

Abridged Government Communication on Youth Policy



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1. Introduction

Youth policy is cross-sectoral and concerns a broad range of policy areas such as young people's education and training, work, health, influence, culture, leisure and housing issues. The youth policy bill Focus on young people – a policy for good living conditions, power and influence (Govt Bill 2013/14:191) set out an objective for youth policy: that all young people should have good living conditions, the power to shape their lives and influence over the general development of society. This objective affects all central government decisions and initiatives concerning young people aged between 13 and 25 years. This communication reports the progress towards the policy objective of the Swedish youth policy. The action plan presents measures that will contribute to fulfilling the objective.

1.1 The matter and its preparation

This government communication builds on a large number of reports from government agencies, organisations and researchers, and on statistics about young people's living conditions. In May 2019 the Government gave identical commissions to the Ombudsman for Children in Sweden, Boverket (the Swedish Board of Housing, Building and Planning), the Delegation against Segregation, the Public Health Agency of Sweden, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF), the National Board of Institutional Care and the Swedish Arts Council to deliver analyses for the Government's youth policy (Ku2019/01066). The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (LSU) was awarded a grant to coordinate and compile input from the youth movement of supporting information for the Government, including a description of the children and youth organisations' needs and an analysis of how the Government's youth policy can be developed. Invitations to submit analyses intended to develop the Government's youth policy were also sent to employer organisations, trade union organisations, political youth associations, religious youth associations, education associations, youth associations for national minorities and the indigenous Sami people, and to research institutions. In December 2019 Minister Amanda Lind, responsible for youth policy, held a hearing with government agencies and voluntary associations affected by the objective of youth policy. Consultations have been held with the Youth Policy Council on several occasions.

1.2 Summary

At a Cabinet meeting on 18 March 2021, the Government adopted a communication on youth policy (Govt Comm 2020/21:105). The communication gives an account of the development towards the youth policy objective. The communication sets out how there has, in several respects been a positive development of young people's living conditions in, for instance, the area of education and training and regarding young people's health. At the same time there are challenges concerning educational results and access to sport and culture, where there are clear differences between young people based on socioeconomic factors. Young people living in areas with socioeconomic challenges are particularly vulnerable and often have poorer living conditions and life-chances growing up than young people living in other areas. More and more young people feel that they have the possibility of influencing

political decisions, and their interest in politics is at historically high levels. At the same time, socioeconomically vulnerable groups have less possibility of having an influence and feel that they are listened to less than other young people.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit large parts of society hard and has had particularly great impacts on the life-chances of children and young people. Everything from restrictions at school and on carrying out leisure activities to increased difficulties in getting established in the labour market have worsened how many young people feel and the life-prospects they experience. In general terms, the COVID-19 pandemic also risks having major economic and social consequences for already vulnerable groups. Even though statistics are available in some areas, it will take time to develop knowledge about the long-term consequences for young people. It will therefore also be important to follow and analyse the living conditions of young people in the coming years.

1.3 New priorities in youth policy

The youth policy communication presents new priorities for the Government's youth policy. The priorities are:

- mental health among young people is to increase
- all young people are to have a meaningful leisure time
- all young people are to be involved in building society
- young people's social inclusion and establishment in the labour market are to increase

1.3.1 Mental health among young people is to increase

Young people's mental health is an important issue that requires broad action in several policy areas. Good mental health is essential for good living conditions and conditions for growing up. This priority is intended to further concretise the previous prioritisation concerning young people's well-being. This priority refers, in the first place, to the measures being taken in public health policy and health policy, but actions are also required in areas such as the rights of LGBTQ people and actions to address segregation.

1.3.2 All young people are to have a meaningful leisure time

Having a developing and meaningful leisure time is an important part of growing up. Leisure time has a great role to play for young people since it can provide an arena open to all, where everyone is able to freely develop their capabilities and participate in society. Young people's leisure time has also previously been a priority area. Several policy areas are covered by this priority. This applies, for instance, to actions in leisure time activities, culture, sport, and participation in associations.

1.3.3 All young people are to be involved in building the society

Young people's influence and participation has been a central part of youth policy since its inception. The same applies to the possibilities for young people to organise themselves. Setting a priority that all young people are to participate in building the society is a clarification of the youth policy objective.

1.3.4 Young people's social inclusion and establishment in the labour market is to increase

The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have had a particular effect on young people's school situation and their situation in the labour market. The areas covered by this priority include actions in labour market policy, young people's enterprise, and young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). Young people's establishment has also been a priority in the past but is now expanded to contain social inclusion.

1.4 The youth policy's framework/objectives and its actors

Young people are affected by decisions in all areas of society and both at local and regional level as well as at national level. Youth policy is cross-sectoral, which means that the objective of the policy area is achieved through action in several other policy areas. Youth policy has a coordinating responsibility for actions by the Government affecting young people.

Many governmental agencies contribute to the implementation of the Government's youth policy. The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society is the Government's administrative agency for issues concerning youth policy and policy for civil society and has a cross-sectoral responsibility. At the same time, youth policy cannot be restricted to government decisions and actions. Good living conditions for young people are created through an interaction between central government, municipalities, regions, the private sector and civil society.

Municipalities and regions are responsible for considerable parts of the public services met by young people in their everyday lives through, for example, the school system, social services, health care and large parts of the area of culture and leisure. The responsibility of municipalities and regions is important for the realisation and development of youth policy. Municipalities fund, support, promote and implement actions for young people. Municipalities also provide important infrastructure to realise large parts of young people's leisure time activities.

The private sector, consisting of the business sector, value-based organisations, and civil society, is an important part of youth policy. The parts of civil society active in the youth area include children's- and youth organisations, sport organisations, non-profit organisers of cultural events, faith communities, women's-, environmental-, and integration organisations and associations.

1.4.1 Who are young people?

The term young people refers to individuals in the transition between childhood and adult life. The scope set for national youth policy is the age range of 13–25 years, but, in practice,

there is no sharp dividing line between childhood and adult life. In Sweden there were just over 1.5 million young people aged 13–25 years at the end of 2019.

