

**29 April 2005**

**The Swedish Youth Report  
on the Implementation of the  
World Programme of Action for Youth**



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# Introduction

Since the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth, a national mainstreamed youth policy has been developed in Sweden. It did at first look upon youth more as a resource, but lately it has taken the welcoming shift of focus to stress the need of real influence for youth. There are clear goals in the Swedish youth policy. What we need more of is resources, actions and ways to implement every part of it. In a sense the situation is similar on the global level: We have plenty of words and proposed actions in WPAY but there is less of implementation and actual achievements.

Youth make up one billion of the people living in the world. Consequently, youth should be mainstreamed into policymaking but the mainstreaming has to be followed-up. Obviously, such a large share of the world population is not a homogenous entity. Rather there are groups that have to be prioritized further as they have not been so before. This is valid for Sweden as well as for the rest of the world.

The young civil society is part of the implementation of a better world that is going on, whether or not there is a youth policy or UN resolution. The report you are holding in your hand is a mixture containing opinions on things that should be improved together with a few examples on what could actually be done, in organisations as well as in society. The different parts come from Swedish youth and youth organisations. The opinions in each part of the report are the opinions of the youth or youth organisation that has written it and not those of LSU. Obviously this report only reflects a minuscule share of what should be done by the whole society as well as what is done by youth.

After all, the real asset of the youth movement is not its words – it is its achievements.

*Åsa Bjerling*  
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*The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations, LSU<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations, LSU, is an umbrella organisation of 100 Swedish youth organisations. LSU's work range from exchanges of experiences between Swedish youth organisations to international development co-operation with networks of youth organisations in Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. For more information, please visit [www.lsu.se](http://www.lsu.se) or e-mail [info@lsu.se](mailto:info@lsu.se).

# Young People in Sweden – With Disability

## Background

Even as late as the 1970s, children, youths and adults with disabilities lived in institutions in which others decided what they should do and not do, and how they should do things. Often, they had no contact with parents and/or other relatives. Young people with disabilities were seen as "victims", someone to be taken into care. The institutions had everything required: schools, pre-/ after-school recreation centres and housing. They were miniature communities. Communities in which no "poor" little girl or boy "suffering" from a disability would come to any harm. Harmed by what? Shame. That awful feeling that arose when one's child was different, out-of-the-ordinary or abnormal. The norms were: able to walk, well-proportioned, intelligent and independent, able to hear and see, and with sound mental health etc.

## Nowadays

The feeling of being an outsider is still extremely widespread throughout Swedish society. At the latest general election, for example, disabled people were forced to vote by post, as the polling stations were not adapted to disabled persons. How are young people with disability going to be able to fully take part in community life if they can't even choose the way they want to cast their votes? Being able to take part in democratic elections is a basic human right. (Though, apparently, not for everyone?!). If Sweden were to have a head of State who was, for example, a wheelchair user, the Swedish Parliament would require adapting as, at present, it is not possible to reach the rostrum on wheels. (Alterations are in progress).

Sweden is a good country – with many shortcomings. During EU's Year for the Disabled a slogan was produced, which read: "100 % human." (Following protests this was withdrawn.) Aren't all young people 100 % human?! No. Not if one is forced to accept special solutions all the time. Persons who are deaf can't have an interpreter when they need one, young, motor-handicapped people have to take numerous detours to get into restaurants, blind people can't read all books, as all books aren't published as "talking books" or in Braille. There are many examples.

Human rights are, as we all know, to apply to everyone, but they don't. Unfortunately. There are lots of documents that are good, but completely ineffective. The UN's standard regulations, for example, are regulations which most people (in the disabled people's movement) have heard about, but they are not complied with. Laws and regulations are all well and good, but it would be even better to be able to put

pressure on municipalities, county councils and the Government. The problem is that regulations are often only recommendations that are duly signed, but, as there are no possible sanctions against municipalities, county councils or the Government, such documents don't, in practice, make much difference.

### **All young people**

Are young people with disabilities included in the notion "all young people"? Actually not. There are lots of examples showing that young people with disabilities don't count, are not valued as being equal to others. Large parts of new buildings, which are supposed to be public buildings: shops, theatres, cinemas, and other leisure-time amenities, are constructed so that they are completely inaccessible for people with motor disabilities.

Sweden is, in many ways, a good country. Perhaps it's time for Sweden to become even better and to become aware of all young people's real needs and not just to guess what young people's needs are. We who are young and disabled do obviously not differ from youth in general. We have all the same need but due to the inaccessibility of society we do not have the same opportunities as others in fulfilling them. The rights of youth with disabilities are not mentioned frequently in either the WPAY or the Swedish governmental report on implementation of WPAY. If this is due to that youth with disabilities are seen as all other youth this is welcoming. However, the risk is large that it is rather due to that we are not considered.

In either way, we are a part of society. Or, are we not?

*Veronica Svensk  
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# Schooling in Sweden<sup>3</sup>

## Introduction

In comparison with poorer countries, Sweden puts more resources into schools. Pupil participation is also more established. A great deal of improvement, however, remains to be made. The following covers some aspects of Swedish schooling that are good, and worthwhile emulating, as well as those in need of change or improvement.

## The Association of Swedish Student Councils – SVEA<sup>4</sup>

The Association of Swedish Student Councils, SVEA, is an umbrella organisation for all pupils' councils in the upper bands of compulsory schools and colleges/upper secondary schools. The organisation works to improve Swedish school pupils' knowledge about school democracy and pupils' participation. We also work to influence those who make decisions so that the decisions taken are affected by pupils' perspectives, thereby having connection with reality. SVEA is so well established that decision-makers turn to us for advice. Our objective is that this should take place to an even greater extent, above all at local government level throughout Sweden.

## Human rights in Swedish schools

For many years, debate on discrimination and human rights has been raised, and light shed thereon, in discussion about schooling, but the task is far from nearing completion. The most serious shortcoming, according to SVEA, is that there is no law on discrimination, which applies to the entire system of schools or defends the legal rights of pupils. At present the onus is on pupils to show that a school has done wrong. This is virtually impossible for an individual student to bring to a conclusion, taking traumatic experiences related to discrimination and mobbing into consideration. At the same time, the legal system is complex and difficult to deal with for an individual pupil placed in an exposed position.

Schools seldom take responsibility for the rehabilitation of pupils who have been subjected to physical and/or mental abuse. It is also difficult for a pupil to show that he/she has been subjected to abuse by someone in authority e.g. a teacher or principal.

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<sup>3</sup> This section relates to paragraphs 21, 25, 27, and 29 on Education; to paragraph 63 on Health; paragraph 65 on Environment; to paragraphs 98 and 100 on Girls and young women; to paragraphs 100, 105, 106, and 107 (b-e) on Full and effective participation of youth in society and decision-making.

<sup>4</sup> For further information on SVEA go to [www.svea.org](http://www.svea.org), write [joni.lindgren@svea.org](mailto:joni.lindgren@svea.org), or call +46-(0)8-562 788 01.

The legal rights of pupils must, therefore, be strengthened if we are to continue to be willing to attend school, feel that it is a safe place to be in and partake in schooling. To make this possible consequences are required for the schools, principals and authorities responsible that do not comply with the Education Act, whilst, at the same time an Act is required to clarify regulations concerning responsibilities and sanctions for schools that contravene such an Act.

