



THE SWEDISH NATIONAL  
BOARD FOR YOUTH AFFAIRS  
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A description of young people's living conditions

## **Swedish youth policy in brief**

The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs is a government authority. We work to ensure that young people (13 to 25 years of age) have access to influence and welfare. We do this by producing and communicating knowledge on young people's living conditions. We also distribute funding to the civil society in the form of support for organisations, projects and international cooperation. All the support we distribute is given on behalf of the Swedish government. The EU programme Youth in Action is a tool for practical youth policy at local, regional, national and European levels. The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs is the national office for Youth in Action.

# Foreword

Youth is a time when a lot happens in life, and the conditions under which young people grow up leave a permanent impression on them. The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs is charged with following up the national Swedish youth policy. Part of that task involves compiling indicators on young people's living conditions.

*Youth Today 2009* is the fourth follow-up report, providing a compilation and an analysis of the indicators. These are produced by various government agencies with responsibilities in the field of youth policy.

The report has been compiled in the department for National and Municipal Youth Policy by researchers Fabian Sjö and Nils-Olof Zethrin in close cooperation with Head of department Inger Ashing. The Board thanks all of the agencies that have taken part in this year's follow-up.

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# Introduction

## Swedish youth policy

In 2004 the Swedish parliament adopted a policy bill entitled *The Power to Decide – The Right to Welfare* (prop. 2004/05:2) which set out the broad aims of national youth policy. The present system of follow-up was established at the same time. The Government's Budget Bill for 2008 (prop. 2007/08:1) modified the broad aims and clarified the two overall objectives of national youth policy:

### All young people shall have

- real access to welfare
- real access to influence.

The principal target group for youth policy is young people between the ages of 13 and 25. This age group comprises around 1.5 million people, though other age groups may also be affected by the policy. Young people form a heterogeneous group. Their opportunities and living conditions vary, depending among other things on gender, age, Swedish or foreign background, cultural and socio-economic background, place of residence and possible disabilities or learning difficulties. Society must take account of these differing circumstances in all its efforts to support young people. Youth policy can contribute to narrowing the differences by shedding light on young people's living conditions, not least for those who for various reasons face greater difficulties than others. Youth policy is to be implemented through coordination and analysis in five main areas:

- Education and learning
- Health and vulnerability
- Influence and representation
- Employment and means of support
- Culture and leisure

## The follow-up system

The follow-up of youth policy has its point of departure in the regular structure for the Government's evaluation and performance management of the government agencies. An important part of this structure is the annual reporting of indicators in relevant policy areas. Youth policy must be integrated into other areas of policy that affect young people's living conditions, and its implementation must start out from the existing objectives in these areas.

In 2005, the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs was tasked, together with the other agencies concerned, with identifying indicators of young people's living conditions. Since then, agencies have within the framework of their own activities covered the development of young people's living conditions as part of their annual reporting. Compilations and reports are sent both to the relevant Government Ministry and to the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs.

In 2009 most of the agencies received clearer instructions from the Government on the reporting of indicators. The full report *Ung idag 2009 (Youth Today 2009)* provides a compilation of the indicators reported by 17 agencies and the Swedish Sports Confederation (see Appendix 1 for the reporting authorities).

Youth policy should ensure that public efforts to improve young people's living conditions are based on sound knowledge of the different target groups. Most people's everyday life is influenced not only by decisions taken by Government and Riksdag, but also by decisions taken at the local, municipal, level. This is why a youth policy organised at the municipal level and on young people's own terms is of decisive importance for the effectiveness of national youth policy as a whole. *Youth Today 2009* will contribute to providing municipalities with the relevant knowledge.

In the full report, 85 indicators from the agencies concerned are reported. The indicators are divided into five chapters according to the main areas of youth policy (see above). The present summary provides examples of indicators from each main area, followed by a concluding discussion.

# Education and learning

An important aspect of welfare is to be able to develop as a person and to acquire new knowledge. Knowledge also gives a person greater potential to exert an influence. The policy area *Education and learning* encompasses young people's access to informal learning as well as to formal and informal education.

## School students reach the objectives for Year 9

Between 2003/04 and 2007/08, the share of students who met the national objectives for Year 9 in sixteen subjects increased slightly, from 80.8 to 81.6 per cent.<sup>1</sup> The share of girls who met the objectives was higher than that of boys throughout the period. Performance was significantly better among students of Swedish background compared with those of foreign background (Table 1).

## Qualification for upper-secondary school

The share of students qualifying for entry to upper-secondary school (*gymnasieskolan*) has fallen slightly over the past five school years, from 89.6 per cent in 2003/04 to 88.9 per cent in 2007/08. There has been relatively little change in the difference between the sexes. The share of girls qualifying for upper-secondary school in 2007/08 was 89.9 per cent, whereas the corresponding share of boys was 87.9 per cent. The share of students with a foreign background who qualified was significantly lower, at 76.6 per cent, than the corresponding share of students with a Swedish background, at 91.0 per cent. Within the group with a foreign background, there was a large difference between students who arrived in Sweden before the first year of primary school and those who arrived after. Among students who were born abroad and arrived after the first year of primary school, the share qualifying for upper-secondary school was 54.0 per cent in 2007/08, while the corresponding

**Table 1. Share of students who meet Year 9 objectives in 16 subjects according to final grades, 2003/04, 2005/06 and 2007/08. Per cent**

School year	Total	Sex		Background	
		Girls	Boys	Swedish	Foreign*
2003/2004	80,8	83,7	78,1	82,7	69,2
2005/2006	81,0	83,9	78,3	82,8	69,4
2007/2008	81,6	84,0	79,3	83,7	69,3

Source: Swedish National Agency for Education. Further information (in Swedish): [www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se), Statistik, Grundskolan, Betyg och Prov, Riksnivå, tabell 6 A.

\* Pupils born abroad as well as pupils born in Sweden with both parents born abroad.

**Table 2. Share of students qualifying for upper-secondary school, 2003/04, 2005/06 and 2007/08. Per cent**

School year	Total	Sex		Background		Students with foreign background		
		Girls	Boys	Swedish	Foreign	Born in Sweden	Born outside Sweden*	Born outside Sweden**
2003/2004	89,6	91,1	88,2	91,4	78,2			
2005/2006	89,5	90,7	88,3	91,3	78,3	85,2	84,6	57,8
2007/2008	88,9	89,9	87,9	91,0	76,6	84,6	84,4	54,0

Source: Swedish National Agency for Education. Further information (in Swedish): [www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se), Statistik, Grundskolan, Betyg och Prov, Riksnivå, tabell 1. See also Länsnivå, tabell 1 and Kommunnivå, tabell 1.

\* Arrived in Sweden before the first year of primary school.

\*\* Arrived in Sweden after the first year of primary school.

share for those who arrived earlier was 84.4 per cent (Table 2). Students' eligibility for upper-secondary school also varies with their parents' level of education. Among students whose parents have at most lower-secondary education, the share qualifying for upper-secondary school was 67 per cent in 2007/08. The corresponding share for students whose parents have post-secondary education was 95 per cent. To qualify for upper-secondary school, students do not need to pass all the subjects referred to in Table 1. This explains why a larger share of students qualified for upper-secondary school in 2007/08 than met the objectives in Table 1.

### Young people in higher education

In the autumn term of 2008, there were 329,153 individuals registered in higher education institutions (universities or *högskolor*).<sup>2</sup> Of these, 60 per cent were women. Almost half of students were in the age group 20–25 years. For women, enrolment reaches a peak at the age of 22 years, when approximately one in three is enrolled

in higher education. For men, the peak occurs at 23 years of age, when around one in four is enrolled. The share of the total population studying in higher education peaks in the age group 21–24 years, where one in four people is enrolled. In the age group 25–29 years the corresponding share is 13 per cent. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the share of young people enrolled has increased considerably, reaching a peak in the autumn term of 2005. Since then the share has declined somewhat. Between autumn 2007 and autumn 2008 changes in the proportion of young people enrolled in higher education have been small (Table 3).

### Parents' level of education

In the academic year 2007/08, the children of highly educated parents (one or both parents having completed at least a three-year course of post-secondary education) made up around one third of first-year students aged under 35. In the population at large aged 19–35 years, the corresponding share was only a little over 20 per cent. The proportion of people who had begun higher education studies by the age of 25 was 30 per

**Table 3. Share of the population enrolled in higher education by sex and age group, 1990–2008. Per cent**

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2007	2008
<b>All ages</b>	<b>2,02</b>	<b>2,78</b>	<b>3,21</b>	<b>3,66</b>	<b>3,51</b>	<b>3,56</b>
Women	2,25	3,10	3,78	4,35	4,22	4,27
Men	1,78	2,45	2,63	2,96	2,79	2,83
<b>19–20 yrs</b>	<b>9,02</b>	<b>15,36</b>	<b>14,47</b>	<b>14,63</b>	<b>14,69</b>	<b>14,78</b>
Women	10,54	18,23	16,95	16,59	16,96	17,06
Men	7,57	12,61	12,08	12,76	12,52	12,62
<b>21–24 yrs</b>	<b>12,49</b>	<b>20,11</b>	<b>25,13</b>	<b>28,01</b>	<b>25,94</b>	<b>25,72</b>
Women	13,53	21,76	27,92	31,90	30,11	29,93
Men	11,51	18,52	22,45	24,29	21,98	21,70
<b>25–29 yrs</b>	<b>6,40</b>	<b>8,48</b>	<b>10,89</b>	<b>13,83</b>	<b>12,96</b>	<b>13,03</b>
Women	6,23	8,46	12,17	15,49	14,86	14,82
Men	6,55	8,49	9,65	12,24	11,15	11,32
<b>30–39 yrs</b>	<b>2,49</b>	<b>3,14</b>	<b>4,18</b>	<b>4,87</b>	<b>4,53</b>	<b>4,56</b>
Women	3,14	3,94	5,64	6,58	6,12	6,16
Men	1,88	2,39	2,79	3,23	3,01	3,01
<b>40–49 yrs</b>	<b>1,36</b>	<b>1,67</b>	<b>2,17</b>	<b>2,57</b>	<b>2,38</b>	<b>2,34</b>
Women	2,12	2,51	3,39	3,97	3,66	3,60
Men	0,64	0,85	1,00	1,23	1,16	1,13
<b>50–59 yrs</b>	<b>0,45</b>	<b>0,56</b>	<b>0,64</b>	<b>0,88</b>	<b>0,95</b>	<b>0,99</b>
Women	0,69	0,87	0,97	1,32	1,42	1,49
Men	0,21	0,25	0,32	0,45	0,48	0,51

Source: Swedish National Agency for Higher Education.

