

2023-01-13

Dnr: BO 2022-0282

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The Ombudsman for children in Sweden's Submission: The right to education, advances and challenges

The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden is a government agency established in 1993 representing children's rights and interests on the basis of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Ombudsman is an independent national institution based on the Paris Principles that monitors the implementation of the Convention in municipalities, regions and government agencies. The Ombudsman identifies weaknesses in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, proposes changes to laws and ordinances, collects and disseminates knowledge and information about the situation of children and advocates and participates in the public debate.

1. In answering questions number 8 and 9 and part of question number 6 the Ombudsman for Children in Sweden would like point out increasing lack of equity/equality as one of the main challenges in implementing the right to education for children in Sweden and a crucial issue to address nationally.

2. The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden emphasized this in a Supplementary Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in August 2022.¹ The importance of systematically and continuously monitoring school equivalence and schools' compensatory capacity has been emphasized also by others, for example the Government Inquiry into a More Equivalent School that handed over its report in April 2020 and the Swedish National Agency for Education.²

3. Many children and youth in Sweden grow up in a safe, healthy and positive environment and have access to education of good quality in a safe environment. Swedish laws concerning education also set high standards and are improved regularly. However, Sweden faces major challenges in implementing the laws and there are significant differences in realizing the right to good quality education in a safe environment depending on where in Sweden you live and which school you go to, which is linked to factors such as segregation, socio-economy and regional conditions. There are also significant differences depending on personal

¹ The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden, 2022, Supplementary Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (https://www.barnombudsmannen.se/globalassets/dokument/barnkonventionen/fns-barnrattskomite/2022/supplementary_report_sweden_final_2208015.pdf).

² Swedish Government Official Reports, SOU 2020:28, En mer likvärdig skola – minskad skolsegregation och förbättrad resurstilldelning (the Government Inquiry into a More Equivalent School), and the Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, Analyser av familjebakgrundens betydelse för skolresultaten och skillnader mellan skolor: En kvantitativ studie av utvecklingen över tid i slutet av grundskolan (Analyses of the importance of family background to school results and differences between schools: A quantitative study of the development over time at the end of compulsory school).

circumstances such as country of birth and parents' educational background. Furthermore, the differences seem to increase.

4. For example, a child's family background has been of increasing significance to school results in the past two decades, and school segregation has increased during the same period. Differences in school results between different schools have also become larger, to a great extent due to the increased school segregation. Also, schools are deficient in their compensatory mission.³

5. Recurring reports also show the need for proactive work to prevent offensive and humiliating treatment and to change norms. Many pupils feel that school is not a safe environment and some groups of children are more vulnerable than others, for example girls, pupils belonging to sexual minorities and pupils with disabilities.⁴

6. Much of the decision-making in Sweden, and thereby also implementation of law, takes place in regions and municipalities. This is the case with for example schools, which municipalities are organisers of. Municipalities as organisers of schools has been pointed out as one of the challenges when it comes to equity/equality in education. Adding to this, Sweden has a system of independent school organisers and school choice which together with housing segregation, has contributed to the increasing school segregation.

7. For more information and examples please see the above-mentioned Supplementary Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the other reports referred to in this submission.

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³ Swedish Government Official Reports, SOU 2020:28, En mer likvärdig skola – minskad skolsegregation och förbättrad resurstilldelning (the Government Inquiry into a More Equivalent School), and the Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, Analyser av familjebakgrundens betydelse för skolresultaten och skillnader mellan skolor: En kvantitativ studie av utvecklingen över tid i slutet av grundskolan (Analyses of the importance of family background to school results and differences between schools: A quantitative study of the development over time at the end of compulsory school). Please also see Swedish Government Official Reports, SOU 2019:40, Jämlikhet i möjligheter och utfall i den svenska skolan.

⁴ See for example Ministry Publications Series, Ds 2021:13, Nationell plan för trygghet och studiero (National plan for security and a calm academic environment), and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate's annual report for 2021. Please also see the Swedish National Agency for Education "Attityder till skolan 2018" (Attitudes to school in 2018), the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, Resultat från Skolenkäten 2017–2018 (Results from the school survey 2017-2018), and the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, 2020, Det blir ju bara värre om jag berättar... Ungas erfarenheter av sexuella trakasserier i utbildningsmiljöer (It will only get worse if I tell... Young people's experiences of sexual harassment in educational settings).