

## Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission  
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



# COUNTRY SHEET ON YOUTH WORK in SWEDEN



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# 1. Context of youth work

## Youth work and youth policy in Sweden

In Swedish national youth policy, the concept of youth work is almost non-existent. Instead, a related concept is used, namely *meaningful leisure activities* (meningsfull fritid). That concept mainly relates to activities in youth organisations.

There is a strong tradition, when describing Swedish youth work in a European context, to only focus on leisure and open activities, preferably taking place in recreational centres and in youth organisations (see for example Forkby 2014; Forkby and Kiilakoski 2014, and the European Commission's reports on youth work). The following definition of youth work by Forkby and Kiilakoski corresponds with this tradition:

*Youth work broadly describes measures used to promote capacity-building and learning for young people in youth organisations, leisure activities, youth clubs, and other non-formal settings. (Forkby and Kiilakoski 2014: 2)*

That stands in stark contrast to the broad approach in the national youth policy objective, which is:

*All young people should have access to good living conditions, power to shape their own lives and influence over the development of the society. (Government Bill 1993/94: 135)*

The Swedish youth policy consists of a long-term orientation as well as an action programme. The action programme focuses on three main areas: transition from school to work and society, young people's power and participation and young people's leisure time, organising and well-being.

Initiatives directed to young people's leisure form thus only a (minor) part of the Swedish Government's actions in the youth field. The activities taken within the government's youth policy are in line with the definition of youth work given in the Youth Partnership's glossary:

*Youth work is a summary expression for activities with and for young people of a social, cultural, educational or political nature. The main objective of youth work is to provide opportunities for young people to shape their own futures.*

...

*Today, the difficulty within state systems to adequately ensure global access to education and the labour market means that youth work increasingly deals with unemployment, educational failure, marginalisation and social exclusion. Increasingly, youth work overlaps with the area of social services previously undertaken by the Welfare State. It, therefore, includes work on aspects such as education, employment, assistance and guidance, housing, mobility,*

*criminal justice and health, as well as the more traditional areas of participation, youth politics, cultural activities, scouting, leisure and sports. Youth work often seeks to reach out to particular groups of young people such as disadvantaged youth in socially deprived neighbourhoods, or immigrant youth including refugees and asylum seekers. Youth work may at times be organised around a particular religious tradition.*

## **Local level leisure-oriented youth work**

Unlike at the state level, the concept of youth work is somewhat more used in the work of the municipalities (see also Forkby 2014). Local youth work is funded by the respective municipality. Sweden has 290 municipalities with local governments. The municipalities have a considerable degree of autonomy and largely finance their own activities, due to independent powers of taxation. The municipalities are responsible (partly in some policy areas) for youth policy issues such as schools, employment and training, health care, social care and services, culture and leisure.

At local level, the voluntary sector, mainly youth organisations, provides an important arena for leisure activities. Besides that, in most municipalities there are recreational centres (*fritidsgårdar*), mainly targeting young people between 13 and 16 years of age, or youth/culture houses for those in secondary education and up to 25 years of age. These facilities show resemblance to what in other countries are called youth clubs or community centres, depending on their specific orientation (Forkby 2014).

Offering all young people meaningful leisure activities is regarded as a field separate from both school and social work. At the municipal level, leisure is most commonly under the responsibility of the committee of culture and /or sports. It is up to the municipality to decide whether and how leisure activities are formed, as no legislation or other national steering policies exists, requiring specific actions from the municipalities in the field of leisure.

### **Free zone or risk prevention?**

How to form meaningful leisure activities has been discussed for a long time. Discussions have touched on whether the efforts should be preventive and mainly focus on young people at risk, or generally promotive and target all youth. There has also been a positioning between those aiming for better learning opportunities in recreation centres so that young visitors can fill in educational gaps, and those who want to offer a free zone completely disconnected from school, with a focus on traditional and new forms of cultural activities (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2008).

An argument for the latter option is that recreation centres offering a free zone play an important role in strengthening young people's influence and societal involvement. Such spaces can build a base for community activities and enable contacts between young people and the civil society (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2008).