Note: All figures are for the autumn term.

cent for those born in 1970, increasing to 45 per cent for those born in 1982. Here, however, there are large differences according to parents' level of education. Of children born in 1982 to parents with research-level education, 86 per cent had begun higher education by the age of 25. This share falls to 22 per cent for children whose parents had at most lower-secondary education.

### Students with a foreign background

In the academic year 2007/08, almost 53,000 students of foreign background were enrolled in Swedish higher education institutions. Foreign background in this context means that the student was born in another country or that both parents were born outside Sweden. Visiting students are excluded. Nowadays, the share of students with a foreign background corresponds broadly to the share of the total population with a foreign background, which was around 17 per cent in 2007. However, a fairer comparison is obtained by focusing on the age group 19–34 years, to which the majority of students belong. It then becomes clear that students with a foreign background are somewhat under-represented, since the proportion of all 19–34-year-olds with a foreign background is higher, at 22 per cent in 2007.

### Students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties

The available information on students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties comes from students who have made contact with the coordinator for these issues at their higher education institution, or who have been brought to the coordinator's attention by teaching staff or study advisers. The majority of these students have re-

ceived special pedagogical support. This means personal pedagogical assistance in the study environment to enable individual students to compensate for functional limitations due to a permanent disability or disorder. Also included are targeted pedagogical measures offered to groups of students. During 2008, close to 5,000 students, including research students, received special pedagogical support. Of these, 64 per cent were women. The number of students receiving special pedagogical support increased by 14 per cent compared with 2007. The largest group consisted of students with dyslexia, who accounted for 60 per cent of those receiving support – an increase compared with 2007. Another relatively large group that received special pedagogical support was students with cognitive difficulties or disorders. In addition to these 5,000 students, around 1,200 were in contact with coordinators for the purpose of study planning, without applying for special pedagogical support. In total, therefore, at least around 6,200 students took contact with or came to the attention of coordinators in higher education. This represents an increase of 12 per cent compared with 2007.

### Teachers' qualifications and the number of teachers per 100 students

Between the academic years 2003/04 and 2008/09, the share of teachers with university-level teacher training qualifications fell from 74.2 per cent to 72.0 per cent. There were 8.1 teachers per 100 students in 2008/09, which is approximately the same ratio as in 2003/04 (Table 4).

**Table 4. Qualifications of upper-secondary school teachers and number of teachers per 100 students, 2003/04–2008/09**

School year	Total no. of teachers	of whom in service*	Share (%) with teaching qualifications**	No. of teachers per 100 students (full-time)***
2003/2004	35 386	33 283	74,2	8,2
2005/2006	37 513	35 294	73,2	8,1
2007/2008	39 506	37 518	72,0	8,1
2008/2009	40 627	38 392	72,0	8,1

Source: Swedish National Agency for Education. Further information (in Swedish): [www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se), Statistik, Gymnasieskolan, Personal, Riksnivå, tabell 2. See also Länsnivå, tabell 1 and Kommunnivå, tabell 1.  
 \* "in service" excludes those employed short-term (less than one month) or on full leave.  
 \*\* "teaching qualification" means university-level teacher training or equivalent  
 \*\*\* "full-time" means full-time equivalent.

# Health and vulnerability

Health has a major impact on people's lives, their perspective on society and their capacity to participate in it. The policy area *Health and vulnerability* covers physical and mental health along with exposure to risks of various types. Habits such as smoking, alcohol consumption and drug use significantly affect both current and longer-term health, as does the way in which individuals are treated by other people. Policy in the area of health and vulnerability also aims to strengthen the legal rights of the individual, and to reduce criminality and increase security.

## Lethal violence

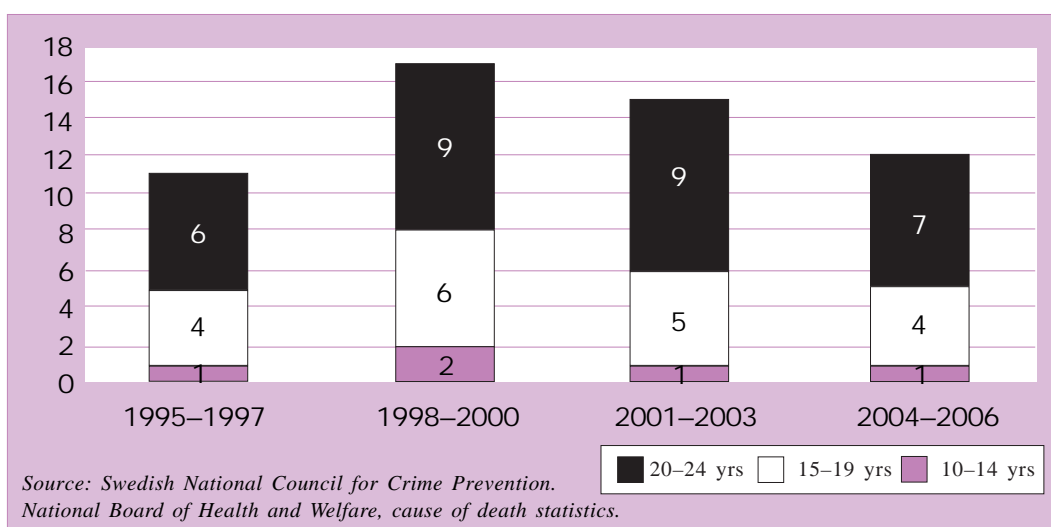
In establishing the level of and changes in exposure to crime, almost all indicators are subject to the problem of unreported cases or inaccessible information. One category of crime, however, where the number of unreported cases can be assumed to be very low is lethal violence in the form of murder, manslaughter and assault resulting in death. The so-called cause-of-death statistics produced by the National Board of Health and Welfare report the number of deaths due to 'assault by another person' according to the death certificate. The latest report is from 2006, during which ten people in the age group 10–24 years were judged to have died as a result of violence or other deliberate assault by another person. This was the lowest number for nine years, following a decreasing trend since the beginning of the 2000s (Figure 1). Furthermore, the total population in this age group has grown by close to 10 per cent between 1998 and 2006. The number of victims is however very small, and changes over anything other than a long period of time must be interpreted with extreme caution. For example, random factors may have resulted in an abnormally high number of victims at the start of the period under comparison in 1998–2000. Figure 1 also shows that there is no decrease in the average number of victims if the comparison is extended further back in time (1995–1997). However, this comparison is not entirely relevant on account of the above-mentioned growth in population. It may therefore be reasonable to speak of a slight reduction in the risk for young people

of death due to violence, even if the numbers are very small and the risk has always been extremely low. Almost two thirds of the young victims of lethal violence between 2004 and 2006 were boys or young men. This is roughly the same proportion as in the previous three-year periods (1995–97, 1998–2000 and 2001–03).

### Exposure to lethal violence of young people compared with older age groups and young people in other countries

To compare young and older people's exposure to lethal violence, the number of victims must be set in relation to the size of the total population in each age group. In Sweden the number of victims aged 25 years or over is one to two per hundred thousand. The incidence is somewhat lower in the under-25 age group, at less than one per hundred thousand. This relationship between exposure in the different age groups has remained relatively unchanged from the end of the 1990s to 2006.

At the same time, the statistics show that young men are exposed to a somewhat higher degree than young women. In the population aged 25 years or more, men fall victim to lethal violence to a greater extent than women. One of the reasons why adult men as a group are most exposed is that lethal violence disproportionately affects people who abuse drugs or have a criminal lifestyle, or who otherwise live on the margins of society. These groups in turn consist largely of adult men. Although young people in general run a greater risk of being exposed to violence and threats, in Sweden they are less at risk than adults of meeting a violent death. In an international perspective, exposure to lethal violence in Sweden is generally very low. According to a compilation of figures by the World Health Organisation in 2002 (WHO 2002), the number of 10–29-year-olds who die as a result of deliberate violence in Sweden, and in several other western European countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain and Norway, is less than one per hundred thousand. This may be compared with the global average of nine per hundred thousand. It is above all in South American and African countries where large numbers of young people are killed, but the USA and Russia also lie



**Figure 1. Deaths due to 'assault by another person' by age group, 1995–2006. Average number per year.**

above the global average according to the WHO. Within Europe, exposure to lethal violence among young people is higher in the eastern European countries, with certain exceptions, at around double the level in Sweden and other western European countries. In Finland too, young people are more exposed than in Sweden, although the differences between Sweden and Finland in terms of lethal violence are greater among adults. The WHO's compilation is based on statistics from the 1990s. There is nothing to suggest, however, that the situation in

Sweden as compared with other countries has changed to any great extent since 2000. Although exposure to lethal violence has indeed fallen among young people in Sweden during the 2000s, the change is relatively small and similar changes in other western European countries cannot be ruled out. In Finland too, for example, the number of young victims of lethal violence has fallen somewhat during the 2000s.

