



CITIZENSHIP AND LIFELONG LEARNING MONITOR 2020

SWEDEN



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ABSTRACT

The following report represents one of nine national case studies feeding into the SOLIDAR Foundation's annual Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2020. The purpose of the Monitor is to take stock of the developments at European and national level in terms of citizenship education policies and lifelong learning policies. The Swedish report is focused on the general three main themes: global citizenship education, digital citizenship, and community partnerships for interculturality. It accounts for challenges, governmental approaches to them, and civil society approaches to them for each of the three themes. In a year in which learning has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become more apparent how essential global citizenship education is for the development of competences that prepare learners for global challenges and that prepare them to act responsible towards their fellows beyond any national border. A comprehensive approach to the topic has been the case for the past years in Sweden, even under different other names, rather than global citizenship education. The new efforts to improve the curriculum regarding topics such as peace, security, Holocaust remembrance and sustainable development reveal this. The Swedish learners respond well, with high scores of civic competences, and

with an acute awareness over global issues, such as climate change. However, teacher shortages, inequality in access to education which leaves Northern, more rural areas behind and an academic achievement gap between native and migrant background learners reveal that the Swedish system still needs reforms to tackle these challenges before their impact becomes dire. During the pandemic, it must be appreciated that Sweden was well-prepared from a digital perspective, even if there were some reports of regional discrepancies. The impressive public investment in education has led to Sweden being one of the countries who uses the most ICT in education. Similarly to global citizenship education, a lack of prepared teachers would also frustrate all the investment in digital infrastructure. The Swedish public authorities need to adapt their approach to the needs of the learners, as there seems to be an increase in polarization across ethnic and racial lines in Sweden which culminated with increased public support for the far-right, populist party Swedish Democrats. To anticipate these challenges, the government must continue investing in CSOs who are working on the ground to provide lifelong and lifewide learning in flexible contexts that account for the socio-economic discrepancies.

INTRODUCTION

Sweden is one of the countries with the highest investment in education in Europe¹. The pay-off has been significant with learners scoring high on civic competences tests, with the civil society being vibrant and engaged in the democratic processes of the country but also with the educational system managing with more ease the digital transition caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The level of digital skills that the Swedish population has is significant, with the current generations seemingly being prepared for the green and digital transitions. However, more work needs to be done

to mainstream global citizenship education (GCE) internally given how this is addressed mostly from the perspective of development cooperation. Moreover, not all people in Sweden benefit from access to the digital tools needed to engage in digital learning and polarization and segregation have been creeping into education institutions, leading towards an increase in far-right views. The presence of far-right parties in the Swedish parliament is also providing a platform for those wishing more cuts to education rather than support for intercultural education.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

TERMINOLOGY

Within the diversity of conceptualizations for GCE, Sweden is not using the term GCE specifically. This does not mean that it is not working on the topic, but rather that it focuses on versions of it such as education for sustainable development, development education², Holocaust remembrance³, or, what is more widespread, education and information about global issues⁴. SOLIDAR Foundation partner, [Swedish Workers' Educational Association \(ABF\)](#), highlights the divergent terminology in Sweden, expressing the uncommon nature of the term GCE for the Swedish culture.

The Swedish government is implementing the Global School programme⁵ to strengthen the school's ability to educate young people to take responsibility for sustainable development in a multicultural society and prepare them to function in a global context. The Swedish Council for Higher Education also provides training for teachers in the framework of this programme, focusing on global sustainable development and intercultural understanding. Beyond this, the programme facilitators are organizing seminars across Sweden, which can be adapted to the needs of specific schools, supporting the teaching profession in understanding how to link GCE with their curriculum

¹ European Commission (2020). Country Report Sweden 2020. 2020 European Semester: Assessment of progress on structural reforms, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances, and results of in-depth reviews under Regulation (EU) No 1176/2011. Pp.42-43. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0526&from=EN>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

² Government Offices of Sweden (2003). A Swedish Strategy for Sustainable Development – Economic, Social and Environmental. Available at : <https://www.government.se/contentassets/3f67e0b1e47b4e83b542ed6892563d95/a-swedish-strategy-for-sustainable-development-summary>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

³ Government Offices of Sweden (2020). National initiative to increase knowledge about the Holocaust and antisemitism. Available at : <https://www.government.se/press-releases/2020/02/national-initiative-to-increase-knowledge-about-the-holocaust-and-antisemitism/>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

⁴ Saleniece, Ilze (2018). Global Citizenship Education in Europe: How Much Do We Care?. CONCORD Europe. p.111. Available at: https://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CONCORD_GCE_FundingReport_2018_online.pdf. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

⁵ Ibid.

and governing documents, how to develop the staff's skills but also to share best practice examples of other educational institutions. The Global School Programme is developing materials for teaching GCE, and is also launching collaborations with municipalities, linking the local authorities with the education practitioners to ensure a holistic approach to GCE that would make it underpin the educational system⁶. The government is preparing a new curricular reform to improve the safety and peace education in the classroom⁷, while also recognizing the increasing anti-Semitic feelings across Sweden. The Ministry of Education has been opening multiple exhibitions to illustrate the Holocaust's history impact over Sweden and it will be leading the work of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, an intergovernmental organisation to promote Holocaust education, research and remembrance, from 1 March 2022 until 28 February 2023⁸.