The Government has received a draft bill, which has been warmly welcomed by some organisations and authorities but, at the same time, severely criticised by others for reasons which, by and large, intimate lack of trust in pupils.

### **Conclusions:**

- A law on discrimination, which applies to everyone at school, must be in place in order to increase safety for all pupils.
- Schools must be made responsible to offer qualitative rehabilitation to everyone who has been subjected to mobbing, infringement of rights, violations or discrimination.

### **Should school meals be free of charge to some, but not others?**

Most pupils in Sweden do not need to pay for school lunches. This promotes results in school, making it easier for pupils to concentrate throughout the entire school day. It is commendable that Swedish schools do not differentiate between rich and poor.

Everyone has the same right to education, independent of whether their family can afford to pay for school meals or not. This is at least the case in the compulsory school. Nothing about the obligation for municipalities to provide school meals is, however, stated in documents regulating colleges/upper secondary schools.

This means that local authorities may decide that pupils are forced to pay a certain fee per term to have school lunches or that they may bring their own food to school. Some schools solve this by giving pupils food vouchers, which they have to make do with. This leads to various problems at Swedish upper secondary schools/colleges. The problem here is that even though college education is said to be voluntary it is, in most cases, a prerequisite of being able to have an acceptable life in present-day Sweden, since the vast majority of jobs require some form of tertiary education. In practice, this means that pupils from low-income homes find it more difficult to be able to attend schools in municipalities in which schools do not provide school lunches.

### **Conclusions:**

- Pupils ought to have a legal right to school meals both in compulsory schools and upper secondary schools.
- Schooling must always be free-of-charge in both compulsory and upper-secondary schools. This applies to meals, material, learning aids and schooling as a whole.

## **Pupils' organisations**

In most schools the students organise themselves by electing school councils, which are democratic associations, with representatives from each class. These associations, together, are to be able to put forward the views of the pupils to management and teaching staff, facilitating pupils' influence on various matters. These pupils' councils may affiliate themselves to one of the two pupils' organisations at a national level. The pupils' councils, and their national organisations, are often encouraged by individual schools, as well as various organisations and authorities at national level. However, we see this happening much too little. Nowadays, schooling in Sweden has two overall goals, one the pursuit of knowledge, the other fostering democracy. The latter is of major importance with respect to the existence of pupils' councils. Furthermore, pupils' councils form a clear link in the work towards sustainable development, as there is continuous discussion of improvements and development of tuition and schools as a whole. School life is an important platform for successful work towards sustainable development since discussion has to start in the classroom. Sustainable development needs to be discussed continuously for it to become reality, pupils' councils making a contribution.

Many, unfortunately, do not see the connection between sustainable development and how pupils are organised - pupils' councils being often forgotten when discussing goals for schooling. Pupils feel that pupils' councils and similar democratic associations with a majority of pupils ought to be encouraged via greater resources both in the form of allocation of time and finance.

Unlike many countries, Sweden has dared to give pupils opportunities towards greater influence in the classroom, following the deregulation of the school sector, and schools being managed by objectives since 1994. Pupils think this influence is positive but, unfortunately, it has been questioned following investigations of knowledge acquisition such as PISA, Timss and NU03. Sweden has come a long way towards the development of democratic upbringing and education but has not gone all the way, so it is important to evaluate the results of investigations that show that Swedish pupils exhibit a worsening of knowledge, e.g. in Maths.

Pupils have a lower ability to recite the times tables but are better at questioning things. This is difficult to measure in investigations. We believe that, if Swedish schools are successful in bringing about a way of thinking, which teaches us to question matters, we have come a long way towards understanding what knowledge is and how one assimilates it. It is important that the investigations are evaluated in a correct manner in order to prevent Swedish Schooling from taking a step backwards and reverting to schools in which teachers are omnipotent and knowledge goes unquestioned.

For several years Sweden has had a trial period for local governance, but with pupils' majority, whereby the municipality can delegate decision taking to a democratic joint body representative of all groups involved in schooling, e.g. teachers, service personnel and pupils. It has further been decided that pupils are to be in the majority in such joint



bodies. We view this as something positive in the development towards a more democratic school form. It has been proposed to the Government that this trial should be made permanent. We see this trial as something very positive and would like to see it made permanent, as well as encouragement being given to spreading it to more schools throughout Sweden.

The organising of pupils should be encouraged and facilitated by:

- The right to remedial instruction
- Access to instruction and courses about school democracy and pupils' influence
- Making local governance trials permanent
- Increasing aid to pupils' organisations

### **Do instructional materials and methods take society and gender perspectives into consideration?**

The learning material most commonly used in schools is still textbooks. The books that have been used in social sciences since the 1950s have been studied by one researcher. She is of the opinion that the textbooks used for social science subjects are not anchored in present-day society, to the contrary, they are more likely to contribute to pupils believing that they don't have any chance of influencing the society they live in. Society generally is portrayed as better than what is really the case; concepts such as influence, democracy, equality and sustainable development are discussed far too little. The methods used in the current educational system vary greatly from school to school, and teacher to teacher. It is more often the case that the more recently trained teachers utilise newer methods but, at the same time, most teachers who are active in schools are approaching retirement age. The development of competence ought to be a more central concept in the daily lives of teachers than today, but here there is a dilemma. Teachers do not have the time for this, as many schools are under-manned, so the development of competence in schools, to the extent required, would swallow a large share of the annual budget.

The conclusion, then, is that learning materials currently in use should be scrutinised and developed so that schooling reflects society more closely and is in unison with it to a considerable degree instead of being something divorced from the realities of society. Discussions about sustainable development must be taken up in social sciences as well as other subjects.

Schools also have to understand the importance of continuously developing competence to a greater extent than today and to be able to guarantee pupils that all teachers in every school are fully qualified and have sound pedagogical training.

**Conclusions:**

- Pupils must be able to partake in selection and express views about the learning materials available for use in school
- All non-qualified teachers must be able to become fully qualified via training which runs concurrently with their work
- All teachers must be fully trained
- Teacher training must be continuously evaluated and improved

**How important, in reality, are the steering documents for schooling in Sweden?**

If the current steering documents for schooling were complied with our schools would be much better than they are. Unfortunately, follow-up and consequences for schools that infringe regulations are inadequate. The Swedish National Agency of Education (SNAE) conducts quality audits of all schools in Sweden, which is admirable. The audits examine whether schools reach the objectives set in the curricula and comply with regulations, or not. But, at present, the SNAE has no sanctions at its disposal, which means that even if a school fails to meet the quality requirements it can, in practice, ignore criticisms made, as there will, after all, not be any consequences for doing so.

As has been mentioned earlier, Swedish Schooling is managed by objectives, which is fine. Many parties, however, both school leaders and teachers consider these to be difficult to follow. Thus, there is a need for common national interpretation of the various parts of the curricula in order to make it easier for all schools to be able to follow them, thereby achieving better quality.

