



Ministry of Health and Social
Affairs
Sweden

Coordination Secretariat

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Sweden is working to achieve the objectives laid down in the Final Document of the UN's Special Session on Children 'A World Fit for Children'

1. Introduction

In May 2002, a Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Children adopted the Final Document *A World Fit for Children*. The Final Document comprises a declaration and a plan of action aimed at respecting and ensuring the dignity and well-being of all children. The principles and goals contained in the plan of action from the Final Document has been integrated into the Swedish Government's child policy for a long time. The objective of the child policy – that children and young people are to be respected and have opportunities for development and security and also for participation and influence – reflects the plan of action and goals of the Special Session from a Swedish perspective. A further development of the Swedish strategy to realise the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was presented to the *Riksdag* (Swedish Parliament) in January 2004.¹ The aim of the further-developed strategy was (based on previous experience gained and the challenges lying before us, including those referred to in the Final Document *A World Fit for Children*) to ensure the realisation of every girl's and boy's rights regardless of disability, origin, social or financial position.

This report presents the advances in the areas relevant to the follow-up of the Final Document from the UN's Special Session on Children. The

¹ Communication 2003/04:47

point of departure for the report and similarly the Swedish approach to the Final Document is that all public bodies in Sweden should focus on child-specific issues in our welfare society. These issues are not always identical to the objectives and initiatives referred to in the Final Document, but correspond well with the strategic approaches and the spirit of *A World Fit for Children*.

The report has been prepared within the Swedish Government Offices with the assistance of all of the ministries concerned. The conclusions and analyses presented in the report reflect a sample from the initiatives taken during the last five years aimed at realising the rights of the child.

This report has not been preceded by any special consultations with either the NGOs or children. This results from the substantive issues raised in both this report and the Final Document *A World Fit for Children* are, and have always been, in focus in the course of the Government's dialogue with these stakeholders.

For example, the 2006 'Sweden for Children' campaign included local seminars for municipal decisions-makers and officers, as well as children and young people, parents, NGOs and the private sector. The aim of this was to encourage local work on the rights of the child, to identify needs and opportunities within local work concerning the CRC, and to enhance the participation and influence of children at a municipal level. The Reference Group of Children of the Minister of Health and Social Affairs concluded this initiative through a dialogue with several Government members.

Regional conferences aimed at presenting and deploying successful working methods have been organised by the Children's Ombudsman. Questions surrounding the realisation of the goal of the child policy have been raised on several occasions at the Reference Group of Children of the Minister of Health and Social Affairs and within the Child Rights Forum in dialogue with NGOs.

Issues concerning the living conditions of the child in Sweden have also been raised within the reporting process to the committees and commissions that monitor the realisation of international instruments on human rights. The periodic reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva under the CRC as well as Sweden's periodic reporting on the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has also involved dialogue with civil society, other stakeholders and children concerned.

2. Measures to achieve the targets

A number of *strategic measures* have been taken both nationally and regionally in the Nordic countries and within the framework of Sweden's international development cooperation:

In 1999 the *Riksdag* adopted a national strategy to realise the CRC, which was updated in early 2004.² A number of areas for development have been identified for future strategic work. These call for increased knowledge about the situation of children through improved statistics and the follow-up of the efforts made to implement the child policy as well as offering support to and information for politicians, officials and other interested parties in the form of a handbook for the implementation of the CRC and the establishment of a national centre that is able to offer knowledge and competence development in the application of the CRC.

In the National Human Rights Plan of Action 2006–2009,³ work aimed at influencing attitudes and work with education initiatives were emphasised as being priority measures directed at both the public and public operations. This work also includes measures to enhance awareness and knowledge about the rights of the child.

The national objectives of the disability policy are a social community based on diversity, that society is designed to allow people with disabilities of all ages full participation in the life of the community, and equal opportunities in life for boys and girls, men and women with disabilities. Work on disability policy is to focus particularly on, among other things, enabling children with disabilities to achieve independence and self-determination, identifying and removing obstacles for full participation in society for people with disabilities, and preventing and combating discrimination against people with disabilities.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has drawn up an overall strategy for children and young people in the Nordic countries. This strategy, which is multisectorial, proceeds from the rights perspective including the CRC.

The following measures should be noted as regards the objective *to promote a healthy lifestyle*:

National action plans have been drawn up to combat alcohol and narcotics.⁴ Children and young people are the most important target

² Communication 2003/04:47

³ Communication 2005/06:95

⁴ Government Bill 2005/06:30

groups in both of the plans of action as regards preventative work and early intervention.

During 2006 the Government invested SEK 250m into preventive and promoting initiatives for young people and to develop drug-free meeting places. The aim of the initiative is to counteract young people drifting into a social exclusion.

As in many parts of the world, overweight and obesity is also a public health problem in Sweden. The Swedish government finds this development very troubling and is working, nationally as well as internationally, to halter these trends. Again, children and adolescents are prioritized groups. The Swedish government is tackling this problem through social and structural interventions, information, parent education programs, and close collaboration with the industry.

The National Centre for Health Promotion for Children and Adolescents is commissioned by the government to support schools and youth recreational centers with knowledge on how to increase physical activity, nutrition and other health promoting activities. The work of the NCCF takes a holistic approach to the relationship between physical activity, nutrition and young students learning and development.

