

Sweden UPR - Fryshuset

Polarization and segregation undermining human rights, increasing social incohesion

Introduction

As Sweden's largest civil society organization for youth Fryshuset works actively towards upholding and realizing young people's human rights, a core enterprise to build and sustain peace in Sweden.

Over the years we have seen an increasing trend towards polarization and segregation in Swedish society leaving young people – especially those from minority groups - feeling marginalized from mainstream society and unable to realize their human rights, including inadequate resources allocation for youth, access to basic services such as quality education, healthcare and services, and a safe living environment.

This is compounded by divisions between central-peripheral areas of the country, urban-rural, city center-suburbs, and into ethnically Swedish and non-ethnically Swedish areas.

1. Polarization and segregation

1.1. Social cohesion impact on access to basic services, especially for children and youth

We welcome the fact that Sweden:

- has a delegation against segregation (Delmos)
- has an anti-discrimination act (2008-567)¹
- recognizes “the importance of creating policies for youth that [...] provide youth employment opportunities and vocational training, fostering their education, and promoting youth entrepreneurship and constructive political engagement” (art.11 UNSCR 2250: Youth Peace and Security)²;
- the Swedish parliament has adopted a bill on making the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Swedish law AND is proposing a guidance document, an education initiative and continued systematic transformation work.

Rural areas and marginalized suburban areas however show higher obstacles in accessing employment opportunities, high quality education, health care and meaningful leisure activities, leading to hopelessness and young people harboring a disbelief in a sustainable future.

This in turn leads to effects on mental and physical health, a lower graduation rate from primary school, unemployment, lower participation in democracy and a higher risk for youth choosing a criminal lifestyle or using deadly violence.

The Children's Ombudsman report 2018 “[Outsourcing, violence and love for the suburb](#)³” shows that the statistical inequality in many areas where children grow up affects their possibility to have their rights fulfilled. It also states that the feeling of exclusion and being an outsider that children and youth grow up with in these marginalized areas is deeply problematic. Low expectations from grown-ups affects the child's vision of possibilities for education and work, and their hopes for a bright future.

The free school choice reform by which parents can choose to place their children in schools outside their local area has segregated schools into class categories, with less gentrified areas seeing school grades drop.

Employment opportunities are also lacking in marginalized areas and young people do not see a bright future for themselves if they stay there. Indeed, the unemployment rate among young people was 22.3 percent, an increase of 3.9 percentage points compared with May 2018⁴. Native-born Swedes have higher employment rates than all groups of foreign-born people. Not even those who have spent 20 years or more in Sweden have the same employment rates as natives. In marginalized areas of Stockholm, a city where inequalities are rising,

¹ https://www.government.se/4a788f/contentassets/6732121a2cb54ee3b21da9c628b6bdc7/oversattning-diskrimineringslagen_eng.pdf

² <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm>

³ “Utanförskap, Våld och Kärlek till Orten – Barns Röster om Att Växa Upp i Utsatta Kommuner och Förorter” <https://www.barnombudsmannen.se/globalassets/dokument-for-nekladdning/publikationer/ar2018.pdf>

⁴ <https://tradingeconomics.com/sweden/unemployment-rate>

children's health is also affected, with cavities in their teeth 13 times more common⁵ than in other parts of the city.

Recommendations: Social cohesion impact on access to basic services, especially for children and youth

- Build evidence through researched causes of segregation and polarization in Sweden, by consulting affected populations and civil society actors working with young people, to identify tangible solutions for all basic services – beyond those solutions identified by the delegation against segregation (Delmos).
- Amend the National Action Plan (2019) to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime to include:
 - o the prohibition of the public denial, trivialization, justification or condoning, with a racist aim, of crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes.
 - o stronger legislation to criminalize the creation or the leadership of a group which promotes racism, support for such a group or participation in its activities.
 - o discrimination on the ground of language as well as segregation to the forms of discrimination listed in the Discrimination Act and enact legislation making it possible to withdraw public financing from parties promoting racism and to disband such organisations.
- Take measures to prevent segregation in housing that has led to isolation and socio-economic segregation, undermining social cohesion.
- Adopt targeted measures to reduce the vulnerability and segregation of members of youth, Roma and persons from ethnic minorities by enhancing employment opportunities, including through the introduction of temporary special measures, and the strengthening of financial incentives for employers, such as tax incentives⁶.
- Implement the relevant employment and social protection policies and programs while paying particular attention to main cities and for disadvantaged and marginalized groups including children, refugees, asylum seekers, Roma and Afro-Swedes in those areas (Concluding Observation from the ESCR Committee)
- Develop a national plan to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child in laws and applied in practice (beyond the current guidance document, education initiative and continued systematic transformation work) to include:
 - o Taking measures to counter the education segregation, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity (as per art 28)
 - o Taking all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child - at home and in school (as per art 19.1)

