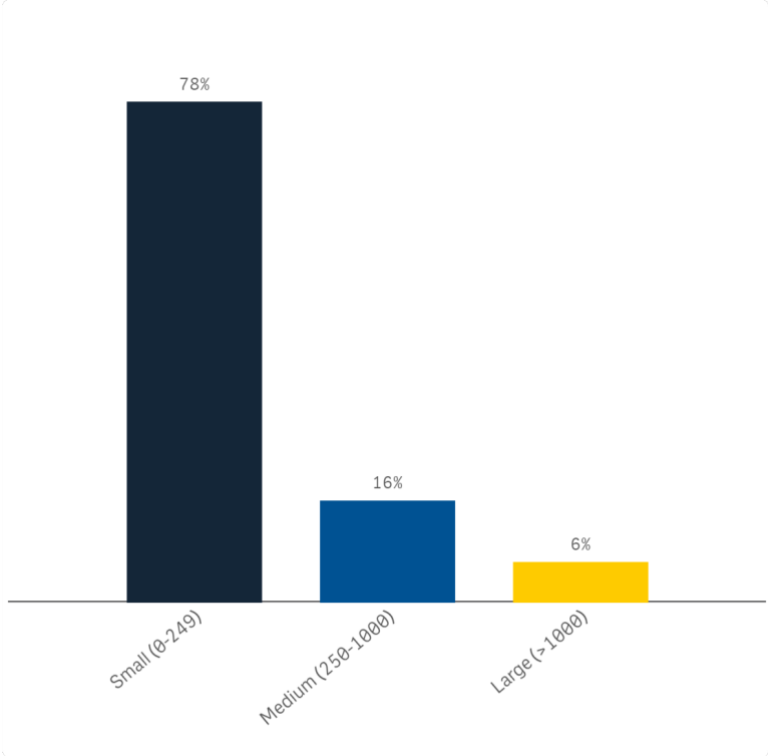
NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 64. “Don’t know/Not applicable” responses are included but not shown in this figure.  
SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.

WHAT IS YOUR COMPANY’S MAIN INDUSTRY IN THE NETHERLANDS?



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 64. "Don't know/Not applicable" responses are included but not shown in this figure.  
SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.

SWEDISH FIRMS’ LOCAL NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES IN THE NETHERLANDS IN 2025



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 63. "Don't know/Not applicable" responses are included but not shown in this figure.  
SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.

## The enduring appeal of the Dutch market meets emerging challenges

Swedish companies are expressing growing concerns about the Dutch business climate, as their perception of it has steadily declined over the past three years. While most companies still view the business climate positively, the overall sentiment has weakened compared to previous years.

As previously mentioned, this is also reflected in respondents' investment plans, where many choose to postpone investments for now. The Managing Director for Volvo Cars in the Netherlands, Herrik van der Gaag, affirms that "as a trading nation, we prosper from stability. In times of turbulence, people stay in the same spot." An increasing number of companies hold a neutral stance toward the business climate, indicating that while the climate is not necessarily bad, new challenges and difficulties have emerged, impacting businesses' outlook.

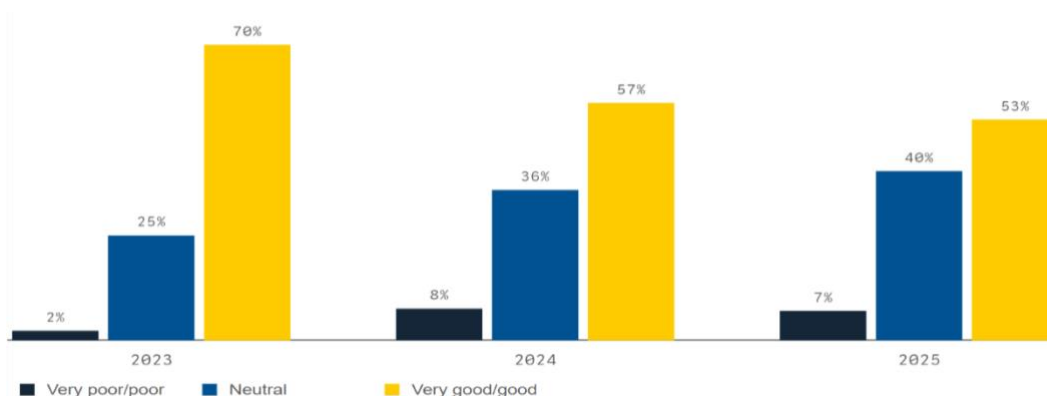
Among those who hold a neutral stance on the current business climate, mature companies are overrepresented. In contrast, newcomers are more likely to view the business climate very positively. This contrast reflects the differing perspectives of each group: mature companies draw on long-term experience and can compare current conditions to previous years, while newcomers bring a fresh perspective. The fact that newcomers view the business climate favourably is a strong indicator of its continued appeal, although important issues have risen.