FORMAL EDUCATION AND LEARNERS' ACTIVISM: TWO-WAY DEVELOPMENT OF GCE

For the moment, these GCE efforts are very much targeted towards the upper secondary school level as the curriculum establishes that students should have insights on this topic to develop a personal approach to overarching, global environmental issues. Education should illuminate how the functions of society and ways of living and working can best be adapted to create sustainable development. The approach to the topic is, therefore, cross-curricular, with sustainable development being also reflected across the science subjects, looking into energy, climate and impact on the ecosystem, as well as on ecosystem services, utilisation of resources and the viability of ecosystems. Different aspects of sustainable development such as consumption, allocation of resources, human rights and gender equality are also cross-curricularly included⁹. This is complemented by the cross-curricular implementation of citizenship education in the Education Act (2011) and the school curriculum for all levels. The Swedish educational system promotes democratic values and students' democratic participation across all subjects. The democratic values referred to in the Swedish system are: the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, gender equality and solidarity. Children should acquire knowledge of how a democratic society functions and their views should be heard. For this reason, the Swedish schools system



6 Swedish University and Colleges Council (2020). The Global School Programme. Available at : <https://www.utbyten.se/mojligheter/mojligheter-inom-forskola-och-skola/den-globala-skolan/>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

7 Eurydice (2020). Sweden – Ongoing Reforms and Policy Developments. National Education Systems. Available at : https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/ongoing-reforms-and-policy-developments-71_en. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

8 Government Offices of Sweden (2020). Sweden to lead the work of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Available at : <https://www.government.se/press-releases/2020/12/sweden-to-lead-the-work-of-the-international-holocaust-remembrance-alliance/>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

9 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (2019). Sweden - Raising awareness about global issues. Youth Wiki. Available at : <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/home/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/94-raising-awareness-about-global-is-sues-sweden>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

gives students formal democratic influence through the student councils¹⁰.

The approach seems to be successful, as the Swedish 8th-graders have high levels of civic knowledge based on the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study. They score 62 points above the average of the other 20 participating countries, and have been on an improvement curve since 2009. However, there is a 120 points gap between socio-economically advantaged learners and disadvantaged ones, and a gap of 71 points between native learners and learners with a migrant background¹¹. The open atmosphere in the classroom and the cross-curricular approach seem to have been conducive for the positive side of these results¹², and have also impacted the consciousness of those Swedish pupils who have mainstreamed the Friday for Climate protests. Greta Thunberg has been leading this movement, and her acute sense of awareness, her

unbreakable commitment and her tremendous empathy for the world surrounding us cannot be considered as a byproduct of the educational system, but it is representative for an environment which has fostered Thunberg's activist spirit. Many young Swedes have followed her in this fight for the climate which has sparked the worldwide commitment of the youth towards this cause. Thunberg, however, recognized the importance of activism beyond formal education, leaving the educational system to be able to promote the [Fridays for Future](#) movement and to fight for a cause for which there is no time to wait anymore. This reveals the important role of informal education, of learning through activism and volunteering, highlighting how this topic cannot be limited to formal education but it is more about developing competences to be active in all contexts of life.

Though the high level of civic competences and the awareness of global issues were fostered,



10 European Commission (2018). Education and Training Monitor 2018 Sweden. P.5. Available at : https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2018-sweden_en.pdf. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.



learners have experienced adversity, as the educational system has some gaps which are counterproductive to GCE. The system is very reliant on teachers to implement it, while around 40% of them are above the age of 50, with 1 in 5 teachers up for retirement in the coming 5 years. Work-related stress is highlighted as a main driver for the young teachers leaving the profession, and the National Agency for Education projects that 227.000 teachers will be needed by 2031, which is 80.000 more compared to the projection of teacher graduates by then. A high proportion of current teachers are not qualified for this profession, with 20% of teachers in compulsory education not undergoing initial teacher education (ITE). The wages of teachers are significantly lower compared to professions with comparable levels of education, while approximately 63% of Swedish teachers claim that they would not choose the same profession if they would have another chance. This is the lowest percentage in the EU,

with the average being around 77%¹³. In this context, more efforts related to GCE would just pile up on the precarious state in which teachers find themselves, and it is no longer sustainable to simply rely on them to reform an educational system to ensure that GCE underpins it.

INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN SWEDEN

In this context, teachers and formal education have been supported by CSOs and movements that provide non-formal and informal education. This supports the idea that GCE does not belong only to the formal education sector, but it also must be thought of in a life-long and lifewide perspective that extends to all the contexts in the life of a learner. The work of we_change is such an example of external support and you can read more about this case in the textbox below.

¹³ European Commission (2019). Education and Training Monitor 2019 Sweden. Pp.4-5. Available at : https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2019-sweden_en.pdf. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

CASE STUDY

We_change represents Sweden's largest sustainability initiative for young people. It works in close partnership with upper secondary education institutions, championing a whole-school approach that involves all stakeholders, to strengthen teaching about sustainable development. Young people are put in contact with actors from business, research, authorities and civil society, receiving the opportunity to meet on issues concerning their common future. Since 2011, 70.000 youngsters benefitted from we_change's programme. Politicians, schools and municipalities also receive targeted training from we_change on how to include the young people in various processes. Supplementary upper secondary education

modules are designed by we_change and can be used in formal education.

The flexibility of the organization has been beneficial during COVID-19, but also in general for being able to capture the interests of the learners in various formats and environments. [The meeting opportunities organized for 2020 were a film festival and a sustainability hackathon](#), bringing the various stakeholders around these topics to bypass social distancing rules while also developing digital and environmental competences. We_change's diverse portfolio of activities captures a lifelong and lifewide model of learning which involves formal education, but is not limited to this style of learning.

The theoretical understanding of GCE must be backed by practice, and for this reason, yet again, informal and non-formal education providers are bringing this practical experience to the fore, providing an educational model that develops competences while relating all of the learners' actions to the impact that they have

globally. The culture of volunteering in Sweden is much appreciated and it is a model that can expand interest on GCE while helping the younger generation take action on being active promoters of GCE. The textbox below provides a glimpse into the type of volunteering provided in the Swedish society.

As there is no governmental strategy for the implementation of GCE and the membership in the CSOs have been decreasing¹⁴, it is important for the national authorities to recognize the important role of CSOs in contributing to a vision of education that would facilitate the capacity to

meet all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The national authorities must better collaborate with CSOs, must increase their presence in formal education and must ensure that adequate funding is provided to them so that they can continue the work on GCE.

CASE STUDY

An impressive case of volunteering-based action, but also of campaigning to raise awareness on sustainability-related matters, is the case of the [Keep Sweden Tidy Foundation](#). This non-profit organization operates since 1983, though it is rooted in an environmental campaign launched in 1963. The breadth of actions organized are focused on maintaining Sweden's ecosystems clean and ensuring that environmental responsibility is instilled in all Swedes.

The example of their Litter Picking Days encompass this philosophy, as the Foundation invites volunteers to collect litter, effectively cleaning up the environment, while also ensuring that

a learning-by-doing process is implemented so that the volunteers can become ambassadors for a clean environment by understanding the impact of certain habits on humans' surroundings.

The Foundation goes even beyond by being the National Operator for the international [Young Reporters for Environment programme](#), by which young people are given a platform to engage in research on the environment. They organize international education programmes for learners aged 11-25 and train them via various workshops, events and competitions to raise awareness on the environment and empower the learners to take action for sustainability.

¹⁴ Saleniece, Ilze (2018). Global Citizenship Education in Europe: How Much Do We Care?. P.111-113.

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

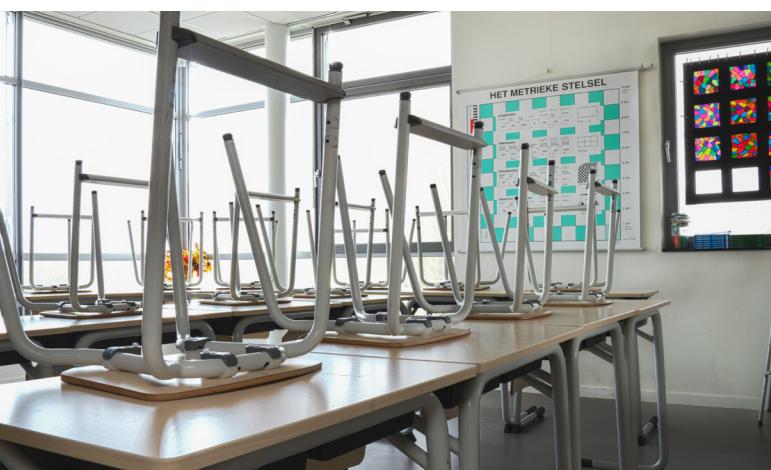
COVID-19 AND EDUCATION

The response of the Swedish authorities to the COVID-19 pandemic was different compared to other European countries. Lockdowns were not imposed, with more targeted solutions being used by the government. However, in March 2020, the Swedish government did adopt a policy related to school closures which gave the government the power to enforce such closures in case the COVID-19 pandemic would worsen, while also setting up conditions for which specific educational institutions would be able to opt for a distance learning model. Based on this, upper secondary schools, VET institutions, higher education institutions, and municipal adult education institutions could have provided distance learning¹⁵. This policy was not used on upper secondary education institutions until December 2020, when, as the second wave of COVID-19 has been ravaging Europe, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven announced their closure¹⁶. This situation led to less pressure on online learning and on