Those focusing on risk prevention give a higher priority for creating informal learning activities, together with actors from the local community. Informal learning activities are

commonly tailored for those young people who are less successful at school, to support them to gain such skills that may strengthen their future opportunities (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2008). Open recreational centres focusing on prevention are thus not only arenas for leisure activities, but also places where young people can get support in finding their ways into society and the labour market, in co-operation with schools and the local community (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2006).

## Retrospective

When the United Nation declared 1985 as an international youth year, youth issues became a definite part of the Swedish political agenda. The three goals set for the international youth year were participation, development and peace. Sweden chose to concentrate on participation. From here on, Swedish youth policy has elaborated comprehensive youth policies, with a strong focus on making young people's voices heard.

In the article "Youth policy and participation in Sweden: a historical perspective" in *The history of youth work in Europe*, volume 4, Torbjörn Forkby describes how Swedish youth policy was shaped in the late 1980s. The then minister of youth, Margot Wallström, called in a committee to consider how democracy, participation and equality should be achieved in national youth policy:

*Importantly, the committee report emphasised that youth had to be offered "real" participation. This meant that young people were to be permitted to be in positions of power, and through this, learn what influence is about and take responsibility. This kind of reasoning was influenced by what was called the "free zone" or "free room" debate. The German socialisation theorist Thomas Ziehe was an important figure in Sweden (along with theorists from the British subculture school), and influenced a number of youth culture researchers (see Sernhede 1984). A "free room" meant a space free of adults and commercialism, a place where young people could develop so-called unusual learning processes with friends. This line of thinking would later be realised through self-organised youth clubs.*

(Forkby 2014: 53)

## **2. Strategic and legislative framework of youth work**

### **Legislative framework**

Different from many other European countries, youth work is not a commonly used concept to define initiatives directed towards young people in Sweden. Therefore, there are no legislative frameworks or other national level policy documents addressing youth work.

### **Policy framework and priorities**

The Swedish Government's main tool for activities with and for young people of a social, cultural, educational or political nature is the national youth policy. The main themes for Swedish youth policy according to the government's priorities in the budget proposal for 2018 are:

- transition from school to work and society, mainly relating to employment, education and housing;
- young people's power and participation;
- young people's leisure time, organising and well-being.

Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) are a priority group within the government's youth policy initiatives. Other groups that are specifically targeted are young newly arrived, young people with immigrant backgrounds or who belong to ethnic minorities, young LGBT people and young people with disabilities. Initiatives focusing on better knowledge and addressing mental health, discrimination, violence prevention and better access to leisure activities often target the above-mentioned groups.

What is more, all government decisions and actions that affect young people between 13 and 25 years of age ought to have a youth perspective. A youth perspective is based on human rights and states that young people are to be seen and treated as a diverse group of individuals with different backgrounds and different conditions. It also states that young people's independency is to be supported and that all youth should have the possibility of influence and participation (Government Bill 2013/14: 191).

In Sweden, municipalities have considerable autonomy on how youth policy is implemented. Therefore, while the national youth policy is compulsory for ministries and central government agencies, it is only advisory at the local level.

## **Youth work professions**

The government's initiatives directed towards young people are channelled through different professions and arenas. Probably the most common connotation to youth worker is recreation leader (fritidsledare), working in a recreational centre. Other relevant professionals are for example those working with:

- young people not in education, employment or training;
- young newly arrived;
- young people's participation in local democracy;
- young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights;

young people's mental well-being.

### **3. Recognition**

#### **Formal recognition**

Sweden is in the process of developing a structure for validation of non-formal and informal education. There is no regulated framework for validation in Sweden yet.

Validation methods in Sweden differ between different actors. Career and guidance counsellors within adult education and employment services are generally key practitioners in initial validation. They identify the purpose of a validation for an individual and follow up the process at different stages. Today, there are no formal requirements for carrying out a validation. The national criteria and guidelines note that those professionals who contribute to carrying out validation should meet set competence requirements. The information here is based on the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning, country reports for Sweden 2014 and 2016.

