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Partnership between the European Commission  
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# INFORMATION SHEET

## VOLUNTEERING OF YOUNG PEOPLE

### SWEDEN



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# 1. Volunteering of young people in Sweden

*Give an overview on volunteering 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) concerning volunteering of young people?*

*On national level:*

Sweden has a long tradition of volunteering and active citizenship among its population which dates back to the 1600s. Later in the 19th century, popular mass movements began to appear, inspired by those in other countries. It has been suggested that the comprehensive provision of social services funded by the state could imply that volunteering has less of a role to play in Swedish society but a number of studies have affirmed that this is not the case. Voluntary activities are considered to be an important driver in the process of democracy and political mobilization within Sweden.

The general pattern of volunteering is characterized by a focus on membership. This is a consequence of the prevalence of the popular mass movements – which have been encouraged by state policy - within Swedish society. Indeed, a very high percentage of the Swedish population are still members of voluntary organizations. This means that “voluntary activities” have traditionally, and are still, to a great deal directed at the internal, democratic and political life of NGOs or have at least been performed within the framework of an organisation.

However, this is now beginning to change and we can see tendency that traditional membership-based voluntary work is slowly beginning to decline. But instead there are a growing number of people that now prefer to determine their own level of involvement and seek a ‘freer’ relationship with the voluntary organisation. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the amount of voluntary activities aimed more at helping other people have grown. There are several factors that may have contributed to this growth, including a desire to contribute to society without necessarily supporting a whole “ideological programme”, the need to decide more freely and individually when time can be allocated for voluntary activities and the restructuring and privatisation of parts of the welfare state.

Policy on NGOs and popular movements was established in 2001 as a separate policy area in the central government budget. At that time, the current goal was also adopted – that people should have the best possible opportunities to organise themselves and take part in NGOs and popular movements of various kinds. Policy on NGOs and popular movements focuses on encouraging and supporting people’s organisation in associations and similar groups and on helping to provide a favourable climate for these organisations to operate and pursue their activities.

Policy on NGOs and popular movements includes:

- general matters concerning the terms and conditions for NGOs and popular movements;
- general matters concerning grants to NGOs and popular movements;
- the dialogue of the Government and its executive agencies with NGOs and popular movements; and
- statistics, research and knowledge creation about NGOs and popular movements and their activities.

The Division for Youth Policy and NGOs within the Ministry of Education is responsible for this policy. However several other policy areas have close contacts with NGOs within their own sector and are responsible for the distribution of grants etc. to these organisations

*On regional level:*

No federal system

*Is volunteering usually paid?*

Individual organisations decide their own policy. Local branches establish an agreement with the volunteer, depending on the solvency and performance of the branch. These practices also apply to full-time volunteers. In practice, reimbursement of expenses may include food and lodging but there is no obligation for the organisation to cover these costs except for volunteers who carry out European Voluntary Service (EVS), who all receive pocket money, board and lodging.

There is no official definition of volunteering in Sweden. However, across the literature the generally accepted definition seems to be: 'Time and effort that is freely given; unforced and unremunerated, by individuals to voluntary and public organisations'. Although the definition makes reference to volunteering being unremunerated, there may however be a 'symbolic' compensation or payment for voluntary work. Furthermore, voluntary activities can be carried out within or outside voluntary organisations. A clear distinction is made between 'informal' work which is said to be unorganised and 'voluntary' work, which is carried out under the auspices of an organisation. Furthermore, there is no official definition of the voluntary sector as a whole or the organisations which make up the sector.

*- Is there any National voluntary service?*

No

*- What is the legal / financial (fiscal) / social security status of volunteers?*

There is no particular legislation regarding volunteers and they are not assimilated into other categories. In certain cases volunteers are treated as being equivalent to either students or to employees. For instance, voluntary service (*"full-time project-based activities that are carried out on a continuous basis for a limited period of time"*) is considered to be a form of non-formal learning and therefore these volunteers are considered to be students.

Since there is no law to establish the legal status of volunteers, they have no legal right to social benefits. Their entitlement is determined on their legal status within other categories, such as students or the unemployed.