The Swedish education system attaches great importance to issues of democracy, equality and human rights within, among other areas, preschool services, childcare for school children and education. These activities should actively mediate and establish fundamental democratic values such as, for example, the equal value and equality of all people.

The following have been implemented to *provide good quality education*:

The quality programme for schools 'All schools should be good schools'⁵ has been initiated, aimed at enhancing goal achievement within the Swedish school system. The programme deals first with clearer information regarding the development of the individual pupil towards goals, second with an improved quality of work at all levels of the education system, and third with increased clarity in the management of schools.

The Ordinance on Quality Reporting in the School System⁶ has been amended. These amendments require every municipality to endeavour to make quality audits known and easily accessible to all. The Ordinance shall also apply to the preschool services and childcare for school children run by municipalities. The amendments also mean that, as of the

⁵ U2003/1353/S

⁶ Ordinance U1997:702

autumn of 2005, every preschool and after-school recreation centre that is run by a municipality should prepare a quality audit.

An Act⁷ prohibiting Discrimination and other Degrading Treatment of Children and School Students entered into force in 2006. This Act aims to promote the equal rights of children and school students in the activities covered by the Education Act, and to counteract discrimination on the grounds of sex, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief, sexual orientation or disability. Any other degrading treatment that is not directly referable to these grounds of discrimination shall be counteracted by this Act. Under the Act, anyone who is responsible for such an activity – central government, a municipality, a county council or a private party – is obliged to conduct goal-orientated work to promote and achieve the objectives of the Act.

Since 2003, the most important task of the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement has been work to promote the improvement of preschool and school situations in segregated areas. The Agency runs the *Idéskola för mångfald* (School of Ideas for Diversity) within the framework of the Agency's terms of reference. The Agency has selected twenty preschools and compulsory schools, which will disseminate their ideas about how to work successfully with diversity issues to other preschools and schools.

A number of measures have been taken to improve the child's *protection against abuse, exploitation and violence*:

In February 2003, Sweden ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The first report on the implementation of the Protocol has been sent to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and will be dealt with by the Committee in May 2007. In December 2006, Sweden also ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

It is unacceptable for girls in Sweden to undergo *genital mutilation*. A special Swedish law has prohibited and criminalised female genital mutilation since 1982. In addition to legislation, a plan of action against female genital mutilation⁸ has been produced with two important goals: that the genital mutilation of girls in Sweden should cease and that those girls and women who have been already subjected to genital mutilation should receive adequate support.

Statutory amendments have been introduced into the Social Services Act and the Care of Young Persons Act in order to further improve the

⁷ Act 2006:67

⁸ S2003:026

protection of children in vulnerable situations. These amendments mean, among other things, that the reporting obligation is extended to include several professional groups. A provision was introduced in the Care of Young Persons Act whereby the best interests of the child should be decisive in connection with all decisions under the Act and regard should be taken of the wishes of the young person, taking into account her or his age or maturity.

New sexual criminal legislation entered into force in 2005. Among other things, the aim of this legislation was to emphasise and improve in various ways the protection of children and young people against being exposed to violations of a sexual nature.

A review of the legislation against child pornography⁹ is currently in progress. The review aims to enable the effective combat of child pornography and to improve the standing of children in connection with child pornography offences.

An overview of human trafficking offences is also in progress. An analysis will also be conducted within the framework of this review regarding whether the applicable criminal legislation offers satisfactory protection against child and compulsory marriage.

Work with violence in the name of honour is being channelled via the county administrative boards, but national authorities have also been given assignments within this field. Just over SEK 200m (approximately EUR 22m) was appropriated during 2003-2007 for measures to alleviate the situation for girls and young women as well as boys and young men, who are at risk of becoming vulnerable to violence in the name of honour and oppression from their close relatives. An additional SEK 2m was allocated in 2005 and has been earmarked for initiatives directed at 'emergency units for girls'.

An Act on Representation and Custodianship for Unaccompanied Children¹⁰ entered into force in 2005 and entails, among other things, that the special representative shall be given greater responsibility and shall also function as a custodian for these children. Responsibility for the housing of unaccompanied children has been transferred to the municipalities in July 2006.

A plan of action has been drawn up within the framework of the regional Baltic Sea Cooperation concerning children who have crossed the borders on their own or who are victims of human trafficking. Ukraine, Belarus and Moldavia are participating in this cooperation. The plan emphasises the importance of children who are victims of human

⁹ Directive 2005:89

¹⁰ Act 2005:429

trafficking being treated as children and that initiatives taken are adapted to the needs and conditions of the child. There is a national contact point in every country to facilitate bi- and multilateral contacts in respect of individual matters. Training of the professional groups concerned is also in progress.

A National Strategy against HIV/AIDS and Certain Other Communicable Diseases has been drawn up to *combat HIV/AIDS*.¹¹ According to this Strategy, the goal of public initiatives should be to limit the spread of HIV infection and other sexually transmittable and blood-borne diseases, and to minimise the consequences of these for society and the individual. The Strategy emphasises that initiatives in schools to enhance awareness about sex and cohabitation and the prevention of undesired teenage pregnancies (and consequent abortions) are important areas for combating the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

3. Trends in resource allocation for children

We have chosen to present under this heading first the development of central government financial resources for among other things the parental benefit and the child allowance, and also the development of the resources that the municipalities and county councils allocate for schools, childcare and dental care. We also provide examples of other economic initiatives outside the National Budget.