families to support their children in this process over the course of 2020. Moreover, Sweden was already implementing online learning as a tool to provide quality education in remote and rural areas in which there were no teachers working, as a result of teacher shortages¹⁷. As of June 2021, a law will create the context for teachers from different schools to provide online classes to the learners living in the remote areas of the North¹⁸. It remains to be seen how will Sweden cope with beginning of 2021, considering that the possibility of lockdown is more likely now than it was during most of the year 2020.

DIGITAL EDUCATION BEYOND CRISES

Sweden has been improving its approach to digital citizenship and online learning in the years prior to the pandemic with a 2017 National Strategy for the Digitalisation of the School System being implemented. National Action Plans have been developed by the [Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions \(SALAR\)](#) to facilitate the implementation of the strategy¹⁹. The upper secondary education syllabi have been revised based on this strategy and coding classes were included in formal education. The syllabi revision accounts also for developing soft skills linked to understanding the impact of the digitalization on society as well as ensuring critical and responsible behaviour, problem solving and translating ideas into action using digital technology²⁰. However, there are concerns that the strategy's goals for 2022 will not be met²¹.



15 CEDEFOP (2020). Swedish actions on education in response to the corona pandemic. Available at: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/swedish-actions-education-response-corona-pandemic>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

16 Wyatt, Tim (2020). Covid: No-lockdown Sweden to shut secondary schools for a month to combat second wave. The Independent. Available at : <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/sweden-covid-schools-closed-lockdown-b1766304.html>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

17 European Commission (2019). Education and Training Monitor 2019 Sweden. Pp.4-5

18 European Commission (2020). Education and Training Monitor 2020 Sweden. P.8. Available at : <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b0e2c2dd-2495-11eb-9d7e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-171316235>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

19 Ibid. P.4.

20 Ibid ; European Commission (2018). Education and Training Monitor 2018 Sweden. P.6.

21 European Commission (2020). Country Report Sweden 2020. P.43-44.

Even in this context, the Swedish educational system is one of the most digitized in the world, while the percentage of people aged 16-19 with at least basic digital skills is 71%, which is above the EU average of 57%. Most schools have one computer per learner, national tests are digitalized and, in 2018, 91% of the Swedish population was regularly using the internet, above the EU average of 83%. Pupils' use of internet at school for learning is the second highest in the EU in both lower and upper secondary school, as is the percentage of teachers who let students use ICT for projects and class work (63.3%; EU-22 46.9%)²². The digitalization levels in schools also expand to the learners' time outside of educational institutions, with Sweden being a frontrunner in ultrafast connectivity. 84% of Swedish households have access to ultrafast broadband connection, with the aim of expanding this to 95% by the end of 2020. It is unlikely that this target will be met, and even though many Swedish people have access to adequate internet connection, there still remains a small percentage of the population that is being left behind. Approximately 64 million EUR were allocated to ensure that 98% of Swedish households will have access to fast broadband connection by 2025, but the Swedish Post and Telecom Authority is deeming this amount as unrealistic, with another 2 billion EUR being required for this purpose²³.

Though the situation is encouraging, the burden is again placed on unsupported teachers, as only 37% of Swedish teachers feel prepared to use ICT for teaching, compared to the EU average of 39.4%. Moreover, 22.2% of Swedish teachers report a need to improve their ICT skills, compared to the EU average which is 16.1%²⁴. There is no compulsory ICT



element in teachers' Initial Teacher Education (ITE), with only 36% of Swedish teachers reporting receiving this in their ITE²⁵. Moreover, the burden is also significantly placed on the educational institutions themselves. The Swedish model uses a decentralized model for education institutions' administration, with similar amounts of public funding being offered to public institutions or private-run ones, while the institutions then decide over the exact usage of this investment. As a result, there has been a discrepancy to Sweden's response to the COVID-19. A third of the education institutions reported issues with the ICT tools or teachers lacking the capacity to successfully engage these tools. A large number of teachers also reported many technological disruptions²⁶, which reveal the fact that even a system that is financially supported and is recognized as digitalized, was underprepared for the impact of the crisis. Reflecting the decentralisation of the system, all decisions on technical platforms, educational materials are taken at local, and often even school level. Learners were not fully pleased with this model either, especially as newly arrived learners lacked the ICT tools at home and skills needed to