Young people are not a group that is separated from the rest of the population, and this group is generally not more burdened by problems than other age groups. At the same time as youth is a phase of life characterised by greater opportunities, capacities and creativity, youth is also a period characterised by vulnerability. The challenges and opportunities that an individual meets can be different in different periods of life. There are certain social and cultural conditions that are shared in many respects by young people despite their heterogeneity as a group. Young people are generally more dependent on adults and public services than older people. For instance, virtually all young people in Sweden complete compulsory school and upper secondary school, and, for most of them, their home and housing situation depends strongly on what their parents' situation is like.

1.4.2 Young people and migration

The composition of the youth population has changed against the background of greater immigration. Normally around 3 000–4 000 more boys than girls are born each year, but among young people aged 17–23 there is an even larger share of men than women. The sex differences are greatest among 19-year-olds, where there were 9 000 more men than women. This is because young men have been in the majority among people immigrating to Sweden.

1.4.3 The youth population in different parts of the country

The size and shares of the youth population vary greatly across the country. Just under a fifth of all young people (13–25 years) live in the metropolitan cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö. If commuting municipalities near metropolitan cities are included, just over a third of young people in Sweden live in metropolitan cities or commuting municipalities near metropolitan cities. University cities like Lund, Linköping, Umeå and Uppsala have the largest share of young people in relation to their own population. Municipalities in sparsely populated areas account for about 2.5 percent of young people in Sweden. To sum up, metropolitan cities and several university cities have the largest number of young people, and one consequence of this is that young people's situation when growing up and their living conditions can differ greatly depending on where in the country they live.

2. Young people's living conditions

Here good living conditions means that all young people must have good living conditions in terms of the right of young people to enjoy human rights as expressed in Sweden's fundamental laws and in Sweden's convention commitments in the area. The individual must have access to education, employment, housing, health, security, culture, leisure time, their own language, the possibility of participating and exercising influence and a life free from discrimination.

2.1 Young people's health

Good health is essential to achieve the objective that all young people should have good living conditions, the power to shape their lives and influence over the general development of society. Health concerns many aspects including mental, physical, sexual, and reproductive health. It also concerns other factors such as diet and physical activity, obesity, tobacco, alcohol, gambling, physical, mental and honour-based-violence and oppression as well as mortality.

Living conditions during the years of childhood and youth are of great importance for both mental and physical health throughout life. Investing in children's and young people's health is therefore a profitable investment in the long term both for the individual and for society and is one of the most important measures for levelling out health inequalities.

2.1.1 Mental health and ill-health

Most young people in Sweden feel well and say that they are satisfied with life. At the same time the prevalence of self-reported complaints of dread, apprehension and anxiety are increasing, especially among young women. The national public health survey, Health on equal terms, carried out by the Public Health Agency of Sweden shows that mild complaints of dread, apprehension or anxiety are very common in the whole of the population, but that the share reporting these complaints is higher among young people aged 16–24 years than in other population groups. In 2018, 46 percent of women and 33 percent of men aged 16–24 years reported that they had mild complaints of dread, apprehension or anxiety. This share has been at about the same level for several years. But the share of young people reporting severe complaints has increased. The increase has been greatest among young women, where around 20 percent, compared with 8 percent of men, report that they are severely troubled by dread, apprehension or anxiety (Public Health Agency 2018). In addition to differences in mental health between the sexes, there are also differences linked to socioeconomic factors and conditions when growing up.

The Public Health Agency finds in its report *Why is mental ill-health increasing among children and young people?* from 2018 that the share of girls and boys aged 13 and 15 years reporting recurring psychosomatic symptoms has doubled since the mid-1980s. The increase in self-reported mental health symptoms is also matched by an increase in psychiatric conditions that require specialist care, which, according to the Agency, indicates an actual increase in mental ill-health and not just an increased reporting propensity or a change in clinical practice.

In Sweden in 2019, a total of 138 persons, 91 young men and 47 young women, aged 15–24 died as a result of a confirmed suicide. Even if there is a decrease in suicide in most age groups around the world, several countries, including Sweden, have been able to observe an

increase in recent years in the number of suicides among young people. It is worrying that more young people are dying of suicide since it is a cause of death that can be prevented.

2.1.2 Effect of various factors on mental health and ill-health

Both international studies and studies using Swedish data demonstrate that there is, at an early age, already an uneven distribution of good mental health and of mental ill-health, which is linked to the family's socioeconomic situation. For example, children and young people who are worse off report mental and psychosomatic troubles more frequently. Moreover, conditions when growing up affect mental health as an adult, and vulnerability in childhood increases the risk of receiving psychiatric care later in life.

Schooling is also of great importance for young people's health and well-being. Irrespective of family circumstances, pass grades and good relationships with classmates and teachers are important in reducing the risk of ill-health.

The COVID-19 pandemic may entail a greater risk of mental ill-health among children and young people in need of special support, those living in families with socioeconomic or other challenges and the groups of young people covered by the compensatory role of schools.

2.1.3 Why is mental ill-health increasing?

There is no clear-cut answer to why self-reported mental ill-health is increasing among children and young people. The Public Health Agency makes the assessment that this trend indicates that there may have been changes in the general living conditions of children and young people. There may, for instance, be factors related to their time at school, entry into the labour market or the transition to adult life that have a negative effect on young people's mental well-being (Public Health Agency 2018). The Public Health Agency and the Agency for Youth and Civil Society have seen a need for expanded support for young people with mild or moderate mental ill-health by, for example, strengthening the work of youth clinics and school health services on mental health. Both youth clinics and school health services have the potential to work on prevention and on offering early interventions in cases of mental ill-health for young people in need of easily accessible support.

2.2 Physical health

The share of 13- and 15-year-olds who say that they exercise at least one hour a day and are physically active enough remains small and largely unchanged since the first measurements in 2001. Obesity has increased in all age groups and the underlying causes of this trend seem to be greater urbanisation and changes in forms of transport as well as the advent of digitalisation along with automation in working life, which have led to less physical activity and therefore less energy consumption. Eating habits have improved since 2001 regarding the daily intake of vegetables, soft drinks and sweets among both girls and boys. In the period 1980–2015, however, the total energy intake per person and day increased by around 9 percent. Eating habits also show socioeconomic differences with children of adults with short education eating less fruit and vegetables and drinking more soft drinks.

