

Council of Europe  
Conseil de l'Europe



European Union  
Union Européenne

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

# INFORMATION SHEET

## PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

### Sweden



Last updated: 3/3/2011  
By: Idah Klint

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Youth participation in Sweden _____	2
2. Youth participation in representative democracy in Sweden _____	4
2.1. Participation in elections _____	4
2.2. Young people elected into representative bodies _____	5
3. Youth participation in civil society _____	6
3.1. Membership in NGOs _____	6
3.2. Youth participation structures on local, regional or national level _____	6
4. Learning to participate _____	8
4.1. The formal education system _____	8
4.2. Non formal education _____	9
5. Youth information in Sweden _____	10
5.1. The structure of youth information _____	10
5.2. The youth information services _____	10
5.3. Topics of youth information _____	11
5.4. Young people's involvement in youth information _____	11
6. Informal ways of young people's participation _____	12
7. Sources of information _____	14

# 1. Youth participation in Sweden

*Give an overview on participation of young people (13 – 30) in your country on the national and regional level (in federal states) answering the following questions:*

*- Are there official national/regional recommendations (policies) establishing the right of young people to participate in society?*

In Sweden there is no comprehensive youth policy law such as in Finland or Denmark. Instead, the youth policy and young people's participatory rights is regulated in the context of other legislation and in a number of conventions and documents of different legal status.

One of the two goals of the Swedish national youth policy is to ensure that young people have real access to influence/participation. It is however in the municipalities that decisions are made on many of the factors of most importance for the situation of young people. An important part of the Government's efforts to strengthen young peoples influence over their own lives and over society is therefore focused on supporting municipalities and youth organizations /local youth associations in developing methods for local youth involvement.

The Government Offices, various departments, provides data and investigate current issues for different government decisions. The youth policy unit, relating to people aged 13 - 25 years, has shifted ministry after the elections in September 2010, the unit used to belong to the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality now belongs to the Ministry of Education. The responsibility for child protection policies relating to all up to 18 years remains at the Ministry of Social Affairs. The government actions on issues related to youth participation is an important part of the overall youth policy. The government and the government authorities have a responsibility to follow the CRC, which includes children and young people's right to influence/participation.

In 2009 the government presented a summary of its 21 most important initiatives within the youth policy area, the initiatives were divided into themes; participation, health, work, education and culture and leisure. Three of these efforts focused on youth participation:

- youth participation will be promoted through a national Youth Policy Council;
- The National Board for Youth Affairs will distribute support to young people's organization;
- the National Board for Youth Affairs will support the municipalities in their work with young people's influence/participation.

The National Board for Youth Affairs (NBYA) is the main government authority that seeks to enhance young people's access to participation. Much of the work is directed at the municipalities and the local governments, which is crucial to how well Sweden lives up to the youth policy objectives. One feature of how the NBYA monitor the national youth policy is to let young people's voices be heard. The NBYA provides knowledge of young people's living conditions, attitudes, values and opinions collected with the help of two regular national surveys: Attitude and value study and the Youth Survey. In conjunction with the annual thematic reports in the different Youth Policy fields, the NBYA always interviews young people.

The National Board for Youth Affairs is responsible for producing an annual statistical report to the Government on the situation of young people in Sweden. The report is built on contributions from governmental agencies in a broad specter of policy areas (education, employment, culture, health, etc), and covers even the situation in the field of youth participation. Here, indicators such as membership in political parties, membership in organizations, participation in political actions, etc., are presented and analysed. The National Board for Youth Affairs delivers a report to the Government on the development within the Board's areas of responsibility each year, in which even the status regarding young people's participation in society is included.

In 2001 the NBYA started the project *LUPP*, local monitoring of youth policy, a survey that increases the local knowledge of how young people's lives look like and what young people think about their lives. The survey is aimed at young people who are in primary school secondary school and young people aged 19-25 years and raises questions about school, recreation, safety, health, work, their future and politics and participation. Based on the survey results the local politicians can set measurable targets for action that can be followed up in new Lupp surveys in the future. Lupp is not just a method of monitoring but the idea is that the knowledge that it brings will lead to political decisions and actions to develop local youth policy.