## Public health indicators<sup>3</sup>

The Swedish National Institute of Public Health presents in Table 5 several indicators of public health among young people. The most commonly reported risks in the 16–24 age group are being treated in a way that is found to be insulting, and consuming potentially dangerous amounts of alcohol. Being treated in an insulting manner and smoking on a daily basis are more common for young women than for young men, while daily use of *snus*<sup>4</sup>, at-risk gambling habits and drug use are more common for young men. These gender patterns have been constant since 2005. During the period 2005–08, the share of young men with sedentary leisure activities has declined, as has the share of young women who smoke daily.

## The living conditions of young people compared with the population as a whole

The indicators allow the situation of young people (16–24 years) to be set in relation to that of the population as a whole (16–84 years). Such a comparison reveals that a relatively high share of young people of both sexes have encountered insulting treatment and are considered at-risk as regards both alcohol consumption and gambling habits. In addition, daily *snus*-taking among young men is relatively common. However, sedentary leisure activities, overweight and obesity, and daily smoking are less common among young people. Moreover, a lower share of young women take *snus* on a daily basis compared with the population at large.

**Table 5 Indicators of young people's living conditions, 16–24 years, 2005–2008. Per cent**

Indicator	2005		2006		2007		2008	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Insulting treatment	40	25	36	22	37	28	37	21
Sedentary leisure activities	11	13	11	13	11	12	11	9
Overweight	11	15	11	18	10	16	14	15
Obesity	5	4	4	4	5	4	4	3
Daily smoking	16	8	13	6	13	9	12	7
Daily <i>snus</i> -taking	4	20	5	22	6	22	6	16
At-risk alcohol consumption	32	33	32	37	32	33	32	33
Drug use	3	6	2	5	2	4	2	4
At-risk gambling habits	1	5	1	8	2	8	1	5

Source: Swedish National Institute of Public Health, national public health survey *Hälsa på lika villkor* (Health on equal terms). Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs (CAN), *Skolelevers drogvanor* (Drug habits of school students).

### Insulting treatment

Those answering 'yes, at some time' or 'yes, several times' to the question 'Have you in the past three months been treated in a way that made you feel insulted?'

### Sedentary leisure activities

Those answering 'I occupy myself mainly with reading, watching TV, going to the cinema or other non-physical activities, and spend less than two hours per week walking, cycling or on other physical activities', when asked 'How much physical activity have you engaged in during your leisure time in the past 12 months?'

### Overweight and obesity

According to body mass index (BMI), calculated as weight in kg / (height in m)<sup>2</sup>. Those with a BMI

between 25 and 29 are classed as overweight, while those with a BMI over 30 are classed as obese.

### Daily smoking

The share of 16–24-year-olds who state that they smoke every day.

### Daily use of *snus*

The share of 16–24-year-olds who state that they take *snus* (moist powdered tobacco for oral use) every day.

### At-risk alcohol consumption

The definition of at-risk consumption of alcohol is based on three AUDIT (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test) questions which provide an index of how often a person drinks alcohol, how much they usually drink and how often they consume large amounts of alcohol on a single

occasion. The index varies between 0 and 12 points. Men with 8–12 points and women with 6–12 points are classed as at-risk. Those who say they have been drunk two to three or more times in a month are also included in the at-risk group.

### Drug use

The share of second-year upper-secondary students (17–18 years old) who state that they have used drugs in the last month (Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs).

### At-risk gambling habits

The definition of at-risk gambling habits is based on a summary index calculated from responses to three survey questions about respondents' attitude to their gambling.

### **Insulting treatment**

#### **– a measure that is difficult to interpret**

The indicator on insulting treatment is of a different character to the other indicators since it concerns people's subjective impressions. It is not possible to distinguish between different people's interpretations of what is meant by 'insulting' or to determine how far they have in fact been subject to insulting treatment. For these reasons, the indicator is difficult to interpret. However, although it may not be clear what meaning individuals attach to the term, there is a prevailing view that it is worth following the development of self-reported experiences of insulting treatment as an indicator of how the incidence of discrimination changes over time.<sup>5</sup> A higher share of young women than young men have experienced insulting treatment, and a similar gender pattern is observed in the population as a whole (aged 16–84 years). The incidence of insulting treatment falls with increasing age, which may suggest either that young people are exposed more often to insulting treatment, or that they are more likely to interpret treatment of various kinds as insulting.

#### **No gender differences in the indicator on at-risk alcohol consumption**

The indicator on at-risk alcohol consumption suggests that gender differences among young people in this area are smaller than in the population as a whole, in which men are more likely than women to be at risk. In the report *Drogutvecklingen i Sverige 2008 (Drug developments in Sweden 2008)* the share of pupils in Year 9 (15–16-year-olds) who consume alcohol intensively at least once a month is reported. It emerges here that gender differences in this age group are very small since the share of boys who consume alcohol intensively has fallen by more than that of girls in recent years. In the upper-secondary age group (16–19-year-olds), the share of students who consume alcohol intensively at least once a month rises, especially among young men.<sup>6</sup>

### **Health risks among homosexual and bisexual young people**

Owing to the low number of homosexual and bisexual young people included in the reporting, the statistics for this group are subject to a degree of uncertainty. The general pattern, however, is that homosexual and bisexual young people are over-represented as regards several health risks. Broadly the same pattern was observed in a report based on the public health survey from 2005, albeit with reference to a wider age group (16–29 years). The same report also shows that homosexuals and bisexuals in the general population aged between 16 and 64 are over-represented when it comes to being treated insultingly (both sexes), sedentary leisure activities (women), daily smoking (both sexes), daily *snus*-taking (women) and at-risk alcohol consumption (both sexes). Thus the pattern is similar, except in the area of overweight and obesity. Young women aged between 16 and 29 are the only group in which homosexuals and bisexuals are overweight or obese compared with heterosexuals (Roth et al. 2006).

#### **Health risks among young people with disabilities and learning difficulties**

Young people with disabilities and learning difficulties are over-represented in most of the indicators, a pattern which is also observed in the population as a whole. An analysis of the health situation of people with disabilities and learning difficulties aged 16–64 years shows that insulting treatment, sedentary leisure activities, obesity, daily smoking and at-risk gambling habits are more widespread in this group than in the rest of the population. Some of these factors also entail an increased risk of poor or very poor self-rated health (Boström 2008).

### **Health risks among professionally active young people as compared with students**

A clear pattern that emerges from the indicators is that, compared with students, professionally active young people are over-represented in several respects which may be negative for their health. Since few young people manage to attain a higher education qualification before the age of 24, it may be assumed that those aged between 16 and 24 years who are in work have spent less time in education than those who are currently studying. Length of education is often used as a measure of social status. For this reason, professionally active young people may be regarded as having a relatively low position in society compared with young people in higher education, irrespective of the fact that they enjoy for the time being a higher income. As a rule, those with a low level of education suffer from health problems to a greater extent than those with a high level of education. The fact that various health risks are more common among professionally active young people is probably a reflection of the social stratification in health which is observed in the population as a whole.

### **International comparisons**

Sweden participates in an international survey of school pupils' health and health habits which is carried out every four years (WHO 2008). The study covers among other things the health condition of 15-year-olds. The latest follow-up report shows that the proportion of 15-year-olds in Sweden who smoke or drink alcohol regularly or who have tried cannabis is relatively low in comparison with the situation in around 40 other European countries. The prevalence of overweight and obesity among 15-year-olds in Sweden is also somewhat below average.

In a special enquiry on stress among young people in Sweden, various data on the development of mental health problems among the young have been compiled from sources including studies on schoolchildren (SOU 2006:77). Information presented in the enquiry suggests that the incidence of mental health symptoms such as depression and anxiety has increased by more in Sweden than in several other European countries in recent decades.

### **Hospital treatment due to attempted suicide, psychosis or consumption of alcohol or drugs**

Table 6 shows the number of young people per hundred thousand who, according to information from the patient register, have received inpatient hospital treatment. The patient register does not provide a comprehensive picture of young people's mental health problems because only the most serious conditions, such as schizophrenia

and other psychotic illnesses, require admission to hospital, and then usually only at an acute stage. Children and young people with mental health problems are otherwise treated as outpatients. Statistics here leave much to be desired on account of missing information, and Sweden at present lacks the epidemiological data that would allow young people's mental health problems to be tracked over time. The share of young people who have received inpatient treatment as a result of attempted suicide has increased sharply among both women and men in the 15–24 age group. This increase has been under way since the beginning of the 1990s among young women and since the end of the 1990s among young men, and there is no sign of a slowdown in the rate of increase. Between 2004 and 2007 alone, the share of 15–24-year-olds admitted to hospital due to attempted suicide increased by 10 per cent for women and by 16 per cent for men. The incidence among young women was more than double that among young men. The share of young people admitted to hospital for treatment of psychosis is higher among men, at just under 69 per 100,000, than among women, at around 50 per 100,000. The level has remained fairly constant during the four-year period reported, and may even have fallen slightly in the past year, although it is not possible to draw firm conclusions based on small differences from year to year.