#### **Political recognition**

In November 2015, the government decided on a national delegation for validation. The delegation consists of members representing trade unions, employers' associations and national authorities and has taken the name *Valideringsdelegationen 2015-2019*. Its main task is to follow, support and promote co-ordination of validation at both regional and national levels. The final report will be presented in December 2019.

When it comes to social recognition and self-recognition, learning in the youth work context has not been on the political agenda. Instead, formal education at upper secondary level for all and preventing early leaving from education and training have been the top priorities.

#### **Participation in European initiatives to support youth work**

Sweden is involved in Erasmus+ and Youthpass. When it comes to the other initiatives, such as Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio, Sweden has not participated at the national level.

## 4. Funding youth work

Local youth work is funded by respective municipality. Sweden has 290 municipalities with local governments. The municipalities have a considerable degree of autonomy and largely finance their own activities, due to independent powers of taxation. Activities that take place within the civil society are funded by grants from the national government as well as from local government, and by membership fees.

Only information on the national government's funding is available. Of the year 2016 central government total budget for the youth policy area (€31 million), €25 million (236 million Swedish krona (SEK)) were deposited as a state grant to youth organisations.

The government's support to sport amounts to roughly €199 million (1.9 billion SEK). In 2015, about €63 million (600 million SEK) was distributed as local activity support (lokalt aktivitetstöd) for organised sports activities for children and young people.

The central government expenditure proposed for 2016 came to a total of €94.9 billion.

There are no evaluations when it comes to international funding sources for youth work activities in Sweden. Most probably, international funding possibilities only play a minor role for local actors, taking into account local variations.

At national level, the European Social Fund funded the Theme Group Youth in Working Life during 2009-17. The task of the Theme Group was to collect and disseminate information on the methods and results of youth projects for young in NEET situations, financed by the ESF in Sweden.

## **5. Structures, actors and levels in youth work provision**

### **5.1 State structures/public authorities deciding on or providing youth work**

Youth work in the field of leisure is a municipal responsibility in Sweden, both when it comes to outreach activities and to youth centres and youth clubs. Because no specific legislation covers youth work in Sweden, it is up to local authorities to decide which activities should receive financial help and/or other means of support.

Youth work in the field of leisure may be carried out and/or governed by different entities, such as municipalities, civil society organisations (CSOs), faith communities or schools. Youth work takes place in different localities, such as recreational centres, youth/cultural houses, sport facilities, schools, churches, etc.

The fact that there is no real government control of local recreational activities may have a negative impact on the activities, according to local actors interviewed in a report to the government (MUCF 2016). Besides that, as open recreational activities are not a legislative area, the activities often suffer from financial savings in the municipalities. What is more, the fact that each municipality designs and decides on the open recreational activities means that access to leisure activities for young people varies between municipalities.

Above this, the Swedish Government has initiated a number of comprehensive programmes and actions, where the target group consists of young people in a more vulnerable position, such as NEET, young people at risk of violence and radicalisation, young people with a migrant or ethnic minority background, young LGBT people, young disabled, and latterly, newly arrived young migrants. These government actions usually aim at improving skills and competences, and target professionals working in health care or in schools, in social work, in the police force and in organised leisure, including both youth centres and sports. Even volunteers active in CSOs and in faith communities are targeted.

### **5.2 National or local youth councils**

In Sweden, there is not a specific national level youth council or youth parliament. At the local level, there are many. A survey, conducted in 2010, shows that there were over 400 different activities aimed at channelling youth influence in Swedish municipalities. These activities consisted of youth councils, youth parliaments and other youth advisory boards. Youth councils may be initiated by youth groups, youth organisations or local authorities (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2010).

Most youth councils and other youth advisory boards work independently at local or regional level, and are thus not members of any national organisation.

Some – about 50 local youth councils – are members of the Swedish Association of Youth Councils (Sveriges ungdomsråd) (MUCF 2017). The Association of Youth Councils is a civil society organisation of a network character that gathers together youth councils and other advisory groups for young people from all over the country. The Swedish Association of Youth Councils was formed in 2003, by young people, in order to develop better opportunities for co-operation between local youth councils. Co-operation and networking are the main functions for the association.