- *If so: how is the concept of youth participation defined?*

- *What are the measures envisaged to promote different forms of participation on local, regional and national level?*

The National Board for Youth Affairs also administer funds for supporting youth organizations and other youth structures, such as the governmental fund for youth organizations, where youth organizations receive grants enabling them to work actively with youth participation in local democracy. It is possible for Swedish youth NGOs to receive financial support from the Swedish Government. The funding is distributed by the National Board for Youth Affairs (Ungdomsstyrelsen) according to open criteria defined by the Parliament (the Riksdag) and the Government. The criteria ruling the financial support are general, mainly focusing on matters of democracy. In 2010 The National Board for Youth Affairs (Ungdomsstyrelsen) distributed 26 million Euros the youth organizations.

A majority of the Swedish municipalities distribute funds to local youth NGOs. Some municipalities also have reserved funds for local youth initiatives.

The National Board for Youth Affairs even provides small grants for the youth policy development work of municipalities.

- *Do any of the above mentioned measures target specific groups? (please tick)*

females

males

migrants

young people with fewer opportunities

young people in specific regions

minorities (which):

certain age groups within the age range 13-30(which):

at a local level, participation is mainly targeted at young people between 13-20 years old.

other:

## 2. Youth participation in representative democracy in Sweden

Please describe the rules of representative democracy related to young people answering the questions below:

- Is voting compulsory in your country? No
- What is the legal minimum age to vote in elections?

European <sup>1</sup> :	18	National:	18	Local:	18
-------------------------	----	-----------	----	--------	----

- What are the legal requirements for voting in local, regional, national and European elections?

Voting rights to Parliament (Riksdagen) elections are reserved for all Swedish citizens who are 18 years of age before or on Election Day and who are, or have at some time been, registered residents of Sweden.

Voting rights in county council and municipal assembly elections are reserved for Swedish citizens who are 18 years of age before or on Election Day and who are registered residents of Sweden within the county or municipality. Citizens of any Member State of the European Union (Union citizens) and citizens of Iceland and Norway are also entitled to vote in county council and municipal assembly elections under the same conditions. Citizens of other states are entitled to vote if they have been registered residents of Sweden for three consecutive years on Election Day.

- What are the legal requirements for being a candidate in elections?

If you have the right to vote in an election you are also allowed to be a candidate at all levels.

### 2.1. Participation in elections

Please give the percentage of young voters (young people who are allowed to vote below 30 years old) on European (for EU-countries only) and national level. If detailed data on young people is not available please provide the general turnout of all voters and describe the young voter's participation

	Participation in European elections in % of people with the right to vote			Participation in national elections in % of people with the right to vote		
	Total	female	male	total	female	male
% of total population	45,5			84,63		
18-24 year olds	38			76 (18-21)		
				77 (22-29)		

Source: Youth today 2010, National board for youth affairs

<sup>1</sup> If applicable

## 2.2. Young people elected into representative bodies

*Please provide the number (in total and by gender) of young people under the age of 30 who are members of the national parliament. Please provide the total number of parliamentarians on national level.*

	MP ≥ 25		All MP (2006)	
Women	3	%	165	%
Men	7	%	184	%
Total	10	%	349	100 %

The party political involvement among young people in Sweden is small and the young people are significantly underrepresented in the party system.

### 3. Youth participation in civil society

#### 3.1. Membership in NGOs

Please give the percentage of young people aged 13 to 30 (if possible in total and gender) who are members in non-governmental organisations (including political and youth NGOs) and if possible for youth NGOs. Please provide the same data for political parties as well. For comparison, please provide the same data for the whole population.

	NGOs, including political NGOs and youth NGOs			Youth NGOs			Political parties		
	Total	female	male	Total	female	male	total	female	male
% of total population	81								
16 – 25 year olds	61	59	64				3,5	2,5	4,5

Source: Fokus 10, The national board for youth affairs

Just over half of all young people in Sweden, **61** percent, are members of any association according to Statistics Sweden, SCB. The largest percentage of young people are involved in sports organizations/clubs, **eight out of ten** young people have at least sometime before the age of 20 belonged to a sports club (SOU 2008:59). Regarding Youth NGO numbers it is not possible to give an overview, the NBYA only has the number of young people that are members of the youth NGO's that receives government grants. In 2011, a total of **599 942** young person's where members of the 90 organizations that received government grants.