At the same time, young peoples' health habits have improved to some extent since young peoples' use and misuse of alcohol has decreased in the 21st century. The trend is the same for the use of tobacco, where there has been a considerable reduction. There are, however, challenges in the form of new products on the market, such as e-cigarettes and tobacco-free nicotine snus, which attract young people to use nicotine products. The use of cannabis has increased slightly among young people (16–29 years) in Sweden compared with recent years.

2.2.1 Sexual and reproductive health and rights

Physical health also includes sexual and reproductive health. All young people have the right to quality teaching in sex and human relationships and to be given the possibility to reflect on sexuality, identity, and norms. However, among young people aged 16–29 years only 37 percent of men and 26 percent of women stated in 2017 in the Public Health Agency's population study that the teaching of sex and human relationships in schools had given them the knowledge they need.

Moreover, visitors to youth clinics are mostly women, and many boys and men experience that they do not have a natural place for having individual conversations and asking questions based on their sexual health. However, knowledge is lacking about whether this affects men's knowledge of and participation in both their own and their partner's sexual and reproductive health.

3. Education and training

The right of children and young people to education of high and equitable quality is an important part of the fulfilment of the Government's objective of youth policy. Education is a human right and good knowledge from compulsory school provides conditions for completing upper secondary school. Completion of an upper secondary education then provides greater opportunities for work or further studies. Gender-equal education is also one of the targets of gender equality policy. This means that women and men, girls and boys must have the same opportunities and conditions regarding education, study choices and personal development.

3.1 Knowledge development at school

The National Agency for Education's monitoring statistics show that almost all young people start one of the various forms of education given at upper secondary school or upper secondary school for pupils with learning disabilities. There is a positive trend of mainly higher learning outcomes in upper secondary school and a rising share of pupils with an upper secondary qualification. Over time, average grade scores and the share of pupils with basic eligibility for higher education has increased. Swedish young people's results have also improved in international measurements of knowledge (PISA) with a generally lower share of

low-performing pupils and a higher share of high-performing pupils in reading comprehension compared with the OECD average. At the same time, around a quarter of pupils left Year 9, the final year of compulsory school, in spring 2019 without a passing grade in one or more subjects. Seen over time, this trend is relatively even, which, taken together, points to continued challenges in work by schools for pupils' progress towards the objectives.

In both compulsory school and upper secondary school there are distinct differences in learning outcomes between girls and boys and women and men. There are also clear differences in results between pupils with foreign backgrounds and pupils with Swedish backgrounds and between pupils with different socioeconomic backgrounds. This is a situation that underlines the compensatory role of schools. The increase in school segregation is also problematic from an equity perspective regarding the task of developing democratic skills in children and young people. Differences in quality between schools mean that all pupils do not have the same access to good education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the conditions for providing regular teaching in, for instance, compulsory school and upper secondary school. For periods during the pandemic, distance teaching was used, especially for upper secondary school, municipal adult education, higher vocational education, folk high schools, and higher education. This has resulted in challenges for pupils, students, and teachers.

3.2 How do young people feel about school?

The overwhelming majority of pupils at compulsory school and upper secondary school express that they thrive at school. However, the share of pupils who feel stress and feel that they are victims of degrading treatment has increased. Girls and women feel more stress than boys and men. The gender differences in stress experienced may, for example, be associated with girls and women stating to a greater extent than boys and men that they feel that the requirements are too high. The share of pupils who feel bullied at upper secondary school has increased from 2 percent to 6 percent compared with 2015, with young people with disabilities being particularly affected. Young people with disabilities also say that they are not certain of being able to get the support they need from an adult should an insecure situation arise. Several pupils describe how they suffer as pupils with disabilities when adaptations are not in place and how these situations generate stress and lack of motivation.

3.2.1 Municipal adult education and Folk High School

Since 1 July 2020 municipal adult education consists of education at basic level, education at upper secondary level, special education at basic level, special education at upper secondary level and education in Swedish for immigrants. Municipal adult education can be an important alternative educational path for young people who do not have a qualification from upper secondary school. It is important that there are alternatives to upper secondary school so that these young people can complete an education, for example, in municipal adult education or at a folk high school (inquiry report Our common responsibility – young people not in employment, education or training [SOU 2018:11])

The objective of liberal adult education is to give everyone the possibility, along with other people, of increasing their knowledge and cultivation for personal development and participation in society. Liberal adult education is, in many instances, a functioning alternative for those who have, for various reasons, chosen not to continue their education in the school system. The composition of participants at Folk High Schools has undergone a change in the 21st century with a growing share of participants with disabilities and participants born abroad who have weak knowledge of the Swedish language. Against this background, these activities are facing some challenges concerning teaching methods and a greater need of support, staff and special skills.

3.2.2 Universities and other higher education institutions

The Government is working to build a strong knowledge society with research and education of quality throughout the country. Gender equality between women and men must always be observed and promoted in the activities of higher education institutions. The share of upper secondary pupils going directly on to studies in higher education has increased over the long term. Direct transfers to universities and other higher education institutions increased particularly in 2008 and 2009, which could be explained by the economic crisis and the high youth unemployment during that period. Since then, the share going direct on to studies in higher education has fallen by a few percentage points. In general, young women have higher transition frequencies than young men.

3.2.3 Gender distribution in educational choices

There are still challenges regarding the Government's objective of a gender-equal education. The educational choices made by young women and men differ, especially at upper secondary school where young people tend to choose programmes leading to vocational areas where their own sex is in the majority. The results also suggest that the gender-bound educational choices at universities and other higher education institutions are unchanged.

3.2.4 Informal learning and non-formal learning

Informal learning is often defined as the learning that takes place on account of daily activities in connection with work, family, or leisure settings and that is not structured in terms of objectives, time, and support for learning. This includes voluntary work and involvement in associations, and the learning can also be unintentional from the perspective of the person doing the learning. Non-formal learning is also often defined as the learning that does not take place within the framework of formal education systems but that takes place within planned activities, i.e., has objectives and time for learning, and with certain support for learning. Youth work, involvement in associations and other leisure activities can give young people important both personal and vocational skills, important entrepreneurial proficiencies and proficiencies concerning teamwork, leadership, project management, problem-solving and critical thinking. In certain cases, youth work and involvement in associations are a bridge to education and training or work, and therefore prevent exclusion.