Currently a draft bill on a new school law is under consideration at government level. A committee has produced a new proposal, which, among other things, would mean that pupils are given the right to appeal against grades awarded if there is reason to believe that assessment made is erroneous. Pupils welcomed this proposal for many different reasons. One is that this is a way for us to have better legal rights. Many teachers currently in schools are not fully qualified, which means that they do not have knowledge of how grades should be awarded, nor how to follow the criteria used for grading. Thus, it may be the case that pupils are assessed incorrectly even though they have achieved the goals set in respect of knowledge. If pupils were given the right to appeal, problems would be fewer. As matters stand, it seems that the proposal will be re-written, leaving out the part giving pupils the right to appeal against grades awarded. We view this as very serious failing in the process of creating a new school law.

**Conclusions:**

- Steering documents must be complied with
- There must be consequences for infringements against the steering documents for schooling
- Distribution of responsibilities: State – municipality - school must be clearer and better allocated than at present

**Case study: Staffanskolan, Söderhamn**

Some schools in Sweden are far ahead of others with respect to work on pupils' participation concerning work environment matters. A local course of studies for pupil safety officers has been introduced at Staffanskolan in Söderhamn. In this way they acquire knowledge of what is meant by "working environment" and how work can be carried out at a school to make improvements. Pupils' safety officers are a democratically elected group of pupils from different classes and years, commissioned to ensure that the school is a safe and secure place for pupils to be. We view this course, which gives the time and providing the knowledge required to perform the tasks involved in being a pupils' safety officer, as something extremely positive and of utmost importance. We need to have encouragement to carry out things that we do and need time and help to learn what working environment covers and how we can influence matters connected therewith. Pupils in Sweden think that it would be a good idea if this course, or similar ones, could be introduced at national level in several countries so that more schools could make use of the good example set by Staffanskolan.

*Joni Lindgren*

*President*

*Association of Swedish Student Councils*

# Assessment of the Situation for Young Refugees in Sweden in Connection with the WPAY + 10 Review

In connection with the review of the UN World Programme of Action for Youth the *Mission Covenant Youth of Sweden* has taken the initiative for an ecumenical call for action together with four fellow Swedish christen youth organisations: *the Swedish Baptist Youth Federation (SBUF)*, *The Methodist Youth Council (MKU)*, *Church of Sweden Youth* and *the Student Christian Movement in Sweden (SCM)*<sup>5</sup>. We argue that the situation for young refugees requesting asylum in Sweden has deteriorated since 1995 when the WPAY was adopted.

- It is our opinion that basic human rights and the necessary conditions for physical and mental health are not fulfilled for all young persons in our country in conflict with several paragraphs of the UN Programme of Action for Youth, that Sweden has committed itself to live up to (according to paragraphs §5, §8, §20, §50).
- We are concerned that the needs of these children are not given priority in connection with decisions about their asylum claims. In addition, humanitarian considerations are not taken sufficiently into account, e.g. in connection with assessment of health conditions. Neither are these considerations sufficiently strong in connection with judgements about the possibility to get a sufficiently qualified and necessary health care in the county of origin.
- Thus we argue that this situation in Sweden as soon as possible has to change in order for the rights of youngsters according to WPAY to materialise.

There is a wide spread opinion in Sweden supporting such a position based in strong empathy for the young refugees. This has among others been manifested in the recent so called "Easter Appeal". This document has been supported by over 40 000 persons signed by their names and confirmed by 28 different church organisations and over 60 other organisations in Sweden.

In the context of the WPAY review we are concerned that many of the refugee families arriving to Sweden are carriers of traumatic experiences of war. Many of these persons have frequently been abused, threatened and their human rights have not been considered sufficiently. In Sweden these families are met by very time consuming administrative procedures in response to their request of residence permit. They are also facing a more restraining asylum policy, and some refugees decides to hide themselves in fear of being expelled. Today only 10% of the applicants for asylum are allowed to

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<sup>5</sup> In sum these five youth organisations consist of almost 65 000 members.

stay in Sweden in comparison with 50% a decade ago. All these factors reinforce the insecure and threatening situation in which they find themselves. The situation for a considerable number of children and youth has turned so drastically unacceptable that they have given up and finally reached very negative mental conditions of apathy. The symptoms are varied but it could for example be expressed through a degree of passivity that sometimes turns so serious that these young persons remain bound to their beds without any contact with the surrounding world and have to be medically fed by others. According to a recent published research report the number of such cases with children in apathy conditions has dramatically increased from 55 cases the year 2002 up to 410 identified cases by the year 2005. Children suffering from these conditions are even expelled from Sweden by air ambulance transports assuming potential care in their country of origin. It is reasonable to doubt that this care is always provided at the needed level of quality or if the quality is sufficient that the access is provided, e.g. due to economic capacities of these families.

The problem is very complex and the reasons for this situation are heavily debated these days in Sweden. Investigations are being made but there seems not to be easy solutions within the present set of rules and regulations and its interpretations.

The upcoming review of the WPAY provides for us as a youth organisations a natural possibility to get our voice heard concerning this important question about the situation for children and youth under severe stress in contemporary Sweden. It is our position that the situation is unacceptable and we recognise that young persons in our country live under very traumatic and exposed conditions, in contrast to what in principle is agreed upon in the WPAY document, or to quote § 8 from that document:

*§8. We, the peoples of the United Nations, believe that the following principles, aimed at ensuring the well-being of young women and men and their full and active participation in the society in which they live, are fundamental to the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond:*

*(b) Every State should guarantee to all young people the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and other international instruments related to human rights;*

*(j) Every State should take measures to improve the situation of young people living in particularly difficult conditions, including by protecting their rights;*

*(l) Every State should provide young people with the health services necessary to ensure their physical and mental well-being, including measures to combat diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, and to protect them from harmful drugs and the effects of addiction to drugs, tobacco and alcohol;*

We want as youth organisations to show our solidarity and find ways to alleviate the situation for these exposed fellow young beings. We would also like to voice their

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<sup>6</sup> §5, United Nations declaration of intent on youth: problems and potentials, WPAY. See also §5 d) and e).

concerns which they cannot easily do themselves, by pointing at how the present situation is in conflict with the intentions of WPAY, but also the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In the report of the Swedish government to the UN about the implementation of the WPAY in Sweden (published by the 26 October 2004) the importance of the access to health care for all on equal terms is highlighted<sup>7</sup>. In addition the problem of the unhealthy mental situation for many young Swedes is addressed. However, the situation for the young refugees currently residing in Sweden seems not to be included in these broader concerns. We consider that the lack of such a perspective is serious. In this context we would like to quote the WPAY paragraph 50 concerning the "provision of basic health services":

*§50. All young people should have access to basic health services in the interest of all and of society as a whole. It is the indispensable responsibility of each Government to mobilise the necessary awareness, resources and channels<sup>8</sup>.*

The latest research report about these issues was presented 27 April 2005 in the Swedish news paper *Dagens Nyheter*. In this report it is stated: "During the time the investigation proceeds the relevant and responsible authorities will have to continue the child psychiatric, medical and social work in care of these children and their families. The families also have to be assured to get a legally sound and safe assessment for their asylum claims". We do agree with the authors of this report concerning this position and are keen that the situation should be solved as soon as possible.