The regulatory environment is mentioned several times as one of those issues, both in the survey and in interviews with respondents. When looking at the data, most respondents report that the regulatory environment is stable. However, among those who respond that it is deteriorating, the company profiles vary greatly from the automotive sector to retail to health care and life sciences. With some exceptions for known issues such as nitrogen regulations, this variety suggests that rather than specific regulations, the issue seems to originate more in the decision-making processes in general.

Another point that the survey responses raised was the current geopolitical climate. The Netherlands' role as a hub for international companies and global value chains means that global political developments inevitably impact the local business environment. This uncertainty is once again prompting companies to act with caution.

On a more local note, the Dutch trading legacy is noticeable in the culture of doing business. The business climate is valued not only for its strong infrastructure and logistical advantages, but also for the people operating in it. Johanna Westera from Ecophon notes that "the Dutch are tough negotiators, but easy to work with." The Dutch are known for a direct and decisive communication style, which helps streamline negotiations and reduces ambiguity. A collaborative mindset is deeply embedded in Dutch business culture, fostering open dialogue, pragmatic decision-making, and a solutions-oriented approach that many Swedish companies appreciate when establishing and growing their operations in the market.

### HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE THE CURRENT BUSINESS CLIMATE IN THE NETHERLANDS?



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 57. "Don't know/Not applicable" responses are included but not shown in this figure.

SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.

## Persistent issues remain for Swedish companies in the Netherlands

Swedish companies report high satisfaction with key business conditions in the Netherlands. Factors such as personal safety, physical infrastructure, distributors, and suppliers largely meet Swedish companies' needs in the Dutch market. These aspects are a testament to the long legacy of Dutch trade. With efficient trade routes by sea, air, rail, and road, the country offers excellent global connectivity. These favourable conditions have also supported the development of strong distribution and supply networks, which Swedish companies benefit from. However, there are still areas with room for improvement.

Licences and permits remain a challenge for businesses, especially due to strict yet uncertain environmental regulations, which make obtaining the necessary approvals difficult. The lack of clarity around the specific requirements, as well as lengthy approval processes, creates delays that hinder business operations, particularly for industries that need environmental permits, such as construction, energy, and manufacturing.

Moreover, skilled labour shortages remain a persistent challenge in the Netherlands, with a high prevalence of part-time employment further complicating recruitment efforts. The growing demand for flexible working arrangements drives up labour costs, and as wages also continue to rise, respondents of the survey identify this trend as a key concern.

While part-time work is less commonly requested in Sweden, the Netherlands has the highest proportion of part-time workers in Europe. One contributing factor is the country's high marginal effective tax rate. According to the OECD, the effective tax rate on increasing a family member's earnings from 50 per cent to 100 per cent is 52 per cent, meaning over half of the additional earnings are effectively lost due to higher taxes and reduced benefits. In addition, the high cost of childcare further diminishes the financial incentive to work full-time. For families with young children, the extra income earned from additional hours is often offset by increased daycare expenses. These factors help explain why many individuals opt to reduce their working hours.

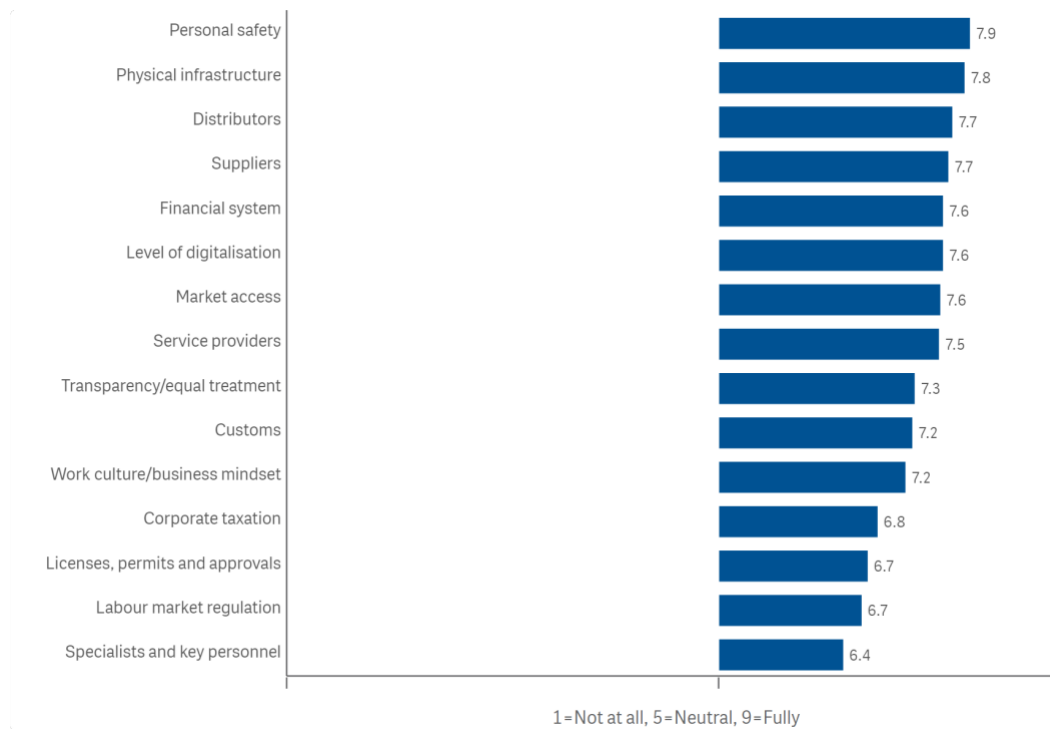
Another group gaining attention is the younger generation entering the workforce. Like others, they are increasingly demanding flexibility. While this trend presents challenges, as noted above, one managing director underscores the importance of companies adapting to the expectations of younger employees. He remarks, "We are a house of multiple generations, and if you are not careful, the rules are always set by the same generation," highlighting the need for responsiveness from companies.