22 European Commission (2020). Education and Training Monitor 2020 Sweden. P.4-5.

23 European Commission (2020). Country Report Sweden 2020. P.54.

24 European Commission (2019). Education and Training Monitor 2019 Sweden. P.7-8.

25 European Commission (2020). Country Report Sweden 2020. P.4.

26 Ibid. P.7-9.

properly accustom to the Swedish educational system. Many pupils explained that the internet connection at home is not good enough to support online learning. They have also highlighted the increased workload that distance education brings, together with the increased levels of stress and the health implications of using ICT tools too much. Teachers have also highlighted that learners are less present in the learning process while using online learning²⁷. To mitigate this the Swedish authorities have allocated 11 million EUR to organize vacation schooling for learners who failed to meet their educational goals during the crisis²⁸.

The advanced nature of the Swedish system has made transition to online learning

successful, but this has offered a glimpse into the further problems that come with online learning that have not yet been thought through and that reflect the need for a paradigmatic shift on what it means to include ICT tools in the classroom. For this reason, the value of the historically strong Swedish civil society cannot be minimized. Informal education provided by CSOs has enjoyed the same financial support from the Swedish government during the pandemic as the levels of 2019, which SOLIDAR Foundation partner, ABF, has commended. The activities performed by them are needed to develop solidarity and continue the personal developments of learners in a lifelong and lifewide learning manner even during the pandemic.

CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation partner, [ABF](#), has successfully transitioned its activities online during the pandemic. ABF is Sweden's leading workers' education association, operating since 1912 as part of the labour movement and furthering social-democratic ideals. It provides study circles, courses, lectures, cultural events across all Sweden, providing education and training outside of the traditional schooling model.

As it managed to transition these activities online, ABF has developed a best practices guideline to ensure that its learners and partners can also



successfully engage in online learning and teaching. The tips that they offer ranged from how to organize seminars or cultural events to how to manage internal meetings online and to how to retrain for the labour market in light of COVID-19 changes. The various resources can be found [here](#) and represent an effort from the civil society to level the playing field ensuring that all CSOs can continue providing invaluable learning during the pandemic while all learners have equal access to learning, preparing themselves for a society impacted by the pandemic and digitalization.

27 Ibid. P.8-9.

28 Ibid. P.9.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROMOTING INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

The previous edition of our Monitor looked into synergies between formal education providers on one side and CSOs on the other side with respect to the promotion of intercultural dialogue in a lifelong and lifewide manner. However, to be able to secure such an approach to the topic there is a need to ensure that it is present in all contexts of the daily life and that it involves a paradigmatic change. For this reason, our current edition will consider partnerships happening in the communities and the implementation of projects within the community to shine a light on the importance of capacity building for a bottom-up response to combatting prejudice and discrimination.

SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS ON MIGRATION

The Swedish communities have become more fractured as the 2015 migration wave provided challenges on the long-term inclusion of newcomers in the Swedish society. The tensions arising from the far-right party, the Swedish Democrats, gaining more seats in the Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament) have been also fueled by similar such extremist views being proliferated across the Nordic countries. What was once considered a safe haven for migrants and what remains an important actor in development cooperation²⁹, undergoes a period of

turmoil regarding its citizens views on diversity. Sweden is not experiencing the same level of polarization as in many other European countries, but the potentiality of latent extremist views exists and has been manifested upon provocation from Danish far-right supporters who have burned a copy of the Quran in Stockholm earlier this year. The act was followed by subsequent Anti-Islam protests across the country which culminated with a protest opposing this racist and provocative act which turned violent in the city of Malmö³⁰. The protest was calmed down, but the fact remains that a powder keg finds itself underneath the Swedish society with a decrease in the percentage of Swedish citizens that have a positive view of creating opportunities for migration³¹.

CSOS FOR MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES

In this context, it is the work of CSOs that becomes valuable, as they can work daily with the communities in cause and as they are the ones on the forefront of providing a positive narrative of migration. SOLIDAR Foundation partner, ABF, has developed a guide for combatting Afrophobia, which is racism associated with and discrimination towards people coming from Africa or that have African descent. You can read more about this in the below textbox.

29 Carlson-Rainer, Elise (2018). Sweden Is a World Leader in Peace, Security, and Human Rights. *World Affairs*, 180 (4), pp.79-85. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0043820018759714>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

30 CIVICUS Monitor (2020). Quran Burning Sparks Protests in Malmö. Available at : <https://monitor.civicus.org/up-dates/2020/10/14/quran-burning-sparks-protests-malmo/>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.; Deutsche Welle (2020). Malmö: Violence erupts after anti-Muslim activity. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/malmo-violence-erupts-after-anti-muslim-activity/a-54748905>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

31 Ahmadi, Fereshteh, et al. (2020). Diversity barometer: attitude changes in Sweden. *Nordic Social Work Research*, 10 (1), pp.21-38. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/2156857X.2018.1527242?needAccess=true>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation partner, ABF, has partnered up with Afrosvenskaras riksorganisation (ASR) to develop a study circle specifically focused on an issue that has been mushrooming across the highly diverse Swedish nation. The study material was created by ASR and is called Afrophobia Yesterday and Today. The study circle is supported by further resources such as the government-commissioned report on Afrophobia which was developed in 2014 as well as other handbooks on the topic stemming from various Swedish municipalities. All resources are accessible [here](#).

