

## Sweden

**Population:** 8.99 m. **Fertility rate:** 1.71. **GDP per capita:** USD 28 100 **Children under 7 years:** c. 420 000.

**Female labour force participation:** 76.6% of women (15-64) participate, 20.8% of whom are in part-time employment (male part-time is 8.5%) (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005).

**Labour force participation rate of women with children under 6 years:** In 2004, the labour participation rate for women aged 15-64 was 76.6%, decreasing from 82.5% in 1990. Of those, 20.8% work part-time, compared to 8.5% of men (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005).

**Employment rate of women with children under 3:** 44% full-time and 36.2% part-time.

**Remunerated maternity and parental leave:** 480 days of parental leave to be divided between the two parents. 390 days are paid at 80% of earnings, the remaining 90 days at a flat rate. 60 days are reserved exclusively for mothers, 60 days for fathers, and the remaining days divided between them as they choose. 35% of fathers take their 60 days, much the highest proportion in OECD countries.

**Average duration of parental leave:** About 87% of leave days are used, mothers used 82.8% of the total days and fathers 17.2%.

**Social expenditure:** 28.9% of GDP. **Child poverty rate:** 4.2% after taxes and transfers (UNICEF, 2005). Though still very low by OECD standards, the rate has risen by over 50% in the past five years.

**Compulsory school age:** 7 years.

**Funding of pre-school services:** Public investment in ECEC was reported as over 1.9% of GDP in 2004. Funding per child in centred-based ECEC is second highest among OECD countries (after Denmark), reaching on average in 2004, USD 12 097 per child (Martin-Korpi, 2005).\*

**Average costs to parents:** Parental fees cover about 9% of costs in pre-school, amounting to about 2% of average income. Parents with one child pay maximum USD 135 monthly; with two children USD 107 monthly; and with 3 children USD 54 monthly.

**Legal entitlement to a free service:** From age 4 years (from 3 years if a child has additional needs, e.g. second-language children) for a free pre-school morning service of 3 hours.

**Major service types and duration:** Pre-school (*förskola*) offers full-time care for pre-school children aged from 1 to 6 years. Pre-schools are open throughout the year, with daily hours adjusted to meet the needs of working parents. Leisure-time centres (*fritidshem*) offer part-time activities for children from 6 to 12 years. Open pre-schools (*öppen förskola*) offer part-time activities for children. They are intended for use by parents caring for children at home and for family day care providers. Family day care homes

\* Martin-Korpi, B. (2005), "Early Childhood Education and Care in Sweden – A Universal Welfare Model", *Learning with other Countries*, Policy Paper No. 4, Daycare Trust, London.

(*familjedaghem*) offer full-time care for pre-school aged children. The pre-school class (*förskoleklass*) for 6- to 7-year-old children is specially conceived to facilitate transition towards the primary school.

**Rate of access to regulated services:** 45% of 1- to 2-year-olds and 86% of 2- to 3-year olds; 91% of 3- to 4-year olds; 96% of 5- to 6-year-olds. In the age group 6-7 years, 91% of children attend the pre-school class, with another 7% already in compulsory school. OSP for children 6-12 years: X50%.

**Designation and professional qualifications of lead staff:** *Familjedaghem*: family day care parents employed by the local commune, by whom initial training levels are fixed. Many family day carers are former teachers (university level education) or child assistants (senior secondary vocational training). *Förskola* or pre-school centres for children aged 1-6 years are staffed to 50% by pre-school teachers (*Förskollärare* teacher/pedagogues – pre-school educators with a 3.5-year university degree) and 50% by trained child assistants with a 3-year upper secondary training certificate. *Fritidshem* is out-of-school provision (OSP), staffed by leisure-time pedagogues, with a 3.5-year- university degree.

**Child-staff ratios and maximum group size:** Specific national standards regarding adult-child ratios and group size do not exist. These are set by each municipality, and vary considerably from one municipality to another. In centre-based ECEC centres and in family day care, the ratio is typically 5 to 6 children per adult. Maximum group size in pre-school centres, based on national statistical averages data, is 17 children per group, with a ratio of 5.4 children per trained adult. Maximum group size in out-of-school provision (OSP) is 30 children, with an 18.4:1 child-staff ratio.

