

Sweden Programme



# The Search for a Youth-Inclusive Sweden

Produced by the  
Life & Peace Institute in  
collaboration with Students  
for Sustainable Action  
from Jönköping University

For more than 30 years, the **Life & Peace Institute** (LPI) has been working with peace and conflict issues to promote non-violent, people-centred conflict transformation programmes that bridge theory and action, grounding policy in local experience. An international centre with headquarters in Uppsala, Sweden, LPI works in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Horn of Africa and in Sweden.

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“How wonderful it  
is that nobody  
need wait a single  
moment before  
starting to improve  
the world”

Anne Frank

# The Search for a Youth-Inclusive Sweden

The importance of greater youth inclusion is reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which sees youth participation as essential for creating a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable world.



This policy brief aims to provide a short overview of youth inclusion in Sweden as this relates to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is part of a pilot project implemented by the Life & Peace Institute (LPI) in 2018. This project aimed to increase knowledge and raise awareness among young people in Sweden about the 2030 Agenda, with specific attention to Global Goals 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

This policy brief concludes with a set of recommendations for policy and decision-makers, as well as local government, non-governmental and civil society actors. These recommendations are the result of a public forum, held in January 2019, featuring the participation of youth from Uppsala University, Jönköping University and Södertörn University College. They intend to offer insight about how to better promote youth inclusion based on input from youth themselves.



## The importance of youth: being and becoming peacebuilders

In its efforts to contribute to and sustain peace in the Horn of Africa, LPI seeks to include all relevant actors to construct peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The particular importance of youth – from all groups, identities and backgrounds – in the pursuit of sustainable peace is highlighted in LPI's *Being and Becoming a Peacebuilder*.<sup>1</sup> This 2017 report is based on lessons learnt by LPI and its partners through more than 20,000 hours of youth-led dialogue work in the Horn of Africa. It contributes to *The Missing Peace*,<sup>2</sup> the United Nations study on the progress of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda.<sup>3</sup>

### *In Being and Becoming a Peacebuilder,* LPI outlines four key insights:

- Youth are not a homogenous group
- The idea that there are youth issues is misleading and unhelpful
- Youth are the present and the future
- Youth need an enabling environment

These insights are important because they highlight key learnings expressed by young people in the Horn of Africa to ensure their inclusive and effective participation in their societies. The inclusion of youth is essential for attaining sustainable peace. It is also a necessity for socially sustainable and equal societies, thus making it imperative for all countries and actors to aim for greater youth inclusion.

In Sweden, LPI recognises the need for greater efforts for youth inclusion from an intersectional understanding of the age group from policy makers and civil society. Although there are existing structures for youth participation in Sweden, these may not be easily accessible or well-known to all youth. Moreover, those that do exist may not address the specific needs or concerns of all groups of youth.

<sup>1</sup> *Being and Becoming a Peacebuilder* (2017).

<sup>2</sup> *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security* (2018).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015).

## The push – and pull – for a more inclusive world

The UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>4</sup> With its 17 Global Goals, the 2030 Agenda outlines how the world can become socially, economically and environmentally sustainable by 2030.

Inclusivity – the idea of no one being left behind – is at the core of the 2030 Agenda. It is one of the driving forces underlying how the 2030 Agenda was shaped and came into existence through a consultative process. The 2030 Agenda cements the Global Goals as benchmarks for all countries, regardless of their wealth or geographical location. The broad consensus on inclusivity also put emphasis on the importance of youth inclusion.

In 2018, across its seven programmes, LPI supported 16 inclusive peace projects, directly engaging 35 partners in 28 different locations across the Horn of Africa and in Sweden.



<sup>4</sup> Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015).

With the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 on YPS, for the first time in history, the international community recognised the importance of youth inclusion to sustainable peace. The importance of the underlying principles of UNSCR 2250 have also been reaffirmed at subsequent high-level meetings, such as the UNSC Open Debate on YPS, held in New York city in April 2018.

Sweden participates in several key initiatives that aim to raise the ambition level of progress towards the 2030 Agenda. In the ‘Champions to Be’ initiative, Sweden joined eight other countries in pledging to be leaders in the implementation of the Global Goals.<sup>5</sup> Sweden also took a stand to join ‘Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies’, an initiative convened by the governments of Brazil, Switzerland and Sierra Leone, and supported by the Center on International Cooperation, a New York University think tank.<sup>6</sup> Sweden also makes a financial contribution to the promotion of the accompanying Sustainable Development Goal 16+ (SDG16+) roadmap, which explains how Global Goal 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions can be linked to other Global Goals and targets in the 2030 Agenda. Sweden also took up the promotion of the YPS agenda during its time in the UNSC.

In Sweden’s National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda there is a recognition of the need for inclusive approaches to the Global Goals. In relation to Goal 16, Sweden’s foreign policy puts a focus on peacebuilding and conflict resolution, stating that Sweden has contributed extra resources to dialogue and mediation initiatives.<sup>7</sup> The NAP also emphasises the importance of youth inclusion in peace processes.