As with mental health problems, the patient register provides only a limited picture of drug and alcohol abuse among the young, since much treatment is provided through outpatient care, and many young people with drug and alcohol problems do not seek or are not given the chance to receive healthcare. Hospital treatment for alcohol poisoning among 15–24-year-olds is more common for women than for men, although this is quite a recent development and the difference remains small. As recently as 2004 the reverse was true: more young men than young women received hospital treatment for alcohol poisoning. Looking further back in time, by a decade or more, we see that alcohol poisoning was significantly more common among young men than among young women. The incidence of alcohol poisoning among the young has increased over a longer period, and continues to do so. During the 2000s so far (2000–07), the share of 15–24-year-olds receiving hospital treatment for alcohol poisoning has increased by 53 per cent for women (from 171 to 263 per 100,000) and by 30 per cent for men (from 199 to 259 per 100,000). Hospital treatment for alcohol poisoning is twice as common in the age group 15–19 years as in the age group 20–24 years, among both women and men. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the share of 15–24-year-olds receiving inpatient hospital treatment as a result of drug abuse has also increased. Men are affected more than women, and the

**Table 6 Number of 15–24-year-olds who received hospital treatment at some time during the year due to attempted suicide, psychosis, alcohol poisoning or drug abuse, 2004–2007. Per 100,000 population**

	Women				Men			
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007
Attempted suicide	326	330	345	359	129	132	136	150
Psychosis	53	56	51	50	76	73	76	69
Alcohol poisoning	205	228	248	263	212	219	237	259
Drug abuse	147	141	150	166	188	193	203	217

Source: National Board of Health and Welfare, patient register.

Note: 'Alcohol poisoning' here includes both toxic effects of alcohol (diagnosis code T51) and mental and behavioural disorders due to use of alcohol (diagnosis code F10).

differences between the sexes have been reinforced over the past 20 years. In 2007, the difference was 30 per cent, with 217 cases per 100,000 young men compared with 166 cases per 100,000 young women.

### Deaths due to suicide, drug abuse and road accidents

There are few fatalities among the young, which is why changes from one year to another must be interpreted with caution. In the age group 15–24 years, just under 150 women and 320 men died in 2006. Within this age group, mortality is highest among 20-year-olds. Deaths among young people are most often caused by injuries, and around half of all deaths are due to road accidents or suicide (Table 7). Both road accidents and suicide are more common among young men than among young

women, which is an important part of the explanation for the higher mortality rate of young men. Between 2003 and 2006, suicide accounted for approximately a quarter of all deaths among 15–19-year-olds and a third of all deaths among 20–24-year-olds. Road accidents accounted for 29 per cent of all deaths among 15–19-year-old boys and 21 per cent among girls of the same age. Among 20–24-year-olds, road accidents accounted for 24 per cent of male and 14 per cent of female fatalities. Suicide has become less common in the population as a whole. Among young people, the level has remained broadly unchanged since the 1990s. The number of drug-related deaths between 2003 and 2006 did not rise to the same extent as the number of hospital admissions due to drug abuse.

**Table 7. Total mortality among young people by age group and cause of death, 2003–2006. Per 100,000 population**

Cause of death	Total				Women				Men			
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Suicide</b>												
15–19 years	7	8	7	9	6	6	5	8	8	10	10	10
20–24 years	16	19	15	17	10	7	10	11	21	30	20	22
<b>Drug abuse</b>												
15–19 years	2	2	2	1	2	1	..	0	2	2	3	1
20–24 years	6	7	7	6	2	1	4	2	9	13	10	9
<b>Road accidents</b>												
15–19 years	11	9	7	7	8	4	4	4	14	13	9	10
20–24 years	11	11	10	12	5	4	3	4	17	18	18	19
<b>Total mortality</b>												
15–19 years	34	37	26	32	30	27	16	22	38	46	36	41
20–24 years	48	59	47	51	24	29	27	32	70	88	67	69

Source: National Board of Health and Welfare, cause of death register.

Note: In 2004, the tsunami in Thailand resulted in a sharp increase in mortality among children and young people in all age groups, with boys/men and girls/women affected in equal measure.

# Influence and representation

One of the most important objectives for youth policy is for young people to have real access to influence. The policy area *Influence and representation* is concerned with young people having the same opportunities as other groups to take part in the democratic dialogue. It is also concerned with young people's capacity to influence their situation, both in the personal sphere and in society at large. A good society for young people must make the most of young people's experience and ideas.

## Participation in general elections

Since 1970 Sweden has had a common election day for elections to parliament, county councils and municipal councils. Voter turnout declined from the 1980s up to and including 2002, but increased in all age groups in the 2006 elections. The largest increase was among first-time voters whose turnout was higher in all three elections. Turnout for the county and municipal council elections was a couple of percentage points lower in all age groups than for the parliamentary election (Figure 2).

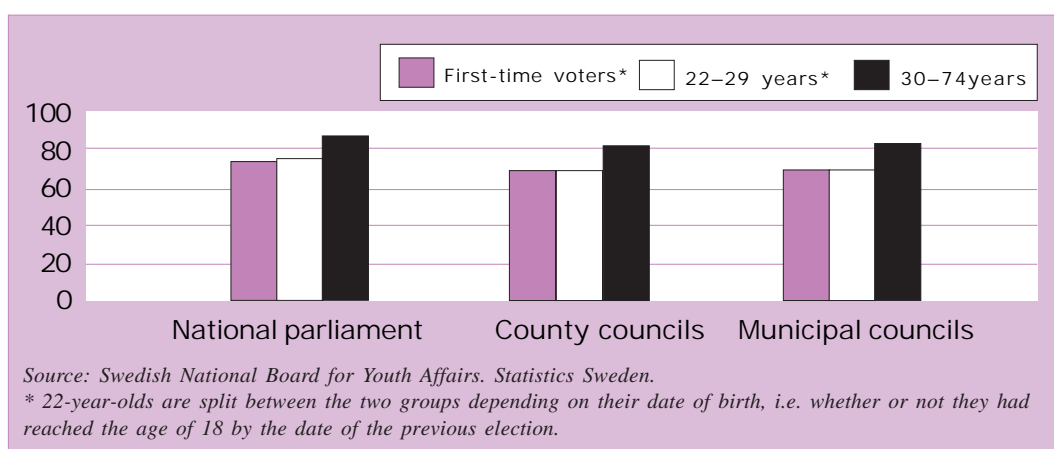
### Parliamentary elections

Participation in elections to the national parliament fell between the election years 1994, 1998 and 2002. Voter turnout followed a similar path in different age groups. In the 2006 parliamentary elections, however, voter turnout in all age groups increased. Of all those eligible to vote, 82.0 per cent voted in the parliamentary election, an increase of 1.9 percentage points compared with the 2002 election. The greatest increase was among first-time voters. Despite this break in the trend, the decline in turnout in all age groups remains significant in relation

to turnout at the beginning of the 1990s (Table 8). Turnout in the elections between 1994 and 2006 was lowest in the youngest age groups. In the 18–29 age group, turnout was highest in large cities (at 80 per cent) and lowest in sparsely populated areas (at 65 per cent). Women were more likely to vote than men in all age groups, but especially among younger voters. The difference between people born in Sweden and those born abroad increased slightly between the 2002 and 2006 elections, with increased turnout among Swedish-born voters. Turnout in groups with limited resources – those with lower levels of education or low incomes and the unemployed – was markedly lower than in better-off groups, regardless of age.

## Nominated and elected representatives in general elections

The number of young people standing for election as representatives in decision-making democratic institutions is a sign not only of how far young people wish to take advantage of opportunities for influence and power, but also of how far the adult world is willing to surrender power to them. The share of 18–24-year-olds elected to parliament, county councils and municipal councils is lower than this age group's share in the total population. They make up approximately 10 per cent of the population, whereas in parliament the share of elected members aged between 18 and 24 is stable at 0.5 per cent after the 2002 and 2006 elections. The share of elected members in the same age group in county and municipal councils increased slightly between the 2002 and 2006 elections,



**Figure 2. Voter turnout in the 2006 elections. Per cent of those eligible to vote.**

**Table 8. Voter turnout in parliamentary elections, 1994–2006. Per cent**

	1994	1998	2002	2006
<b>First-time voters*</b>				
Men	78	75	68	74
Women	85	73	73	78
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>22–29 years*</b>				
Men	79	74	72	75
Women	84	79	74	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>30–74 years</b>				
Men	89	85	83	85
Women	91	88	86	88
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>86</b>

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs. Statistics Sweden.

\*22-year-olds are split between the two groups depending on their date of birth, i.e. whether or not they had reached the age of 18 by the date of the previous election.

from 1 per cent to 1.3 per cent in county councils and from 2.1 per cent to 2.5 per cent in municipal councils. According to a study of the 2006 county and municipal elections by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting 2007), the average age of municipal councillors was 51.6 years. In municipal councils the share of members aged under 30 was 6 per cent, while the share aged over 60 was 29 per cent. In county councils the average age was 53.6 years, and only 4 per cent of councillors were aged under 30, while 30 per cent were over 60. Even if the share of young people nominated and elected is lower than their share in the total population, the 2006 election saw an increase compared with 2002 in both the nomination and the election of 18–24-year-olds. The number nominated for parliament and county councils increased by just under 30 per cent, while the number nominated

for municipal councils increased by 4 per cent (Table 9). There was also an increase in the numbers elected. While there was no change in the parliament, the numbers elected as county and municipal councillors increased by over 30 per cent and 16 per cent respectively. In the 18–24 age group, the number of men nominated and elected increased by more than the number of women. This is clearest in the parliamentary election where the number of young men nominated increased by 44 per cent and the number of young women by 10 per cent.

The same tendency is observed in municipal elections, where the number of young men elected rose by 30 per cent (while the number nominated rose by 2 per cent), and the number of young women elected rose by 4 per cent (while the number nominated rose by 7 per cent).

