

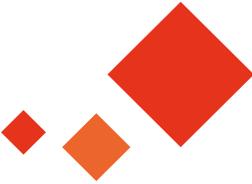


COUNTRY STUDY

SWEDEN

Country monitoring report 2016

With regards to the Paris Declaration, Sweden has invested to work against racism and hate speech (prolongation of the Council of Europe campaign No Hate), and actions to protect democratic values against violence.



As of primary school citizenship education is offered in Sweden. At first as part of cross-curricular theme and partially integrated with other subjects; and as of secondary school as a stand-alone obligatory subject. In comparison to other countries Sweden champions with the highest number of hours dedicated to the subject – 95 per year . Yet the most important aspect of civic education in Sweden, as commented by the SOLIDAR Foundation member organization from Sweden, is its practical roll out at school. It is important that students do not only learn theory, but also have space to practice their civic competences. Therefore, creating and sustaining a democratic environment at schools where pupils are empowered is one of the examples.

Moreover, Sweden has unique practical workshops in democracy, the so-called Study circles. As a form of non-formal and informal learning opportunity they are widely available to everyone. A study circle is a group of people who meet regularly and study together. An optimal size of a group for collective learning is between eight and 12 participants. There are absolutely no constraints and anyone can start one and anyone can join the circle, thus no requirements for prior knowledge or admissions tests. In addition, they can meet anywhere, at times that best suits 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

Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning

Participation of adults (25-64 year-olds) in Lifelong Learning (LLL) has traditionally been high and remains one of the highest in the EU (29.4% compared to 10.7% in 2015). However, the high participation rate masks great gender differences: while the participation rate for women is 36.7%, it is only 22.3% for men.

Behind the high levels of participation in Lifelong Learning in Sweden stands the tradition of popular education movements in Scandinavia that date back to 19th century when they made efforts to organise learning opportunities through folk high schools and creation of study circles in communities. The easy access and active reach out to people, supported structurally, has built a strong culture of learning. This tradition shapes the Swedish approach to Lifelong Learning that very much looks at empowering people through (all forms of) learning and puts democracy at its heart. Non-formal and informal learning occupies a significant share.

Participants in study circles and other 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%.

Vocational Education and Training Overview of the situation presented by the European Commission

Upper secondary students' participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) is decreasing, yet the employability of VET graduates remains very high. In

Sweden vocational schools are perceived as being of low status. Their educational curricula is composed out of general orientation and is lacking practical contents. Elements of work-based learning and apprenticeships were only introduced in 2011, to make education more relevant to the labour market and increase attractiveness of VET amongst youth.

Nevertheless, the apprenticeships have suffered from a 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' organisations to further develop work-based learning and apprenticeships in local vocational programmes. Furthermore, a new employment law entered into force on 1 July 2014, which introduced salaries for secondary school apprentices.

However, apprenticeships remain a weak point of the VET system in Sweden. Less than 2%¹ of young people takes up this opportunity. This is one of the lowest rates in Europe. The lack of permeability between different forms of education and programs is a challenge. This 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.

As of 2016 the Swedish government dedicated funds to strengthen the VET system by investing in improving quality of educational offer and its attractiveness for potential students. The reform supports as well career guidance, strengthens

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-se_en.pdf



collaboration between education and *world of work*, as well as to improve transition pathways from VET to higher education.

Validation of NFIL

Sweden has made progress in the development of validation of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) in comparison to fellow EU member states. 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 organisations, 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 2011/2012. Yet the biggest developments in this area started as of 2015 when several initiatives were launched. One of them focuses on the assessment and recognition of prior learning of migrants that is currently highly relevant due to migration and the refugee crisis.

There is a good level of coordination between stakeholders with regards to development of validation arrangements on both regional and national level. The *National Delegation for Validation 2015-2019* gathers representatives of national authorities, trade unions and employers' associations. It is planned that in 2017 this group will present its recommendations for national validation strategy, and subsequently having a law on validation voted in the parliament.

Current focus of validation was much more on issues related with labour market, however since 2014 when Sweden faced a severe increase of number of asylum seekers. This has redirected priority towards validation of their prior learning and knowledge to facilitate integration and provide faster pathways towards further education and employment.

Early-school Leaving

The early school leaving rate (5.9% for native-born and 13.9% for foreign-born) remains well below the EU average of respectively 10.1% and 19%. The overall share of early school leavers in Sweden equals to 7% that is the national and EU2020 targets. Also, there is a problem with completion of upper secondary education rates amongst foreign-born students. In the last years the number of those who do not qualify for the 'national programme' that prepares 16 year olds for further education or for the labour market is raising. This is predominantly the case for a group of foreign-born students who arrived to Sweden after the age of seven.² In the last years Sweden's position in the PISA survey looking at basic skills proficiency is decreasing as well.

Nevertheless, the overall good performance with regards to low rate of school drop outs is credited to high investment in education, favourable family environments and good participation patterns in early childhood education (95.9% in 2012; 95.8% for boys and 95.9% for girls, compared to the EU average of 93.9%). Nevertheless, one of 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. The 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; and from 1 January 2015, they will also be obliged to provide appropriate individualised measures. Municipalities may also legally reallocate resources to schools with

² https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-se_en.pdf



low-performing students, although restricted to a limited number. The Swedish school system is fully decentralised, and the way measures are implemented can differ widely among municipalities.

For people who did not complete their education there are existing possibilities to finish education and receive a diploma. The network of second/ further chance education centers is well established and accessible.