Appropriations are allocated within the framework of the National Budget, aimed at children as regards the public child allowance, parental benefit, maintenance support, child pension, care allowance for children with a disability, pension entitlement for child years and housing allowance for families with children. There has been a significant increase over the past five years in the budget appropriation for parental benefit and the public child allowance. Housing allowance has reduced slightly while the other items have increased slightly. The trends in appropriations over the last five years – in thousand SEK – are as follows:

	2002	2006
- Public child allowance	20 994 000	23 805 000
- Parental benefit	19 617 000	27 170 292
- Maintenance support	2 441 000	2 273 000
- Orphan's pension and survivor's support for children	972 000	1 044 000
- Care allowance for children with a disability	2 108 000	2 680 215
- Pension entitlement for child years	3 669 000	4 452 000

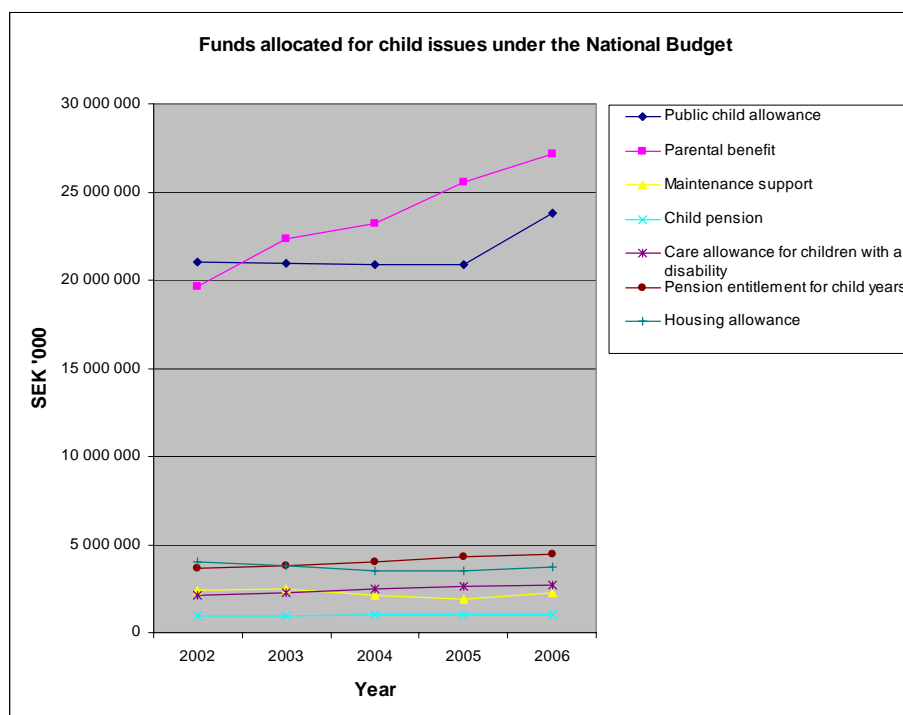
¹¹ Government Bill 2005/06:60

- Housing allowance

3 998 000

3 730 000

Table 1. Graph showing trends in the National Budget regarding appropriations for children (in SEK '000). Source: Ministry of Health and Social Affairs



Many decisions relating to children are made at a local level in Sweden, primarily by the municipalities though also by county councils. Under the Education Act, the municipalities are responsible for children being offered preschool activities, childcare for school children and school education. There are also private preschools and independent schools that have managers other than the municipalities. The county councils are responsible for, among other things, issues relating to health and medical care services for children. Opportunities to improve the living conditions of children therefore depend to great extent on the political willingness and financial capacity of the municipalities and county councils. Central government sets goals and the municipalities and independent managers determine how these goals should be achieved. However, the Government may actively stimulate development by giving its authorities assignments or by utility-earned incentives for certain operations.

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) concluded in its latest report¹² that there was a pronounced improvement in the overall financial result of the municipalities in 2005. Their good finances have made it possible to increase the allocated resources to the education sector. This effect was greatest within preschools. The targeted central government grant for improvements in staffing levels within

¹² Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, *Aktuellt om skola och barnomsorg* [Education and Childcare News] – October 2006

preschools, which was introduced in 2005, corresponding to approximately one-third of the total increase in costs.

Table 2. Childcare service expenses 2003-2005, billion SEK, current prices

Operation	2003	2004	2005	Change 04/05	
				billion SEK	per cent
Preschool	32.7	34.4	37.5	3.1	9.1
Registered childminding home	3.1	3.0	2.8	-0.2	-6.1
After-school recreation centre	10.4	10.3	10.4	0.1	1.1
Other	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.4
Total	46.5	48.1	51.2	3.1	6.4

Source: Municipal accounts summary 2005, Statistics Sweden

There was also a rather large increase in expenditure in upper secondary schools, while there was a moderate increase for compulsory schools and childcare for school children. As the number of pupils at upper secondary school has increased, the total increase in expenditure has not resulted in an increase in the cost per pupil. As the number of pupils at compulsory school has reduced, the moderate increase in expenditure in these schools nonetheless entailed a certain increase in the cost per pupil.