1.2. Rising crime

Criminal activities often connected with marginalized areas are a result of segregation and polarization. Young people seeking an income, identity and social status in particular are easy recruits for gangs that can offer both. Indeed, lack of positive alternatives and positive role models to look up to in their vicinity, as well as representatives that they can relate to in positions of power, coupled with low household incomes and outright poverty, draw youth to choosing a criminal lifestyle. Recruitment to criminal activities and destructive networks in these areas happen at a young age, when children are highly suggestible to factors of status, quick money, power and influence.

⁵ "Skillnadernas Stockholm- Kommissionen för ett Hållbart Stockholm 2015" p.3

<http://www.stockholm.se/PageFiles/1020704/Rapport%201%20Skillnadernas%20Stockholm,%20juni%202015.pdf>

⁶ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sweden, 2016. Para 24 p.5

The risk of ending up in a criminal environment – both as a victim or perpetrator - is bigger if you grow up in a place with a high level of unemployment, dependency on state welfare and a high proportion of young people who graduate primary and secondary school with insufficient grades⁷.

Recommendations: Rising crime

- Establish more national and municipal structures to enable cooperation with civil society actors, who play a crucial role of in harboring the trust towards state agencies and social services – we encourage more cooperation similar to the Ideellt Offentlig Partnerskap (IOP)⁸.
- Create a national ‘disengagement from criminal environments program’ that includes:
 - Joint programming at the municipal level between with police, civil society and social service to provide tailored programs for individuals seeking help to leave criminal lifestyles.
 - Crisis management teams – composed of therapists, social services, with a strong connection to civil society actors in the local area - at the municipal level that can immediately meet the needs of family and friends of victims of deadly shootings – and act preventively in case of retaliatory shootings risks. Youth leaders and civil society actors currently are forced to fill this gap.
 - Create coordination platforms between police authority and civil society actors that work with conflict resolution and conflict prevention.

Ensure local mobile support teams to exist throughout the country – to provide a sense of presence and safety by meeting young people and guiding them to positive opportunities and activities. Teams should be comprised of “credible messengers” who are individuals who are able to connect with and motivate the most at-risk young people to successfully challenge and transform destructive thinking, thinking, attitudes and actions⁹.

- Establish comprehensive and needs-based re-integration programmes for those released from prison developed in coordination between prison staff, social services and civil society that may include rights and obligations, skills and jobs training, as well as orientation about opportunities that prevents a return to the criminal lifestyle.
- Increase the number of youth workers and youth centers, and better their perception in society through investment in their training, higher salaries and highlighting their value in society in job centers, the media and in raising awareness of this as a career path in schools.

1.3. Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees

Fryshuset also relates polarization and segregation to Sweden’s migration system.

New arrivals tend to get housed in already marginalized areas, undermining their integration into society but also isolating them from education and jobs and a healthy and sustainable lifestyle.

Young people who have *not* been granted asylum and decide to stay in Sweden in hiding must also have their rights upheld regardless of their legal status. It is insufficient to point to legal decisions when young people are homeless, suffer poor health and find themselves in a deeply traumatizing limbo. Here, civil society actors are saving lives every day, and the state must understand and value the human rights aspect in this work and continue to support it.

Recommendations: migrants, asylum seekers and refugees

- Ratifying the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families to enhance access to employment, to curb segregation and ensure better social cohesion.
- Implement commitments under the *GLOBAL COMPACT FOR SAFE, ORDERLY AND REGULAR MIGRATION (GCM)*, and in particular:

⁷ “Andra Sidan är Ni Klara? Återrapportering och utvärdering av Fryshusets Mobila Team i Östberga”, page 7.

https://www.bra.se/download/18.62c6cfa2166eca5d70e10fe1/1557846853560/2019_0228_%C3%85terrapportering%20och%20utv%C3%A4rdering%20av%20Fryshusets%20mobila%20team%20i%20%C3%96stberga.pdf

⁸ Idea-borne public partnership (IOP) is a collaboration between municipalities or county councils and a non-profit activity . The model was developed in 2010 by Forum, which is the industry organization for idea-based organizations with social focus. The IOP is an intermediate between association grants and procurement of services. The first IOP agreement in Sweden was signed in Sigtuna , and is now a common form of cooperation between municipalities and NGOs. [1]

