

SWEDEN ¹⁹³

Trade Unions in the Education Sector

- Swedish Teachers' Union (**Läraryrbundet**); Teachers and head of schools, from pre-primary to tertiary education in both the public and private sectors, affiliated to the Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees (TCO) and Education International.
Membership 230,000 (82% female)
- National Union of Teachers in Sweden (**Lärarnas Riksförbund**); Certificated teachers and counsellors employed in pre-school, primary, secondary and adult education in both the public and private sectors, affiliated to Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (SACO) and Education International.
Membership 87,000 (70% female)¹⁹⁴
- Swedish Association of University Teachers (**Sveriges Universitetsläraryrbundet SULF**); University teachers, researchers and doctoral candidates within the public sector, affiliated to Education International.
Membership 20,000 (48% female)¹⁹⁵
- Swedish Association of School Principals and Directors of Education (**Skolledarförbundet**); Principals, assistant principals and other persons with leading positions within the school system in both public and private sector.
Membership 7000 (54% female)¹⁹⁶

Ratifications

- C. 87 Freedom of Association and the Protection of the Right to Organise (1948) ratified 1949
- C. 98 Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining (1949) ratified 1950
- C. 100 Equal Remuneration (1951) ratified 1962
- C. 111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) (1958) ratified 1962
- C. 144 Tripartite Consultations (1976) ratified 1977
- C. 151 Labour Relations (Public Service) (1978) ratified 1979
- C. 154 Collective Bargaining (1981) ratified 1982

¹⁹³ Grateful acknowledgement of the written report and additional contributions from Jörgen Lindholm, International Relations Secretary, Läraryrbundet.

¹⁹⁴ according to latest figures 31 December 2012 <http://www.saco.se/Nyheter--debatt/Aktuellt-fran-Saco/Pressmeddelanden/saco-fortsatter-att-vaxa/> and <http://www.saco.se/Global/Dokument/Forskning%20och%20Kunskap/Statistik/Medlemsstatistik%202011-12->

¹⁹⁵ Representativeness study of the European social partners: Education Sector -Sweden SE 001019Q, Matts Kullander, Elinor Håggebrink 21.04.2011 EIRO

¹⁹⁶ see references in note 1.



Education System

The Education Act 2011,¹⁹⁷ which is a consolidation of earlier laws, provides for compulsory free education from 7-16 years and sets out the responsibilities of the municipalities and county councils and the framework for the national curriculum, the guaranteed tuition time and length of each academic year, and the qualifications required for appointment as a teacher. A teacher cannot be given permanent status unless they have a teacher training qualification. The municipality is responsible for providing education within this framework. Independent or free schools were introduced as part of the 1992 education reforms and they must follow the national curriculum. In 2010, about 10% of the schools were independent or privately run.

The central government allocation for primary and secondary education is less than 50% of the municipal education budget, and the rest is raised through municipal taxation. Before 1995, the allocation was specifically earmarked for education and was linked to the number of teaching hours and teaching contracts required at each school. This system has now been replaced so that the municipalities receive a generic allocation and the local authorities decide on the budget for schools, which is generally about 42% of its total budget. In some cases, the distribution of the municipal education budget is discussed with the unions.

There are an estimated 450,000 employees in the education sector.²⁰⁰

Freedom of Association

The Nordic model of industrial relations is characterised by the major role given to national collective bargaining and there is a high union density and membership of employers' organizations. However, since 2006 there has been acceleration in the decrease in union membership in both the public and private sectors as a consequence of the removal of the tax exemption on trade union dues and because the unemployment insurance funds, which are managed by the unions, became much more expensive. By 2008, the overall union density rates had dropped to 72% and only 52% of young workers (16-24 years old) were trade union members.²⁰¹

There is a constitutional recognition of the right to freedom of association. The Co-Determination in the Workplace Act (MBL) of 1976 is the main instrument which sets out the industrial relations system in Sweden and provides for a positive right to freedom of association. Its provisions cover both public and private sector employees. Workers can form and join unions of their choice, without prior authorisation or excessive requirements. The law

¹⁹⁷ <http://www.government.se/content/1/c6/02/15/38/1532b277.pdf> accessed 20.01.2013

¹⁹⁸ *Facts about Sweden: Education; the Swedish Institute p. 4* www.sweden.se accessed 1.02.2013