## Auspices

Auspices for young children 1-6 are unified in Sweden. Responsibility for central policy, for the goals, guidelines and financial framework of ECEC lies solely with the Swedish Ministry of Education and Science. Distinctions between day care and kindergarten were removed by the 1998 School Act, which sees all services for young children from 1-6 as “pre-school” and from 6-7 years as “pre-school class”. Compulsory schooling begins at 7 years. Like the shifting of responsibility for the sector towards the Ministry of Education some years earlier, this Act signals – and reinforces – a major shift of understanding in Sweden with regard to early childhood services, which are now seen as being concerned primarily with individual, and social development.

The School Act also devolves major responsibilities to the 290 municipalities, which have the full responsibility of providing ECEC. Municipalities have the duty to create sufficient numbers of pre-school and leisure-time places, to monitor the quality of ECEC services and to provide sufficient resources. The Ministry of Education and Science has the main responsibility for national policy-making, and the National Agency for Education is responsible for overall evaluation, data collection, development and supervision of ECEC at central and regional levels.

## Context

**Labour force rates:** In 2004, the labour participation rate for women aged 15-64 was 76.6%, decreasing from 82.5% in 1990. Of those, 20.8% work part-time, compared to 8.5% of men (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005). 44% of women with at least one child under 3 were in full-time paid employment and 36.2% in part-time paid employment (OECD Survey Data, 2004).

*Parental leave:* The duration of combined (covering both parents), remunerated parental leave is 480 days. 390 days are paid 80% of annual earnings and 90 days paid at a universally applicable flat rate of SEK 60/day (EUR 6.58/USD 8), which is doubled for indigent families. About 87% of leave days are used, mothers used 82.8% of the total days and fathers 17.2%. The 480 cash-benefit days can be divided equally between parents. A parent may transfer up to 180 of her or his days to the other parent. (60 days are reserved exclusively for fathers and 60 days exclusively for mothers on a use-it, lose-it basis). Around 95% of the 390 high-rate benefit days and some 80% of the flat-rate days are claimed. In addition, temporary parental benefit is payable to a parent who is caring for a sick child up to the age of 12 and in some cases, 16 years. For these purposes, 120 cash-benefit days are available at 80% of the qualifying income. An average of 7 days per child are drawn each year. A further pregnancy benefit of 80% of earnings is paid for expectant mothers in employment who are unable to go on working from 60 to 11 days before birth.

### **Access and provision**

By law, all children 1-12 years have a right to pre-school education. Most pre-school provision is provided directly by municipalities in day care centres. Provision through municipal, family day care covers about 12% of children, especially in rural areas. Private day care provided by parental and personnel co-operatives, churches, corporations and other providers exists also for 13% of children. Except for parental fees, private provision is funded by the municipalities and contractually, is expected to meet the basic standards of public child care, although without the obligation to follow the Pre-school Curriculum. Currently, parental contributions to ECEC are capped at 11% of costs, and are waived for families in economic difficulties. For families with more than one child, fees are capped at 3.2 and 1% of the combined household income for the first, second and third child respectively.

#### *Rates of provision*

*0-1 years:* Few children under the age of 18 months are in ECEC, due to the parental leave system (see “Parental leave”, above). Almost all children are cared for by a parent (generally, the mother) in the home. Children have a right to a place in an ECEC centre from their first birthday. In general, children begin in day care at from about 15-18 months.

*1-6 years:* 45% of 1- to 2-year-olds and 86% of 2- to 3-year-olds are in ECEC services. For 3- to 4-year-olds participation rises to 91% and for 5- to 6-year-olds about 96%. Family day care caters for about 7% of children 1-6 years. Like centre-based ECEC and accredited out-of-school (leisure time) care services, family day care is in operation full-time for the working year.

*6-7 years:* 91% of children attend the pre-school class, with another 7% already in compulsory school. Over 50% of children 3-12 years are enrolled in leisure-time centres, participation peaking to about 75% for children from 6-9 years. In addition, “open pre-schools” (drop-in centres) offer a service to children and families (often low-income, immigrant) for a few hours every day. In rural areas, some of these drop-in centres are being transformed into family resource centres. The National Agency for Education has formulated guidelines for the conduct of these centres, and family day care.

### *Children with diverse needs*

*Children with disabilities:* Children with disabilities or psycho-social challenges have a priority right to services and are well integrated. In fact, there is no categorisation of these children, who are well represented in the Swedish pre-school.

*Children from low-income families:* The child poverty level, after taxes and transfers, is 4.2%; the lowest in OECD countries. Targeting low-income groups is therefore not a focus at this level, although additional educators are often supplied to centres receiving more low-income or immigrant children.