One important difference between the different forms of learning is that a person who has participated in formal or non-formal education often receives a certificate of education that has a recognised value, while participants in informal learning often do not. Results and knowledge are measured in different ways, and sometimes not at all, in informal and non-formal forms of learning. Youth policy cooperation through the EU Youth Strategy and the two EU programmes Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps have prioritised strengthening partnerships between educational institutions in formal and non-formal learning in recent programme periods. Strategies for more integrated life-long learning are encouraged in this cooperation, as is recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The EU's youth strategy calls on Member States to work for the recognition of volunteer experience and the validation of study results.

4. Establishment of young people in the labour market

The sub-objective of youth policy that all young people are to have good living conditions means that all young people are to have the possibility of working. The group of young people of working age is more sensitive to economic fluctuations than other age groups, which is generally associated with young people having shorter work experience and being new to the labour market. The relatively weak position of young people in the labour market has become clear during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first place, promoting young people's entry to and establishment in the labour market is a question of young people's possibilities of supporting themselves and having an independent life. At the same time, the entry of young people to the labour market is also essential for a good national economy.

4.1 Development of young people's work and employment

The consequences of the crisis triggered by the pandemic have had a strong negative impact on the situation of many young people in the labour market. Many of the jobs that disappeared were in industries where young people often get their first foothold in the labour market. Moreover, young people often have temporary jobs, which have decreased sharply during the pandemic. The possibilities for young people to get jobs straight after upper secondary school got worse during the summer of 2020. Municipalities have been less able to provide holiday jobs and work placements in health and social care, for instance. Studies have shown that unsuccessful labour market entry is associated with poor labour market outcomes several years later (Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy [IFAU] report 2004:13). This suggests that youth unemployment as such may have long-lasting negative effects. This is a risk that new entrants to the labour market meet during the pandemic and that risks being amplified if the crisis is protracted.

At the same time, the Swedish labour market is in constant change. One form of employment that has become more and more common especially among young people is 'intermittent

employment' which is often called on-call employment or hourly employment (SOU 2019:5). This type of employment plays an important role for employers in need of labour at temporary workload peaks and when employers need to replace temporarily absent staff. Employment of this kind can be a way to enter working life, especially for young people without work experience or for groups who are far from the labour market. They are, at the same time, insecure forms of employment that often have poor security conditions for the employee, a risk factor for the development of mental ill-health among young people. To a greater extent than previous youth generations, young people today want their work to be meaningful and to give them possibilities of combining work with leisure time and family life. More young people today also think that financial security and permanent (i.e., open-ended) employment is important to them compared with previous youth generations. Young people today are also more worried than adults are about their own or their family's financial situation (Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2019, Young people with attitudes).

4.2 Unemployment

Historically, there have been great variations in youth unemployment. Young people are affected more by cyclical fluctuations in the economy than other groups since they more often have insecure forms of employment and have not had time to get established in the labour market. Young people are hit particularly hard during economic crises in terms of high unemployment and low employment. However, youth unemployment usually falls quickly when the economy recovers, and young people experience shorter periods of unemployment than older age groups.

The group of unemployed young people contains certain sub-groups that have a particularly vulnerable position in the labour market. One of them is young people without a full upper secondary education. At the age of 30, around 90 percent of all young people have entered the labour market, while the corresponding figure for those who do not have a school leaving certificate is around 80 percent. Some groups are at even more risk of being long-term unemployed and have more difficulty in getting established in the labour market. This applies, for example, to young people with a foreign background, where young women born abroad have greater difficulty in getting established in the labour market than young men born abroad. Young people with disabilities also have greater difficulty in getting established in the labour market; here the situation is also getting worse, and this group accounts for a large part of those registered with the public employment service. A report from the Agency for Youth and Civil Society also shows that young LGBTQ people have greater experience of involuntary long-term unemployment. The situation in the labour market also varies greatly between different regions in the country, which can be partly explained by the housing shortage in growth areas that prevents young people from moving from areas with a shortage of work.

Another challenge for the establishment of young people in the labour market, mentioned by both young people and employers, is the lack of knowledge about how working life functions. The measures that can help to strengthen young people's knowledge about working life include study visits to workplaces, visits to schools by business operators or various vocational categories and testing running a business or a project in practice.

4.3 Young people not in employment, education or training

The group of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) consists both of unemployed individuals and of inactive individuals who are not looking for work. In relation to the population, the number of young people not in employment, education or training has almost halved in the past ten years. It is mainly the share unemployed that has decreased at the same time as the inactive group has been relatively unchanged. In numerical terms, most young people not in employment, education or training were born in Sweden. However, their share is much higher among young people born abroad than among those born in Sweden. This applies especially to women born abroad who have twice as high a share as women born in Sweden. In 2018, the share of young women and men aged 20–25 years not in employment, education or training was higher, on average, in areas with socioeconomic challenges than in the country as a whole. However, the difference between areas with socioeconomic challenges and the country as a whole was much lower in 2018 than it had been at the start of the century. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the situation of young people in the labour market and has led, in a short-term perspective, to falling employment, increased unemployment and more young people not in employment, education or training. At present it is impossible to say anything about how the consequences for young people will play out in a long-term perspective.

A considerable share of those not in employment, education or training receive activity compensation (SOU 2018:11). The majority of new grants of activity compensation on account of reduced work capacity concern psychiatric diagnoses. Over and above these, there are young people with children at home and other inactive individuals. In this group the share who have municipal income support or live in a household receiving income support is also higher than among the rest of the population.

5. Housing and access to the physical environment

Good living conditions require good housing conditions and space for young people in the physical environment. This includes a good home, relatively lower housing costs in relation to income, access to places for activities and meetings and a school environment with sufficient space for different needs. Young people's living conditions are also affected by how the built environment is planned, designed and managed – as well as by how young people themselves are able to influence its development. The Convention on the Rights of the Child gives every child the right to social security and the living standard required for the child's development

as well as the right to express views and have them respected. The right of children to a reasonable standard of living includes access to housing.