### **5.3 Youth and youth work NGOs**

There is a long tradition of awarding government grants to non-profit youth organisations in Sweden. The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) supports youth organisations by distributing government grants. In 2016, 111 youth organisations, totalling 676 000 members between 6 and 25 years of age received a government grant, according to MUCFs Annual Report 2016 (MUCF 2017).

According to the Ordinance on State Grants for Child and Youth Organisations, the purpose of the grant is to support children and young people's independent organisations and influence in society (SFS 2011: 65).

The ordinance defines the formal requirements and conditions that organisations must meet. A grant may be submitted only to youth organisations that are non-profit with voluntary membership, independent and democratic, in their operations they respect the ideals of democracy, including equality and non-discrimination, and have been operating in Sweden for at least two years.

### **5.4 Other relevant actors**

The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) is a government agency for matters relating to youth policy and civil society. The agency has approximately 70 employees. The government decides on the preconditions for the agency's operations. This is implemented by annual appropriation directives and an ordinance. The appropriation directives set out, among other things, how much money the agency has at its disposal and how the money is to be distributed between the different activities. The ordinance contains general administrative provisions concerning how the agency is to carry out its work. The agency shall, according to its ordinance (SFS 2015: 49), work to ensure that the objectives of youth policy and of civil society policy will be achieved by: developing, collecting and disseminating knowledge; distributing government grants; collaborating with civil society organisations in order to safeguard their knowledge and experiences. The ordinance even defines the more specific duties of the agency, which are: contributing to young people's transition from school to work and their integration into society; being responsible for the production of knowledge on young people's living

conditions, attitudes and values, including a database of existing statistics; developing and disseminating knowledge on methods that can improve young people's living conditions; contributing to mainstreaming within relevant government agencies' activities and co-ordination of government initiatives aimed at young people; supporting development of knowledge-based youth policy in municipalities and regions; promoting better opportunities for young people's participation, influence and organisation; promoting young people's leisure activities, their sexual and reproductive rights and access to knowledge of human rights and other issues which may strengthen their power to shape their lives; promote gender mainstreaming; working to counteract discrimination on the grounds of gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or belief, disability, sexual orientation or age; having an overall responsibility for young people's equal rights and opportunities regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression; being the national agency for EU programmes in the field of youth. In addition to the ordinance, annual appropriation directives contain special missions for the agency.

## 6. Forms and examples of youth work in your country

### Meaningful leisure activities

The Swedish Government has a long tradition of funding youth organisations, with the aim of supporting young people's personal and social development through informal and non-formal learning. Since the early 1990s, government's contributions to youth organisations have been ruled by the objective that the activities are to be governed by the young members, thus creating a context where young people have the power to control their own activities (Government Bill 1993/94: 135).

When young people's leisure activities have been discussed in the national youth policy context, two aspects have been dominant since the early 1990s:

- Activities should meet the interests of both genders, and include young people living in socially more disadvantaged areas, young disabled persons, young migrants and, since 2014, have a specific focus on the rights of young LGBT people.
- Better collaboration between local actors, including actors both in the public and civil sectors, is needed, in order to better secure young people's rights and opportunities in the welfare state.

(Government Bill 1993/94: 135; Government Bill 2013/14: 191)

### Recreational centres

Today, there are about 900 recreational centres in Sweden's 290 municipalities. These resemble youth clubs in other countries, and are mainly targeted at youth between 13 to 16 years of age. In addition, there are about 150 youth houses, mainly for those between 17 and 25 years of age (MUCF 2016).

The number of recreational centres in Sweden is decreasing, while the number of youth houses seems to be increasing slightly. However, it is hard to know exactly what the reduced number stands for. Statistics from the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions database (Kolada) do not show, for example, that municipal costs for recreational and leisure activities are lower today compared to earlier years (MUCF 2016).