Taxation of volunteers is not specifically defined in Swedish legislation. Overall national authority in this respect lies with the Swedish Tax Agency (*Skatteverket*). Individuals are entitled to claim expenses from the organisation for costs associated with the voluntary activity they carry out. If the individual is in receipt of an income from the organisation, they can claim a tax deduction on these costs (e.g. travel expenses) in the same way as an employed person can. If they are not in receipt of an income from the voluntary organisation, they are not able to claim a tax deduction on their expenses.

Thus, there is no specific legal framework with respect to volunteering. However, the right for every person to create and participate in any form of association, the freedom of association, is a constitutional right - the right to establish a club or society, without outside interference, and to participate in clubs and societies, is guaranteed.

Although there are no established legal definitions, voluntary organisation and voluntary efforts are generally agreed to be the following:

- **Voluntary organisations:** organisations or associations that are founded on the basis of common ideas or interests, that have some sort of public character and organisational form, that can be established and dissolved without decision from public authorities, that build on

voluntary commitment and [most often] personal membership of some kind and are not looking for private financial gain.

- **Voluntary efforts:** efforts of work without remuneration, that are freely chosen and are carried out in an organisational framework. This organisational framework would be voluntary organisations, or the public sector.

The recent agreement between the government, the idea-based organizations in the social sphere and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions defines the voluntary, non-profit and idea-based sector as: *“all types of idea-based organisations, i.e. popular movements, but also foundations, faith organisations, and associations, e.g. those that operate free schools”*.

## 2. Main actors and networks

- Who are the main actors (institutional and NGOs) in the field of volunteering of young people on the different levels?

*National:*

The **National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations**, LSU, is a coordinating body for almost 100 Swedish youth organisations. The members come from all kinds of organisation, from the party political youth organisations, student movements and religious organisations to leisure organisations. LSU operates as a platform on issues concerning youth, both international and national, and provides a network for national as well as international organisations dealing with youth cooperation.

The **National Forum for Voluntary Social Work** (Forum för Frivilligt Socialt Arbete) is an umbrella organisation for voluntary social work in Sweden and has about 30 member organisations. The Forum provides a platform for exchange of experiences and competence development among their members, and also works with EU co-ordination for Swedish NGOs. The National Forum for Voluntary Social Work is also running an EU- network as well as The National Volunteering Agency (Volontärbyrå). The National Volunteering Agency and local volunteer centres is a new phenomenon in the Swedish volunteering landscape. This new infrastructure offers individuals the opportunity to identify volunteering tasks which match their availability and skill set, without the need to become affiliated to an organization.

The **Swedish Sports Confederation** (Riksidrottsförbundet) is the umbrella organisation of the Swedish sports movement. The main task for the Confederation is to provide support for their member organisations and to represent the sports movement. The Swedish Sports Confederation is also distributing the governmental grants to the sports and athletics associations.

**Swedish NGO Centre for Development Cooperation** (Forum Syd) consists of about 200 non-governmental organisations in the field of international development cooperation. The organisation provides training, information and exchange of experiences to their members, of which many also operate at the national level with voluntary activities in the field of social care. Forum Syd has been commissioned by the state aid organisation, Sida, to distribute financial support for Swedish organisations working with development cooperation.

Sida also runs a special youth programme, **Zenit**, with an extensive website and with activities in Stockholm and Malmö for young people who are interested in work in developing countries.

The **National Board for Youth Affairs** (NBYA) is the National Agency for the Youth in Action Program and the European Voluntary Service within the Program. The NBYA is a government agency.

*Regional:*

An infrastructure for volunteering (regional volunteering centres and a national online 'matching' service) has emerged only in the last 15 years. This infrastructure is still relatively small in terms of the amount of volunteering it generates when compared with the activities of the popular mass movements. There are now around 80 regional volunteering centres in Sweden, which are either run by the municipalities or by large volunteering organisations such as the Red Cross.

*Local:*

See the above

- Are any organisations in this field specifically targeting youth (as participants in voluntary activities and voluntary services)?

The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (LSU), Zenit and the National Board for Youth Affairs.

- Do networks and/or co-operations exist for supporting volunteering of young people in your country?