The cost for a child enrolled at preschool was on average SEK 101 100 in 2005, which was an increase of just over 5 per cent in current prices compared with the previous year. The cost for a child at an after-school recreation centre was SEK 32 100 in 2005, an increase of 3.9 per cent in current prices since 2004.

Table 3. Costs for the various forms of school, 2003-2005, billion SEK, current prices

Operation	2003	2004	2005	Change 04/05	
				billion SEK	per cent
Preschool class	3.9	3.8	4.0	0.2	4.5
Compulsory school	71.4	72.8	74.4	1.7	2.3
Compulsory special school	3.7	4.0	4.1	0.1	2.4
Upper secondary school	28.0	29.1	30.7	1.6	5.6
Upper secondary special school	1.6	1.7	1.9	0.2	9.3
Other education	7.3	7.0	6.7	-0.2	-3.1
Total	115.8	118.3	121.8	3.5	3.0

Source: Municipal accounts summary 2005, Statistics Sweden

The average cost for a pupil at compulsory school was SEK 73 700 in 2005. The average cost for a pupil at upper secondary school was just over SEK 86 900 in 2005.

Dental care is free of charge for children and young people in Sweden. The county councils arrange and finance this operation. The trend for county councils' dental care costs for children and young people is that these have increased significantly over recent years. Costs during 2005 were actually just over 30 per cent more than the costs during 2001:¹³

2001	2003	2004	2005
1.9 billion	2.4 billion	2.5 billion	2.5 billion

Total government expenditure has developed as follows for support for children and their families *in relation to gross domestic product*:¹⁴

	2002	2003	2004
Social benefits	3.0%	3.1%	3.0%
Cash benefits	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%
Benefits in kind	1.4%	1.5%	1.5%

Outside the National Budget: The Swedish Inheritance Fund distributes project funds for the benefit of children, young people and people with disabilities. Support can be sought for newly established projects from NGOs and associations. The Swedish Inheritance Fund is an important funder of the non-for-profit sector and provides financial support for newly established activities among those associations and organisations that conduct NGO work for the benefit of any of the target groups of the fund. In 2005, the Swedish Inheritance Fund Commission granted SEK 326m to such projects.

4. Development and use of monitoring instruments

The *Swedish National Audit Office* is part of the controlling power of the *Riksdag* (Swedish Parliament). Its assignment is to examine central government operations and thereby contribute to good management of resources and efficient government administration.

¹³ Source: Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions

¹⁴ Source: Espress

The Swedish National Audit Office conducted a review in the autumn of 2004 regarding whether the Government and the authorities had complied with the National Strategy to realise the CRC and the Government's information to Riksdag.¹⁵ As regards the child's perspective in Government decisions, the Swedish National Audit Office has examined a selection of terms of reference and government bills from 2004. The review regarding the use of child impact analyses by government authorities is based on details contained in the Children's Ombudsman's questionnaire from 2003 concerning work on the CRC in government authorities.

There is a *coordination unit* within the Government Offices which is responsible for monitoring and following up issues relating the rights of the child. The tasks of this coordination unit include coordinating, monitoring and pursuing work towards the integration of a child perspective in all Government decisions relating to the rights and interests of the child. A number of contact persons for CRC issues have been appointed within all ministries as a step towards improving and developing the work of the CRC within the Government Offices. These contact persons have been offered courses on the CRC and how it should be implemented in the work of the Government Offices. It is intended that these contact persons should help to ensure that the CRC is considered within their respective areas and that the child's perspective is manifested when processing and preparing matters relating to children.

The Children's Ombudsman has the task of representing the rights and interests of children and young people, as well as pursuing the implementation of and monitoring compliance with the CRC. This work includes monitoring compliance with laws and other enactments and also monitoring that their application complies with the standards and visions of the Convention. The task of the Children's Ombudsman also includes providing various stakeholders in society with support and information about the rights of the child, developing methods for the implementation of the CRC, and gathering knowledge and compiling statistics on the living conditions of children and young people.

The National Board for Youth Affairs is a central administrative agency for youth issues and has the overall responsibility for the objectives of the youth policy succeeding in having an impact in various sectors of society. The national youth policy is primarily oriented towards young people aged between 13 and 25. The objectives of the youth policy aim to ensure that young people should have real access to welfare and power. A new system for control and follow-up within youth policy was

¹⁵ The CRC in practice, RIR 2004:30

introduced in 2005.¹⁶ The new system means that a number of relevant authorities annually follow up indicators that illustrate the conditions of life of young people within their respective areas of operation. The National Board for Youth Affairs has been assigned to conduct a summary of these follow ups by the authorities, which is reported annually.

The National Board for Youth Affairs has also been assigned the task of working to ensure that the municipalities develop a knowledge-based youth policy through, among other things, supporting the collation of information regarding the view of young people on influence, how young people get on at school, leisure activities, work, health and future plans, and also analysing the information compiled.

A working group was appointed within the Government Offices in 2005 with the assignment of *developing indicators* to measure and follow up initiatives within child policy. This working group comprises representatives from ministries concerned and from Statistics Sweden, the National Institute of Public Health, the National Agency for Education, the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Children's Ombudsman, the National Board for Youth Affairs and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). The working group reported its proposal to the follow-up system of child policy at end of February 2007.