According to an earlier study, about two thirds of the recreational centres/youth houses fall under the responsibility of the public sector, with the rest run by civil society organisations (CSOs) (Forkby and Kiilakoski 2014).

A recreational centre generally aims to reach a broad group of young people in certain age groups and neighbourhoods. A survey conducted in five municipalities showed that, among 13-15- year-olds, 76% had not visited a recreational centre in the last four weeks. About 11% had visited a recreational centre at least once a week, while others had visited a recreational centre at least once in the last four weeks.

It is quite unusual among 16-25-year-olds to visit a recreational centre or a youth house. According to a national youth survey, only 3% pay a visit every week or more often, 10% pay a visit every now and then during a year, while 87% of the respondents told that they never pay a visit to a youth house or a centre (MUCF 2016).

Those who attend recreational centres often have a more complex life situation compared to other adolescents, including having multiple problems including truancy, delinquency and abuse of alcohol or drugs (Forkby and Kiilakoski 2014).

An article on perspectives and practice in youth clubs in Finland and Sweden describes the situation as follows:

*[y]outh clubs are seen both as an instrument of social policy and as a non-formal learning environment. In the pedagogical landscape, two opposing social aims have influenced youth clubs. Their social justification stems from the fact that youth clubs have been seen as instruments for fostering participation, or, alternatively, as learning environments for a narrow conception of citizenship. The citizenship perspective emphasises the need to take rowdy young people away from the streets and give them learning opportunities, thereby normalising their behaviour, especially in the cities. The participation perspective emphasises supporting the ideas and desires of the young and helping them to define and give voice to their experiences. (Forkby and Kiilakoski 2014: 8).*

## Reaching out

In 2016, MUCF had a government task to map open leisure activities aimed at young people. Methods used included both survey studies and a qualitative approach (MUCF 2016). Some key findings are presented here.

A main success factor to get more young people to attend leisure activities is to work with young people's opportunities to influence and participate. Another success factor is to have a well-functioning organisation in terms of staff skills, support and follow-up.

The generally low status and, sometimes, bad reputation of open recreational activities may discourage some from attending. In MUCF's youth survey from 2015, it also appeared that some young people refrain from participating in leisure activities because of fear of not being included and well-treated by other visitors and the staff. This is more common among girls than boys. It is also more common among young homo- and bisexuals compared to young heterosexuals, and among young people with disabilities compared to those without.

There are circumstances and factors that MUCF found to be specific to certain groups of young people:

- Young newly arrived migrants benefit from general information services on education, health care, housing, labour market and social services. To start with, they need practical help to find their way to the activities. Many young newly arrived find themselves being powerless in regard to their personal well-being, due to the long wait for the asylum decision. Open leisure activities can be an arena where they can feel involved and gain a sense of

belonging.

- Young disabled benefit from targeted activities, accessible facilities, and targeted activities for those between 18 and 25 years of age.
- Girls benefit from a generally safe environment, and working on gender roles, especially targeting masculinity norms that glorify stereotypical macho behaviour, which may dominate the centres.
- Young LGBT people benefit from staff competent in general human rights and the rights of sexual minorities, and who are able to give all visitors a warm welcome, question current norms and behaviours and set a stop to harassments and violations.
- Young adults benefit from targeted activities, as they may have other needs than adolescents. To encourage them to take greater responsibility and leadership is important, as well as working in close co-operation with the local community.

In order to open up leisure activities for all young people, it is important to continuously work with democratic values and inclusion. One way to do that is to work with norm-critical pedagogy,<sup>1</sup> for making more young people feel that the centre is for them.

In the section below, two examples of other forms of leisure activities outside of recreational youth centres are presented. The examples originate from the study conducted by MUCF (2016), and they were originally chosen as being particularly successful in terms of promoting young people's participation. The descriptions exemplify the work of several of the promotional factors identified above.

### **Lindängen all-activity house**

[Lindängen all-activity house](#)<sup>2</sup> was established as part of the programme for sustainable Malmö. The programme took place during 2010-15, with the aim of improving living conditions, increasing security and creating more jobs in low-welfare areas of Malmö. The house has been awarded the Malmö City Diversity Prize in 2012.

