



COUNTRY STUDY

SWEDEN

Country Monitoring Report

Sweden is performing well in most educational comparisons and is statistically doing better than many other EU Member states. Sweden made lately some efforts to improve school outcomes, to facilitate the transition from education to the labour market and to improve the labour market integration of low-educated young people and people with a migrant background.

Recommendations

- Work-based learning elements of vocational training need to be reinforced in order to facilitate the transition between training and school to the labour market;
- Facilitate access to higher education in the framework of VET
- Monitor the recent progresses made in terms of improving school outcomes; facilitating the transition from education to the labour market; and improving the labour market integration of low-educated young people and people with a migrant background.





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1. Promoting access and participation in LLL

Participation of adults (25-64 year-olds) in lifelong learning has traditionally been high and remains one of the highest in the EU (28.1% compared to 10.5% in 2013). However, the high participation rate masks great gender differences: while the participation rate for women is 35.1%, it is only 21.3% for men. Furthermore, participation by the low-educated, who would benefit the most from further education, is lagging behind (19.7% in 2013)¹.

The share of participants in study circles and other

¹ European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – Sweden*.

forms of liberal education in the age group 25-44 and 45-64 are respectively 26% and 25 %, thus one out of four. Again, women have a higher participation rate than men, 56% compared to 44%.

2. Vocational Education and Training

Upper secondary students' participation in vocational education and training is decreasing, but remains close to the EU average (49.4 % compared to 50.4 % in 2012).

The 2010 Education Act aimed at making education more relevant to the labour market, introducing more work-based learning, including apprenticeships in vocational education and training (VET) at upper secondary level.

Nevertheless, since 2011 apprenticeships have suffered from low take-up, high drop-out rates and a lack of interest by both students and employers. The government's 'New apprenticeship reform', included in the 2014 Budget Bill, compensates apprentices for additional costs at the workplace, offers financial incentives to companies to take on an apprentice and provides grants to both municipalities and sectoral employers' organizations to further develop work-based learning and apprenticeships in local vocational programs.

Furthermore, a new employment law entered into force on 1 July 2014, which introduced salaries for secondary school apprentices. The 2014 reform represents an important step in establishing the apprenticeship system in Sweden, provided the measures are properly implemented and are fully supported by the social partners².

However, a weak point of the VET system in Sweden is that apprenticeships do not give access to higher

² European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – Sweden*.



education. The lack of permeability between work-based learning and higher education becomes problematic in the Swedish society where practical experience is required to enter and progress in the labour market. The incentive to carry out work-based learning is being slowed down by its non-recognition and non-validation in higher education.

3. Validation of NFIL

Sweden has made progress in the development of validation of non-formal and informal learning since the last European Inventory update in 2010. The Government has given the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan) the task of coordinating and supporting the national structure of validation of prior learning. Cooperation with education and training providers, sector organizations, social partners, universities and regional representatives is an essential part of this work. The commission to develop criteria and guidelines on validation of prior learning started in 2010 and continued in 2011/2012³.

As of 2016 study associations will also be involved in providing validation of formal and non-formal learning. People can choose out of 20 different modules how to be validated. This will be a way to enable people's access to higher education or to the labour market.

4. Early-school Leaving

The early school leaving rate (7.1% in 2013; 7.9% for boys and 6.2% for girls) remains well below both the national and EU targets of 10% and the EU average of 12%. The rate is 12.2% for those born abroad. An analysis of sub-indicators suggests that reasons for the good performance include high investment in education, favorable family environments and good participation patterns in early childhood education

³ European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report Sweden*.

(95.9% in 2012; 95.8% for boys and 95.9% for girls, compared to the EU average of 93.9%). Nevertheless, one in four young people in Sweden take longer than the standard three years to complete upper secondary school.

Sweden has implemented a number of measures to tackle early school leaving, largely as a result of the 2010 Education Act and supported by the European Social Fund. Focus is on prevention through special support to students who run the risk of dropping out of school, including 'individual study plans', and through increased funding of initial and continuous pre-school teacher education. Municipalities are required to monitor young people up to the age of 20 who are not in upper secondary school; from 1 January 2015, they will also be obliged to provide appropriate individualized measures. Municipalities may also legally reallocate resources to schools with low-performing students, although only a limited number of them do so. The Swedish school system is fully decentralized, and the way measures are implemented can differ widely among municipalities⁴.

5. NEETs

The share of young people not in employment, education or training is low compared with EU-28 (7.5% opposed to 13% in the EU in 2013). Among the slightly older youngsters who have left high school, 20-24 year olds, the share of NEET's was 10.4% in Sweden. In 2013, among the 91 000 15-24 years old NEET's, 43 000 were men and 49 000 women.