The **National Forum for Voluntary Social Work** (Forum för Frivilligt Socialt Arbete) is responsible for *Volontärbyrå*, the volunteer matching database. *Volontärbyrå* was established as a pilot project in 2002. It provides a matching service through an online database, where individuals seeking voluntary work can find vacancies with organizations in need of volunteers and vice versa. In the first 4.5 years after it was set up, *Volontärbyrå* matched over 10 000 tasks for over 700 voluntary organisations. Volunteers who use the matching service are generally younger (64% are between 15 and 35) and also many are new to volunteering (72% of people who volunteer through *Volontärbyrå* do so for the first time).

The **Folkrorelseforum**, was established in 2002 as a forum facilitating dialogue between the government and its executive agencies on one hand and on the other hand, representatives of organisations and other actors in the non-profit sector. Its aim is to ensure the democratic heritage of these organisations is recognised and protected<sup>75</sup>.

- What is the legal / financial (fiscal) status of organisations promoting volunteering?

There is no official definition of a voluntary organisation and the only reference to voluntary organisations in the legal framework is in relation to rules on taxation. In Sweden, it has been very important up to now *not* to regulate voluntary organisations and any attempt to formalise volunteering in law has always been abandoned.

NGOs are generally taxed in the same way as other legal entities in Sweden. However, there are specific regulations for associations which are considered to be acting for the public good (*allmännyttig*). In such cases the liability to pay taxes is limited and the association is only liable to pay taxes on some of its income. The liability to pay tax varies, depending on the type of organization (organisations which are considered to be *registrerat trossamfund* and associations (*ideell förening*) are treated differently to foundations (*stiftelse*)).

Four conditions must be met in order for an association or religious organisation (*registrerat trossamfund*) to be identified as being of benefit to the public for the purposes of tax exemption. These are:

- 1) The main purpose of the association must be of benefit to the public. Such purposes may be religious, political, athletic or cultural.
- 2) The activity of the association must be carried out exclusively, or almost exclusively, to fulfil the purpose identified under point .
- 3) The activity of the association must, over a period of several years, correspond to the revenue of the association's assets. In practice, this means that about 80 % of the revenue must be used for the association's activity.
- 4) The association may not refuse anyone membership, unless there are special reasons for this with regard to the nature and extent of the association's activity or its purpose. If the NGO fulfils these four conditions, it is not liable to pay income taxes on capital and real estate and on business income, if such income originates from the non-profit activity of the association. This means that income generated through fundraising or by other nonprofit activities may be exempted from taxes.

A foundation (*stiftelse*) must have a higher grade of purpose for the public good, for example scientific research, charity, care of children and teaching (associations can have these purposes too). However, foundations are never entitled to tax deductions on business income.

The liability to pay VAT also varies, depending on the type of organisation. Foundations (*stiftelse*) do have to pay VAT but for organisations which are considered to be *registrerat trossamfund* and associations (*ideell förening*), if their income is exempted from income tax according to the above-mentioned rules, the non-profit activity that generates that income is regarded to be non-commercial and thereby is exempted from VAT. This may however change in the future, in line with EU legislation.



### 3. Promotion of volunteering of young people

- Which methods among the one listed below are the most used to promote volunteering of young people in your country?

*By national policies:*

- Advertisement campaigns
- Education
- Youth information centres
- funding of NGOs
- Other:
- None

*By NGOs:*

- Advertisement campaigns
- Education
- Youth information centres
- Other: various activities
- None

*Explain and provide examples for each of the box ticked.*

There are several government agencies which at the national level are responsible for the distribution of grants, information and advice and the implementation of policies toward voluntary organisations within different sectors. Examples of such agencies are; The National Board for Youth Affairs (*Ungdomsstyrelsen*), The National Board for Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen*), and The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tilväxtverket).

All funding which is distributed to the voluntary sector is subject to directives from the government. The government or parliament agrees on directives that identify the goals and results organisations should work towards if they are to receive funding, including reporting requirements. These vary from one to another.

Municipalities also give support to different types of voluntary organisations. The municipalities have the major responsibility for providing information to young people at the local level. Information regarding voluntary activities may be spread in many ways, for example through employment offices, schools and study counsellors. Autonomy for the regions and municipalities in Sweden is very important and they develop their own policies and programmes within the framework set up by the Parliament and Government. As a result, different approaches to promoting volunteering can be found across the country.