**Table 9. Number of 18–24-year-olds nominated and elected to the national parliament, county councils and municipal councils, 2002 and 2006**

	Parliament		County councils		Municipal councils	
	Nominated	Elected	Nominated	Elected	Nominated	Elected
<b>2002</b>						
Women	130	0	180	9	886	154
Men	158	2	234	7	1 216	130
<b>Total</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2 102</b>	<b>284</b>
<b>2006</b>						
Women	143	2	220	11	946	160
Men	228	0	311	10	1 238	169
<b>Total</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>2 184</b>	<b>329</b>

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs. Statistics Sweden.

## Participation in political activities

Of the political activities given as alternatives in the Youth Survey 2009<sup>7</sup>, the most common was to sign a petition, which 41 per cent of 16–25-year-olds said they had done in the past 12 months (Table 10). Next came the purchase of certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons (29 per cent), followed by the wearing of badges or symbols which express an opinion (18 per cent). Five per cent of 16–25-year-olds responded that they had been a member of a political party or taken part in a political meeting, but over 60 per cent said they had not and never would. A similarly high proportion said that they would not use the internet to chat about or to debate politics. However, 9 per cent had chatted about or debated politics on-line in the past year. Few young people (2 per cent) had taken part in illegal demonstrations or actions in the last year and 79 per cent said they could not imagine doing so. A comparison of young men's and young women's political activities shows that young women are more likely to sign petitions, donate money to organisations working for a particular social cause, wear badges that express an opinion and buy certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons. Young men are more likely to chat about or debate politics on-line and to take part in illegal actions. Differences between the sexes were relatively small for

the remaining activities. As a rule, there are large differences in the level of political activity of young people whose parents are highly educated compared with those whose parents have a low level of education.<sup>8</sup>

For most of the activities, the share who say they have participated is twice as high in the case of young people with highly educated parents. There are also differences between young people born in Sweden and those born abroad. Young people born in Sweden have to a greater extent signed petitions, donated money to organisations and bought products for political reasons, while young people born abroad have to a slightly greater extent contacted politicians, written letters to the press, participated in boycotts and lawful demonstrations, and debated politics on the internet. Compared with earlier surveys, the Youth Survey 2009 gave a wider range of alternative answers to the question on young people's political activities. A comparison of participation in the activities given as alternatives in the last three surveys suggests that young people's propensity to participate has declined somewhat in 2009 compared with 2004 and 2007 (Table 11). For several of the activities the changes are small, but the share of young people who state that they have taken part in lawful demonstrations fell by half, and the share who had not taken part and could not imagine doing so increased by 7 percentage points be-

**Table 10. Share of 16–25 year-olds who have taken part in political activities during the past 12 months, 2009. Per cent**

	I have done	I have not done but can imagine doing	I would never do/I have never done	Total
Sign a petition	41	46	13	100
Buy certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	29	34	37	100
Wear badges/symbols expressing an opinion	18	42	40	100
Donate money to organisations working for a particular social cause	16	49	34	99
Chat/debate politics on the internet	9	29	62	100
Take part in lawful demonstrations	7	47	46	100
Make contact with a politician	7	45	49	101
Write letters to the press	7	52	42	101
Take part in a boycott/buyers' strike	6	41	53	100
Be a member of a political party	5	34	61	100
Be a member of an organisation working for a particular social cause	5	46	49	100
Take part in a political meeting	5	32	62	99
Make contact with an official to express a political opinion	3	40	57	100
Take part in illegal demonstrations/actions	2	19	79	100

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs.

Note: Some rows do not sum to 100 owing to rounding.

tween 2004 and 2009. We see also that the proportion of young people who had signed a petition or worn badges or symbols declined during the years in question, but that the proportion who could imagine doing these things increased by roughly the same amount.

### Share of students who feel able to participate in deciding what they are taught in different subjects

Between 1993 and 2006, the share of students who felt able to participate a great deal or quite a lot in deciding what they are taught in different subjects increased by 19 percentage points (Table 12). As in earlier surveys, more students in 2006 said they wanted to influence what they are taught (60 per cent) than felt they actually

able to (44 per cent). At the same time, the share of students saying they want to participate in decisions was lower in 2006 than in earlier surveys. The results show that there are no major differences between different groups of students in how they assess their ability to exert an influence. It is however more common for girls than for boys to want to be able to influence what they are taught.

**Table 11. Share of 16–25-year-olds who have taken part in political activities during the past 12 months, 2004, 2007 and 2009. Per cent**

	I have done			I have never done but can imagine doing			I would never do/ I have never done		
	2004	2007	2009	2004	2007	2009	2004	2007	2009
Sign a petition	52	49	41	37	40	46	11	11	13
Wear badges/symbols	25	25	18	36	39	42	40	37	40
Take part in a boycott	8	7	6	42	44	41	50	49	53
Take part in lawful demonstrations	14	12	7	47	49	47	39	40	46
Take part in illegal demonstrations/actions	3	3	2	17	19	19	80	79	79
Chat/debate politics on the internet	10	12	9	27	32	29	64	56	62
Write letters to the press	8	8	7	50	57	52	41	35	42
Be a member of a political party	6	7	5	35	40	34	59	53	61

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs.

Note: In the 2004 and 2007 surveys, the activity 'Take part in illegal demonstrations/actions' was formulated as 'Take part in illegal demonstrations'.

**Table 12. Share of students who feel they are able to participate a great deal or quite a lot in deciding what they are taught in different subjects, 1993–2006. Per cent**

	Total	Sex		Background		Parents' educational level		
		Women	Men	Swedish	Foreign	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary	Higher education
1993	25	27	24					
1997	34	35	33					
2000	35	34	35	35	34	35	35	34
2003	37	35	39	37	36	32	38	38
2006	44	43	44	44	42	46	44	43

Source: National Board of Health and Welfare's survey on attitudes to school among Year 7–9 students in lower-secondary school (13–16-year-olds) and upper-secondary school students (16–19-year-olds).

Note: The percentage shares are subject to a margin of error which indicates with 95% confidence the limits within which the true shares will lie. Margins of error for the figures from 2003 and 2006 vary between +/-3 and +/-4 percentage points, with the exception of 'foreign background' (+/-5 for 2003 and 2006) and 'lower-secondary' (+/-7 for 2003 and +/-8 for 2006).

# Employment and means of support

The prospects for entry to and establishment on the labour market are a key issue as regards young people's access to welfare and influence. The policy area *Employment and means of support* is concerned with young people's integration into working life, their economic circumstances and the relevant systems of public support.

## Number of unemployed

According to figures from the Swedish Public Employment Service, unemployment<sup>9</sup> during the first quarter of 2009 in the 18–24 age group rose to a monthly average of 44,000, of which 28,700 were men and 15,300 women. This represents an increase of 13,000 or 42 per cent compared with the same period in 2008. The increase was significantly larger for men than for women. In the 18–24 age group, female unemployment rose by 16 per cent while male unemployment rose by 61 per cent during the same period (Table 13). The steep economic downturn which began in autumn 2008 initially affected the export-dependent and male-dominated manufacturing industry before spilling over into the construction industry, which explains why unemployment increased much more sharply for men than for women. During spring 2009, municipal tax receipts decreased sharply owing to the fall in employment, while municipal benefit payments increased.

According to the Public Employment Service, this will affect women to a significantly greater extent on account of the female dominance in employment in the municipal sector. Another important sector for female employment is retail trade, which has also seen a sharp downturn due to reduced demand. This means, according to the Public Employment Service, that unemployment for women will start to increase more sharply during spring 2009, although it is not expected to rise as high as male unemployment. The number of unemployed young people born outside Sweden increased by 19 per cent between the first quarters of 2008 and 2009, and the increase among men was also significantly larger in this group. The number of unemployed young people with disabilities was broadly unchanged. Against the background of a sharp increase in youth unemployment, this means that the share of young people with disabilities in total youth unemployment has fallen. The number of unemployed young people with at most lower-secondary education was unchanged between the first quarters of 2008 and 2009, while unemployment among those with upper-secondary education increased by 898 persons (14 per cent). The number of unemployed young people with less than two years of post-secondary education increased by 11,198 persons (54 per cent) in the same period, while unemployment among those with more than two

**Table 13. Number of unemployed aged 18–24 by sex, country of birth, disability and level of education, 2006–2009. First quarter, monthly average**

	2006			2007			2008			2009		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
<b>Country of birth</b>												
Abroad	5 956	3 567	2 389	6 371	3 828	2 543	5 728	3 407	2 321	6 791	4 371	2 420
Sweden	33 028	19 301	13 727	32 423	18 561	13 862	25 275	14 447	10 829	37 258	24 368	12 890
<b>Disability*</b>												
Yes	1 303	829	474	1 711	1 072	639	1 376	890	486	1 316	908	408
No	37 682	22 040	15 642	37 082	21 317	15 765	29 627	16 963	12 664	42 733	27 831	14 902
<b>Level of education</b>												
Lower-secondary	7 874	4 914	2 959	9 132	5 614	3 518	1 949	1 227	722	1 946	1 317	629
Upper-secondary	27 838	16 398	11 441	27 072	15 573	11 499	6 440	3 926	2 514	7 338	4 717	2 621
Post-second. < 2 years	1 376	674	702	1 158	568	590	20 711	11 805	8 905	31 909	21 227	10 682
Higher > 2 years	1 897	883	1 014	1 432	634	798	1 903	895	1 009	2 858	1 479	1 379
<b>Total</b>	<b>38 985</b>	<b>22 869</b>	<b>16 116</b>	<b>38 794</b>	<b>22 389</b>	<b>16 405</b>	<b>31 003</b>	<b>17 853</b>	<b>13 150</b>	<b>44 050</b>	<b>28 739</b>	<b>15 310</b>

Source: Swedish Public Employment Service.