As regards the Youth Guarantee for persons not in employment, education or training, the strengthening of municipalities' responsibility to monitor young persons under 20 who are not in education is an important change in handling youth at risk of exclusion. Since 2015, municipalities are not only required to provide appropriate individual measures but also to keep record of the interventions. The main

⁴ European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – Sweden*.



focus is on return to education rather than labour market activation. A functioning partnership between the public employment service and various services and actors at the local level is important for the strengthened municipal responsibility to have effect. Sweden also has considerable scope to improve the early intervention aspect in relation to persons not in employment, education or training⁵.

In terms of intervention, the government intends to provide a guarantee related to both education and training/job to young people within 90 days. With regards to education, the guarantee is targeting young unemployed aged 20-24 with the goal to complete their high school education. It should be possible to study on a full-time basis but also to combine study with work or training. This measure has come into effect in August 2015.

6. Citizenship education

Sweden has unique practical workshops in democracy, the so-called Study circles. A study circle is a group of people who meet regularly and study together. An optimal size of group for collective learning is between 8 and 12 participants. There are absolutely no constraints and anyone can start one and anyone can join the circle, with no requirements for prior knowledge or admissions tests. In addition, they can meet anywhere, at times that best suit the group. The participants decide for themselves the content and working methods in the study circle, and then jointly seek new knowledge, skills and insights.

Sweden intends to use the Study circles to promote democracy in Sweden. The participants discover how to re-analyze and question things, develop courage and security and learn how to dialogue and act. The methods are a true exercise in practical democracy.

The study circle is headed by a leader/ facilitator. This person has expertise in the topic and guides the

⁵ European Commission (2015). *Commission Staff Working Document, Country Report Sweden 2015 Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances.*

discussions, making sure that everyone has a say and that all participants' experiences and personalities are respected. That's why several different levels of leader/facilitator training courses are being offered, covering the whole range from an introductory dialogue to university-level studies in liberal adult education methodology. The parts of the development program are: the introductory dialogue, the basic training (about 25 hours in study circle format); continued training (about 80 hours); literature studies and report writing; and university-level liberal adult education methodology.

In addition to the general development program for all study circle leaders/facilitators, courses in specific topics are being offered, some courses for specific target groups, introductory courses for new study material and a special course in Colour and Design for leaders/facilitators in aesthetics.

Last but not least, the Swedish government also offers education about Sweden and in Swedish for immigrants and asylum-seekers. In November 2015 around 27 000 refugees have been in study circles all over Sweden, of a total of 39 000 for all ten study associations. In 2015 Sweden will be expected to receive around 200 000 refugees, mainly from Syria. The aim for 2016 is to include up to 60 000 persons in study circles. That will be funded with 125 million Swedish kronor, around € 119 000.

7. Council recommendations

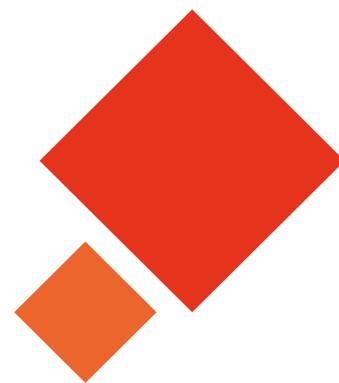
The Council recommendations in 2014 highlighted Sweden's need to take steps to improve school outcomes, (after a marked deterioration in the last decade which contributes to relatively high youth unemployment), to take measures to facilitate the transition from education to the labour market and to improve the labour market integration of low-educated young people and people with a migrant background. In 2015, the country specific recommendations call on Sweden to monitor these progresses⁶.

⁶ European Council (2014). *Council Recommendation of 8 July 2014 on the 2014 National Reform Programme of Sweden and delivering a Council opinion on the 2014 Convergence Programme of Sweden.* European Council (2015). *Council Recommendation of 14 July 2015 on the 2015 National Reform Programme of Sweden and delivering a Council opinion on the 2015 Convergence Programme of Sweden.* ▶▶▶



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SOLIDAR, together with our national members and partners, has developed 15 case studies in 2014, presenting innovative, effective, sustainable and tailor made models to promote social inclusion, the social economy and quality job creation by adapting a social investment approach. In their daily work, SOLIDAR members and partners anticipate new or unmet needs of socio-economically vulnerable people and empower them to actively participate in society and to access the labour market.

These case studies gather strong evidence of the social impact of the activities undertaken by our members and partners to help Member States making progress towards the achievement of the social and employment objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the implementation of the Social Investment Package.

SOLIDAR Foundation in cooperation with national members and partners has gathered an examples of national programmes and initiatives that present the innovative and successful approaches that contribute to the process of building inclusive learning societies. The case studies are centred on themes of lifelong learning, civic and citizenship education, the validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, and NEETs (young people Not in Employment, Education or Training).