We strongly argue that all children and youngsters have the right to a normal life and that their need of safety and stability has to be further highlighted. Sweden, a country which so often is regarded as a carrier of human rights, not the least in its own self image, does not match reasonable standards in its current policy for how young refugees should be treated. The WPAY is very clear on this point:

*§ 20. Implementation of the Programme of Action requires the full enjoyment by young people of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and also requires that Governments take effective action against violations of these rights and freedoms and promote non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, with full respect for various religious and ethical values, cultural backgrounds and philosophical convictions of their young people, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and participation of all young women and men<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> "The overarching objectives of Swedish health policy are that quality of and access to health care should be improved, a good health on equal terms for the entire population, that all people should participate fully in society and equal living conditions for everyone. Children and young people should be respected, be given possibilities for development and safety and for participation and influence". (Swedish Government, section for Youth: Report to the Secretary General on the Progress Made in Sweden in the Implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth, §1.4)

<sup>8</sup> D.1 Health § 50, WPAY

<sup>9</sup> IV Priority Areas, §20, WPAY

In summary it is our firm conviction that this current situation in Sweden as soon as possible has to change in order for the rights of youngsters and the access to healthy conditions and care are assured in accordance with the UN WPAY, earlier endorsed by Sweden. Let us create the best conditions for a just, legally sound and ethically defensible asylum procedure which gives a central role to the individual human being's protection needs.

On behalf of our ecumenical call for action:

Göran Bondesson  
*Secretary General*  
*Mission Covenant Youth of Sweden (SMU)*

Ingela Svedin  
*SMU Abrahamsbergskyrkan*  
*International co-ordinator*

Malin Ivarsson  
*Secretary General*  
*Swedish Baptist Youth Federation (SBUF)*

Kerstin Alm  
*Chair Person*  
*The Methodist Youth Council (MKU)*

Erik Persson  
*Chair Person*  
*Church of Sweden Youth*

Lina Måndröm  
*Chair Person*  
*Student Christian Movement in Sweden (SCM)*

# Alcohol and Other Drugs among Young People in Sweden

Sweden has for long had a comparatively restrictive alcohol policy. Consequently the consumption has been comparatively lower than in many other European countries. The conclusions and proposed action in WPAY on this was therefore not too hard to fulfil for the Swedish government in 1995. However, since then the restrictive policy is being weakened and the consumption of alcohol among youth has increased. This text will examine what UNF<sup>10</sup> believes should be done to put the Swedish alcohol policy back on track.<sup>11</sup>

At the time of writing the government appointed investigator is proposing several changes in the alcohol policy that will increase the consumption of alcohol. Among other things he has advised a drastic decrease in the tax on alcohol. We have already seen what the increased availability of alcohol the last ten years has led to in Sweden with increased consumption among youth as a result. For example the annual consumption of alcohol of the fifteen year olds has increased by 42 per cent (girls) and 23 per cent (boys) between 1995 and 2004.<sup>12</sup> Another clear indication is the latest tax decreases on liquor in neighbouring Denmark and Finland which led to an increase in consumption with more than 30 percent.

## **Damages of drug use**

With these increases, there is also the increase in damages from drug use. These damages can be categorized into four groups.

1. Medical damages – drugs affect youth both physically and psychologically.
2. Social damages – Drugs often leads to social problems. If someone in a family is alcoholic, it affects others in the family. Divorces, violence and economical problems are all examples of social damages in families. A lower self-confidence

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<sup>10</sup> UNF, The Swedish youth temperance movement makes a difference in many young peoples' lives. UNF has 7000 members in more than 100 local communities. UNF members are between the ages of 13 and 25. The organization is not tied to a specific church or religion, or a political party. Although we are not affiliated with a political party, we do act politically! We let politicians know our views on political matters that pertain to alcohol. We write editorials and contact politicians locally as well as on a national scale.

<sup>11</sup> This text relates to Area 6 in the WPAY on Drug abuse, as well as to Area 1 on Education and Area 8 on Leisure-time activities.

<sup>12</sup> According to CAN, the national board dealing with drug issues.



or that one performs worse in school because of drug problems in the family are other examples of social damages.

3. Economical damages – Drugs cost society enormous sums each year. It is expensive to treat those hurt due to one's or others' drug abuse. A lot of damages that would not have occurred without alcohol occur because of the use of drugs.
4. Political damages – drugs constitute an obstacle for people to work together to ameliorate the society. Many people flee from the reality instead of dealing with one's problems.

### **Total consumption model**

There is a correlation between consumption of alcohol as well as other drugs and the extent of alcohol damages. The more that is consumed, the severer are the damages. When it comes to alcohol, research shows that the amount of high consumers increases if the average consumption increases. There is also a correlation between the total consumption and the mortality in several diseases. Moreover, there is a correlation between the total consumption and the amounts of murder and there is probably one between alcohol and assaults.

One could believe that drug problems should be dealt with where they are the severest, that is among the ones who abuse or are addicted. However, totally the largest preventive effect is achieved if the efforts are aimed towards the whole population and not only the high risk groups. As a group, the average consumer causes more alcohol damages than the actual addicts.

### **Actions**

Several different actions could be taken to reduce the problems related to drugs. Below, UNF lists the most important ones.

#### **Availability and consumption**

One of the most important factors for the consumption of alcohol is the availability. When the alcohol is cheap and easy to get, the consumption increases and with it the damages it causes. One could have opinions on restrictions and rules in society in general but when it comes to the sale of alcohol there is a need of regulation for the sake of social and physical health. Information on the harming effects of alcohol is good but it cannot possibly replace the price-instrument and the availability.

Youth and alcohol does not belong together, as youth run larger risks of being harmed and addicted when they drink alcohol. Consequently, youth below the age of 18 should not have access to alcohol at all.

The Swedish restrictive drug-legislation contains effective tools to reduce the use of narcotics. The restrictive policy in combination with preventive measures and care medical care is the best way of keeping the use of narcotics down. The use of narcotics

should be illegal, but it is at the same time important that drug-abusers will not be punished for their abuse. Rather they should get the care they need.

The largest threat against Swedish drug policy is from the outside. Drug liberal attitudes from for example other EU-countries should not be allowed to effect the Swedish legislation.

### **The actions we propose**

- Stop the illegal sale of “folk beer” (2.8-3,5 vol %). Grocery stores cannot handle the sale of folk beer. This has for example been shown in the UNF study discussed below. Therefore this sale has to be moved to the Systembolaget.<sup>13</sup>

- Stop the profit interest within the alcohol handling.
- Neither private interests nor the state should earn money from increased alcohol consumption.

There should be a state monopoly on the sale, import, export and production of alcohol. This monopoly should be run without interest in profits and aim at reducing the alcohol consumption successively. The state alcohol enterprises should be controlled harder and they should not be allowed to do advertisement campaigns.

- State and municipalities should be good examples
- All state enterprises and enterprises in which the state has influence in should work in line with the national goals on alcohol. All state and municipal representation should be free from alcohol, including representation with international guests.

- Use the alcohol-taxation to reduce the alcohol consumption
- If alcohol is expensive, people drink less. The taxes on alcohol and permits to serve alcohol should for that reason be made and granted so that the serving of alcohol is subordinate economical importance.