The Lindängen all-activity house is open seven days a week for children, young people and adults of all ages. All activities are free of charge and anyone can participate in or initiate new activities. The activities are led by professionals together with volunteers. A large proportion of both employees and volunteers live in the area.

The centre offers a wide range of activities – ranging from different sports to language teaching, homework support, dance, theatre and cooking. The basic principle is to only provide such activities that the visitors have asked for.

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<sup>1</sup> Norm-critical pedagogy was formulated as a contrast to tolerance pedagogy, which encouraged tolerance of deviance. From a norm-critical point of view, the starting point is rather that it is the prevailing norms and not the victims of discrimination that constitute the problem. Examples of commonly discussed norms include the hetero-norm, the functionality norm, whiteness norms and the binary gender norm ([www.genus.se/en/wordpost/normnormcriticism/](http://www.genus.se/en/wordpost/normnormcriticism/)).

<sup>2</sup> An all-activity house is a facility where different groups of people and activities can meet, a public venue that everyone in the community has access to and influence over.

Lindängen all-activity house has an extensive network of actors in the area. These involve for example the social services, family counselling, schools or child care. When it comes to newly arrived migrants, the centre guides their visits to libraries, recreational centres, health centres and other local services.

The area-based work also includes contact with parents. In addition to the fact that many adults engage in the activities in the same premises as young people, the staff have regular contact with the young visitors' parents. The staff inform them about the activities and the successes their children achieve. That is a conscious strategy to strengthen the self-esteem of those young people who rarely receive positive responses to what they do in school or otherwise. By telling the parents positive things about their children, the relationship between the youngsters and their parents is also promoted.

Keeping contact with parents also promotes gender equality and youth participation in those residential areas where many young girls are expected to get home immediately after school. With increased knowledge and confidence in the all-activity centre, parents are more likely to let even the girls participate. One of the goals was to pay extra attention to girls and women, because they were underrepresented in leisure activities. The centre has succeeded – more girls and women (60%) than boys and men are now participating (Karlsson and Cars 2015). The fact that activities to a large extent are conducted at school, and in connection to the school day, makes it much easier for girls to participate.

The all-activity house has also meant a major change for the whole area of Lindängen. Housing security has increased, people with different backgrounds meet and get to know each other. The students' study results have also been improved. In 2012, the compulsory school in Lindängen was the school in Malmö with the most improved study results of all schools in the city. Bullying, drug dealing and vandalism have also decreased (Malmö stad 2015).

Karlsson and Cars (2015) have, on behalf of the city of Malmö, studied developments in Lindängen. The main success factors according to their research were not the activities themselves, but the values created – sense of belonging in the community, trust with others and reduced barriers between citizens and local authorities.

### **Den rullande bygdegården - community centre on wheels**

Several municipalities and civil society organisations have started mobile leisure teams in different locations in the country in recent years. Through mobile teams, open leisure activities may take place in neighbourhoods without a permanent activity provider. A mobile team on wheels may be a minibus or a trailer with materials for various indoor and outdoor activities.

Bygdegårdarnas Riksförbund (Association for Rural Community Centres) has a goal of starting more youth activities in rural areas. The background is that the majority of the members of the Bygdegårdarnas Riksförbund are elder, while the existing range of leisure activities for young people in the rural areas is often small.

“Community centre on wheels” (den [rullande bygdegården](#)) is a trailer with materials for different activities. It is up to the local association to book the trailer and pick it up from

the last user. The trailer contains equipment for different sports, games and theatre performances. There is even equipment for young people to make their own movies. The purpose is to provide inspiration, and to let young people try different activities and find out what they like best and what is fun. At the same time, they get information on how to engage in an existing local association, or how to start new activities if there is no local club.

According to Bygdegårdarnas Riksförbund, success factors for mobile teams on wheels are:

- Collaboratation. Different municipalities and associations can provide sponsorship, competences, equipment, personnel, volunteers and information channels.
- Providing a wide range of activities that attract young people with different interests.
- Having a strategy for how young people can get involved.
- Always having at least one leader for introducing and leading the activities.
- Information on how young people can become part of the regular activities.