In addition to concerns about labour costs and availability, companies also report a shortage of technical talent in the Netherlands. This is a widely acknowledged and multi-faceted challenge. The often-cited gap of 60,000 technicians has become a symbol of broader structural issues in the labour market. Hans Vos, General Manager Benelux at FlexLink, emphasises that "a coordinated and sustained effort involving employers, government, research institutes, trade unions, and educators is essential to ensuring that the Netherlands has the technical workforce it needs to remain innovative, competitive, and future-ready."

The lowest-scoring conditions remain largely consistent with previous years despite a shift in government. This suggests challenges in making significant changes to regulations that would improve conditions for businesses, as evidenced by ongoing difficulties in reaching political agreements.



### HOW WELL DO THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS MEET THE NEEDS OF YOUR COMPANY IN THE NETHERLANDS?



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 64.

SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.

## Trade between Sweden and the Netherlands runs smoothly despite some operational friction

Sweden and the Netherlands benefit from the EU's free market, enabling smooth and efficient trade between the two countries. Their strong economic relationship is reflected not only in significant bilateral trade but also in the presence of around 200 Swedish subsidiaries operating in the Netherlands, which collectively employ approximately 735,000 people in the Dutch market.

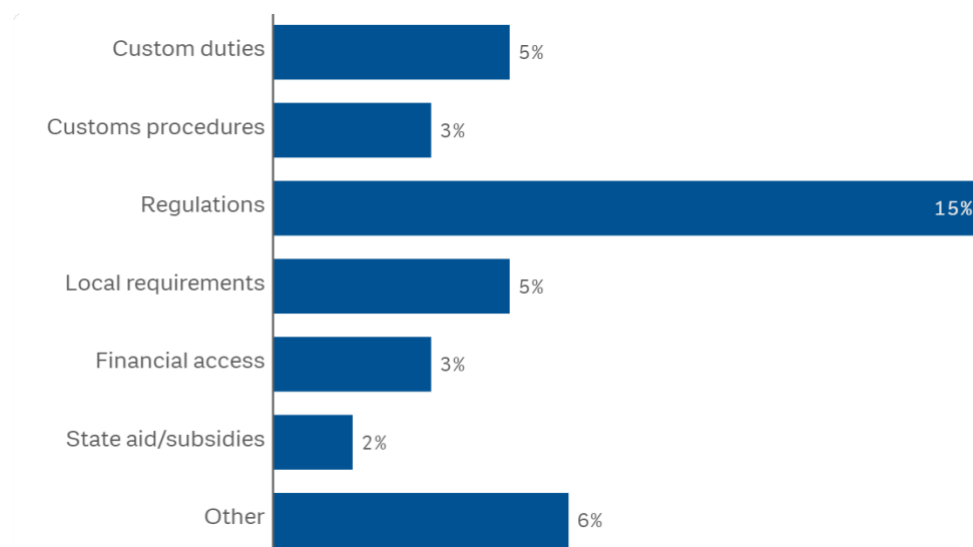
Trade between the Netherlands and Sweden is not affected by any formal trade barriers, as reported by the Embassy of Sweden in the Netherlands earlier this year. However, survey respondents still experience some difficulties with their operations in the Netherlands, as shown below.

This year, regulatory issues have emerged as the primary challenge for Swedish companies operating in the Netherlands. Regulatory concerns appear more prominent than in previous years. Interestingly, survey data also indicates that most companies still perceive the regulatory environment as relatively stable. Interviews help explain this apparent contradiction: while the overall framework may be consistent, many companies view some regulations as too rigid with few possibilities to change the current rules. In particular, there is a strong call for reforms in labour laws and improvements in access to the electricity grid, as both are seen as crucial for enabling investment and growth.

The congestion on the electricity grid has been brought up numerous times in the survey responses. This barrier hinders companies' ability to expand or invest in areas that require reliable electricity. While policymakers are becoming increasingly aware of this issue, access to the grid is currently limited. Companies may need to adjust their electricity usage to align with periods of lower demand, requiring them to plan their operations around off-peak hours.