5.1 Young people's housing

Most young people have good housing, but there are also groups that have a more difficult housing situation including, for example, overcrowding or no home of their own.

Overcrowding is much more common in housing areas with socioeconomic challenges and among individuals born outside Europe. Out of all children in Sweden, around 9 percent live in households with a low standard of income, which means that their incomes do not suffice for the most essential living expenses such as housing, home insurance, childcare, local travel, etc. In areas with socioeconomic challenges the share with a low standard of income is 28 percent while the share with a low standard of income in areas with good socioeconomic circumstances is 2 percent.

Most municipalities make the assessment that there is a deficit of housing for young people in their local housing market. According to the municipalities this is mainly due to there being too few dwellings in general but is also because the homes that are available are too large or too expensive for young people. The fact that the share of rented housing has decreased in combination with growing housing queues has led to more households, including young people, needing to enter the market for owned housing. During the same period housing prices have increased sharply, especially in the metropolitan cities. Housing prices have increased faster than household incomes, which has made it difficult for first-time buyers, who are mainly young people, to enter the market for owned housing.

5.1.1 Young people and homelessness

A survey from 2017 by the National Board of Health and Welfare regarding homelessness showed that a large number of homeless young people had one parent who was in some form of homelessness during the week of the measurement. There are estimated to be around 740 young people in acute homelessness with their own households, with a strong over-representation of people born abroad. Despite concern about a sharp rise in the number of evictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, action taken by landlords, civil society and public institutions seems, so far, to have stemmed such a trend.

5.2 Space for children and young people

The physical environment is children's and young people's development environment, and the place where the foundations are laid for their future health, well-being and engagement for their social and physical surroundings. Children and young people have to be given good possibilities of influencing the development of the common environment. This applies, for instance, to premises in their local environment such as schools and spaces for cultural and leisure activities. The school environment is a very important environment, and an average child in Sweden spends about half their waking time at school during their first nineteen years. A well-planned and -designed school environment therefore has a positive effect on children's and young people's learning, health and well-being. Appropriate and accessible

premises for young people's leisure time activities also improve their possibilities of getting organised and getting engaged in the development of society. But there is great variation in how well the living environments that young people have are designed. Their design is dependent on individual property-owners, the municipality and the organiser of, for instance, schools. Areas with socioeconomic challenges often have lower resources for renovation and new construction, which makes it particularly important to support good design.

5.2.1 Being able to get around by yourself

Being able to get around by yourself and move between different places without being dependent on adults is an important part of shaping one's own life. Children and young people are highly affected by how traffic environments are planned, shaped, designed and used. Young people are often wholly dependent on public transport or on being able to get around on their own using, for example a bike, moped, an A tractor or an electric scooter. In the case of young people living in rural or sparsely populated areas, distances are often long, and public transport services are often limited or non-existent. Young people living in rural or sparsely populated areas therefore need other types of measures, and accessible public transport plays a major role for these young people's possibilities of participating in society.

6. Perpetrating and being victims of crime

Reducing crime among young people is important in order to improve young people's living conditions and future development. Vulnerability to crime can lead to young people limiting their everyday lives in a way that involves negative consequences for the individual and reduces the possibilities of good living conditions. Among young people who subject other people to criminal offences there are often risk behaviours such as misuse of drugs or alcohol or not attending school.

6.1 Young people's criminal activity

Many young people commit a criminal offence on a single occasion. But there are a small number of individuals who commit many offences and therefore account for a large share of criminal activity among young people. These individuals usually have a problematic childhood and a high accumulation of risk factors. In this context, it is, however, important to bear in mind that many young people with a high accumulation of risk factors do not develop a habitual criminal lifestyle. Most of the risk factors identified are ones that children and young people only have very limited possibilities of influencing by themselves. Research also shows that interventions that focus on numerous risk factors in different social environments at the same time have the best effect. Many researchers also argue that the by far most effective measures to address criminal development are those that are applied at an early stage.

The Swedish Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) highlights that young people need concerted interventions characterised by continuity, intensity and adaptation to the individual.

6.2 Young people's vulnerability to crime

The school survey of criminal offences from 2019 shows that 48 percent of pupils in Year 9 of compulsory school state that they have been victims of criminal offences. This is slightly less than the share in 2017, when 51 percent stated that they had been victims of criminal offences. Being the victim of criminal offences is common in the school environment, which is also the most common crime scene for both mild and more serious assault. A large share of those who had been victims of sexual violations and threats also state that they occurred in the school environment. Deadly violence against young people has risen in recent years, with a clear increase since the mid-2010s. This trend is associated with the increase in deadly violence in criminal circles.

6.2.1 Violence in close relationships among young people and vulnerability to sexual offences

An analysis from Brå stated that almost one person in five in the 16–24 age group had been the victim of violence in a partner relationship at some point. Recurring incidents are more common among women than among men as regards to both physical and mental violence. Younger people also report more frequently than older people that they have been victims of sexual violence. Young women in their upper teens and their twenties are over-represented among those who have been harassed sexually in working life or been victims of sexual offences in general. In school, too, girls are victims to a greater extent than boys of sexual harassment and sexually intrusive behaviour. In general, young LGBTQ people are victims of sexual harassment, assault and violence to a greater extent than the rest of the population. At the same time, not enough is known about the specific situation of young LGBTQ people.

6.2.2 Honour-based violence and oppression

Honour-based violence and oppression is a problem in society, and both young women and young men can be victims. The violence and oppression are based on strong patriarchal ideas and are exercised collectively. It is common for the individual's actions to be considered to affect the reputation of the whole family and collective. The control exercised can extend from everyday restrictions of girls' and women's lives, such as choice of clothes, social interaction and freedom of movement, to major life choices such as marriage, jobs, choice of education and norms of virginity. Both girls and women and boys and men can be perpetrators of honour-based violence. Sometimes one and the same person is both victim and perpetrator, especially regarding boys and young men. Child marriage, forced marriage and genital mutilation of girls and women are also examples of honour-based violence. The most vulnerable group is young women living in families with two parents born abroad.