ABF is building up generations of Swedish citizens who are aware of the vast history of racism, being able to contextualize this situation and fully understand the current societal implications of it, as well as the nuances of such behavior. This type of learning is essential, especially for the citizens belonging to racial groups that have been privileged, to be able to develop multicultural learning and ensure that the Swedish population can thrive in a multicultural setting.

The Swedish government recognizes the vital role of CSOs in its [2017 National Plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crimes](#), pledging to continue collaboration and increase funding for these matters. The Jewish, Roma and Sami representatives are frequently consulted by the government to develop actions against anti-gypsyism, anti-semitism and racism towards Sami, while, in 2016–2020, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society increased its allocation of funding to promote activities specifically intended to combat Afrophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Gypsyism, Islamophobia, racism against Sami, homophobia and transphobia³². In this way, the communities that are suffering from these plagues are empowered to fight back, and the most powerful



³² Government Offices of Sweden (2017). A comprehensive approach to combat racism and hate crime: National plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime. P.58-59. Available at: <https://www.government.se/492382/contentassets/e6047ff-54c00452895005f07e2e2ba39/a-comprehensive-approach-to-combat-racism-and-hate-crime>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

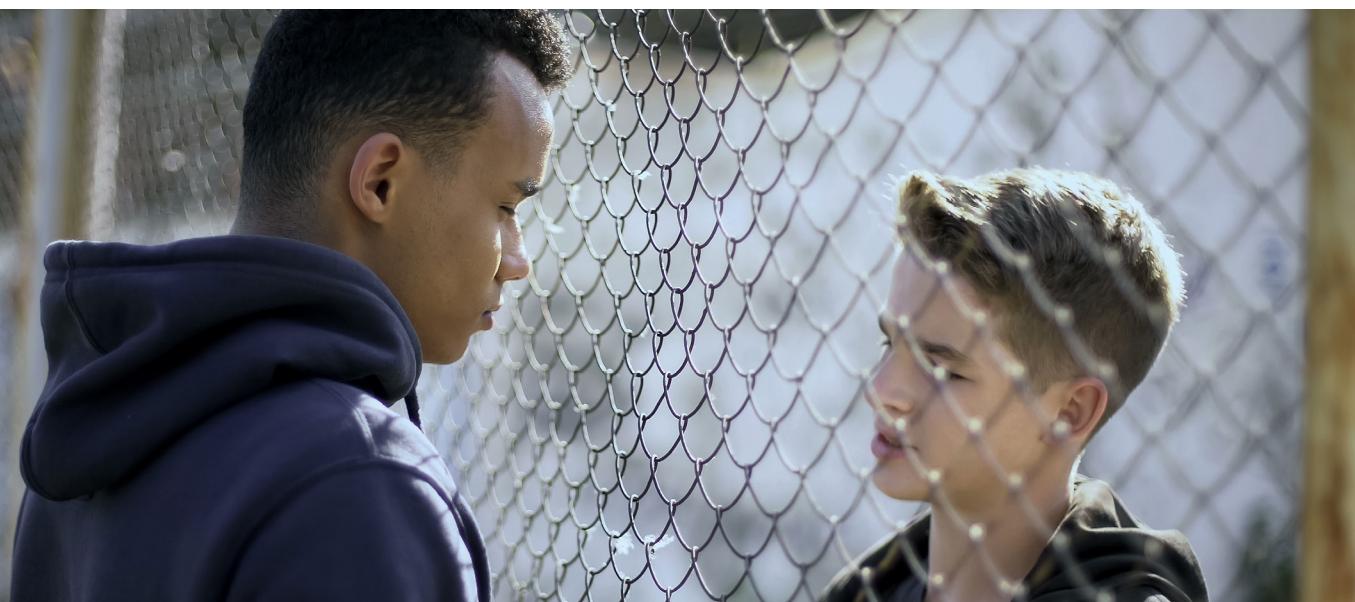
response on this came from the local inhabitants of Malmö, who came together after the riots earlier this year to clean their city³³. Swedish people, regardless of their background, continue to show moving and inspiring solidarity, developing a sense of citizenship and interculturality in their daily life. For this reason, it is important to continue to nurture such impulses rather than simply rely on the fact that the far-right does not have a majority support yet.