Overall, while trade between Sweden and the Netherlands continues to run smoothly, there are notable operational frictions that some companies face within the Dutch market. Nevertheless, the economic ties between Sweden and the Netherlands remain intact, and the business climate continues to offer significant opportunities for Swedish companies.

### HAS YOUR COMPANY, IN THE PAST YEAR, ENCOUNTERED TRADE BARRIERS IN THE NETHERLANDS WITH A NOTICEABLY NEGATIVE IMPACT ON OPERATIONS IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS?



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 64.

SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.

# HOW SWEDISH COMPANIES SUCCEED IN THE NETHERLANDS

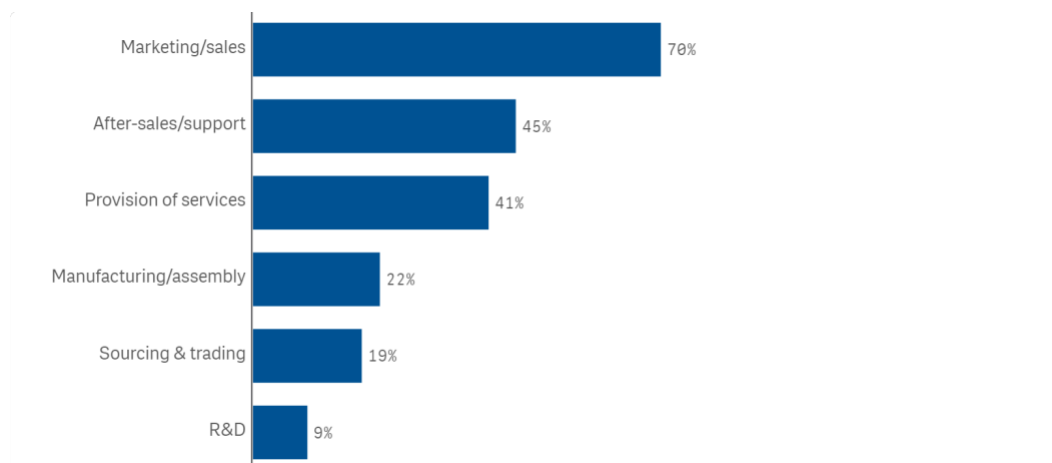
## Marketing, sales and after-sales are key priorities for Swedish firms in the Netherlands

Similar to previous years, marketing and sales remain the primary focus of Swedish firms operating in the Netherlands, followed by after-sales and support. The Dutch market is widely regarded as an effective test market and a strategic entry point into the broader European region. Its diverse, internationally oriented consumer base and open business environment make it ideal for evaluating product perception and market potential. Swedish companies often take advantage of this by introducing their products in the Netherlands and using the insights gained to refine their offerings for other European markets. This is reflected in their strong emphasis on understanding and engaging with end-users in the Dutch market.

This year, the three lowest priority areas for respondents are manufacturing/assembly, sourcing and trading, and research and development (R&D). Notably, the share of companies prioritising R&D has declined from 14 per cent last year to just nine per cent in 2025.

A reduced focus on R&D may reflect the broader trend of cautious investment and market uncertainty. However, R&D has consistently ranked low among Swedish companies in the Netherlands; hence, this decline could be related to R&D activities more often being conducted outside the Netherlands, with companies choosing to centralise innovation efforts elsewhere within their global operations.

### OPERATIONS OF SWEDISH FIRMS IN THE MARKET



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 64. "Don't know/Not applicable" responses are included but not shown in this figure.

SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.

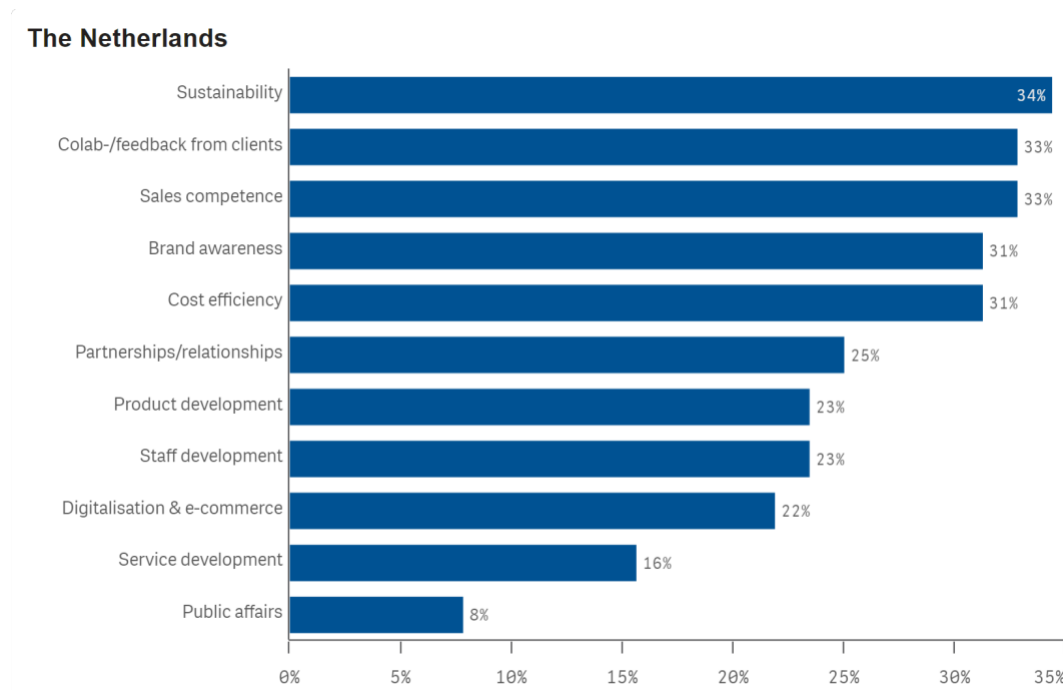
## Sustainability, sales, and strong client relationships drive Swedish companies in the Dutch market