⁹ Credible Messenger Justice Center <https://cmjcenter.org/>

- objective 15 (Provide access to basic services for migrants):
 - Incorporate the health needs of migrants, especially those newly arrived, in national and local health care policies and plans, such as by strengthening capacities for service provision, facilitating affordable and non-discriminatory access, reducing communication barriers, and training health care providers on culturally-sensitive service delivery, in order to promote physical and mental health of migrants and communities overall, including by taking into consideration relevant recommendations from the WHO Framework of Priorities and Guiding Principles to Promote the Health of Refugees and Migrants (objective 15.e of the GCM & articles 2 and 12 of the Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights) ; service provision needs to recognize the trauma that many families carry as a result of fleeing war and leaving everything behind. This trauma if left untreated multiplies within the family and negatively affects children’s quality of life and ability to become active participants in society.
- objective 16 (Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion)
 - Establish comprehensive and needs-based post-arrival programmes that may include rights and obligations, basic language training, as well as orientation about social norms and customs in the country of destination (as per objective 16.b); and ensure that local authorities are informed of arrivals in order to appropriately provide aforementioned provisions.
 - Establishing community centres or programmes at the local level to facilitate migrant participation in the receiving society by involving migrants, community members, diaspora organizations, migrant associations, and local authorities in intercultural dialogue, sharing of stories, mentorship programmes, and development of business ties that improve integration outcomes and foster mutual respect (Objective 16.f)
- objective 17 (Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration):
 - Develop and promote awareness-raising campaigns targeted at communities of destination in order to inform public perceptions regarding the positive contributions of safe, orderly and regular migration, based on evidence and facts, and to end racism, xenophobia and stigmatization against all migrants

2. A system maladapted to a heterogenous population

2.1. Lacking youth representation and participation

All young people in Sweden do not have role models to look up to in positions of power – both in terms of ethnic and gender representation within the civil servant body, police, politicians -- and decisions about them are made by people who do not always know how to relate with the issues they are facing.

As long as lack of representation is not resolved, lack of trust and a feeling of exclusion from positions of power will lead to a feeling of marginalization and exclusion of those who do not belong to normative Swedish society. Youth and children living in socioeconomically marginalized areas in particular are having their right to participation in decision making processes unmet.

2.2. Exclusive and shrinking Civil Society spaces

Sweden is a country built on strong civil society movements - one of the oldest and most complex in Europe. The problem is that the old Swedish way of building a society is not adapted to the no longer homogenous, new Sweden. It needs to be reinvigorated to truly support plurality – in terms of gender, youth and backgrounds. We also see that the space for a free and powerful civil society that leads innovation and flexible solutions adapted to individual needs is shrinking in Sweden. **We are increasingly seen as providers of services to the state, rather than as equal actors in building a sustainable society, with the freedom and support to act effectively. This undermines the democratic spaces where civil society plays a crucial role.**

Recommendations: a system maladapted to a heterogenous population

- Develop and implement - in consultation with key ministries, civil society and affected youth groups - a Youth Peace and Security plan which would include:
 - Increased support for platforms, organizations and meeting places where every young person in Sweden feels truly welcomed to realize their passions, regardless of background, beliefs or where they live.
 - Investing in conflict resolution programs for youth in school, providing knowledge and understanding of one's own role in conflict and giving options to successfully deal with conflict in other ways than through violence.
 - Adaptable participation and information sharing methods for working youth who lack the time to actively participate in standard youth outreach programs for political participation.
 - Implement a plan that eradicates barriers based on class to enable participation for youth in peace and security projects.
 - Better support initiatives that include young people in creating a safer and more sustainable society where they feel ownership over the process.
- Developing a national strategy for the increased inclusion of youth into decision making processes in issues that affect them by:
 - identifying and mapping out entry points for youth in decision making processes at the local and national levels
 - building capacities for them to do access those entry points
 - consider enacting youth quotas in all levels of governance – and notably in department that address youth and children's needs in particular
 - ensuring that local and national authorities are aware and able to include youth in processes.
- Support youth led initiatives in marginalized areas with financial support as well as adequate space so that youth can realize own activities and projects.
- Ensure that civil society in Sweden remain independent, vibrant and inclusive by providing support to developing the capacity of organizations representing the most marginalized groups, to enable them to influence on an equal basis, and in such regarding all civil society groups as equal.
- **Ensure that civil society from a variety of specialized background, including youth, minority groups, peacebuilding and human rights organizations is included in the follow-up to this third cycle of the UPR.**

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