#### 3.2 Youth participation structures on local, regional or national level

Please give a picture of how young people can/do participate in formally recognized ways in civic society/policy in your country by answering to the following questions:

- which types of **youth participation structures** exist in your country and which group of young people these structure do represent?
- what is the degree of participation to decision making allowed by these structures (please fill in the table below)?

type of youth participation structure	% of local structures			% of regional structures			% of national structures		
	Share of power	consulation	information	Share of power	consulation	information	Share of power	consulation	information
.....									

In the National Youth Policy Council (mentioned above), the Government meets and discusses youth policy issues with representatives of Swedish Youth Organizations and people who work with youth. The Youth Policy Council has been invited to comment and give the organizations view of the new youth strategy that where formulated in 2009 (rskr 2009/10: 53)

But efforts to promote young people's influence/participation are mainly at the municipal level. That's where most of the activities take place and where most of the decisions which affect young people are decided. In 2009, the National Board for Youth Affairs published a report about how the local authorities provide youth participation forums. The report provides a comprehensive description of how Swedish municipalities are working with youth influence/participation and highlights best practices (National Board for Youth Affairs, 2009). According to the report, participation forums look different and act differently, but with a common desire, to achieve some kind of contact, communication or dialogue between young people and decision makers. The categorization in the report is used as follows:

- Youth Council
- Youth Advisory council
- Thematic workshops
- Dialogue Forum.

287 municipalities responded to the Board's questionnaire and (Sweden has 290 municipalities in total) 63 percent, 182 municipalities, said that they have some form of influence/participation forum for young people. The four types of forums that the Board categorized above exist in 162 municipalities. In the 20 municipalities that do not have these types of forums answered that they have specific projects or initiatives, and in some cases, youth organizations as an influence/participation forum. A total of 425 forums were specified in the questionnaire. Of those who responded that they work with influence/participation forums 102 municipalities (57 percent) indicated that they have more than one forum.



## 4. Learning to participate

### 4.1. The formal education system

*Please describe existing mechanisms within the system of formal education aiming at developing and deepening learning to participate in your country.*

Student influence/participation is well established at all legal levels of the Swedish educational system, from the Education Act of primary and secondary regulation to the curriculum. The current reform of the Swedish educational system has not resulted in any changes in pupils' participatory rights in schools. The new School law which will go in effect from July 2011 covers all types of schools, from kindergarten to adult education, regardless of whether the owner is a municipality, a county, state, or an individual. Compared with the former Education Act, it is now more clear the school's core values are human rights and that Article nr 12 in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child provides the legal basis for all pupils' rights to influence/participation in school. One change is that it now also specifies the obligations of the schools, for example, that teachers and other schoolstaff should inform students of their rights and support and facilitate their involvement and participation (Ministry of Education 2010).

Students' right to influence/participation is specified by the educational curriculum. The school shall endeavor that each student:

- take personal responsibility for their studies and their working environment;
- gradually exercise a growing influence/participation over their education;
- have an understanding of democratic principles and develop their ability to work in democratic forms. (Lpo 94, p.13)

What influence/Participation concerns are not described in the Education Act, but simply put student influence/participation is that each student should be able to influence their school situation, both individually and collectively. In the way that education policy is designed today, it is reasonable to discuss the student influence from two main perspectives:

- The right to make individual choices, either by choice of school or by the choice of various options within a school;
- The right to have a say in the teaching methods and the working environment.

There are two main ways for pupils in primary and secondary schools to organize their interests. One form is that each class chooses a representative who is part of the school's student council. The second is that all students who wish to join the school's student body, which they then choose a chairman and board of directors in accordance with ordinary union tradition. Student Unions are thus based on pupils' voluntary membership and self-organization.

One of the activities of the government's democracy initiative was the choice of school elections in 2006 conducted by the National Board for Youth Affairs. The project is a sort of "shadow election" during the national elections to the parliament, and is aimed at secondary school students (16-18 years) and students in primary school (13-15 years). Over half of all secondary and primary school students in the country, 1 380 schools and 405 000 students, participated in the school elections 2006 which was the third nationally coordinated school election. The project wants to encourage students to participate in school elections and to increase awareness and motivation on how to participate in and influence society. The National Board for Youth Affairs mission was also to evaluate and monitor the project. During the last National elections in 2010 the National Board for Youth Affairs was once again appointed to arrange the school elections in Swedish secondary schools. In the school election in 2010, over 300 000 students in more than 1250 schools participated.