Sustainability continues to be a key success factor for Swedish companies operating in the Dutch market, with 34 per cent identifying it as important for maintaining competitiveness. While this aligns with a global trend expected to persist, this year's survey shows a six-percentage-point drop in the attributed competitiveness of sustainability compared to last year. One possible reason for this decline is that sustainability is increasingly viewed as a baseline expectation in the Dutch market rather than a differentiator. Nonetheless, it remains the top success factor identified by respondents.

At the same time, sales competence has grown in importance, with 33 per cent of respondents recognising it as a key factor for success, placing it among the top three priorities. Given the large consumer market and strong focus on end-customers by respondents in this survey, this trend is unsurprising. However, the 11-percentage-point increase from last year signals a notable shift in how businesses view the critical skills needed to succeed in the Dutch market.

Collaboration with and feedback from clients has also increased significantly in importance since last year. Much like the declining emphasis on sustainability as a competitive edge, this shift suggests that the Dutch market is becoming more competitive. As new players enter the scene, building a strong reputation and maintaining close relationships with clients are critical for sustaining brand loyalty. In this context, the combination of effectively incorporating feedback from clients and strong sales competence seems like a recipe for success in the Dutch market.

### TO DATE, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS HAVE BEEN IMPORTANT IN MAINTAINING COMPETITIVENESS IN THE NETHERLANDS?



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 64. "Don't know/Not applicable" responses are included but not shown in this figure.

SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.

## Versatile appeal for the Swedish brand in the Dutch market

Beyond an extensive trade relationship, the Dutch and the Swedes share core values related to sustainability and quality. The Swedish brand has long been associated with these aspects, and the brand has thus become a way for Swedish companies to gain a competitive advantage in the Dutch market. Over the years, the importance of the Swedish brand has somewhat fluctuated. However, its contribution to business activities is growing, with an increasing percentage of companies reporting that it plays a significant or partial role in their success compared to last year.

A majority of the companies consider the Swedish brand to be an important asset in their Dutch operations. Large and medium-sized companies are more likely to see the Swedish brand as a strategic advantage, while small companies tend to perceive a limited impact of this. Additionally, newcomers to the Dutch market attribute greater importance to the Swedish brand than more established companies. This suggests that the brand serves as a key entry point for new businesses and continues to signal success in the Dutch market.

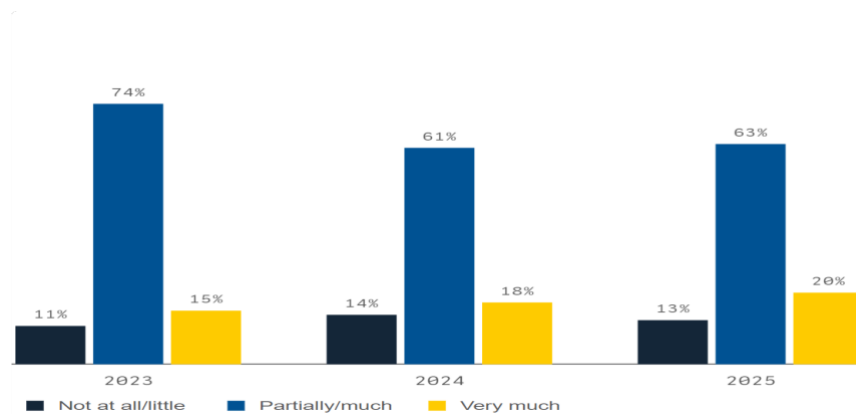
Interviews add nuance to the differences that the Swedish brand plays for newcomers and mature companies on the market. Normorm, a company with a circular business model for renting out office furniture, entered the market in 2020. To them, not only the Swedish brand but the Swedish network has been helpful for their success in the Netherlands. Their Head of International Sales, Douwe Dirks, notes that strong Swedish ties in the Netherlands – including buyers and suppliers who value factors related to the Swedish brand (sustainability and quality) – make the company's Nordic heritage a valuable asset for growth in the Dutch market.