\* Various types of disability affecting capacity for work.

years of higher education increased by 955 persons (50 per cent). Among the factors behind these developments are large-scale redundancies in manufacturing and sharply reduced employment in construction. Both of these sectors often require only a relatively short period of post-secondary training, and the economic downturn initially affects those in the labour force with the least experience, who are usually young. According to the Public Employment Service, unemployment among young people with upper-secondary education is likely to continue to rise sharply during summer 2009, when one of the largest age cohorts finishes upper-secondary school while the labour market is still feeling the effects of recession. These newly qualified young people stand 'far back in the queue' to the labour market, which is also likely to increase the duration of unemployment for this group.

### **Economic living standards for young people with and without children**

The indicator on economic living standards describes the financial situation of young people with and without children. Economic living standards are measured using median disposable income adjusted for household composition.<sup>10</sup> Those with adjusted disposable income below 60 per cent of the median are classed as having a low economic living standard. The share of people with low economic living standards in different age groups may then be determined. Within the 20–29 age group, comparisons are made between those born in Sweden and those born abroad, and between different household types. Also studied is the impact of family benefits (such as child care and parental leave benefits) on the economic living standards of 20–29-year-olds in different household types. The indicator for 2009 is based on a forecast using data from 2007. It shows that the economic living standard of 20–29-year-olds as a whole is below that of other age groups. In addition, a higher share of 20–29-year-olds have a low economic living standard (below 60 per cent of the median for all ages) compared with other age groups (Table 14). In 2009 it is estimated that almost a quarter (23 per cent) of 20–29-year-olds have a low economic living standard. The corresponding proportion for the total population is 14 per cent. Among young single parents it is estimated that more than six out of ten (63 per cent) have a low economic living standard. The corresponding share for young couples without children, and for young people still living with their parents, is around 10 per cent. Economic living standards are also low for a large share of young people living alone without children, at 34 per cent. Around half of

these are students. Among young people living together, the share with a low economic living standard is estimated to rise with the number of children in the household, from 7 per cent for couples without children to 23 per cent for those with two or more children. Between 2001 and 2009 the share of 20–29-year-olds with a low economic living standard is estimated to have increased from 12 to 23 per cent. The increase appears to be particularly sharp for those living alone, and is largest for young single parents, of whom the proportion with a low economic living standard increased from 19 to 63 per cent. Adjusted disposable income is estimated to be lower for 20–29-year-olds born outside Sweden than for those born in Sweden, at 135,000 Swedish crowns per year (c. 12,700 euro) compared with 187,000 crowns (c. 17,600 euro). The difference is relatively large and independent of household type. The share of 20–29-year-olds born outside Sweden with a low economic living standard is double that of those born in Sweden, at 42 per cent compared with 20 per cent. Within the group born outside the country, over half of those with children are estimated in 2009 to have a low economic living standard. In comparison with 2001, a higher share of young people, born both in and outside Sweden, had a low economic living standard in 2009. Family benefits such as payments for child care and parental leave are of significance for relatively few young people aged 20–29. Of close to 1.1 million people in this age group in 2009, only around 180,000 – or 17 per cent – have children. This is somewhat fewer than the 240,000 who live with their parents, and significantly fewer than the 670,000 who have left the family home but not had children. Women tend to leave the family home and have children sooner than men. Of those young people who have left home, the majority (around 490,000) are single, and very few of these (around 20,000) have children. The largest group of households with children, at around 100,000, consists of couples with one child. Around 60,000 people aged 20–29 years are estimated in 2009 to have two or more children. A comparison of economic living standards for young people in different household types shows that single people with children have the lowest adjusted disposable income in 2009. Of those living together, young couples without children have the highest adjusted disposable income, followed by those with one child. Young people still living with their parents have an adjusted disposable income that is almost as high as for couples without children, although their economic living standard is to a large degree dependent on the income of other people (in particular their parents). The results for 20–29-year-olds broadly follow the pattern for house-

holds of all ages. People living together have higher adjusted disposable income than those living alone, and households without children have higher economic living standards than households with children. Economic vulnerability increases with the number of children in the household. In recent decades, young people have spent a longer time in education, thus deferring their establishment on the labour market. Young people's economic living standards are influenced to a large degree by how attached people in the household are to the labour market. Households with weak attachment to the labour market have low income from labour and low adjusted disposable income, while the opposite is true for households with strong attachment to the labour market.

### Student budgets

The indicator on student budgets is calculated by dividing financial support to students by their cost of living. It covers all students who receive financial support from CSN, the central agency responsible for distributing study grants and loans.<sup>11</sup> The cost of living is determined on the relatively low basis of estimates by the Swedish Consumer Agency of the costs of various items of expenditure for a single person. Items are selected in the same way as in previous years. According to the Consumer Agency, a person should be able to manage on an income matching this level of costs, but no allowance is made for example for healthcare, holidays or savings. Accommodation is in the form of a flat without costs for a garden or repairs. Public transport and union contributions are also excluded. CSN's calculation of living costs is based on a flat with one room plus kitchen. The amount of financial support includes grants and loans for full-time studies without additional support. Grants and loans are automatically adjusted before the start of each calendar year for changes in the cost of living according to the consumer price index. The last time the government decided to increase financial support

to students over and above the indexed amount was in the middle of 2006 when total support (grants plus loans) was raised by around 100 Swedish crowns per month (c. 9.40 euro at 2009 rates). In 2008, as in the previous two years, living costs were slightly higher than financial support (Figure 3). Most of the relative increase in costs over the past three years is due to an increase in the share of rented accommodation in total costs. Among accommodation costs, household electricity charges have also increased both in relative terms and in absolute terms per kilowatt-hour. Accommodation costs also increased on account of higher interest charges in 2008. There were smaller increases in personal expenditure, due mostly to a small rise in the cost of food and items common to the household such as cleaning products, home equipment, media, telephone, internet and home insurance. Figure 3 shows developments from 1980 onwards, but it is easier to compare developments from 1993 to 2008, during which time costs have been calculated on a similar basis. In this period, although the cost of items common to the household has increased continuously, the most marked increases have been for rent, household electricity and food.

### Young adults living in the parental home

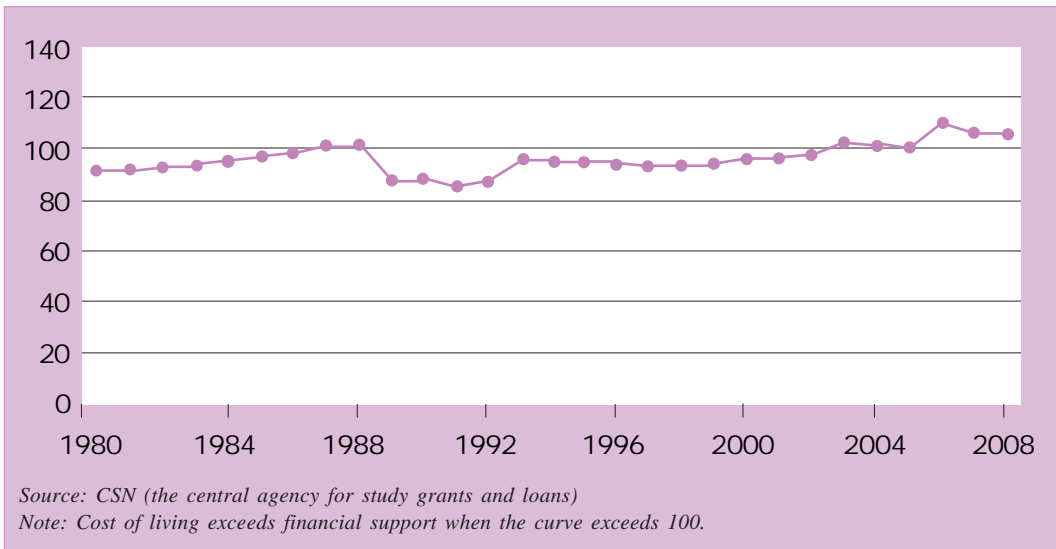
The proportion of young people who still live with their parents may serve as an indicator of the extent to which young people are able to enter the housing market. The Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning stresses, however, that there are many different reasons to remain in the parental home. The marked differences in behaviour between young women and young men in this respect suggests that it is not only access to accommodation which determines when a young person decides to leave home. In 2007, around 180,000 young people aged between 20 and 25 years were living with their parents. Of these, 40 per cent were women and 60 per cent men. In other words, young men

**Table 14. Share of people with low economic living standard\* by age and household type, 2009. Per cent**

	Single without children	Single with children	Living together without children	Living together with one child	Living together with two or more children	Living with parents	Total
20–29 years	34	63	7	19	23	11	23
30–49 years	15	29	5	6	10		11
50–64 years	13	22	3	7	16		7

Source: Försäkringskassan (social insurance office).