Sweden's third *periodic report to Committee on the Rights of the Child* on the implementation of the CRC was examined in January 2005. Prior to this examination, the Government responded to the Committee's supplementary questions during the autumn of 2005. In conjunction with this review, a Government delegation comprising representatives from relevant ministries concerned has participated in the dialogue with the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Sweden's reporting to the Committee monitoring the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has also been an opportunity to monitor Sweden's work for children in these areas.

The Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS) was allocated the overall responsibility for coordination regarding Swedish child and youth research. Important parts of the assignment include implementing strategic initiatives within the area, establishing cooperation between the various fund givers disseminating research results and arranging meeting places for researchers and practitioners.

¹⁶ Government Bill 2002/05:2, *Makt att bestämma- rätt till välfärd* [Power to decide – right to welfare]

The evaluation of the first *plan of action for human rights* and work on the new plan of action for 2006-2009 has also entailed a follow-up of the work to realise the rights of the child in Sweden. As a first step in work on a plan of action for human rights for 2006-2009, a survey has been conducted regarding any inadequacies that may prevail in the protection and promotion of human rights in Sweden, including the rights of the child. This survey is based on a multitude of views, proposals and other material that has been gathered from, among others, the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights, as well as the UN monitoring committees. One point of departure for the survey was that Sweden should monitor its international commitments on human rights. The views and recommendations of international bodies regarding how Sweden complies with these rules therefore provide significant guidance on work to realise these rights. Consultations have been conducted with a large number of NGOs, researchers and experts to establish their views regarding human rights in Sweden. Furthermore, views and proposals have been gathered from a large number of stakeholders in society. Special meetings have been held with all of these reference groups.

5. Partnerships and alliances to achieve the goals, child participation

For some years now, the Minister for Social Affairs has had a *child reference group* with a number of boys and girls aged between 13 and 18 with various backgrounds and from different parts of Sweden. The aim of this group is that it should constitute a forum for regular annual dialogue between Ministers, officers within the Government Offices, and children and young people on important and topical issues relating to them. Issues that have been discussed include education, economic vulnerability among children and young people, the influence of the media on the self-image of young people, safety and security in the environment of young people and children, alcohol, narcotics and tobacco, the physical and mental health of children and young people, parental support and how a good parent should behave, and also the Internet with its opportunities and its unpleasant side. The views of the reference group have, among other things, constituted a basis prior to the Government's report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in the autumn of 2002 and have also contributed to the Government's work on following up the Final Document of the UN Special Session on Children in 2002. Furthermore, the discussions of reference group about economic vulnerability were referred to in the Ministry Memorandum 'Economically vulnerable children'.¹⁷ The reference group has also responded to a survey from the Work Environment Law Commission.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ministry Publication Series 2004:41

¹⁸ Directive 2004:91

Approximately 50 000 boys and girls participated in various activities to discuss self-esteem, equality, ideals and identity within the framework of the *Girl Project*, which was conducted during 2004 and 2005. The aim of this project was, together with both boys and girls, to deal with the commercialisation and sexualisation with which they are confronted in their everyday lives and the way in which this affects their image of themselves and each other. The project was also aimed at establishing a dialogue with the media, the advertising sector, advertisers, etc. regarding their role and responsibility as regards their influence on boys and girls. Some hundred voluntary organisations around Sweden have also been engaged.

A *Child Rights Forum* has been established for permanent dialogue between the Government and the NGOs working with children and child rights issues. Ministers, State Secretaries and staff from the ministries concerned meet about ten representatives from these organisations biannually. The structure and method of work of the Forum will be adapted continually so that they refer to the issues of current relevance for improving the living conditions of children in Sweden.

The Government has worked with 'Dialogue Forums' for a number of years, which means that representatives from youth organisations are invited to engage in discussions with the Government regarding current youth policy issues. Four dialogue forums were conducted in conjunction with the course of the work with the latest Youth Policy Government Bill.¹⁹ The latest Dialogue Forum was conducted in March 2006.

More than half of Swedish municipalities have different kinds of input councils, such as, for example, youth councils and youth parliaments, and/or action plans for the participation of young people. Here, young people are in various ways given opportunities to influence the way in which their local municipality functions.

Most decisions relating to the living conditions and rights of a child are made at a local level, by municipalities and county councils. Opportunities to realise the goals of the child policy for every child living in Sweden consequently depend to a large extent on the political willingness and capacity of municipalities and county councils to implement the measures that are necessary within their fields of responsibility and competence. The Government has encouraged the process, which resulted in the establishment in 2005 of a *Partnership for work with the rights of the child*, made up of twelve municipalities. The

¹⁹ Government Bill 2002/05:2, *Makt att bestämma – rätt till välfärd* [Power to decide – right to welfare]

Government has also made funds available for the coordination of the Partnership's operation. The twelve municipalities²⁰ have decided to enter into close collaboration regarding the implementation of the CRC within municipal operations. The Partnership focuses on, among other things, the development of working methods, the coordination with other stakeholders and the skills development of staff and elected officials. Representatives from both the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and the Children's Ombudsman regularly attend meetings of the Partnership.

The county councils are responsible for, among other things, health and medical services and traffic issues. Since the autumn of 2000, there has been a network of responsible officers within all of the county councils, which is coordinated by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. This county council network constitutes a forum for the sharing of experiences and the development of skills in work to realise the rights of the child. Representatives from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and the Children's Ombudsman attend the meetings of the network.