7. Leisure time, sport and culture

Good living conditions also mean that young people must have access to meaningful and developing leisure time activities in forms that include e.g. sport and culture. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children have the right to play, recreation, rest and leisure time. States Parties to the Convention shall encourage the provision of, for example, appropriate and equal opportunities for recreational and leisure time activity. Leisure is important to people of all ages, but young people have, in general, more leisure time than other age groups and also attach a slightly higher value to their leisure time (Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2019, Young people with attitudes). The leisure time can also be an important arena for young women and men to gain influence over their own lives and participation in the democratic society. Recreational activities are also of great importance for young people's physical and mental health and can have a compensatory effect for young people who, for various reasons, encounter challenges in other parts of life (Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2019, Young people's right to meaningful leisure – access, security and obstacles 2019).

The restrictions to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 have meant that children's and young people's access to recreational activities and possibilities of meeting people of the same age in public areas have been limited. The closure of, for example, leisure centres, libraries and swimming baths have meant that young people's access to meaningful leisure time activities has been limited.

7.1.1 Leisure time

Around half of all young people aged 16–25 years think that they have the right amount of leisure time. Both young women and young men think that the most important thing about leisure time is having fun, but there is also a large share of young people who think that it is important to have the opportunity to learn new things of interest to them. Almost all young people (97 percent) state that they feel secure at the leisure time activities they take part in. How young people view their leisure time and what they do during their leisure time is bound up with how they feel. There is a greater risk that young people who feel that they have too little leisure time or too much leisure time are stressed compared with young people who think that they have the right amount of leisure time. Young men generally tend to be less stressed about their leisure time than young women.

In the 16-25 age group there are two social activities that most young people engage in. More than nine young people out of ten replies that they communicate every week with other people on the internet or via social media. Eight out of ten socialise with friends in their leisure time every week. There is also a large share of young people, six out of ten, who state that they take part in sport activities every week outside an association. Around three out of ten engage in a cultural activity. Most young people state that they have quite a lot of or very great possibilities of participating in various types of leisure time activities if they want to.

There are some groups of young people who state to a smaller extent than others that they have good possibilities of participating and that they refrain from doing so for various reasons. These groups are young women, young people with disabilities, young people from financially vulnerable households, young people born abroad and young LGBTQ people. The most common obstacles to participation in leisure time activities among young people are that they do not have time because of school and work, that the activities cost too much money, that it is difficult to get to the activities or that the activities are felt to be too difficult.

7.1.2 Open leisure time activities¹

Young people born abroad and young people from areas with socioeconomic challenges visit open out-of-school leisure time services to a greater extent than other groups of young people. It is also more common among young people in the 16–19 age group to visit open out-of-school leisure time services than among young people aged 20–25 years. A larger share of young women than young men never visit a youth recreation centre.

7.1.3 Association membership

There are also differences regarding association membership between young people in different age groups. The share who are members of an association is lower among young people aged 20–25 years than among young people aged 16–19 years. In addition, there are gender differences regarding what type of association young people are members of. It is more common for young men to be members of sport associations, while it is more common for young women to be members of cultural associations and environmental associations.

7.2 Sport

Sport is an important part of many young people's adolescence. Participation in voluntarily organised sport has clear advantages for the development of young people's health in, for instance, the form of well-being, better quality of life and the ability to regulate feelings and deal with setbacks (Swedish Sports Confederation, 2019).

There is a clear health trend among young people today to live a healthy and physically active life. The interest in being active in sport and exercise remains high, while statistics show that the interest in participating in them in an association has decreased. Six out of ten young people aged 16–25 years were members of an association in 2018 compared with seven out of ten in 2009.

There are also certain differences regarding which groups take part in sport. The share of young people taking part in sport in an association is highest in socioeconomically strong groups. Girls with foreign backgrounds are the group that takes part least in sport. Children with disabilities get less exercise than the rest of the population and that group has comparatively more sedentary leisure time.

¹ In a Swedish context *open leisure time activities* correspond primarily to the concept of youth work (ungdomsarbete) on a European level.

Both young and older people need regular physical activity, and there are groups of young people that do not engage in physical activity regularly. Young people's possibilities of engaging in sport and exercise are deficient in some cases, and they are also unevenly distributed across the county. This inequality increases in line with the family's level of education, household finances and position in the labour market. The central sport policy challenge is therefore being able to provide a broad and varied offering of sport and exercise adapted to children's and young people's different interests, place of residence and other circumstances.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a strained situation for many sport associations, but it is still hard to assess the long-term consequences for the sport movement and its possibilities of activating both broad groups of young people and more vulnerable groups. The survival of the sport movement through the crisis and its ability to adapt and renew its activities during and after the pandemic are important issues to monitor.

7.3 Culture

Having access to art and culture and having the possibility of engaging in their own creative activities opens the way to different emotional expressions and helps young people in the process of shaping themselves and understanding the world around them. All young people having access to art and culture is part of the objective that all young people are to have good living conditions.

Participation in culture in their leisure time is high among children and young people, with younger children and girls participating more in cultural activities. However, the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis notes that there are differences between the participation of different groups in cultural activities, with income and education having strong correlations with cultural habits. The share of young people who read books has halved from 60 percent to 30 percent between 2007 and 2018. The international PISA survey shows that the reading ability of young people has also deteriorated markedly in the 21st century. This trend turned round in 2015 and the most recent results from 2018 demonstrate a positive development.

The biggest challenges for young people's participation in culture are reaching children and young people throughout the country. There are great socioeconomic differences between different groups in society, between young women and young men, between different housing areas and between urban and sparsely populated areas.

Municipal cultural schools have a central role for children's and young people's equitable access to culture. Cultural schools reach more than 200 000 children and young people throughout the country and are a unique meeting place for children and young people from different parts of society. Cultural schools help to lay the foundation for children's and young people's creative development since they are able to access and practise a number of different artistic forms that are part of what is offered by cultural schools. Municipal cultural schools

offer possibilities of being part of a community, even outside school, and give children and young people possibilities of developing and meeting in new contexts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the possibility for everyone to participate in cultural life. Children's and young people's possibilities of partaking in culture and their right to do so, both in their leisure time and at school, has been, and will continue to be, influenced as a result of the pandemic. The difficulty of fulfilling the objectives of cultural policy is a considerable challenge that needs to be followed closely.