*Are there teacher trainings programmes at the national and/or regional level on this topic?*

The Government's Bill *Best in class - a new teacher's education* is related to how teachers should be trained along the school's democratic mission. The government bill identifies the knowledge and skills necessary for all teachers, regardless of orientation. These in turn are grouped according to eight areas, the first area "training and organizational terms, the foundations of democracy" (Bill 2009/10: 89, p. 67) is of most interest here. The report mentions the importance of democracy more explicitly as:

"One of the school's main tasks is to foster democracy. For future teachers, it is necessary to know the theoretical basis of democracy but also to master its practical forms." (SOU 2008:109, p. 193)

Since March 2010, a training program for head teachers is compulsory education for directors who have not previously undergone post training. The motive for the education is stressed by the importance of "a democratic, learning and communicative leadership in schools" (Ministry of Education 2001, p. 57). One of the goals of school law and authority is that principals must have good knowledge of the basic values of the school statutes, which now includes both democracy and human rights. Within the school leadership the head teacher must "demonstrate a good ability as a leader and as a democratic role model for pupils and staff so that an open communicative environment is created" (National Agency for 2010g, p. 10). The education must include 30 ECTS credits, divided into the areas of school law and authority, objectives and performance management, and instructional leadership (Prop. 2009/10: 27). The training program is three years and is conducted on a variety of locations in the country.

## **4.2. Non formal education**

*Please describe five to ten existing examples of actions/programmes/activities at national or regional level, outside the formal education system, aiming at developing and deepening learning to participate in your country.*

The National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations – LSU (*Landsrådet för Sveriges Ungdomsorganisationer*), is a coordinating body for almost 100 Swedish youth organizations. It aims at constituting a forum for matters of common interest in youth organizations and providing a network for national as well as international organizations dealing with youth cooperation.

Youth Councils of Sweden (*Sveriges Ungdomsråd*) is an umbrella organization for local youth councils. The organization is both a network that acts as intermediary between local youth councils that are members of the organization and work with strategies to develop the skills of its members.

The Swedish student councils have two umbrella organizations; *Svea* and *SECO* that works to support the work of the student councils in the Swedish schools.

The Association of a Joint Future is the organizer of the national "Opinion festival"- URIX. The association consists of four youth organizations, the Red Cross Youth, Youth Against Racism and Youth Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights. The purpose of the annual festival is to increase young people's active participation in society and be a forum for committed young people who are not members of any organization. The objective is to create a meeting place for young people between 13 - 18 years from all over Sweden. Empower young people by showing concrete and democratic methods to influence their lives and the society.

National Network for Youth Influence (NUNI) is a support network for civil servants in the municipalities that wish to develop their work with young people's participation and influence.

## 5. Youth information in Sweden

### 5.1. The structure of youth information

*Please describe how youth information is organised in your country answering the following questions.*

*- Do youth information points / centres exist?*

Information does not exist as a separate field or objective in Swedish youth policy, but is a natural part of other policy fields. In this regard Sweden differs from many other EU Member States. But Sweden has a long tradition of openness and accessibility with regard to information. The principle of public access, which means that all citizens have the right to view public documents, is a linchpin of the Swedish system. This has led to actors in the public sector operating in an open climate and making active efforts to provide information that is readily accessible from both a practical and linguistic point of view. Many government agencies and regional and local actors produce both paper-based information and information on the Internet, such as special websites aimed at young people.

But action can be taken if it is discovered that there are special needs, or significant gaps in information for young people in important areas. For example, the Government in 2007 identified a need to supplement the youth guidance centres that provide advice and support on sexual and reproductive health and rights and relationships, which exist throughout the country, with a youth guidance centre on the Internet. The youth guidance centre on the Internet was launched in mid-November 2008.

*- Does youth information coordinated at the national level exist?*

No

*- Does youth information coordinated at the regional level exist?*

No

*- Is youth information in your country member of any European network (ERYICA, EYCA, Eurodesk)? If yes, name the network.*

The National Board for Youth Affairs is the national coordinating body of Eurodesk. At the moment there is 21 local Eurodesk information points, these consists mainly of municipalities.