Sweden has contributed to enhancing the opportunities of children to also express their views in an international context. For example, government funds have been made available to Save the Children Sweden to facilitate participation by children from various countries in the *work with the UN study on violence against children* that was presented in the autumn of 2006.

6. Results

The majority of children and young people in Sweden have a good life and live well under secure and good material circumstances with both or one of their biological parents. According to a survey of children and young people in compulsory school years 2–9²¹ carried out by the Children's Ombudsman, children and young people are on the whole very satisfied with their lives. They are also very content with their bodies and health and how they feel. The same applies to family relationships, leisure time, family finances and housing.

An interdepartmental working group has described and analysed the situation of *children in economically vulnerable families*.²² Based on among other things the conclusions of this report the Parliament has decided on improvements regarding maintenance support and housing allowance for families with children as well as to introduce a child

²⁰ Borlänge, Gunnared City District in Göteborg, Gävle, Haninge, Kalmar, Karlskoga, Västerås, Sigtuna, Trelleborg, Uppsala, Örebro, Östersund.

²¹ BR 2005:03

²² Ministry Publications Series 2004:41

supplement for parents who are studying. However, the wellbeing of economically vulnerable children primarily involves the opportunities of parents to find work and earn their own income.

Education for children and young persons comprises preschool activities, childcare for school children, preschool classes, compulsory school, compulsory special school for students with severe intellectual/learning difficulties, upper secondary school and upper secondary special school. In addition, there is education at Sami schools and at special schools for children with impaired hearing, vision or speech. The municipalities and individual managers are responsible for the fulfilment of the requirements and objectives determined by, among other things, the Education Act and the curricula.

The number of children at *preschool* has increased in recent years. The number of children per employee and the average group size has slightly decreased. There has been a worrying trend of increasingly bulk of children groups and reduced staff ratios within after-school recreation activities.

Education at *compulsory schools* aims to provide pupils with the knowledge, skills and general education that they require to participate in the life of the community. Compulsory school also constitutes a base for future education at upper secondary school. The proportion of students who achieved the Pass grade in all subjects was 81 per cent in Year 9 of compulsory school for the school year 2003/04. The proportion of pupils eligible for upper secondary school for the school year 2005/06 was 89.2 per cent. A greater proportion of girls than boys and a greater proportion of pupils with a Swedish background than those with a foreign background are eligible for upper secondary school.

Upper secondary school is a voluntary form of schooling, comprising 17 national programmes and specially designed and individual programmes.

The initiative for *more teachers and other specialists* in schools has increased the staff ratio. Municipalities have given priority to the employment of teachers with special teaching skills, which is of great importance for those children and pupils in need of special support. The number of staff at municipal schools has increased by a total of 14 000 full-time posts if account is taken of the reduction in student numbers. Of these, approximately 10 000 are directly financed by a special central government grant for increasing staff numbers. Follow-ups show that these initiatives have been greatest at special schools for students with severe intellectual/learning difficulties and compulsory schools and less at upper secondary schools.

A national conference – Meeting the Child – about meeting *the child's needs and rights within the health and medical services* took place in 2005. The conference was an opportunity to share experience as regards

the skills development of staff within the health and medical care services. The conference has been documented in writing and results distributed to health and medical care staff throughout Sweden.

The National Institute of Public Health and the National Board of Health and Welfare have produced a proposal for strategies and measures for a national programme for *suicide prevention*. The aim of the programme is to contribute to reducing the number of suicides and attempted suicides among the population. The background to this is that the earlier reduction in suicides appears to have tailed off and there has been an increase in the proportion of young people aged 15 to 24 who are being cared for owing to suicide attempts. The number of suicides in this age group has been just over one hundred cases for many years, although the total number of suicides in the population has reduced.

The National Board of Health and Welfare has been assigned, among other things, to conduct and report statistics on intentionally inflicted *violence against children*. The first five-year report was presented in 2005 and contains details of the number of children who died as a consequence of abuse by another person (32 children), the number of children who have been discharged from hospital as a consequence of abuse (1 295 children) and the number of children who have sought care at an emergency unit or accident and emergency department at a hospital (approximately 2 500 children a year).

The National Board of Health and Welfare have also produced an investigation, documentation and follow up system - Focus on the Need of the Child - which has now been implemented in the municipalities to develop investigation and follow-up work within the social welfare services.

The Committee of inquiry on *knowledge about sexually exploited children* in Sweden submitted proposals²³ regarding the compilation and dissemination of all of the information that the Commission had produced in the area. As a result of this proposal, the *Stiftelsen Allmänna Barnhuset* (Swedish Children's Welfare Foundation) was allocated special funds for disseminating knowledge and implementing regional conferences on sexual exploitation of children in Sweden. Six such regional conferences were implemented during 2005-2006. *Stiftelsen Allmänna Barnhuset* is continuing its work to disseminate knowledge.

The Committee of inquiry on *eviction and homelessness among families with children* has submitted proposals, which have, among other things, resulted in the Enforcement Service being assigned to produce statistics on the number of children in households that are evicted. The National

²³ SOU 2004:71

Board of Health and Welfare is to produce guidance for the work of the social welfare services with such families.