It is also worth noting that many survey respondents are multinational corporations. In an internationally oriented market like the Netherlands, this often means that ties to the company's headquarters or ownership are not always strongly reflected in local operations. For example, Hans Houtappels, CEO of Swedish-owned Moonen Packaging, describes the company as a distinctly Dutch brand but acknowledges the potential benefits of drawing more on its Swedish heritage, which carries positive connotations.

Volvo is a multinational corporation that, on the other hand, remains strongly associated with the Swedish brand. As the Managing Director of Volvo Cars noted in an interview, “We are a global company, but a Swedish brand.” This perspective reflects a broader trend among mature, well-established Swedish companies in the Netherlands, which rely on their longstanding reputation – one that already embodies the premium quality and values associated with Swedish origin. These firms continue to carry the Swedish identity as part of their brand and reinforce it through consistent operational excellence.

In conclusion, while newcomers to the Dutch market use the Swedish brand as a valuable entry point to establish credibility in a competitive business environment, established companies ensure their continued reputation of quality.

### TO WHAT EXTENT WOULD YOU ESTIMATE THAT THE ‘SWEDISH BRAND’ CONTRIBUTES TO YOUR BUSINESS IN THE NETHERLANDS?



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 64. “Don’t know/Not applicable” responses are included but not shown in this figure.

SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.



# ACTING SUSTAINABLY

## Rising to the challenge: Swedish companies embrace sustainability demands

Sustainability remains a cornerstone of Dutch business. However, this year's survey shows a slight decline in the share of companies reporting that customers in the Netherlands place strong emphasis on environmental considerations. This echoes previously mentioned findings, where fewer respondents identified sustainability as a key area for gaining a competitive advantage.

As a representative of the automotive sector, the Managing Director of Scania Netherlands, Janko van der Baan, noted that “the customer of our customer is in the driver's seat”, underscoring that the expectations of end-customers remain a powerful force behind corporate sustainability efforts. For many, this incentivises change, while for others, the signal is weaker, and adoption is slower.

Interviews suggest that there is not necessarily a waning interest in sustainability, but there is a tension between values and spending behaviour in the Dutch market. As several respondents noted, while customers care about sustainability in principle, price often takes precedence in practice. The Dutch market's sensitivity to price presents a challenge for companies offering sustainable solutions.

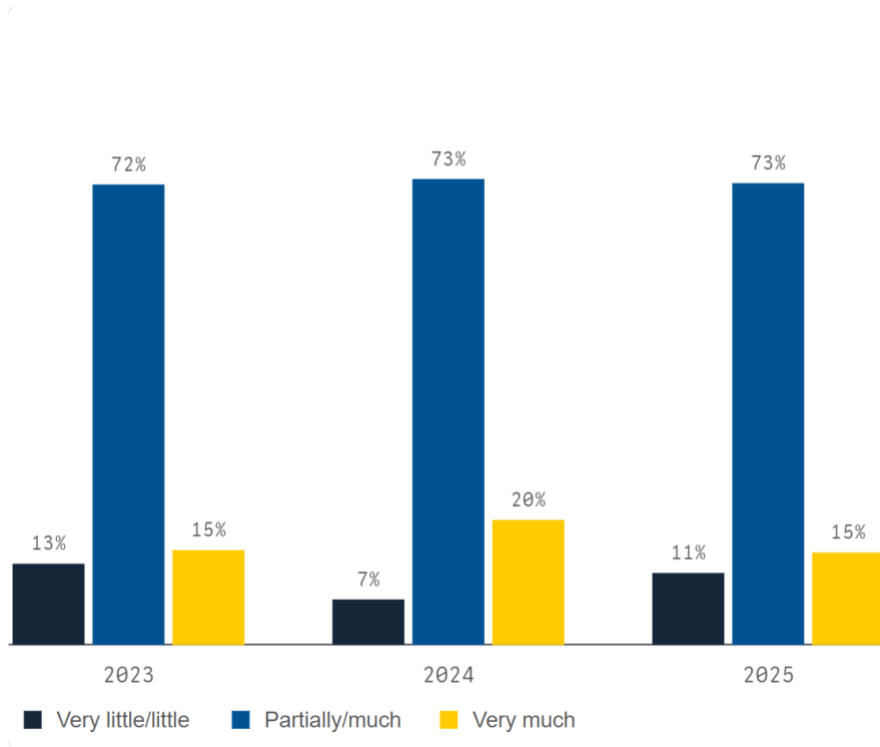
Still, there are paths forward. As explained previously, the Swedish business community has been helpful for some companies in expanding on the Dutch market. The presence of several large Swedish corporations that are willing to pay for sustainable solutions provides both demand and added credibility to sustainable newcomers.