8. Power to shape their lives

The second part of the objective of youth policy is about young people's power to shape their own lives and means that all young people are have to have the same possibility – irrespective of gender, gender identity or gender expression, ethnic origin, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age – to be independent, to make independent choices and be able to take responsibility for their actions (Govt Bill 2013/14:191). Having power to shape their own lives is closely bound up with having good living conditions and having influence on the general development of society. The extent to which a young person can be independent, make independent choices and be able to take responsibility for their actions depends on what their living conditions are like. Important parts include their financial situation, housing situation, relations to their family and friends, school performance, establishment in working life, mental and physical health and security as well as whether the person has enjoyable and developing leisure time activities. Feeling able to have influence on the general development of society also affects the power to shape one's own life in a positive direction.

8.1 Differences in power to shape their lives

The review presented above shows that a majority of young people in Sweden today have good living conditions. Against the background of this analysis, a large majority of the group of young people can be assumed to have power to shape their own lives, both their present and their future. There are, however, some groups that clearly have poorer living conditions than other young people and that may have particular difficulties in achieving power to shape their own lives, as is also shown in the presentation of young people's living conditions. There are, for example, important differences between young people in terms of age, gender and various socioeconomic factors. There are also differences concerning young people with disabilities and young LGBTQ people. As stated above, young people in particularly vulnerable positions experience a higher degree of mental ill-health compared with other young people, which impairs their possibilities of shaping their lives.

8.1.1 Young people with disabilities

One important starting point for disability policy is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which lays down that States Parties shall take all necessary measures

to ensure the full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children. The Agency for Youth and Civil Society concludes in its focus report It would be nice if they asked sometime from 2019 that all groups of young people do not participate to the same extent in the possibilities available to exert an influence. This conclusion was also drawn by the Democracy Inquiry from 2014 (SOU 2016:5). Young women and men with disabilities are one of the groups that are under-represented in municipal forums for influence. The Agency points out young people in schools for pupils with learning disabilities, in particular, as a group that municipalities have difficulty reaching. "Stay at homes", i.e., young people who have dropped out from school, are also difficult to reach, and previous studies show that young people with disabilities are over-represented in that group. However, the Agency sees that there are great differences between municipalities regarding their level of ambition in the influence work being conducted concerning all young people. There are several good municipal examples that can be highlighted, but the need remains for intensified and deeper work to ensure that all young people are given the possibility of having influence.

8.1.2 Young LGBTQ people

Young LGBTQ people are subjected to more discrimination, threats and violence than other young people. For instance, one in five young homo- and bisexual persons say that they have been victims of violence by a person close to them. Among young LGBTQ people it is young bisexual women and trans people who have least trust in other people, show the highest rates of ill-health, have the most experiences of violence and have more self-destructive behaviour than other people. Young LGBTQ people more often feel that they are made invisible, discriminated against and insecure. They are also more vulnerable financially and have poorer social safety nets than other young people (Agency for Youth and Civil Society. Different realities – Young LGBTQ people about their living conditions, 2019). It is consistently more common among young LGBTQ people to feel limitations and restrictions in their living conditions.

8.1.3 The national minorities and the indigenous Sami people

Sweden has five recognised national minorities: Jews, Roma, Sweden Finns, Tornedalers and the indigenous Sami people. The recognition of Sweden's historical national minorities is an important democratic principle that is based on the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Sweden has to ensure compliance with the rights of the national minorities, which follow, in part, from international undertakings about human rights. The transmission of language and culture between generations is one of the main tasks of minority policy, and it is important to give children and young people influence in these matters. This is why the Act on National Minorities and Minority Languages (2009:724) requires government agencies to promote children's and young people's possibilities of having an influence and to take account of matters that are of particular interest to them.

8.1.4 Discrimination and racism

Experiences of discrimination and racism risk influencing young people's living conditions and power to shape their lives. In a study from the Equality Ombudsman, young people describe their experiences of discrimination and racism. They describe what it means to have to experience, early in life, that you are different and also describe exclusion through dismissive attitudes from people around them and what it is like to, for instance, be a visible minority group. This involves everything from discrimination in everyday life to hate crimes with racist motives.

Through their role for democracy, schools have to promote a school climate in which all pupils feel secure and respected. Despite this, racism is common in schools. According to the Swedish anti-bullying organisation Friends, ethnicity is the most common basis for harassment in the intermediate and senior levels of compulsory school. (Friends 2020). Roma representatives testify, for instance, about the prejudices and racism against Roma to be found in schools, which risks having an adverse effect on their schooling. According to the report, racism harms children's mental and physical health and can lead to chronic stress among children that can affect the possibilities of living a healthy life.

8.2 Self-support

Having your own income and being able to support yourself is of great importance for achieving power to shape your own life. A small share of young people already has their own incomes, albeit very small, at the age of 13. Often this is income from holiday jobs or weekend work. At upper secondary age, around 90 percent have some form of earned income, which indicates that young people acquire work experience at an early stage. Up until the age of 20, differences in earned income between young women and men are relatively small. After that, young men have a higher average income than young women. This applies both to those who have income of business activities and to those who have earned income.

Young people's debt is an important aspect of the question of young people's possibilities of achieving power to shape their own lives. If a young person has a debt with the Swedish Enforcement Authority, this can lead to a non-payment record that makes it harder to get established in society. Just over 30 000 young people aged 18–25 years had aggregate debts of more than SEK 1bn in 2019. A larger share of young men has debts with the Enforcement Authority.

9. Influence on the development of society

The third part of the objective of youth policy, that all young people are to have influence on the general development of society means an explicit objective that young people will be involved in building society and that they have an explicit right to influence. All young people are to have good possibilities of being involved and influencing decision-making at all levels of society. Young women and men must be able to participate in political decision-making

processes, be represented in popularly elected assemblies and have influence on questions of importance for the development of society as a whole. The participation of young people in popularly elected political assemblies is crucial to a vital democracy. A youth perspective is to be promoted in regional development policy. Municipalities and regions are key actors regarding work for children and young people. They therefore need good knowledge about what a child perspective and a youth perspective mean and how they can be integrated into decisions and action, as well as about methods for conducting dialogues with children and young people. Young women's and men's influence and participation are priority areas in European and international cooperation.