- 20-year age limit on buying alcohol

The age-limit to buy alcohol should be 20 years at the pub as it is at the Systembolaget. A general 20 year-age limit makes the regulations clearer as well as increase the age of first alcohol-use.

- Stop the home made alcohol and smuggling of alcohol
- There should be a 0,0 % alcohol-limit for all traffic on land, at sea and in air
- Do not legalise cannabis

If society gets a more accepting attitude to one drug, the consumption increases and with it the damages of the drug causes.

- No to harm reduction – harm reduction is a step in the wrong direction.

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<sup>13</sup> The Swedish retail monopoly on alcohol. No alcoholic beverages stronger than folk beer are allowed to be sold in grocery stores.

## Environment

Consumption of alcohol and narcotics is influenced of the environment we live in. For the alcohol consumption of youth, the consumption pattern of the family is important. Other factors are advertisement and trend-setting media, friends, leisure-time activities and attitudes in society overall.

UNF believes that youth have the right to grow up in a drug-free environment. Youth should not have to suffer because of adult's consumption. No matter where in the country or from what social group a youth is he/she should have the right to grow up in an environment free of drugs.

A poor availability of leisure-time activities often lead to that youth, in the absence of alternatives, drink alcohol or try drugs. A varied and flexible supply of leisure-time activities is an important part of the preventive work, and it has to be the responsibility of the municipalities to offer that.

- Abolish the alcohol traditions

The society in Sweden nourishes the alcohol-related feasts and traditions. The right of all children and youth to grow up free of drugs is therefore hard to get.

- All municipalities, regions and ministries should have their own action plans on drug policy and the state has to earmark funds for the municipalities to carry out their action plans.
- It is the responsibilities of the municipalities that there are leisure-time activities free of alcohol.
- Organisations and civil society should be free from alcohol

All organisations that carry out work that is funded by the state, municipality or – regions should do all their work without alcohol. This should not only apply to ordinary organisation-meetings, but also arrangements such as conferences, tournaments and parties.

- Youth should not be subject to general drug-tests

The Swedish constitution points out that no one shall touch or interfere on ones body against ones will. The exception is mainly when there is a suspicion of crime. Youth should not be treated differently and be given a poorer constitutional protection than others. As a consequence, they should not be subjected to drugtests against their will unless there is a suspicion of crime.

- Stop all direct and indirect alcohol advertisement
- Support for children of drug addicts

All schools shall work with “peer supporting” activities, a general support all pupils can use when they need to. All municipalities should have support groups for children to drug-addicted parents.

- Stop youth-oriented liquor

Sweet alcoholic beverages, such as alco-soft drinks and cider, often attract a young group who is sensitive for alcohol. Moreover, the beverages do not taste alcohol

which could lead to excessive consumption. These kinds of products have become more common the last years.

- Educate the bar-staff.

It has been proven effective to educate the staff of bars and pubs in the alcohol legislation. It leads to that fewer are served too much which makes the environment nicer. All the staff of bars should have such training as a certificate to work.

## **Knowledge and school**

The school is the place outside home in which youth spends most of their time. It is therefore important that the school is a drug-free environment that spread good and objective information about alcohol and narcotics as well as showing the alcohol-free alternatives.

The knowledge passed on in schools, as well as at other places, has to be based on facts and scientific conclusions. There has to be independent research that is not ordered by profit-driven companies.

Teachers are role models. That is why they themselves have to have thought of and discussed their own attitude towards alcohol. All teachers have to propagate non-drug use, even if they themselves use alcohol.

- Non dependent alcohol research

Research on, among other things, consumption trends is needed to evaluate the effects of drug-policies. It is important that this research is not steered by those with an economic interest in alcohol.

- The municipal school-plans and the work-plans of the schools should contain actions to address the alcohol and drug problem
- All activities arranged by schools should be free from alcohol and other drugs

This also applies to school-trips, parties and parental meetings.

- The school should be better at teaching on drug-issues and they have to be given a higher priority. Those working with youth do also have to learn more about the issues.

## **Internationally**

The situation in Sweden is nowadays not only affected by Swedish laws and regulations but also of forces outside the country. UNF opposed Sweden to join EU 1995 due to drug-reasons. We still look upon the EU with critical eyes when it comes to these issues. The weakening of the border controls, large tax-free import of alcohol and the liberal stance on drug issues of the EU in general are threats to the health of Swedish youth.

Other international forces also work to increase the consumption of alcohol and narcotics. This is not only seen in Sweden but throughout the world. The ruthless and devastating advertising of the international alcohol industry constitute a threat to

democracy and development throughout the world. The Swedish alcohol industry is also a part of this threat. Swedish international aid is not thrust worthy as long as we so not end the ugly methods of Swedish alcohol industry in the developing world.

- Allow national decision making within the EU on the alcohol and drug-policies.
- See alcohol as a social issue – not an agricultural issue

In the EU, alcohol is handled as an agricultural issue and large economic subsidies are given to, for example, vine-producing farmers. This results in a lake of vine and a pressure on the low-consuming countries to increase their consumption.

- Allow national decision making on imports of alcohol from other EU-members.
- Stop the untaxed import from other countries.
- Stop the Swedish export of alcohol and alcohol production abroad

Alcohol is an obstacle to development and a major problem in many developing countries. Swedish alcohol-exports and production abroad should not be allowed to damage the Swedish international aid efforts. This should stop. It is particularly important that the Swedish state does not handle production and selling of alcohol abroad.

- Sweden must play an active role in the creation of a European alcohol policy  
As a leading country within alcohol policy and with a lower consumption level than most other countries, Sweden has to take on an active role in the creation of the new social-policy in the EU. The Swedish role has to be to stand up for the restrictive alcohol policy that aims at reducing the consumption.
- International development aid should give increased support for democracy and freedom from drugs.

Alcohol is a global problem. Youth from more and more countries take the drinking habits of the Western world at the same time as the situation in the west as well as in the east and south is becoming unsustainable. We need to put considerable efforts on youth-projects aiming for democracy and freedom from drugs in order for us to not see populations who go under. The focus should be at combat alcohol as an obstacle for development.

*Nina Svensson  
Board Member  
The Swedish Youth Temperance Movement*

# Measuring Gender Equality

## - How the Young Folk's Association did it<sup>14</sup>

Gender equality is imperative for sustainable development and a foundation in a true democracy. An organisation or a country that only includes parts of the population or members is not a democracy. We need to work with gender equality issues to ensure that democracy involves everyone. The capacity, knowledge and experiences of both women and men are a prerequisite for a sustainable development. Youth organizations that work with gender equality contribute to an inter-generational culture of equality and a more democratic society. Democracy is not won once and for all, but must be won and nourished by each generation.

The association would like to share with you a process that has led to making democracy and the promotion of gender equality a concrete reality in our organization. Young Folk's Association has 9000 members of whom 80 % are between the ages of 7 and 25. The most important activities take place in the local clubs. Every club is unique and each club decide about their own activities.<sup>15</sup>

Sweden has a long history of co-educational schooling and other activities, rather than separate arrangements for girls and boys, women and men respectively. This, in a way, has been seen as one of the symbols, expressions and indicators for equality between the sexes. Now, when we are looking more closely at structures and systems, we can see that in fact the opportunities for influencing decision-making and organizational politics are far from gender equal. In some organizations, work to support girls and young women and to promote gender equality has used same-sex methods – that is girls only or boys only solutions – to give girls and boys the opportunity to develop as individuals instead of having to compete or mingle with the opposite sex.