One respondent also highlighted that customers are becoming more selective, demanding sustainability offerings that are backed by concrete evidence. This reflects a growing expectation for transparency and measurable impact, which is essential for staying competitive in the market.

At the same time, many companies recognise that sustainability alone can no longer function as a competitive edge on the Dutch market without collaboration across the value chain and within industries. As one respondent put it: “If you have a sustainable mission, that can't be the exclusive go-to-market strategy. The impact is bigger if you have many companies doing the same thing”. Such a view reflects the realisation that impact requires industry-wide collaboration. By working together, companies can amplify their impact and create meaningful change that individual actions alone cannot achieve. Nevertheless, the challenge remains for companies to maintain their competitiveness while engaging in these collaborative efforts.

There seems to be a strong sense among respondents that Swedish companies in the Netherlands are ready to meet the sustainability challenge. Many describe sustainability not as an obligation but as an intrinsic mission. Combined with a growing awareness of the tangible effects of climate change and a Dutch mindset focused on innovation and staying ahead, this creates a business environment that is both ambitious and future-oriented.

## TO WHAT EXTENT DO CUSTOMERS IN THE NETHERLANDS CONSIDER ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OF A PRODUCT OR SERVICE IN THEIR PURCHASING DECISION?



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 62. "Don't know/Not applicable" responses are included but not shown in this figure.

SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.

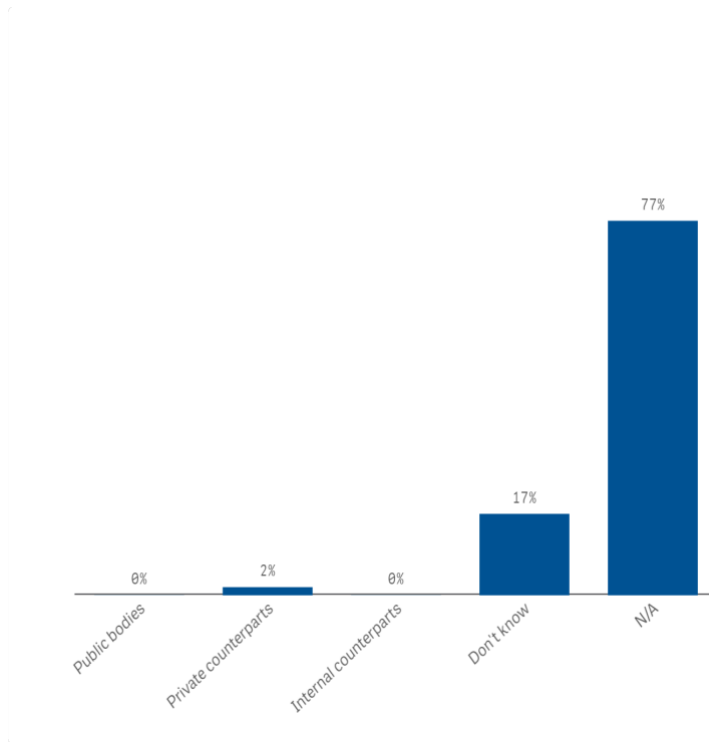
## Corruption is not a concern for Swedish companies in the Netherlands

Corruption is rarely a concern for Swedish companies operating in the Netherlands. In the 2024 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) by Transparency International, the Netherlands scored 78/100, ranking 9th globally. Similarly, Sweden, with its low corruption levels, ranked 8th.

This year's survey indicates that, among the small number of respondents who reported exposure to corruption, 11 per cent were small companies – suggesting that smaller firms may be more vulnerable to such risks. Although the number is small, it underscores the importance of robust systems to support companies that have limited resources and bargaining power in navigating the business climate in an ethical way.

With the Netherlands consistently ranking among the least corrupt countries in the world, Swedish companies can operate with confidence in the integrity of both public institutions and private sector counterparts. The low level of corruption is often taken as a given, creating a stable and predictable business environment. As a result, Swedish firms can concentrate on core operations and growth strategies rather than concerns related to corruption or governance risks.

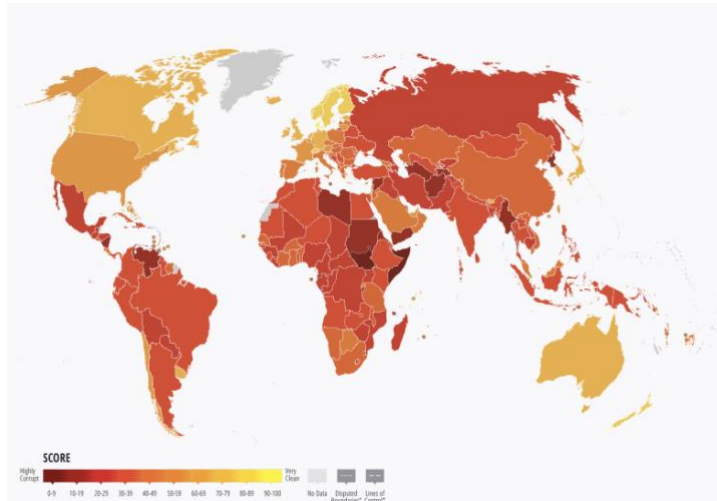
**HAS YOUR COMPANY IN THE NETHERLANDS BEEN EXPOSED TO CORRUPTION, SUCH AS, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, ATTEMPTS OF BRIBERY OR FRAUD IN CONTACT WITH ANY OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS?**



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 64. "Don't know/Not applicable" responses are included but not shown in this figure.

SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.

**CORRUPTION PERCEPTION INDEX 2024**



NOTE: With a CPI score of 78/100, the Netherlands ranked 9/180 in 2024, a change of -1 compared with 2023.

SOURCE: Transparency International.

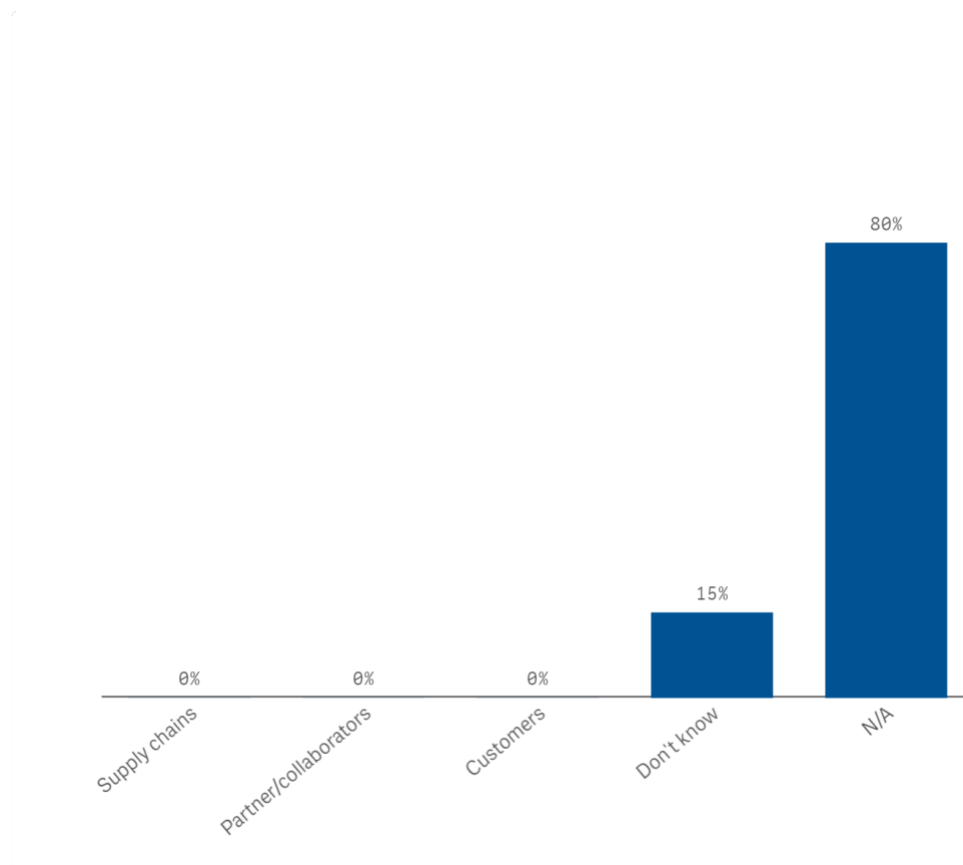
## The Dutch business climate upholds ethical standards

Swedish companies operating in the Netherlands report no known instances of human rights violations linked to their supply chains, partners, collaborators, or customers. This suggests that ethical business practices and regulatory compliance remain strong in their operations. Additionally, it indicates a high level of trust in Dutch market standards and corporate responsibility measures.

The Netherlands has long been a front-runner in promoting human rights and preventing violations, both domestically and in international supply chains. Currently, the Netherlands is preparing to implement new due diligence requirements in line with the European Union's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, adopted in 2024. Forthcoming obligations will require companies to assess, prevent, and mitigate adverse impacts throughout their operations and value chains, ensuring greater transparency and accountability.

The Dutch government maintains a proactive stance on sustainable and ethical business practices. Their approach aligns with EU standards and clearly signals that companies are expected to take responsibility not only for their direct actions but also for the broader impacts of their business models. The Netherlands is dedicated to fostering a responsible, transparent, and competitive business climate for companies to contribute to and exist within.

### HAS YOUR COMPANY IN THE NETHERLANDS ENCOUNTERED ANY FORM OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND/OR LABOUR RIGHTS ABUSE IN CONTACTS WITH ANY OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS?



NOTE: The number of respondents for this question was 64. Don't know/Not applicable" responses are included but not shown in this figure.

SOURCE: Business Climate Survey for Swedish Companies in The Netherlands 2025.

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