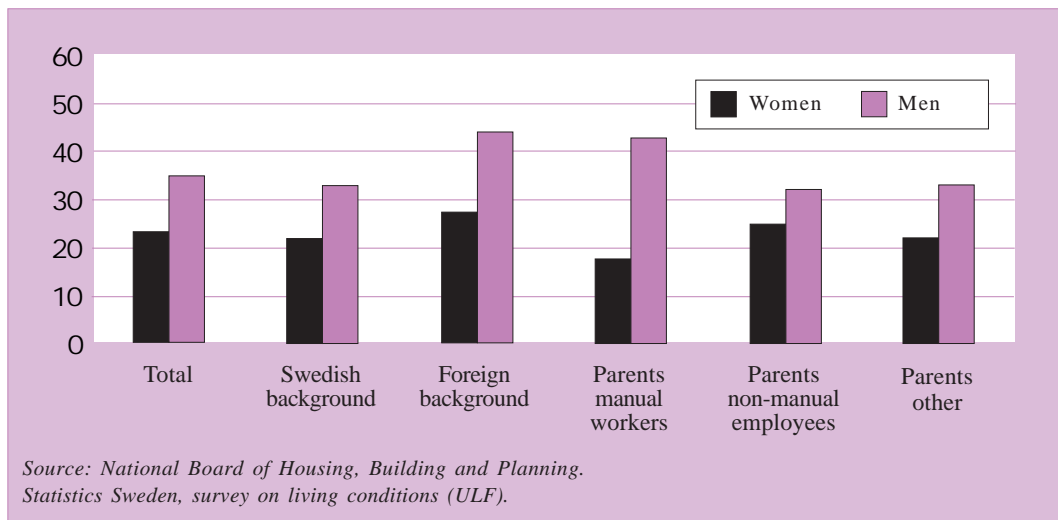
\* less than 60 per cent of median disposable income adjusted for household composition; figures for 2009 are forecasts based on 2007 data from Statistics Sweden's Household Finances survey (HEK).



**Figure 3 Student budgets: cost of living in relation to financial support for studies from CSN, all recipients, 1980–2008. Quotient**

remain in the parental home to a significantly greater extent than young women. There are also large variations depending on whether a person has a Swedish or a foreign background. The groups most likely to remain living with their parents are men with a foreign background and men with a working-class background (Figure 4). Overall,

there have not been large changes in the tendency of young people to remain living with their parents during the period 1998–2007. The share of young men aged 20–25 years who remain in the parental home has fallen slightly, while the corresponding share of young women has increased slightly.



**Figure 4. Share of 20–25-year-olds still living with their parents, by sex, background and parents' occupation, 2006–2007. Per cent**

# Culture and leisure

The policy area *Culture and leisure* concerns policy objectives in the areas of popular movements, sports and culture. Leisure plays an important role for young people, and the aim of policy in this main area is that young people should, in their leisure activities, have access to influence and should be encouraged through these activities to participate in a democratic society and to improve their health.

## Participation in associations and popular movements

Clubs, societies and other associations continue to enjoy a strong standing with the young, and can be found wherever young people themselves are found. Many young people participate in various kinds of association, whether in school, in the local area at home, or in other settings where young people gather. Yet indicators under this heading from previous years have demonstrated large differences between young and older people's membership in associations. In *Ung idag 2008 (Youth Today 2008, Ungdomsstyrelsen 2008b)*, a difference of 24 percentage points between the younger age group and the reference group aged 35–74 years was reported,

where 88 per cent of the older age group were members of an association. Earlier reports have shown that the proportion of young people who state that they are a member of an association has been falling.

Activity in popular movements and associations, including the proportion of young people who are active in an association, is measured here using an indicator that shows how many young people have attended an association meeting in the last year (Table 15). The proportion of 16–19-year-olds who are active in an association is larger than that of 20–25-year-olds. Within the whole of the 16–25-year-old age group, the differences between those with Swedish and foreign backgrounds are relatively small. Greater differences are apparent when the figures are broken down by sex. The share of young women with a foreign background who are active in associations is almost 15 percentage points lower than the corresponding share of young women with a Swedish background. The difference between young women and young men with a foreign background is even larger: the share of young women active in associations is 23 percentage points lower. Parents' socio-economic background appears to be of greater significance

**Table 15. Share of 16–25-year-olds who have attended a meeting at an association, society or similar\* in the last 12 months, 2006/07. Per cent**

	16–19 yrs	20–25 yrs	16–25 years			35–74 yrs
			Men	Women	Total	
<b>Background</b>						
Swedish	39,1	28,7	35,3	31,9	33,6	45,1
Foreign	36,3	25,6	40,4	17,1	30,2	26,6
<b>Socio-economic group of parents' household</b>						
Manual workers	28,2	23,0	29,5	21,0	25,3	41,1
Non-manual employees	43,5	33,5	43,2	33,3	38,3	46,1
Self-employed**	45,6	27,6	34,8	36,2	35,5	43,0
<b>Region***</b>						
Large metropolitan areas	32,4	31,9	33,7	30,5	32,1	42,9
Larger towns	42,3	27,3	38,3	29,2	34,0	39,9
Other	41,8	24,7	36,0	29,7	33,0	44,9
<b>Total</b>	<b>38,7</b>	<b>28,2</b>	<b>36,2</b>	<b>29,8</b>	<b>33,1</b>	<b>42,4</b>

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs. Statistics Sweden, survey on living conditions (ULF) 2006/07.

\* Excluding trade union and political party meetings.

\*\* Excluding self-employed professionals with at least 6 years of post-secondary education, who are included among non-manual employees.

\*\*\* Large metropolitan areas = H1–H2 in Statistics Sweden's classification (Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö); Larger towns = H3; Other = H4–H6.

ance for young people's activity in associations in the 16–19 age group than in the 20–25 age group. In large metropolitan areas, the variation in association activity by sex and age differs from that observed in other regions. The active share in the younger age group is 10 percentage points lower in large metropolitan areas than in other regions. Outside the large metropolitan areas, the level of activity varies much more between the different age groups; here, the active share among 20–25-year-olds is around 15 percentage points lower than among 16–19-year-olds. The indicator is based on Statistics Sweden's Survey of Living Conditions (ULF) for the years 2006 and 2007. The data for two years are pooled to obtain a larger sample and thus more reliable comparisons between different groups. The sample is based on responses from 1,368 individuals in the 16–25 age group and 5,460 individuals in the 35–74 age group. In 2006 the methodology for the interviews on which the statistics are based was amended, and a number of the survey questions were redrafted. Previously the indicator was reported in two separate tables, one showing participation in popular movements and associations, another showing the share of young people who are active in associations. This means that it is not possible to make comparisons further back in time.

# Concluding discussion

*Youth Today 2009* is the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs' fourth compilation of indicators describing young people's living conditions. It is difficult to give a general picture of young people's welfare. Young people are different and their circumstances vary widely. But it is clear from our compilation that the vast majority are doing well and are living in good conditions.

Our examination of the indicators reveals positive developments for young people in several areas.

For example:

- Fewer young people have received social assistance and sickness benefits, and young people's expenditure on accommodation has fallen in relation to their income.
- A larger share of young people say they might consider starting a business, and feel that they have acquired useful knowledge in school about running a business.
- A slightly larger share of Year 9 (15–16-year-old) students meet attainment objectives set at national level, and Year 9 students' attainment in Swedish, English and Swedish as a second language has improved.
- Lethal violence among young people is on the decline, and fewer young people smoke and take *snus* on a daily basis.
- The turnout of young voters increased in the 2006 elections, and a larger share of young people were nominated and elected to decision-making institutions. More young people feel they are able to bring ideas to the attention of municipal decision-makers.

We also see a number of negative tendencies.

For example:

- There has been a sharp rise in youth unemployment over the past year.
- The proportion of young people with a low economic standard of living is rising, and more young people are receiving debt repayment orders.
- Students' living costs have over the last few years exceeded the financial support they receive.
- Attainment in mathematics among Year 9 students has fallen.
- The number of municipalities providing public adult education is in decline.
- Young people's health has not improved in line with that of other age groups, and the share of young people receiving hospital treatment for violence-related injuries, attempted suicide and alcohol and drug abuse has increased.
- Young people's engagement in the work of clubs, societies and associations is in decline.
- There is a general decline both in young people's own practice of cultural activities and in their attendance and reading habits.

This year's follow-up of indicators demonstrates, therefore, both positive and negative trends in young people's living conditions. In describing the development of the indicators, it is important to have in mind the context in which these changes occur. For example, despite the positive overall trend in students' fulfilment of Year 9 objectives, a fifth of students do not meet the prescribed objectives. And despite a decline in young people's activity in clubs, societies and associations, these organisations continue to enjoy a strong standing with young people, a third of whom have attended an association meeting during the past year. Although young people's turnout at elections and the share of young people nominated and elected to representative assemblies have increased, young people are still under-represented in the national parliament and in county and municipal councils, and a smaller share of young people vote in general elections compared with older age groups.