For many years now, Sweden has been seen as one of the most gender-equal countries in the world. However, the truth is that in many areas, we still have a lot to do: boys and young men speak out more and get more attention in schools, young men are paid better than young women and all young people experience a more sexualised media, although the way in which young women are usually depicted – undressed, passive and

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<sup>14</sup> This text relates to the section on Girls and young women in the WPAY. The text is based on the statement brought forward during the panel session of CSW 49 on Future perspectives on the promotion of Gender Equality: through the eyes of young women and men.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on the Young Folk's Association or the method described, please e-mail [info@viunga.se](mailto:info@viunga.se).

as objects, tends to be very different than how young men are usually portrayed – fully clothed, active and as subjects. All of these examples reinforce stereotypes of female and male behaviour that are not much different from those that applied in our parents' and grandparents' generations. The capabilities, feelings, experiences and ideas of young people must be taken seriously, by themselves as well as by others. Very often young girls and boys who express personal feelings of uncertainty due to some experience that has reminded them of the way gender inequalities work; they feel that they do not have the same opportunities or that their world is limited because of their sex. One of the main tasks we have is the provision of analytical tools that can help young people to explain the unequal world they live and must make their futures in.

One of the tools The Young Folk's Association has developed involves gathering statistics as a basis for self-critical discussions, self-discovery and collective reflection concerning our own organization. Feelings can always be discussed and are difficult to explain, but statistics based on the workings of your organization can render certain circumstances and dynamics visible and are hard to ignore. Young Folk's Association has developed a tool for measuring participation in our annual meetings. We analyse how much time each delegate used in addressing the plenary meeting, the attendance of the delegates disaggregated according to sex, the behaviour of the delegates towards each other and the participation of females and males in discussions.

When we used this method for the first time, in the year 2001, the results of how much time different people used in the plenary meeting came as a shock to many of us. Boys used 73 % of the time and the girls only 27 %. Two years later the boys talked 60 % and the girls 40 % of the time. At both events the girls were in majority among the delegates; 56 % and 58 % respectively. We could also see that the boys proposed more resolutions than the girls, and that the resolutions proposed by boys were more often adopted than those proposed by girls. Our simple analytical method clearly showed that boys take more of the space and they therefore have a much greater opportunity to influence decision-making. These results have been a basis for our internal work with gender equality at national and regional levels. It is much easier to start a discussion with these statistics as a common base.

The statistics reveal a very un-equal participation between girls and boys in the organization's decision-making, challenging many members belief that our organization provides girls and boys and the same opportunities.

Our organization has developed this method and it has helped us, but we have realized that its use must be ongoing. We can see a difference in the participation and influence of girls and boys from years 2001 to 2003, but we are still far from our goal of being a genuinely gender-equal organisation. This year, we will once again measure the gender dynamics of our annual meeting. Gender equality is not something that can be done as a project for a limited period of time. The work has to be mainstreamed and our work must include and incorporate new members and their views, opinions and situations.

The difference in the amount of time that girls and boys respectively speak and are listened to is not unique, not for young people, nor for Sweden. Young people today and in the future will continue to be interested in working with gender equality issues. Young people and those who work with young people must discover critical analytical tools to enable the understanding of the workings of the world around them in gendered terms, everything from a lesson in school to participation in political decision-making bodies.

*Frida Ohlsson*  
*Association Secretary*  
*The Young Folk's Association*



# RFSU Input on the World Programme of Action for Youth

## Introduction

In the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) issues concerning young peoples sexual and reproductive health and rights are addressed and/or referred to in several sections<sup>16</sup>. As a synthesis the WPAY provides a holistic approach towards advancing young peoples sexual and reproductive health and rights, including information, prevention and services related to sexuality and reproduction. The WPAY also emphasises gender inequality and gender dimensions on youth development.

## Sexuality, reproduction and poverty

It is widely understood and agreed that in order to gain power over their lives and fully participate in the sustainable development of society, young people need access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. However, many young people are denied their right to education, contraceptives and services for reasons based on age, colour, class, disability, HIV status, sexual orientation and gender identity. Some services, like safe abortion, are denied young people because of reluctance from health providers, even though they are legally attainable.

Such discrimination is rooted in prejudice, taboo and fear from society, service providers, teachers, adults and peers. A definition of poverty related to the ability to make choices in life is applicable for the situation such young people exist in: "Poverty is lack of power, lack of possibilities and lack of security". A synthesis would then read "Lack of power over sexuality and reproduction, lack of possibilities with sexuality and reproduction and lack of security regarding sexuality and reproduction". Young people who wouldn't be defined as "poor" in a more traditional sense will then also fall under this category. RFSU chooses to single out three burning issues for these young people: HIV/AIDS, Safe Abortion and Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity. RFSU would also like to stress that a prerequisite for success for any initiative regarding young people directly or indirectly is the full and meaningful participation of young people.

RFSU demands that 10% of all Swedish Overseas Development Assistance is earmarked for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

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<sup>16</sup> World Programme of Action for Youth paragraphs 8 (g); 49; 53; 56; 58; 62; 98; 103; 111

## **HIV/AIDS**

Young people are taking the hardest blow from the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. Over 50% of the newly infected are between 15 and 24 and in the hardest hit region, Sub-Saharan Africa, 75% of these young people are young women, a horrifying symptom of the situation of girls and young women. Furthermore, children and youth are orphaned in numbers too vast to grasp, with devastating consequences for themselves and society in large.

The majority of young people infected with HIV attract the virus through sexual transmission. Furthermore many young women become pregnant without intending to do so. This points to the emergency need for sexuality education for young people as well as adequate, accessible and affordable sexual and reproductive health supplies and services, including contraceptives, for young people. Systems for providing sexuality education and prevention must have a broad scope in order to reach youth both in- and out of school. In regions where injecting drug use is a strong contributor to the spread of HIV/AIDS needle exchange and other harm reduction strategies must be implemented and reach young people.

The gender dimension of HIV/AIDS, a pandemic becoming increasingly feminised, must be addressed, especially in the context of young people. Due to social norms and rules, young women are often forced to use their body as sexual capital, a life of sex in exchange for money, fish or school uniforms. Buyers of young women's bodies are often richer middle-aged men, paying a higher fee if the condom is excluded from intercourse. A young woman with the burden to bring as much fish as possible from the docks or a young mother with two children to feed is not left with a choice in such a situation. While many initiatives to empower young women have been implemented, the value of these need to be raised and the size up scaled. Young men must also be encouraged to participate in the endeavour for gender equality rather than be excluded and framed as hopeless cases without ambition or justification to contribute to change.

Young people living with HIV/AIDS face strong stigma and discrimination all over the world. While the social stigma, reaching as far as ending in banishment from the family or even lynch killings, must be stopped, the structural discrimination within health systems requires special attention. Many young people living with HIV/AIDS are rejected when seeking services and care for their condition. Many end up being blamed for becoming infected. Young women living with HIV/AIDS and become pregnant face double discrimination and are often either forced to disclose their HIV status when seeking maternal care or faced with situations where they have to undertake a coerced abortion. The guilt of bringing a possibly HIV positive baby into the world is seldomly dealt with adequately.