There is also a large number of independent NGO umbrella organisations in various fields, that *work with* volunteering rather than organisational forms created to *promote* volunteering. In fact, NGOs themselves carry out the majority of promotion activities in Sweden. They rely on volunteers and therefore carry out activities to engage more people in their work

- Which among the followings are methods of recognition of volunteering of young people in your country?

European Youth Pass

Certificates

Credits in the formal education system

Awards

Incentives

They are valued in the CV

Other:

They are not recognised

*Explain and provide examples for each of the box ticked.*

There are no support schemes and incentives to engage individuals in voluntary work. However, as described above, the government does provide significant financial support to the sector, which is considered to be a way of encouraging voluntary work. Furthermore, the social and personal benefits of undertaking voluntary work (e.g. to make contacts, to enhance the individual's CV) are widely recognised and therefore could be seen as an incentive.

- What obstacles to young people's engagement in volunteering do exist and how are these faced by national policies?

For unemployed persons who do carry out voluntary activities, there are a number of conditions which they must comply with in order to continue to receive their benefits. Under the Law on Unemployment Insurance (1997:238), Point nine outlines the conditions which must be met in order to receive unemployment benefits. These include a requirement to be available to work three hours per day, or on average 17 hours per week, and to be available to start work unless obstacles to doing so have been declared. This could prevent the unemployed from undertaking volunteer work on a full-time basis.

Individuals in receipt of other social insurance benefits, such as the long-term sick, can also risk losing these if they carry out voluntary work. This is only the case however if the voluntary work is considered to be equal in effort to paid employment. Providing a number of conditions are met, such as maintaining the number of voluntary hours contributed below one eighth of normal working hours, it is still possible for such individuals to carry out voluntary work. This policy tends to impact disabled individuals who take on a board position for an organisation for disabled persons.

Family allowances can still be claimed, providing the volunteer activity does not mean that they are unable to comply with the requirements under Swedish Social Security Law. However, a 2005 study of volunteer activities among young people found that young people who volunteer [full-time] as their main occupation do not fall within any of the groups that are entitled to social security benefits. They are sometimes treated in the same way as students, or employees but the lack of clarity within the current legal framework means that there is a risk that volunteers are being inconsistently assessed.

These problems relate to most security systems, such as social insurance, unemployment insurance, and the pension system, as well as other benefits such as parental insurance. Some young people who carry out voluntary work alongside regular employment or study are also affected in this way.

It is primarily young people with good socio-economic positions who are able to take part in volunteer programmes. The vast majority of volunteer programmes receive many applications from highly motivated young people. As a consequence of this, additional resources are not always allocated for outreach activities to individuals with fewer opportunities or with specific needs.

The majority of other problems identified on volunteer activities in Sweden was found to be caused by the unclear formal status of volunteer programmes. Young people who become involved in volunteer activities as their main occupation do not fit into any of the groups that are entitled to social security benefits. The current regulatory system runs the risk that volunteers are being inconsistently assessed since it is not always clear how the law should be applied to a volunteer's situation.

Other obstacles are connected with the unclear meaning attributed to the term "volunteer". Since such activities are relatively unknown among young Swedish people, the recruitment group for volunteer programmes is significantly reduced. The risk is that only those, who are well positioned in associations, able to take initiatives and/or accustomed to travelling, or active in terms of applying for information, will be contacted. A corresponding problem is that representatives of municipalities are not always familiar with the term "volunteer" thereby accentuating the risk that young people do not receive relevant information.

As regards socio-economic obstacles, measures are continuously being taken to combat social exclusion in all areas of society. Within EVS there is the explicit goal of addressing young people with fewer opportunities, and the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs is actively working to encourage more organisations to use EVS as a tool for recruiting young people with limited opportunities.

#### **4. Mobility of young volunteers**

*- Is there any national monitoring of how mobility of young volunteers takes place?*

No

*- What are these monitoring mechanisms? If yes, please explain.*

## 5. Sources of information

Lundström, T and L Svedberg (2003), *The Voluntary Sector in a Social Democratic Welfare State – The Case of Sweden*, Journal of Social Policy

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*Volunteering in the European Union*, Directorate General Education and Culture (DG EAC), Country Report Sweden, London 2010