The social welfare services, police, public prosecutors and health and welfare services have been collaborating locally since 2005 in joint trial operations conducted under the same roof in connection with investigations of children suspected of being victims to serious crimes, '*Child investigations centre*'. The assignment is, among other things, to better adapt investigations of suspicion of an offence against a child to the needs of the child and consequently to improve the quality of investigations. The fundamental idea is that the child should only need to come to one place during the investigation. Joint trial operations of children as victims are currently in progress in six cities. An evaluation of these operations will be reported on in March 2008; thereafter the Government may adopt a position on the forms for future work.

One result of the work of the National Board of Health and Welfare on further developing preventive work against female genital mutilation is a joint declaration from the Swedish Imam Council, the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, the Catholic Church and the Christian Council of Sweden. All of these denominations clearly distance themselves in writing from all forms of female genital mutilation. The National Board of Health and Welfare has also produced and disseminated guidance on female genital mutilation to the police and prosecutors. Educational material adapted to schools, the health and medical care services and the social welfare services has been produced, and a data bank with facts and information about female genital mutilation has been created on the web site of this authority. A folder directed at girls who have been or are at risk of being genitally mutilated has been distributed to compulsory schools.

Professional groups, whose work concerns children, need to have good knowledge about the practical application of the CRC. Örebro University has, on the assignment of the Government, established a national centre for training on the implementation of CRC offering *competence and method development* in the practical application of this convention for professional groups working with and for children. UNICEF Sweden is now producing a Swedish *handbook on the implementation of the CRC*. This handbook is based on the recommendations and comments that the Committee on the Rights of the Child has prepared during the year regarding the implementation of the CRC, in relation to the circumstances in Sweden. This is intended to serve as support for politicians, officials and other interested parties.

The child rights perspective has also become a central issue in Sweden's *international development cooperation*, where the CRC must permeate

operations both at multilateral and bilateral levels.²⁴ Work on the child rights perspective in development cooperation is based on the Millennium Development Goals that the UN Member States jointly undertook to satisfy no later than 2015. The goals that primarily provide guidelines for the work of Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) on the rights of the child are the goal to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (Goal 1), the goal to achieve universal primary education (Goal 2), the goal to reduce child mortality (Goal 4), and the goal to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (Goal 6).

Swedish initiatives within international cooperation have, among other things, resulted in approximately 2 000 demobilised child soldiers in Columbia, child-friendly education in almost 150 schools in Laos, more efficient work for the rights of the child in the Philippines, and support for young mothers and young offenders in Mali.²⁵

7. Summary of experiences, conclusions and initiatives since 2002, and future plans at a national and regional level

A general welfare policy forms a base to enable the realisation of both the Millennium Development Goals and the objectives and plan of action contained in the Final Document *A World Fit for Children*. One of the objectives of Swedish welfare policy is in particular to guarantee both girls and boys a good start in life. Parents have the main responsibility for the care and upbringing of a child. The task of society is to support and supplement the parents so that good and secure conditions for childhood can be assured for every child.

The *National Strategy* to realise the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has played a decisive role in the work to improve the living conditions of children in Sweden. The aim of the National Strategy has from the start been that the CRC should permeate all decision making that affects children.²⁶

In strategic work, the *child perspective* has been used as an important instrument to ensure that the decision-making processes and operations of both the national and local authorities take account of the needs and rights of the child.²⁷ Adopting a child perspective entails, among other

²⁴ Government Bill 2002/03:122 Shared Responsibility: Sweden's Policy for Global Development, Communication 2001/03:186 A child rights perspective in international cooperation work

²⁵ Sida, Effects of a child rights perspective, April 2006

²⁶ Government Bill 1997/98:182

²⁷ Communication 2003/04:47

things, that one sees and analyses the consequences of a decision for an individual child or group of children. This thus involves trying to establish how children perceive and understand their situation and any possible changes. Having a child perspective also means that one is familiar with and tries to understand the living conditions of children and young people. However, it is ultimately the adult who must make a decision and assume responsibility for this, with their knowledge and experience and on the basis of a child perspective.

The information and *situation profile* that the Government has on how work with the CRC is progressing is largely based on the questionnaire surveys regularly implemented among municipalities, county councils and government agencies by the Children's Ombudsman. These investigations show, among other things, that there is strong support among municipal managers for work with the CRC and that the objectives of the Convention appear in the governing documents of most municipalities. This also applies to the majority of county councils.

At the same time, less than a third of the municipalities have a special strategy or plan of action for the implementation of the CRC and only a tenth have adopted a training plan. A large majority of municipalities and county councils state that there is a need for the further development of skills regarding the CRC and its application, but only a few of them have allocated resources for this. Nor is there any long-term strategy for the implementation of the CRC among most government agencies and the need for continuing education is greater than the resources appropriated.

The Swedish National Audit Office's review of the Government's and the government authorities' work on the strategy to realise the CRC²⁸ also confirms that child impact analyses are rare, that the child's perspective is not always taken into account when making decisions affecting children and that there are few authorities and municipalities that have a strategy for how the CRC should be implemented within their own operation. There is a continuing need for knowledge regarding the rights of the child, and how these rights are transformed into practical action. Initiatives to disseminate this knowledge will need to continue for a long time. Support and motivational initiatives on the part of central government are in this context very important.