## Large differences within the group of young people

Young people as a group are characterised by the fact that they find themselves at roughly the same age and on their way into the adult world, but there are large differences between the individuals who make up the group. It is difficult to compare the situation of a 13-year-old secondary school pupil with that of a young adult aged 25. The overarching objectives for national youth policy are that all young people must have real access to influence and to welfare. Such is not the case today. The follow-up of the indicators shows that living conditions for young people differ depending on their sex, whether they were born in Sweden or abroad, whereabouts they live in the country, whether they have disabilities or learning difficulties, and what kind of socio-economic background they have. These differences are observed in all the main areas of youth policy. The situation of young women is worse than that of young men when it comes, for example, to mental health, work-related illness and compensation for reduced working capacity. At the same time, young women do better in school, are more likely to vote in general elections and have not yet been as badly affected as young men by unemployment. Young men are more prone to crime as both victims and perpetrators, and are more likely than young women to be in debt or to be evicted. On the other hand, they earn more on average than young women, they are more likely to run their own business, and they participate to a greater extent in the activity of associations. Young people with a foreign background generally do worse in school, are worse off financially and live in worse housing conditions than young people with a Swedish background. Among students who have completed upper-secondary education, however, those with a foreign background are more likely to go on to higher education than those with a Swedish background, and young people born abroad are more favourably disposed to running a business than those born in Sweden. Where a young person lives – the county and municipality, and whether in a large city or a more sparsely populated area – influences among other things entry into higher education, indebtedness, public health, housing conditions and entrepreneurship. We also observe differences between young people with and without disabilities or learning difficulties, for example in terms of labour market status and public health. The public health indicators also demonstrate differences between young people depending on their sexual orientation. An important variable that affects living conditions is a young

person's socio-economic background. Studies show that it is pupils' socio-economic background – in terms of their parents' level of education and attachment to the labour market – rather than which country they were born in which chiefly influences the prospects of good results in school (Socialstyrelsen 2006). Socio-economic background is also reflected in the degree of influence young people have; the indicators demonstrate that young people whose parents have a low level of education are much less politically active and feel less able to influence municipal decision-makers than those with highly educated parents. Several studies show that the level of education, among young people as well as their parents, is crucial for political interest, participation in elections and knowledge of democratic processes (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2007b, Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting 2009, Ekman 2007). The indicators show that in several areas there is a group of young people whose circumstances are worse than those of others. The differences between those who are doing well and those who are not are growing, and there is a risk of increased exclusion among the young.

## The important role of society

Putting an end to exclusion among the young requires the coordination of society's resources. This much is clear in the areas of both health and the labour market, as well as in other sectors. The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs has in a series of reports stressed the need for cooperation focused on the needs of young people.

Since young people's socio-economic background influences their living conditions, and since the opportunities available to them differ, public initiatives play an important role for young people's learning, health, potential for influence, cultural activities and integration into society. One of the most important places for young people is school. Aside from the knowledge they acquire, young people are influenced as individuals by the school environment. In its report on the living conditions of young people in deprived neighbourhoods (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2008a), the Board emphasises the importance of qualified, competent teachers with a common pedagogical outlook in order to strengthen students' educational development. Teachers can also play an important role for young people's interest and engagement in social issues. Teachers who are engaged and allow all pupils to join in discussions and learn about politics and democracy can inspire their pupils to develop an interest in society, regardless of pupils' socio-economic backgro-

und (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2007c). Schools are also of considerable importance for young people's cultural activities. Young people come into contact with culture during their leisure time, yet a large part of public cultural initiatives reach young people during timetabled activities in school (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2007a). Schools are not the only social resource with significance for young people's living conditions. Youth clubs play an important role for many young people. In working to put an end to exclusion and to facilitate young people's integration into the labour market, coordination between municipal actors such as the labour market and social units and state-level actors such as the public employment service and the social insurance office is of great importance (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2008a).

### Cross-sectoral youth policy

Within government, society is often divided up into different sectors or policy areas, each managed by means of different agencies and other public initiatives. People's lives however are not divided up into sectors; the different areas are all connected and inter-dependent. The five main areas of youth policy – education and learning; health and vulnerability; employment and means of support; influence and representation; and culture and leisure – are all essential aspects of young people's living conditions. If a young person's potential is restricted in one of these areas, there is a risk that this will lead to negative consequences in other areas too.

A negative experience in school, for example, may affect the chances of getting a job and providing for oneself. Poor health may limit the scope for meaningful leisure activities. A person who grows up in an insecure home environment in a local area marked by social exclusion runs a greater risk of failure in school. The indicators show that young people with a low level of education find it harder to get a job and to break with unemployment than those with higher education. Unemployment may lead to poor health through insufficient social contacts, feelings of inadequacy and poor self-confidence. It also makes it more difficult for young people to set up their own home. Lack of influence is also strongly linked to ill health (Statens folkhälsoinstitut 2005). In the same way, good opportunities when growing up – in the form of a functional home environment with the possibility of meaningful leisure activities, and a school where pupils feel noticed, are not exposed to bullying and harassment and are able to influence their situation – provide young people with a solid foundation and facilitate their further integration into society.

## Young people's health and economic situation

This report has illustrated the situation for young people in many different areas. Two that we particularly wish to highlight are young people's economic situation and their health, along with the relation between the two. Last year's indicator report, *Ung idag 2008 (Youth Today 2008)*, Ungdomsstyrelsen 2008b), gave several examples of how young people's economic situation had worsened in spite of the favourable economy. The Board pointed out that with a coming downturn there was a risk that the situation would worsen further. Since then the economy has entered a severe recession. Because young people are as a rule among the groups that are hit first and hardest when the economy deteriorates, the large increase in youth unemployment over the past year is not surprising. Although few of the other indicators describing young people's economic situation have worsened, this is probably only because not enough time has yet passed for the recession to show up. While unemployment rises, the number of young people in the population is set to grow over the coming years. This increases the risk that young people's situation will worsen still further, and that more will end up as outsiders. Even if most young people are generally healthy, the proportion who exhibit symptoms of mental and psychosomatic health problems has increased (Socialstyrelsen 2009). This increase concerns not only self-reported difficulties such as uneasiness, worry and anxiety, but also hospital treatment for young people suffering from depression and anxiety. According to the National Board of Health and Welfare, the causes of this increase are unclear, but one possible explanation is that young people's living conditions – including the prospects of getting a full-time job – have changed substantially. In view of the present state of the labour market for young people and the expectation that difficult times will continue, additional resources should be invested with a view to facilitating young people's entry into the labour market. Otherwise there is an obvious risk that the group of young people with health problems is set to keep on growing.

## Reporting authorities

**Arbetsförmedlingen**

(Swedish Public Employment Service)

**Arbetsmiljöverket**

(Swedish Work Environment Authority)

**Boverket**

(National Board of Housing, Building and Planning)

**Brottsförebyggande rådet**

(Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention)

**Centrala studiestödsnämnden**

(CSN – the central agency for study grants and loans)

**Försäkringskassan**

(the social insurance office)

**Högskoleverket**

(Swedish National Agency for Higher Education)

**Kronofogdemyndigheten**

(Swedish Enforcement Authority, dealing with debt recovery)

**Kulturrådet**

(Swedish Arts Council)

**Skatteverket**

(Swedish Tax Agency)

**Skolverket**

(Swedish National Agency for Education)

**Socialstyrelsen**

(National Board of Health and Welfare)

**Statens folkhälsoinstitut**

(Swedish National Institute of Public Health)

**Tillväxtanalys/ITPS**

(Swedish Agency for Growth Policy Analysis)

**Tillväxtverket/Nutek**

(Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth)

**Ungdomsstyrelsen**

(Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs)

**Valmyndigheten**

(Election Authority)

**Riksidrottsförbundet**

(Swedish Sports Confederation)

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[www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se/publications](http://www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se/publications)

# Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Year 9 in Sweden is the final year of lower-secondary education at age 15–16. Before choosing an upper-secondary school, students receive an overall merit value calculated as the sum of the numerical equivalents of the final grades in their 16 best subjects.

<sup>2</sup> *Högskolor* (literally 'high schools') in Sweden are similar to universities as regards undergraduate studies. The figures exclude research students.

<sup>3</sup> The principal statistical source used for these indicators is the national public health survey, *Hälsa på lika villkor* (Health on equal terms), which the Swedish National Institute of Public Health has carried out annually since 2004 together with Sweden's county councils and regions. The survey covers the population aged between 16 and 84 years. In the 2004 survey, however, 16- and 17-year-olds were not included. In the 2008 survey, a national selection of 20,000 people aged 16–84 was included, together with a further 57,500 people from the counties of Västra Götaland, Östergötland, Jönköping, Kalmar, Dalarna and Blekinge. The response rate was 56 per cent, or around 43,000 persons in

total. There were 4,497 young people aged between 16 and 24 years who responded to the national public health survey in 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Moist powdered tobacco for oral use.

<sup>5</sup> Report by the Ombudsman against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation (Ombudsmannen mot diskriminering på grund av sexuell läggning, Statens folkhälsoinstitut 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Report on drug developments in Sweden by the Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs (Centralförbundet för alkohol- och narkotikaupplysning 2008).

<sup>7</sup> A survey conducted every other year by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs of a representative sample of the country's 16–25-year-olds.

<sup>8</sup> Highly educated in this context means that both parents have studied at a higher education institution for at least two years; a low level of education means that neither parent has studied for at least two years at a higher education institution.

<sup>9</sup> People not currently working who are actively looking for work, ready to start work promptly and not participating in a labour market programme run by the Public employment service.

<sup>10</sup> Disposable income is adjusted for the number and type of household members to provide a measure of income per capita in relation to the burden of support in the household. In practice, household income is divided by a weighted sum of household members, where the first adult has a weight of one, and partners, children and other adults in the household have a lower weight to reflect the fact that living together is less expensive than living in separate households.

<sup>11</sup> Students of all ages who receive financial support are covered, hence it is not possible to discuss the 19–25 year age group separately. The indicator on student budgets should therefore only be used as a general measure of the relationship between costs and financial support for studies.

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# YOUTH TODAY 2009

## A description of young people's living conditions

The vast majority of young people today are doing well. For example, a larger share of 15–16-year-olds satisfy the national objectives for school year 9, and more businesses are being started by young people. But there are also negative tendencies. Young people's health has not improved in line with that of older groups, youth unemployment has increased sharply and young people's economic situation has worsened. Young people's circumstances and opportunities vary, depending among other things on age, sex, socio-economic background, Swedish or foreign background, place of residence and possible disabilities or learning difficulties.

*Youth Today 2009* is the fourth compilation of young people's living conditions produced by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, building on reports from 17 government agencies and the Swedish Sports Confederation.



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