9.1 Young people's participation in democracy

Voter turnout among young people has increased in elections to the Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament) and to municipal and regional councils. In contrast, turnout in elections to the European Parliament has been considerably lower than in elections to the Riksdag and fell further in 2019. Voter turnout reflects differences in political participation in general and there are clear differences in voter turnout between groups of young people in relation to education and between young people with Swedish and foreign backgrounds.

More and more young people consider themselves being able to influence political decisions, and their interest in politics is at historically high levels. The latest survey from the Agency for Youth and Civil Society shows that the most important societal issues for young people are health care, schools and education, migration and immigration, and the climate.

9.1.1 Protests, networks and social movements

Young women's and men's possibilities to organise themselves are important for their possibilities both of shaping their lives and of influencing the development of society. The share of young people who are members of a political party or an association has decreased, but young people's participation in democracy seems not to have decreased overall. Instead, young people's participation is expressed in different ways today, including through demonstrations and protests. Social media often play a decisive role for the possibilities of getting mobilised in these contexts. They make it possible to get organised without organisations and to form network-based movements.

The internet and social media have created greater possibilities for young people to access information and for the formation of opinion. At the same time, disinformation is spread more easily. The share avoiding news is particularly high among young people with low interest in politics, where news habits tend to be associated with socioeconomic factors. The climate in public debate has also become harder and threats and hate speech are expressed to a greater extent, especially on the internet and in social media. Online hate often has elements of racism, gender-based hate, sexism and similar forms of hostility. One group that is particularly subjected to threats and hate is elected political representatives, and this has an adverse effect on the will to take part in political conversations.

9.2 Young people's attitudes to their own influence and to democracy

There are several factors that affect young people's view of their own influence. In the attitude and values study conducted by the Agency for Youth and Civil Society in 2019, young people state, to a greater extent than in studies from 2013 and 2002, that they are able to present opinions to decision-makers. In 2013 just under one young person out of four thought that they were able to present their opinions to decision-makers. In the 2019 study just over a third of young people think that they were able to present their opinions. Unlike the previous studies, it emerges in the 2019 study that it is more common for young men to say that they are able to present their opinions to decision-makers than for young women to say so. The share both of young men and of young women who state that they are able to present their opinions to decision-makers is increasing, but young women are lagging slightly in this trend.

9.2.1 Young people's possibilities of influencing political decisions

In a living and equal democracy, it is important that everyone has the knowledge, tools and capabilities required to be able to actively speak for themselves and take part in the decision-making processes of democracy. Against this background it is important to early on give young people support and the possibility of participating in democratic processes, thereby establishing knowledge and capabilities that they can use throughout their lives. More and more young people feel that they have the possibility of influencing political decisions at both national and municipal level. The Agency for Youth and Civil Society's report Focus 18 states that one common reason given by young people who are not interested in having an influence is that they know too little about what to do to have an influence. The Agency notes that it can be viewed as problematic that a relatively large number of young people cite a lack of knowledge since this suggests that schools are not living up to their task of educating young people about how democracy works at local level.

Vulnerable groups see less possibility of having an influence and feel that they are listened to less than other young people. Areas with socioeconomic challenges also have poorer access to community premises and one common characteristic is that people living in these areas participate and feel involved in democracy to a much lower degree than people living in other areas. There is variation in how young people are involved in shaping society, which means that it is important that central government continues, through its agencies, to provide support and guidance and to spread good examples of how young people can be engaged at various levels of society.

9.3 Young people and the EU

Promoting young people's influence is both an objective in its own right for EU cooperation and something that is to run through all action affecting young people. One important instrument for implementing the EU's youth policy is the Youth Dialogue with young people and youth organisations. The majority of young people are positive to EU membership, even though most consider that they do not have any possibility of influencing decisions at EU level.

10. International cooperation

Young people are affected by decisions taken in all areas of society both locally and regionally and at national and international level. The national objective of youth policy is the foundation for action by Sweden in international cooperation on youth policy matters. There is an ambition to promote collaboration in international organisations and exchanges of experience between countries, and the Government wants to work to strengthen young people's knowledge about, experience of and own international cooperation. The participation of young people in international cooperation should therefore be promoted. Active international work in youth policy contributes to broader perspectives and reinforces national youth policy.

10.1 Youth policy in international cooperation

Youth policy is present in several areas of Sweden's international cooperation. The Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK) is a Nordic cooperation that gathers and spreads knowledge about the living conditions of children and young people in the Nordic countries, promotes a children's rights and youth perspective in the Nordic Council of Ministers and supports children's and young people's organisation and participation in democratic processes.

The EU has conducted youth policy cooperation for more than 30 years and in 2018 it adopted a youth strategy for the period 2019–2027. The objectives of the EU Youth Strategy are to enable young people to be architects of their own lives., encourage active citizenship, counter social exclusion among young people and ensure that political decisions in relevant areas take more account of the situation of young people. Action for youth exchanges in the EU includes the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. The Government is working to enable more young people in Sweden to make use of the possibilities available in the various EU programmes. There is also youth policy cooperation at global level in the UN, for example, where the participation of young people in decision-making processes is one of the main priorities. The 2030 Agenda also places particular emphasis on children's and young people's perspectives.

11. Action Programme 2021–2024

In connection with its communication on youth policy, the Government also presents a new Action Programme for the period 2021–2024 containing action intended to create conditions for achieving the objective of youth policy.

The Action Programme contains around a hundred both ongoing and planned actions regarding physical and mental health; education and training; establishment in the labour market; housing and access to the physical environment; crime prevention work; leisure, sport and participation in culture; power to shape their lives; and the influence of young people on the development of society and so on.

These promote development towards the objective in various ways. As described above, youth policy is cross-sectoral and concerns a broad range of issues such as young people's education and training, work, health, influence, culture, leisure and housing issues. Young people are affected by decisions in all areas of society, directly or indirectly. At the same time, it is important to stress that municipalities and regions are important actors in youth policy since they have a large part of the responsibility for implementing action that affects young people. Civil society actors contribute with important actions and contexts for young people in various ways.



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