Treatment and care for people living with HIV/AIDS has been reinforced during the recent years. While this is indeed needed it is important to make sure that also young people are part of these initiatives. We must also safeguard that treatment and care never becomes a substitute for HIV/AIDS prevention. They are two sides of a coin that is flipping for the destinies of many generations living today and in the world of tomorrow.

In Sweden, sexuality education has been compulsory in schools since 1955. This has contributed to, among many other things, low rates of HIV/AIDS. The benefits of sexuality education are spelled low rates of teenage pregnancy, low rates of STIs, opportunities to raise issues on gender inequality, sexual orientation and gender identity and increases the capacity of all young people to enjoy their rights to a healthy and pleasurable sexual life on their own terms. Furthermore, the compulsory sexuality education has strongly contributed in making issues of sexuality and reproduction not an issue for each and everyone to take care of themselves, but an issue for society as a whole. This is a prerequisite for science based and open information on sexuality and HIV/AIDS.

There are signs that the sexuality education isn't fully implemented in all schools and reports of poor curricula have emerged. RFSU therefore demands from the Swedish government to improve sexuality education in schools. Key points for improving sexuality education in Sweden include

- Compulsory education for teacher students in methods for sexuality education
- Increasing components of gender and gender equality in sexuality education
- Improving curricula and syllabus
- Establishing regional resource and competence centres for sexuality education
- Encouraging research on and development of methods
- Monitoring and evaluation of sexuality education in schools
- Recurrent surveys on sexual habits

Many of those living with HIV/AIDS face strong stigma and discrimination as well as, in some parts of the world, state oppression through discriminatory and derogatory laws. Sweden's laws on HIV/AIDS are among the harshest in the world when it comes to punishments for transmitting the virus; the so called "disclosure of HIV status duty" and the possibilities to put people living with HIV/AIDS in forced internment for an indefinite period of time. RFSU demands the abolishment of these laws.

## **SAFE ABORTION**

When young women becoming pregnant unwillingly and are not lucky enough to be born in a state where safe abortion is legal, accessible and affordable they are often faced with two choices: Either giving birth and by doing so shut away opportunities for

continued education, employment and power over their lives (additionally, giving birth before the age of 20 is not recommended for health reasons) or undergo an unsafe (and often illegal) abortion. In states where safe abortion is available also for young women the figures for abortions per young women are higher than other states. This is clear evidence that young women with a real choice over how and when to form a family choose to postpone parenthood, which points to great insights of responsibility and an understanding of what parenthood is.

Young women living in states where they legally can't access a safe abortion will most likely seek an abortion regardless. If they have an economy to support it, they will seek a safe abortion illegally. If they can't find the money required they are left with unsafe methods, often self-performed. The risk of physical and psychological damage is large and tens of thousand young women die every year after having an unsafe abortion, uncounted numbers end up with severe post-unsafe abortion damages.

Safe abortion is a cornerstone in realising young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. It is above all a matter of young women's power over their own lives and young women's autonomy. Without access to safe abortion young women are more likely to end up in situations where they are deprived of possibilities to improve their lives and contribute to a sustainable development. Safe abortion needs to be made available to all young women seeking it.

Whilst safe abortion for all women, including young women, is available on demand in Sweden it only applies to Swedish women or women living in Sweden. Women from Poland (where abortion is highly restricted) are not allowed to seek the service in Sweden, even though all other medical service is available to foreigners as long as they can afford them. RFSU demands this law to be changed in order to make it possible for women to seek safe abortion services in Sweden regardless of their citizenship. Furthermore RFSU demands that the use of medical abortion as an abortion method is made more available in all of Sweden.

## **SEXUAL ORIENTATION & GENDER IDENTITY**

Young people with sexual orientation other than heterosexual or with a gender identity as transsexual or in any other way of gender expression aren't conforming with gender roles or stereotypes belong to the most excluded and stigmatised in the world. Many times the sexual orientation is in itself illegal and gender identity or intersex conditions are concepts often virtually unknown of. Even though there is a great lack of research on young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) youth the existing research points at a devastating psychological and physical health condition for a majority of the group. This alarming ill-health stems from discrimination, stigmatisation and exclusion and takes many forms depending on context.

Often the behaviour of LGBTI youth will be interpreted using a norm of heterosexuality and biased concepts of women and men (i.e. gender stereotypes). Because of the stigma LGBTI youth rarely talk about the true reasons behind behaviours, often self-destructive. Internalised homophobia and transphobia are common among LGBTI youth and sexuality more often has connotations with fear rather than joy and lust. The support needed for many LGBTI youth is often not in place. Instead LGBTI youth risk being banished from home, abused, imprisoned or arbitrary executed if disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity. The chain of discrimination goes from parents and peers, through teachers and religious leaders to police and state.

What needs to be put in place are changes in laws in order to abolish criminalisation and juridical discrimination on basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Furthermore all education and health programmes on sexuality and reproduction needs to include appropriate, non-discriminatory and evidence based curricula and services. Support for LGBTI youth needs to be part of programs reaching youth. People working with youth need training on LGBTI issues. Research needs to be widely up scaled. Poverty reducing and development strategies regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights for young people needs to be changed in order to be inclusive of LGBTI issues. Human rights must concern all young people and claiming your right to love must never be punished.

There is clear evidence that homo- and transphobia exists widely in Sweden. RFSU sees sexuality education in schools as a key opportunity to address issues around LGBTI and homo- and transphobia. RFSU demands that schools improve the LGBTI component of their sexuality education curricula.

*Victor Bernhardt*  
*RFSU<sup>17</sup>*

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<sup>17</sup> For more information on RFSU, see [www.rfsu.se](http://www.rfsu.se).

# The Story of Save the Children Youth Sweden

## - How we started our own youth organisation<sup>18</sup>

Our parent organisation Save the Children Sweden<sup>19</sup> works for children's rights and arouses public opinion in Sweden and worldwide. Some time ago, about a decade, debate started in the parent organisation about how best to take care of younger members. The organisation has various kinds of membership: family membership, membership for children and youths, and individual membership for those whose age is not within the limits for children and youths – 7 to 26 years of age. According to Article 12 of the UN Children's Convention, children, depending on their level of maturity, have the right to influence matters which concern them. Save the Children Sweden which works in accordance with the Children's Convention, could hardly say that others should work in accordance with Article 12 if we, within our own organisation, did not do so in the best possible manner. How could we do so?

A proposal was put forward at an annual general assembly that the organisation should start a youth organisation of its own, but this was turned down because members wanted young people and adults to work in the same organisation: Save the Children Sweden. So, in 1999, a drive was started, and four youth officers were recruited, three at regional level in Sweden, and one centrally. The thought was that these officers should support local groups, enabling them to activate young people, and to organise training projects so that young people had the means and methods to be more deeply involved. Three successful projects were started: Ellen – a project by girls, for girls to strengthen themselves; Agera (Act) – to counteract hostility towards foreigners and racism, and Respekt (Respect) – to disseminate knowledge about the UN Children's Convention at schools.