Yet, there appears to be a disconnect between Sweden’s focus abroad and at home. Among the areas and themes for the national implementation on Goal 16, the NAP does not mention ‘dialogue’ or ‘youth’ in relation to Sweden. There is no discussion of the need for mainstreaming youth inclusion on critical issues such as marginalisation which exist in all societies. The NAP misses a critical opportunity to acknowledge, in the spirit of YPS and the 2030 Agenda, the role that young people play and will continue to play in ensuring the promotion of a peaceful, just and inclusive Sweden. As in the rest of the world, dialogue and youth inclusion are critical aspects to any country’s successful attainment of Goal 16.

<sup>5</sup> Champions to be: making the 2030 Agenda a reality (2016).

<sup>6</sup> More details about the Pathfinders initiative can be found on the Center for International Cooperation website.

<sup>7</sup> The section for Global Goal 16 can be found on pages 35–38 of the NAP (in Swedish).

The divergence between Sweden's support to global agendas and its failure thus far to localise their lessons in the Swedish context is not unique to Sweden. The disconnect that emerges between the consensus among international political leadership on the 2030 Agenda and developments on the ground is common. However, countries aiming to lead by example, such as Sweden, may need to engage in a deeper introspection to develop a comprehensive understanding of each Goal's relevance to their specific contexts in order to ensure greater inclusion, especially when it comes to youth.



'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'

Global Goal 16



## Supporting Peaceful, Just and Equal Societies: Let's Engage the Global Goals

Using the Global Goals as a basis for the attainment of a more inclusive world, and a more inclusive Sweden, in 2018 LPI initiated a one-year pilot project in collaboration with student associations at Uppsala University, Jönköping University and Södertörn University College. The project objective was to engage young people at selected universities in order to increase their awareness, understanding and engagement around the Global Goals.

A total of 12 workshops, involving an estimated 100 youth participants, were held over the course of the pilot project. The project also facilitated youth input ahead of the hearing on Sweden's NAP for the implementation of the Global Goals in Sweden, which was held on April 19, 2018.

The 2018 pilot project ended with a public forum designed in collaboration with its youth participants, who were involved in determining the theme and format for the event. Youth participants were also active in driving interactive group work forward, resulting in the recommendations at the end of this policy brief. Held on January 22, 2019, the public forum brought together local government representatives, civil society actors and university students to discuss how youth inclusion could be improved across various levels in Swedish society.

During the course of the public forum discussions, it became evident that youth inclusion is considered to be a topic warranting further discussion and reflection. It also became clear that greater efforts need to be made, across actors and levels, to include a wider range of young people in events, thus better enabling the representation and participation of youth from all walks of life in Sweden. LPI acknowledges and agrees with this, and is fully committed to do more to facilitate greater inclusion in the future.

The following recommendations emerged from the discussions among those who attended the public forum in January 2019. Some recommendations are aimed at specific actors, as indicated.

### 1. Changes in attitudes and mind-sets

- Acknowledge and appreciate initiatives carried out by civil society actors and informal actors towards greater youth inclusion (politicians and decision makers);
- Recognise the knowledge that youth possess in terms of the needs of their communities and actively seek to involve them in efforts to improve youth participation (politicians, decision makers and civil society organisations);
- Ensure that events and platforms are accessible to all youth; for example, by arranging transportation to and from venues, and subsidising or waiving event fees for youth participants;
- Identify powerful change-makers, particularly among youth, in local communities and empower them as ambassadors to involve a wider group of youth.

### 2. Financial

- Commit to increased financial investments aimed at promoting greater youth inclusion and participation; for instance, by contributing to more youth activity centres and after-school facilities;
- Support collaborative initiatives between local governments and youth organisations that are aimed at or by design contribute to greater youth inclusion.

### 3. Education

- Include modules on community engagement, prompting students to become actively engaged in their communities, schools and universities;
- Incorporate more events that allow youth to participate in and make decisions about issues that arise in their schools, universities and local communities, as well as events that foster greater awareness of the larger world in which they live, such as model UN programmes.

Student associations at Uppsala University, Jönköping University and Södertörn University College took part in the one-year pilot project.



## Moving forward: Peacefinders

In 2019–2020, LPI plans to implement a follow-up project in Sweden called ‘Peacefinders’. This project aims to bolster the engagement and knowledge of the Global Goals among youth in Sweden. Designed with participant input during the 2018 pilot project, Peacefinders aims to bridge theory and action, passion and opportunity, across four different locations in Sweden: Uppsala, Stockholm, Jönköping and Malmö. These locations have been selected based on two main criteria: previous successful collaboration during the pilot project and the need to engage across a wider geographical area in Sweden to ensure greater youth inclusion.

By engaging a wide range of youth who reside in Sweden LPI hopes to incorporate a variety of different perspectives on and ideas for action towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Sweden.

Equipped with knowledge, tools and skills, the young people who participate in the 2019–2020 project will become agents of change for transformative actions in their communities, their country and in their world.

*They will become Peacefinders.*





This policy brief has been produced by the **Life & Peace Institute** in collaboration with **Students for Sustainable Action (SSA)** from **Jönköping University**. It is part of a pilot project that aimed to increase knowledge and raise awareness among youth in Sweden about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with specific attention to Global Goals 5 (*Gender Equality*), Goal 10 (*Reduced Inequalities*) and Goal 16 (*Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*).

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For more information on the project, contact:  
[info@life-peace.org](mailto:info@life-peace.org)

Photography by **Johan Wahlgren**