### 5.2. The youth information services

*Please provide the percentage of municipalities with a youth information point/centre.*

*Is there an online national youth information system? Y/N. If yes, please provide the links to the relevant webpage(s), state if the portal provides youth information only on a specific topic.*

*Are there any online regional youth information systems? Y/N If yes, please provide the links to the relevant webpage(s), state if the portal provides youth information only on a specific topic.*

*Please describe existing national or regional (federal states) print publications for information of young people in your country (e.g. magazines, folders/brochures).*

N/I

### **5.3. Topics of youth information**

*In relation to the structures of youth information you mentioned above, what are the main contents of information delivered to young people?*

- career guidance
- studies and scholarships
- jobs and training
- general health matters
- relationships and sexuality
- social security benefits
- rights of young people
- consumer rights
- European opportunities for young people
- youth activities and exchanges
- Other (please explain)

### **5.4. Young people's involvement in youth information**

*How do young people participate in the national/regional system of youth information?*

N/I

## 6. Informal ways of young people's participation

*Please describe informal ways used by young people to make their voices heard in society in your country.*

About 95 percent of the Nordic young people have access to the Internet at home and the majority uses the internet every day. The differences in this regard in Europe are large but the average for proportion of young people who have Internet access in the EU member countries is approximately 75 percent (Livingstone & Haddon 2009).

In Sweden, a total of 39 percent of Internet users are members of a Web Community. About three out of four, aged 16-25 years are members of different social media communities. Half of the group between 16-25 years use or log in to their community they are members of every day and the differences between young men and young women is very small (Findahl 2010).

Both in the statistics and in the interviews that the National Board for Youth Affairs has conducted with high school students, socially committed young researchers etc, has highlighted facebook as one of the most used communities to communicate with friends and acquaintances. It has also become an important arena for policy, advocacy, networking and mobilization. The increasingly widespread use of Facebook makes it interesting from a participation perspective. Internet and above all facebook has blurred the divisions between the virtual and the real, between the private and the public and between the everyday-life and politics (Carlsson 2010A, 2010b, Olsen & Dahlgren 2010).

*Please describe alternative ways of youth participation connected to the use of online technologies answering the following questions:*

*Top down approach (e.g. online consultations): in which occasion?*

As a basis for the new Government Youth Policy Strategy 2009 young people were able to leave their comments about what matters to them via the website [www.framtidsfragan.se](http://www.framtidsfragan.se) ("your future"). This was one example when the government provided an opportunity for young people to have their say in issues that concern them (rskr 2009/10: 53).

*Bottom up approach (e.g. organised actions through social networks and the internet): in which occasion?*

The Swedish general election to the *Riksdag* was held on 19 September 2010. The election also saw the nationalist Sweden Democrats entering parliament for the first time, as the sixth largest and only none-aligned of the eight parties elected to the parliament, by receiving 5.70 percent of the votes and 20 seats.

Felicia, a 17 year old girl from Stockholm, was so appalled by the election results and during the eve of the election she created a Facebook-event against racism and xenophobia and encouraged people to show up at a central square in the city center the next evening (a square that is famous for hosting different demonstrations). In one hour 400 people had joined the event, after two hours 2000 people and on the following morning 4000 people had joined. When Felicia realized the number of people coming she contacted the police in order to get an authorization for the demonstration. Approximately 10 000 people showed up at the square that night. And similar demonstrations popped up in the cities of Malmö and Gothenborg as well. The media attention was massive because of the quick mobilization and the number of people who participated.

Anton Abele, born in 1992, is a Swedish politician and member of parliament for the Conservatives. He is also an activist, columnist and commentator who became involved after the beating to death of a young boy in 2007. Abele created a Facebook group called 'Save us from violence in the streets' which very quickly got over 100 000 members. In October 2007 Abele

arranged a manifestation against violence in the streets and over 10 000 young people and adults attended in the Royal Garden of Stockholm. Abele is now the youngest Swedish member of parliament ever. Anton Abele has been rewarded for his initiative several times. Among other things, he received the Free Your Mind Award at the MTV Awards in Munich November 1, 2007. Several newspapers named him the "stockholmer" of the year and in May 2008, Abele and Stop the street violence campaign was appointed the year's most important communication activity.

## 7. Sources of information

National Board for Youth Affairs, Fokus 10, 2010

[www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se](http://www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se)

Statistics Sweden,

[www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se)

[www.nuni.se](http://www.nuni.se)

[http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton\\_Abele](http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton_Abele)