The Government has made visible the initiatives for children and young people reported in the National Budget in the form of two official communications²⁹ to the *Riksdag* containing summaries of the initiatives for children and young people as reported in the Budget Bills for 2004 and 2005. The *Riksdag*'s Committee on Finance has stated, among other things, that the future development of the methods for goal and result management in the budget process are of decisive importance for

²⁸ RiR 2004:30

²⁹ Communication 2003/04:143 and Communication 2004/05:93

integrating the child perspective in all parts of official decision making. This analysis must be developed further prior to future budget processes so that the Government's report on initiatives for children and young people in the National Budget will be continuously improved and supplemented with increasing elements of analysis.³⁰

In January 2005, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child dealt with Sweden's third periodic report on measures and advances for realising the CRC. Overall, the Committee had a positive opinion of the ongoing work in Sweden, though emphasised that the CRC is not sufficiently well-known and understood by all professional groups working with and for children, and that sometimes children and young people do not know that they have any real influence on matters affecting them. The conclusions and recommendations of the Committee constitute a valuable basis for the future deliberations of the Government concerning measures to implement the CRC.

Parents are normally the most important persons in a child's life. They have the responsibility to provide the child with appropriate guidance and advice, when the child, according to their development and capacity, exercises her/his rights. In the view of the Government, it is important that *parents continuously obtain support* in their parental role throughout the entire upbringing of the child. The Government intends to assist local managers with the transfer of experience and knowledge of methodology concerning parental support through, for example, disseminating educational materials and models for the improvement of their activities.

The National Institute of Public Health (FHI) has gathered, analysed and disseminated information about how various kinds of *parental support* can be formulated to be of real value. In a report to the Government, FHI proposes³¹ a broad dissemination of methods for parental support, where parents can exercise in practice interaction with children adapted to the development and needs of the child. In this way, the risk of children developing various mental problems is reduced. The municipalities should have overall responsibility for parental education directed at parents within the municipality.

The need for *knowledge about the CRC* generally and *practical application* in particular is still great among decision-makers and various professional groups within central government, the municipalities and county councils. It is important within this context to enhance knowledge about the rights of the child among both professional groups of people and those being trained. The Government will also continue to support municipalities, county councils and government authorities in their work on integrating a child perspective in their decisions and operations. Priority will be given to initiatives to promote the transfer of knowledge

³⁰ Report 2004/05FiU32, Government Communication 2004/05:256

³¹ *New tools for parents – Proposals for new forms of parent support* report, FHI 2005

and the sharing of experiences concerning the CRC and the needs of children to the stakeholders involved.

Forms of *dialogue* and *methods to obtain and assimilate the views and knowledge of boys and girls* still need to be developed and improved. The experience and good examples found among municipalities and government agencies to enable children to become participative needs to be applied and spread within and between the operations affected.

Reality demonstrates that it is not always easy to find *effective forms for dialogue* with children and young people. The interests of children and young people for dialogue with municipal decision-makers vary over time. This depends first on how adults deal with the dialogue, the language they use, the scope that they create for the child's voice, and the feedback regarding the effect of the child's views on the adults' decisions and is also affected by children growing, developing and having other interests. It is not rare for the child and youth councils found at a municipal level to be reorganised, discontinued or restarted. The most positive experiences have been obtained from municipalities seeking and creating forums for dialogue with children and young people at places they attend, namely at school, within various youth activities and the like.

According to the Children's Ombudsman there are several *factors of success* for municipalities, county councils and government agencies to be able to succeed with the work to realise the rights of the child in society. These factors of success are:

- the support and involvement of decision-makers/management,
- governing documents (strategies, plans of action, etc.) focussing on the rights of the child,
- a survey of the conditions of children with the aim of, for instance, questionnaires, opinion polls and open forums,
- child impact analysis, i.e. consideration of the consequences that a decision may have for the child or the group of children concerned. An important part of such an assessment is of course the child's own opinion,
- local child representative/child ombudsman, who can represent the child at a local level,
- established routines for and the structure of responsibility for pursuing and supporting work on the rights of the child,
- education of decision-makers and staff, and the sharing of experiences,
- child and youth appendix to the local budget,
- regular follow-up of the work on the rights of the child

The Government intends to implement several changes within the field of education, for instance to present a new Education Act, investigate the government's special schools, investigate the issue of teacher eligibility and authorisation, and investigate a new upper secondary school.

Sweden's international development cooperation has assumed a more pronounced child rights perspective. It can be concluded at the same time that a great deal of work remains before the child rights perspective is completely integrated into the operation.³² The rights of the child need to be more systematically introduced into the dialogue with cooperating partners than has been the case so far. Other challenges include combating HIV/AIDS from a child rights perspective and influencing other stakeholders to include child rights as part of their work with national plans to reduce poverty in developing countries.³³

There are about 2 million children living in Sweden. The work aimed at achieving the objectives approved in the Final Document A World Fit for Children will continue. Our visionary objective is that Sweden should be a country where every boy and girl receives the best conceivable start in life and where they, regardless of sex, nationality, ethnic or social origin, disability or the family's financial status or place of residence, have the preconditions to develop their personality, capacity and competence in a secure, loving and supportive environment.

³² Sida, Effects of a child rights perspective, 2006

³³ *ibidem*