## 7. Quality standards

### Youth workers

Most staff members working in recreational centres or youth/culture houses are trained recreation leaders from the two-year vocational training programme at the folk high schools, leading to a diploma in youth work. All folk high schools with a recreation leader programme follow a common training plan/curriculum.

There is an ongoing discussion within folk high schools on how to increase the quality of education. One way to ensure that the education provides the right skills is a better dialogue between employers and the education providers about the skills and competences that must be in place to ensure quality in the activities. Such dialogue is already in place between some municipalities and folk high schools (MUCF 2016).

The schools are also able to make quality measurements according to a self-assessment system. The folk high schools are able to apply for membership of SeQf, Sweden's Qualifications Framework. SeQf builds on the common European Qualification Framework. This makes it easier to compare qualifications from studies and working life, both nationally and internationally.

In Sweden, there are about 3 700 recreational leaders, half of them being employed in municipal leisure and culture departments. The majority work at recreational centres and some at youth houses. This occupational group is characterised by a relatively low mean age. Many are in temporary employment, have limited work experience, and are relatively low paid. Lack of legislation and the non-academic education level lead to a relatively low professional status and a considerable educational variation among professionals active in this field. There is, in other words, room for improvement with respect to the competence and status of the occupation (Forkby 2014; Forkby and Kiilakoski 2014).

### Youth work activities

There are no national level quality standards or competence frameworks for youth work. It is up to local municipal authorities to decide whether and how to evaluate local youth work in Sweden.

Peer-learning initiatives for how to assess quality in youth work have, though, been taken by the KEKS-network and the Research and Development Centre for Youth Work.

Quality and expertise in co-operation, KEKS (Kvalitet och kompetens i samverkan) is a network for youth work. The network has existed since 2005 and builds on common goals and a common system of quality assurance. The network has about 40 members, mainly municipal administrations in charge of youth centres, youth houses and youth projects.

The network has developed a quality system that is used by all members in order to develop youth work. This is done both by benchmarking, peer learning, exchange of best practices and other forms of co-operation within KEKS.

The research and development centre, R & D (Kunskapscentrum för Fritidsledarskap), is for youth work in youth centres in the capital area (Stockholm and surrounding municipalities). The research and development centre develops and evaluates methods and leadership for youth work at youth clubs and recreation centres. The focus is on a promotion approach and empowerment and not on social work.

## **8. Knowledge and data on youth work**

In Sweden, the youth work profession has not been backed by research, so there is a lack of basic knowledge. No data are available on the number of youth workers.

### **Current discussions**

As a result of the task of mapping open leisure activities (MUCF 2016), the government has assigned the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) to serve as the support for local level actors when it comes to leisure activities for young people. The task includes providing training and promoting knowledge-based methods. The support should be based on the needs of different local actors, in order to match the needs and preferences of young people.

The agency has previously had assignments relating to leisure activities, such as the initiative on preventive and promotive activities for young people at risk, including drug-free meeting places, during 2006-08, and efforts to strengthen young LGBT person's rights to meaningful recreational activities during 2011-13. These tasks have been time-limited. Therefore, the agency has been arguing for a more permanent mission.

With this increased responsibility, MUCF intends to continue with working on gender equality and norm-critical pedagogy, for example by offering further training in co-operation with civil society organisations and municipalities.

Another option is to develop leisure-oriented youth work in the direction of the European approach to youth work, with an even clearer mission of increasing social inclusion and promoting young people's transitions from school to work. Some youth houses and all-activity centres already work in this way, in close co-operation with the local community.

## **9. European and international dimension of youth work in the country**

The Swedish Government has not yet taken any specific actions to implement the Council of Europe Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work.

Swedish youth workers are able to apply for an Erasmus+ grant, as a support of their professional development through training or networking periods. Periods abroad can consist of training courses, study visits, job shadowing or observation periods at relevant organisations abroad.

## **10. Current debates and open questions/policies on youth work**

N/A

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