INEQUITY AND THE WORK OF CSOS

Beyond the obvious hate crimes, a more subtle way in which newcomers are discriminated is related to underachievement. While early school leaving is increasing across Sweden, the learners born abroad are significantly likelier to drop out of education. The average performance of learners with a migrant background in reading is 83 points below that of native learners, representing the second highest such gap in Europe. A reason behind these inequities could be linked with the segregation of learners in education institutions, with the

migrant background ones finding themselves in institutions within socio-economically disadvantaged municipalities³⁴. The Swedish choice system for schools, launched in the 1990s, has been a main driver for the increased segregation, as disadvantaged learners are less likely to opt for independent schools due to their location and costs associated to joining such schools³⁵.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also seen Swedish trade unions doubling their weekly intake of new members³⁶. The unionization rate is impressive and contributes to building much needed links in communities to weather the crises that have engulfed 2020. SOLIDAR Foundation partner, ABF, is a workers' education association that is closely tied to the union movement which has understood the need to readapt to the demographic changes. Therefore, they provided ways for the newcomers to get into society, to immerse themselves in the Swedish context, developing contacts and the Swedish language skills, while also engaging in migration related projects, of which you can read more in the textbox below.



33 The Local (2020). Malmö residents band together to stave off riots and clean up city. Available at : <https://www.thelocal.se/20200831/malmo-residents-band-together-to-stave-off-violence>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

34 European Commission (2020). Country Report Sweden 2020. P.43.

35 European Commission (2019). Education and Training Monitor 2019 Sweden. P.7.

36 CIVICUS Monitor (2020). Trade Unions See Spike in Membership amid COVID-19 Pandemic, Climate Activism Goes Online. Available at : <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2020/04/22/trade-unions-see-spike-membership-amid-covid-19-pandemic-climate-activism-goes-online/>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.



CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation partner, ABF, has developed comprehensive responses to strengthening migrants' opportunities for integration. All of these co-exist under the umbrella '[Exchanges for empowerment](#)'. This accounts for five sub-projects within local branches which study the actions performed by CSOs across Europe, amongst which SOLIDAR Foundation members [La Ligue de l'enseignement](#) and Workers' Education Association in the UK, to understand their approach to the integration of migrants and to bringing best practices to Sweden. A [digital method book](#) was developed via these initiatives, which contains videos, photos, texts to detail methods on migrants' integration. Co-funded through the European Social Fund, this project has lasted from

2017 until 2019 and has put at its centre non-formal learning for the newcomers, reinforcing the newcomers' self-esteem while building up on skills that they had but were not aware of.

ABF understood the value of partnership across CSOs to develop a wide-reaching approach that accounts for the various needs of migrants but also for the various contexts in which they will be integrated. The empowerment approach serves as an example for how communities could benefit from similar bottom-up models in which their members are prepared to tackle various challenges, and as a result, their community becoming strong enough to adapt to the 21st century and to train any new member in this ethos.

The issue is that all these actions of CSOs require funding and time to develop. The encouraging environment is threatened by the increasing power of the Swedish Democrats who collected 17.6% of the popular vote in the last elections of 2018³⁷, and have obtained 62 seats in the Riksdag. They are pushing an aggressive programme of financial cuts for public education but also for the folk high schools, the institutions providing adult education in Sweden, that would amount to a reduction of the education budget by almost 100 million EUR. This would be only for the year 2021, with further cuts being advocated by them for 2022 and 2023. While it

can be claimed that they do not have sufficient power to push these changes in the Riksdag, they have secured cuts to education in the municipalities in which they have more power, such as Trelleborg³⁸. Moreover, they have been pushing the agenda of other parties more towards the right-side of the political spectrum, which also encourages cuts to education. At a time when polarization could increase, it is investment in education that can develop the needed skills to readapt to the 21st century societies. For these reasons, CSOs working in the field of education, and especially intercultural education, should receive even more support.

37 Lyons, Kate and Greenfield, Patrick (2018). Swedish election: deadlock as far right makes gains – as it happened. The Guardian. Available at : <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2018/sep/09/sweden-election-live>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

38 ABF (2020). SD-attacken mot folkbildningen fortsätter. Available at : <https://www.abf.se/om-abf/nyheter/2020/oktober/sd-attacken-mot-folkbildningen-fortsatser/>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

FUNDING

This section will cover the general public investment in education as well as the sums allocated for GCE, for the development of digital skills and for promoting social cohesion while closing academic achievement gaps. In 2019, 6.9% of the GDP in Sweden was invested in education. The number is way above the EU average of 4.6%, and the percentage is actually an increase from the 6.7% allocated for education in 2009 in Sweden³⁹. This is testament for the privileged position that the Swedish education system has among other EU education systems in terms of access to digital infrastructure, development of digital skills, but also to the high scores of Swedish learners when it comes to civic competences. However, given the previously mentioned attacks on education coming virulently from the Swedish Democrats, but also being exhibited by the Christian Democrats and Moderates, it remains to be seen the direction in which Sweden will continue, though the investment must be kept to similar levels in light of the future challenges post-COVID-19.