*Ethnic and bilingual children:* Sweden has a growing immigrant population. 14% of children in the early services have a mother tongue other than Swedish. Government has made funds available to provide daily, a free 3-hour session of day care for bilingual children from the age of 3 years. All children in need of specialist support are entitled to mainstream ECEC free of charge.

In a national evaluation of pre-schools in 2004, the National Agency for Education expressed concern about the lack of “equivalence” of pre-schools across municipalities (Skolverket, 2004/239<sup>1</sup>). The economic downturn of the 1990s – combined with rising enrolment rates – increased financial pressures on particular municipalities and affected the quality of provision through an increase of the average group size (to 14.6 in the age group 1-3, and 19.7 in age group 3-5). Further, while the number of children in need of special support had also increased (due to larger group size, more difficult living conditions, and immigration), the evaluation recorded unacceptable disparities in pre-school quality between municipalities – and even within the same municipality: “In a decentralised organisation, there is a risk that pre-schools facing worse conditions do not receive sufficient support to carry out their tasks. The evaluation shows that lack of support in terms of resources and management appears to affect primarily pre-schools in low-resource catchment areas” (Skolverket, 2004/239, p. 33). The report suggests that disparities in quality are due in some cases to a lack of targeting (to match differences in need) and, in other cases, to inadequate overall resources. This is a matter of concern, given the fact that child poverty in Sweden rose significantly during the late 1990s (UNICEF, 2005).

### **Quality**

*Regulation and monitoring of services:* Regulation and monitoring of ECEC services are the responsibility of one central agency, the National Agency for Education or *Skolverket*. Family day care, centre-based care and out-of-school care services all are required to be registered, undergo annual reviews, follow national curriculum guidelines and incorporate in-service training. Pedagogical management and supervision is a normal part of quality monitoring processes. ECEC services (for children 1-5) have similar regulations to schools, including annual quality reporting. National indicators on ECEC are developed and monitored by the National Agency for Education, but rather than relying solely on regulation, *Skolverket* publishes yearly reports on ECEC services, including analyses of child-staff ratios and other quality indicators.

*Funding:* The funding of pre-school services in 2004 amounted to 1.9% of GDP. Funding per child in centred-based ECEC is second highest among OECD countries (after Denmark), reaching on average in 2004, USD 12 097 per child (Korpi, 2005).<sup>2</sup>

*Staffing:* Each centre has a director, educational pedagogues (pre-school teachers) and child minders (trained assistants). Pre-school teachers make up 50% of the personnel in the pre-schools. Like leisure-time pedagogues, they are assisted by child assistants (comprising 38% of personnel). Unlike most other countries, leisure-time staff in Sweden are also highly trained, and like pre-school pedagogues have a 3.5-year university level degree. About 2-3% of pre-school personnel are men.

*Training requirements:* Almost all (98%) staff in Swedish pre-school centres are trained to work with children. Centre directors must have a university teaching or pedagogue qualification. Pedagogues (both educational and leisure-time) require a three- to four-year tertiary degree from a higher level university college. Most child assistants, who work alongside pedagogues, have completed a post-secondary professional diploma of three years, focused on “Children and Leisure-time Activities”. Some older staff have fewer formal qualifications, but the current career ladder has various points of entry for child minders to take up higher training leading to pedagogue status. Family day care providers are not required to have a qualification, but some 70% have either a child assistant certificate or have received 50-100 hours of mandatory training from their municipal employers. The National Agency for Education recommends that family day carers should receive a training and certification equivalent to the child assistants in the pre-schools.

*Work conditions:* Statutory weekly hours for all ECEC staff are 40 hours/week. There is no statutory requirement for a minimum level of staff development or for recommended staff development hours per year. However, in-service training (staff development) is well recognised by municipalities as necessary for centre-based day carers and leisure-time staff, but less well for family day carers.

*Child-staff ratios:* National statutory requirements for child-staff ratios do not exist, but monitoring of the actual ratios practised is compulsory and ongoing. In centre-based ECEC centres and in family day care, the ratio is typically 5 to 6 children per adult. Maximum group size in centres, based on national statistical averages data, is 17 children per group. In accredited out-of-school care/leisure centres the average group size is now around 30 children per group (with a pedagogue and assistant), but this ratio is considered by parents and professional as too high. The government bill on quality issues forwarded to Parliament (*Riksdag*) in September 2004 includes significant additional finance to provide about 6 000 new staff in order to improve adult-child ratios in ECEC services. This could mean a 10% increase in pre-school staff.