NEETs

The share of young people neither in employment, education or training (NEETs) is low compared with other EU Member States (7.3% opposed to 15.3% in the EU in 2015). The NEETs cohort in Sweden consists predominantly of short-term unemployed (one third of the entire group).³ Another sub-group that stands out are those with low level of education, 31% of the group are early school leavers who did not complete upper secondary education.⁴ Youth with third level qualifications are only 6%. In Sweden there is no gender gap within the group of NEETs, both women and men are at an equal level of threat of becoming a NEET. The most exposed group to becoming a NEET are migrants. They are 1.5 times more likely to be neither in employment, education or training than native-born students. This is closely related to the rates of early-school leavers that are highest among migrants, which has a long-term consequence of exclusion, risks of falling into poverty and deteriorating chances to succeed in life.

As regards the Youth Guarantee for persons neither 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

³ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef1602en2.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/sweden/sag2016-sweden.pdf>

but also to keep record of the interventions. The main focus is on the 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 training.

The rate of NEETs in Sweden has a declining tendency. By reinforcing intervention measures the government was able to improve situation of young people. It was achieved by reinforcing the Youth Guarantee to address needs of unemployed and low-skilled youngsters. Gradually a 90-day guarantee of job or education/training was introduced.

Citizenship education

With regards to the Paris Declaration, Sweden has invested to work against racism and hate speech (prolongation of the Council of Europe campaign No Hate), and actions to protect democratic values against violence.

As of primary school citizenship education is offered in Sweden. At first as part of cross-curricular theme and partially integrated with other subjects; and as of secondary school as a stand-alone obligatory subject. In comparison to other countries Sweden champions with the highest number of hours dedicated to the subject – 95 per year⁵. Yet the most important aspect of civic education in Sweden, as commented by the SOLIDAR Foundation member organization from Sweden, is its practical roll out at school. It is important that students do not only learn theory, but also have space to practice their civic competences. Therefore, creating and sustaining a democratic environment at schools where pupils are empowered is one of the examples.

⁵ http://www.indire.it/lucabas/lkmw_file/eurydice/Citizenship_schools_Europe_2005_EN.pdf



Moreover, Sweden has unique practical workshops in democracy, the so-called *Study circles*. As a form of non-formal and informal learning opportunity they are widely available to everyone. A study circle is a group of people who meet regularly and study together. An optimal size of a group for collective learning is between eight and 12 participants. There are absolutely no constraints and anyone can start one and anyone can join the circle, thus no requirements for prior knowledge or admissions tests. In addition, they can meet anywhere, at times that best suits 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-analyse and question things, develop courage and security and learn how to have a 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 discussions, making sure that everyone has a say and that all participants' experiences and personalities are respected. That's why 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. Part of the development programme 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 programme 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. There is a dedicated funding available for inclusion of migrants and refugees into study circles.

Council recommendations

"Sweden experienced the sharpest decline in the educational performance of 15-year-olds of any OECD country over the past decade in the PISA survey, and is now performing below both the EU and OECD averages. Deteriorating outcomes of school education risk putting pressure on Sweden's competitiveness and innovation capacity in the long run. An important performance gap between students with and without a migrant background adds to the education challenge. This gap deserves particular attention in light of the large number of newly arrived young migrants to be integrated into the education system. Unclear school funding mechanisms paired with unsystematic monitoring of the use of funding at different levels of the school system hinder the efficient use of resources. The government has made additional funding available to improve school outcomes and equity, and it is taking steps to integrate the newly arrived migrants in education."

"The high influx of refugees experienced in the past year has a number of social and economic consequences for Sweden. While in the short run, the inflow of refugees is set to increase public expenditure and to create additional domestic demand, thereby EN 5 EN raising GDP, the medium-term effect on employment and growth hinges on refugees' successful labour market and social integration, including via educational support. This issue is high on the political agenda both at the EU and Member State level and will be monitored and analysed closely, including in the 2017 country report."

[Source: EUR-Lex, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2016.299.01.0053.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:299:TOC]

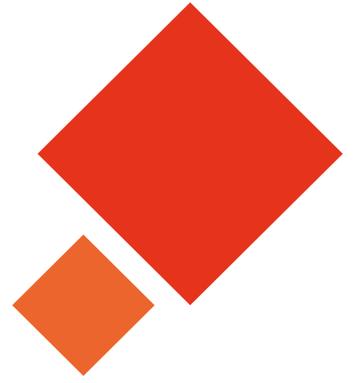


solidar

FOUNDATION

Rue de Pascale 4 -6
1040 Brussels
Belgium
T +32 2 500 10 20
F +32 2 500 10 30

Twitter: @SOLIDAR_EU
Facebook: SOLIDAR
www.solidar.org
solidar@solidar.org



As part of the Lifelong Learning Watch SOLIDAR Foundation has developed 12 country studies in 2016 covering the status in different Member States when it comes to; Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning, Vocational Education and Training, Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (NFIL), Early-school Leaving, NEETs and Citizenship education in reference to 2016 Council's country-specific recommendations.

The SOLIDAR Foundation is the cooperation platform of SOLIDAR; a European network of NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR brings together 60 member organisations based in 25 EU member states and in 6 candidate countries. We work together in Social Affairs, International Cooperation and Lifelong Learning. The Building Learning Societies pillar includes 23 members, covering 18 EU member states.

SOLIDAR Foundation engages through member and partner organisations citizens in EU decision making processes, empowers people through lifelong learning and VET, and voices their concerns to the EU institutions by carrying out active lobbying, project management and coordination, policy monitoring, research and awareness-raising.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

This publication has been produced with the financial support of the European Union. The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Union.