The GCE investment provided by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) is impressive in comparison to the work of other EU member states. SIDA had a budget of over 4 billion EUR in 2020, though it is unclear how much was specifically allocated to GCE⁴⁰. Up until 2015, the sums for GCE were exceeding 7 million EUR⁴¹, though it must be highlighted that GCE tends to have an external lens or a lens focused on environmentalism in Sweden. Based on this, the funding is insufficient, as the entire educational system needs to be overhauled to ensure that GCE is a term

underpinning it. Without such measures, the Swedish learners risk lagging behind as the 21st century society is evolving.

The sum of approximately 64 million EUR that was allocated for increasing the broadband connections across Sweden has been deemed as insufficient to meet the government's target of 98% of the Swedish households being covered by broadband until 2025⁴². However, access to internet is very widespread in Sweden, and though not yet a public good, it is far more advanced than in the rest of Europe. To determine the continual investment in education for the purpose of the digital transition, more research needs to be done into the exact needs of the learners given that a large number of learners still complain about access to digital devices and about the speed of the internet connection. This happens in the context in which Sweden did not go into a similar lockdown to other EU countries, having less learners depending on personal devices. An appropriate analysis of the conditions existent in the Swedish households must be undergone to be able to understand the barriers that need to be mitigated.

As SOLIDAR Foundation partner, ABF, has highlighted, the budget for the provision of formal, non-formal and informal education has not decreased due to the pandemic. This has been conducive to the development of community projects linked to intercultural education. However, the increased polarization coupled with the academic achievement gap between learners of migrant background and native learners reveals a need for further investment.

39 European Commission (2020). Education and Training Monitor 2020 Sweden. P.3.

40 Swedish Development Aid Authority (2020). Finansiering av biståndet. Available at: <https://www.sida.se/sa-fungerar-bistandet-finansiering>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

41 Saleniece, Ilze (2018). Global Citizenship Education in Europe: How Much Do We Care?. P.29.

42 European Commission (2020). Country Report Sweden 2020. P.54.

For this reason, investment to support the education institutions dealing with severe challenges has been facilitated since 2016 with the ‘Cooperation for the Best School possible’ governmental programme, which started allocating annually 6.2 million EUR to specific education institutions, which was then increased. The National Education Agency estimates that the programme will reach 71 school providers, 245 schools and 57 pre-schools in 2018, and 110 school providers, 305 schools and 102 pre-schools by the end of 2019. As the investment in education is decentralized, the government has provided targeted funding to municipalities with high percentages of learners coming from a migrant background or from a socio-economically disadvantaged background. The funding amounted to EUR 104 million in 2018, EUR 365 million in 2019 and

EUR 627 million in 2020⁴³. For the moment it is difficult to assess the impact of these investment especially as they rely on recruiting new teachers and preparing them adequately, but it represents the correct approach to combating inequality and strengthening social cohesion within Sweden. It must be highlighted that the current discrepancies, and implicitly the efforts to address them, have been the result of the liberalization of the schools system in the 1990s and the introduction of the voucher system in education. The decentralized funding, the equal public investment allocated to public and to privately-managed education institutions and the possibility of Swedish families to pick the education institutions of their learners leads to segregation and to people being left behind. This system must be addressed for the additional investment to be effective.

43 European Commission (2018). Education and Training Monitor 2018 Sweden. P.7.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Mainstream GCE in formal education and expand its focus internally, ensuring that citizenship education is done under a global frame
- ◆ Develop a GCE strategy at the level of the government while ensuring that GCE is under the remit of the Ministry of Education and that constant funding for GCE is established
- ◆ Increase the current public investment in GCE
- ◆ Provide better ITE and CPD for teachers on GCE
- ◆ Provide incentives for the teaching profession to ensure sufficient educators to implement GCE
- ◆ Better link the volunteering programmes with education
- ◆ Increase the funding for expanding broadband connections across Sweden and speed up the process to ensure that all learners have access to internet as a public good
- ◆ Launch a research process to assess the digital needs of learners in their households given that for the moment the formal education institutions are sufficiently developed, but there might be insufficient opportunities for learners to develop their skills outside of formal education
- ◆ Provide better ITE and CPD on ICT in the classroom for teachers to ensure that they can facilitate the digital learning process and that they make use of the digital infrastructure existent in formal education institutions
- ◆ Maintain the levels of investment in CSOs to ensure that they can engage also in a process of digitalization
- ◆ Eliminate the voucher system from education to prevent school segregation
- ◆ Develop more institutional processes to collaborate with CSOs to develop a strategy on combatting racism and similar discriminatory behaviours

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