*Curriculum and pedagogy:* The Ministry of Education and Science published in 1998 a general curriculum (Lpfö, 1998) for all centre-based services, in order to ensure a high level of cohesion in curriculum and pedagogy across the country. At the same time, consistent with the devolution of operational authority to the municipalities, centres are free to evolve their own local curricula and pedagogical methods, from the principles outlined in the state curriculum. Lpfö (1998) specifies only broad goals and guidelines, leaving open the means by which these goals should be achieved. Philosophically, the curriculum builds on the idea of the child as competent learner, active thinker and involved doer. A strong orientation towards: democratic values; continuous learning and development; connecting to the child’s experiences; development in groups; and the pedagogical importance of both care and play, underpin curriculum development and enactment in ECEC programmes. Co-operation between the pre-school class, the school, and the after-school care centre is emphasised. Municipalities have responsibility for programme implementation and evaluation.

*Monitoring, evaluation and research:* Substantial research and analysis of early childhood epistemology and pedagogy is a feature of Swedish ECEC. However, funding for this research, particularly for social research on children, is limited with much research being self-funded (Country Note for Sweden, 1999). Research that is publicly funded is supported by the government and funded through the Foundation for Social Research.

*Parent and community involvement:* The role of parents has been relatively weak in the Swedish pre-school. New regulations on parents' involvement and influence in ECEC are being prepared. These regulations will further enhance parent involvement and influence, a central element of quality monitoring and service responsiveness.

## **Developments**

Several far-reaching developments have taken place in ECEC in Sweden since the OECD review. In addition to consolidating the transfer of ECEC into the sphere of education, the system has been significantly expanded and reformed. The right of every child to a place "within reasonable limit" (defined as not more than three months) is assured in almost all municipalities. A government bill to make pre-school universal and free for all 4- and 5-year olds was legislated in 2003. For children from bilingual backgrounds, a free 3-hour kindergarten programme is available every morning from the age of 3. Fee variability across municipalities, which hindered low-income parents from using services, has been countered in the legislation. In addition, the restrictions on access for children of unemployed parents, and for children of parents on parental leave, have been completely removed; the right is now attached to the child, irrespective of the situation of parents. Further legislation introduced a low flat, parental fee for services. The municipalities received increased state grants to implement the legislation. In 2001-2003, SEK 5.6 billion were added to budgets for this development.

Quality too has been greatly emphasised. In 2004 a grant of SEK 2 billion increased state grants to local authorities for the employment of 6 000 additional pre-school teachers and child assistants, primarily to reduce class sizes and improve adult-child ratios to 1:5 on average for this period of childhood (0-6 years). Much of this effort has been devoted to improving quality for the older children. A Government Bill on quality issues was presented in September 2004 setting out the regulations on extra staffing, pre-school (for ages 1-5) as part of the school system. Also included are regulations on ECEC during evenings and weekends as well as curricula development to reflect multicultural ECEC services. Like the rest of the education system, ECEC in Sweden will also receive in the future annual quality reports, and national indicators for quality are being developed by the National Agency for Education.

In 2002, a new teacher education programme for pre-school teachers, school teachers and leisure time workers was introduced. The development allows a common psycho-pedagogical training for teachers and leisure time pedagogues. A common core of training in general education is provided for the three categories followed then by optional "fields of study" and "specialisations" suited to the type of work – early childhood, compulsory school and leisure-time work – to be chosen. This new training entitles the three groups to work together in teams with children 1-10 years in pre-school, school and after-school centres. No evaluation of the reform has been undertaken to date, but evidence from the ground suggests that fewer candidates are selecting the pre-school option, possibly because of the longer working hours and slightly lower pay. A possible resolution of the issue may be one of equalising the working conditions (salaries, weekly and annual hours, etc.) of all teachers.

**Notes**

1. Skolverket (2004), *Preschool in Transition: A National Evaluation of the Swedish Preschool*, National Agency for Education, Stockholm.
2. OECD (*Education at a Glance*, 2005) provides a figure for Sweden of USD 4 107 per child in pre-primary education according to the ISCED Level 0 definition, but we have not been able to ascertain what Statistics Sweden understands by this term. The investment level of USD 12 097 corresponds well to realistic assessments of costs in high quality services, and to the structural features of Swedish pre-school, such as, the child-staff ratios practised and the education levels and salaries of staff.