Although young peoples' activities became better through this support, several hindrances were noticed. Young people, active in the organisation, met annually at a youth rally to discuss how to develop youth activities and the support needed to do so. The question of starting a youth association was discussed at these meetings and gained more and more support as knowledge about the lack of young peoples' influence grew. Lack of influence was partly due to the unsatisfactory functioning of the National Board

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<sup>18</sup> This section relates to paragraphs 104, 105, 106 as well as 107 b and c on Full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making.

<sup>19</sup> More information on Save the Children Youth can be found at [www.rbuf.se](http://www.rbuf.se) or by e-mailing [rbuf@rbuf.se](mailto:rbuf@rbuf.se).

reference group for young people, and partly that there were a number of hindrances at local level within the organisation. Young peoples' contact with local associations varied, sometimes functioning satisfactorily; hindrances, in the form of difficulties with financing and influence, occurring at others. Proportional representation of young people in decision-making bodies was low. It was difficult for young people to compete with adults in respect of board membership and at annual meetings. So, naturally, young people had started to organise their own youth groups outside local associations. These groups had no rights within the organisation.

This lack of rights is in parallel to the structural exclusion of young people throughout society and the world at large. Adults give benefits to themselves and exclude young people from acquiring resources and knowledge – being able to have power. Young people are excluded because they are young. No regard is given to diversity, since young people possess unique knowledge and insight into their own circumstances and, perhaps, have a different perspective on matters, and how to solve problems in the best way. Views on, and attitudes about participation by young people must be changed! Young people are a vital resource that should be utilised.

At the 2001 youth rally it was decided that a youth organisation was needed within Save the Children Sweden – otherwise, young people would not get the power they were entitled to and wanted to have. When young people have an organisation of their own they can meet adults on equal terms and with equal rights at the same level. The ambition was not to leave Save the Children, nor to stop working together with adults. No conflict was envisaged, only an establishing of facts, together with a possible solution to the problem. Towards the end of May 2002, the National Board put forward a proposal to the national annual general meeting that Save the Children Sweden should start a process that could lead to the setting up of a youth organisation within the Save the Children. A large number of young people spoke in support of the proposal, which was passed without noticeable opposition. Now, young people were free to start an organisation of their own.

The first step was taken at the next youth rally, a working party of young people being elected to handle the process. This consisted of ten young people of both sexes, varying age and from different parts of the country. They worked for a year before decision being taken to start Save the Children Youth Sweden in September 2003. The major task consisted of bringing together the young members of Save the Children Sweden in order to get views on the organisational form of the organisation and to begin to have thoughts about the starting point(s) and objective(s) for the organisation's activities. This was achieved by disseminating information via a young peoples' newsletter to active young people, holding meetings, together with the national board discussing issues about the relationship and collaboration with the parent association (regulated by mutual agreement and inclusion into the constitution of both parties), meeting other youth organisations to learn from them, setting up an interim executive committee consisting of members of the working party, producing a proposal for a constitution and inviting



every member of Save the Children Sweden between the ages of 7 and 26 to the inaugural annual general meeting.

This inaugural meeting was attended by just under a hundred young people (at that time there were some 200 active young members within Save the Children Sweden). The approval of the Constitution and official formation of Save the Children Youth Sweden received a standing ovation, enthusiastic cheering, applause and foot stamping! The first national board, nominating committee and auditors were elected. Working groups were also set up at the general assembly: a group for each project and a group to handle spreading information including the newsletter. The youth organisation also took over Save the Children's youth activities and incorporated the youth groups, which already existed in some parts of the country. Via an agreement with the parent association, which the interim executive committee had reached with the national board, both parties were to collaborate by being represented in each-others executive committees, dual membership and a carrying out activities on the basis of Save the Children's fundamental values, etc. Later on, when representatives of both organisations had taken their seats in each-other's executive committees, new proposals were produced for the constitutions, by which the youth organisation became entitled to appoint one member of the parent organisation's executive committee, together with deputy and vice-versa, given that the member and deputy appointed to the executive committee of the youth association by the parent association be between the ages of 7 and 26 (i.e. also be member(s) of the youth organisation. In other words, membership is dual for persons between the ages of 7 and 26 unless the person actively expresses the will to be member of only one of the organisations.

A lot of work lay ahead for the national board of the Save the Children Youth Sweden. There were approximately 3,800 young members in Save the Children Sweden who would now be asked if they wanted to join the youth organisation as well. There were about 20 active youth groups here and there in the country and some 200 active youths. There were three major national projects to be kept running. To be able to manage this the Youth Association was allocated the same amount of funding as that allocated to youth activities, with four officers handling the three projects and other youth activities. A decision to this effect had been taken jointly by the National Executive Committee and the youth organisations working party about half-a-year earlier. Thus, Save the Children Youth Sweden had come a long way and had significant prerequisites even before it was set up.

The Executive Committee of the Youth Association organised its activities with this in mind, using working parties as support, but set up an office in order to manage everything. The parent organisations youth officers had stopped working by the summer as their period of project employment had come to an end. Support was forthcoming from others at Save the Children's office but, to be able to work independently, we needed our own office. A recruitment process was started to find a secretary for the Youth Association, responsible for financial matters and human resources, and an



information officer, responsible for disseminating information and training. The chairman was remunerated in order to be able to carry out the duties entailed in holding the position and, especially at this point in time, to be supportive at the newly-started office. It was also thought that the working parties would be able to give support, but, initially, problems occurred over roles and responsibilities. To give an example, the working party that was set up at the general assembly to work with the newsletter was to do so together with the information officer. Later it was decided that the information officer would be entirely responsible. It was difficult to know who should do what and the staff found work heavy and stressful. Earlier, the working party handling the setting up of the youth organisation, followed by the interim executive committee and the first executive committee elected, had taken care of and organised the activities that were now handed over to the office. It took about a year to come through this phase. In 2005 things have started to work better.

The year was also filled with decisions about who ought to have contact with the youth groups, how to handle projects, and how to deal with the relationship with the parent organisation's office. One project is continuing with one person employed on a project basis, the Ellen girls' group project, the others are being carried on in other forms – the material is still available but no training is being offered. At the second general assembly directives for fields that were given priority were approved and objectives set for a two-year period. An "opinions package" was also produced by this meeting, giving the organisation's views on questions relating to children and young people. Through the directives the organisation gained clarity as to the direction activities should take and more precisely what it ought to achieve. Save the Children Youth Sweden (in accordance with the constitution) worked with the same objectives as Save the Children Sweden – a better world for children, but what exactly could the youth organisation contribute? We are to make efforts to complement and collaborate with each other, but how can this be done in the best way? The directives showed the way. The "opinions package" was a starting point for changing the organisation from being a projects-based to becoming an opinion-based organisation. And that's where we now stand. We, the members of the executive committee feel that we can best change the circumstances of children and young people by changing views on and attitudes towards children and young people. We want to direct our activities mainly towards young people having more power in society. We can do this better than our parent organisation as we speak in our own interests. The "opinions package" was especially needed since it had become clear that young people think differently than adults, which was another reason for us to set up an organisation of our own.

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