¹⁹⁹ [http://www.skl.se/kommuner_och_landsting/om_kommuner/kostnader_och_intakter\(A+B+C+D\)](http://www.skl.se/kommuner_och_landsting/om_kommuner/kostnader_och_intakter(A+B+C+D))

²⁰⁰ *Idem EIRO Representativeness Study p.1*

²⁰¹ *EIRO On-Line "Trade Unions take action to counter membership decline" Paul Anderson and Thomas Brunk, SE0806029, 09-07-2008*

allows unions to conduct their activities without interference. There is no registration requirement or minimum membership. There are no legal barriers preventing workers, including foreign workers, from joining a union.

The industrial relations system is largely self-regulating and there is no State agency that deals with matters such as union recognition, or certification of bargaining agents or certifies union elections.

“The right of association may not be infringed. Infringement of the right of association shall be deemed to have occurred where an employer or employee, or the representative of either, takes action that is detrimental to the other party as a consequence of such party's exercise of its/her/his right of association or where an employer or employee, or the representative of either, takes action directed at other party for the purpose of inducing that party not to exercise its/her/his right of association. Such infringement shall also be deemed to have occurred notwithstanding that the action was taken for the purpose of fulfilling an obligation towards a third party.” (Section 8)

Teachers in the public sector also fall within the terms of the 1994 Public Employment Act, which is a consolidation of earlier laws. The law is of general applicability and concerns qualifications to be considered in hiring, occupation outside of working hours, termination of employment, disciplinary proceedings, labour disputes, health examinations and related matters. Public sector employees have the right to strike, provided public health and security are ensured.

The Employment Protection Act 1982 is also of general applicability and covers both public and private employees. It regulates employment and termination of contracts and protects employees from dismissal without due reason.

There is framework legislation on occupational health and working time (the Work Environment Act 1977 and Working Time Act 1982) and the Swedish Work Environment Authority is responsible for monitoring their implementation. This framework legislation is reflected in the sectoral collective agreements.

The national pension system safeguards a basic pension for all workers and an additional pension is defined by collective bargaining in each sector.

Collective Bargaining

The Co-Determination Act also gives trade unions the right to negotiate with employers; in turn, employers have the duty to enter into collective agreements. Hence, collective bargaining is a strong and well-developed tradition in Sweden. The coverage rate of collective agreements for all sectors was 98% in 2008.²⁰²



Furthermore, collective bargaining agreements also include the right of co-determination for employees in matters regarding the conclusion and termination of contracts of employment, the management and distribution of work and the operation of the activity in general (Section 32). Collective bargaining is conducted at three levels: national, sectoral or industry-wide and local level, in the case of education at municipal level or with the independent school. At national level, the framework, which dates back to the 1930's, defines the roles of the parties. There are also cross-sectoral agreements on pensions and other collective insurances, an employment transition fund so that a percentage of the wage is paid into a fund to help workers made redundant.

The sectoral agreements define the minimum average pay levels and general working time provisions as the framework for procedural rules for dialogue at the local municipal level. In the public sector, Lärarförbundet and Lärarnas Riksförbund negotiate jointly in a special cooperation council called the Teachers' Negotiation Council (*Lärarnas Samverkansråd*), with the most important employers' organisation, which is the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). The SALAR represents 290 municipalities, 18 county councils and 2 regions. In this cooperation, the unions have agreed not to recruit each other's members, which eliminates some competition as they organise some of the same members. Coverage of collective bargaining agreements in the public sector in education is 100%.

In the independent or "free school" education sector, collective agreements cover about 85% of the employers.²⁰³ There is a national collective agreement with each national employers' association and there are between 10-15 employers' associations with interests in free schools. It is the responsibility of the union Branch office to identify private employers and to recruit members. There are an estimated 3000 collective agreements with the free schools.

During the 1980s and 1990's, there was a gradual process of government decentralisation and one important step took place in 1995, with the "municipalisation" of the school system to give more autonomy to the local authorities and schools. A system of management by objectives was introduced and schools and local authorities were required to prepare quality statements against which their performance was evaluated. The unions issued a joint declaration supporting this transition and emphasising their role as partners in the promotion of school development.²⁰⁴

At the same time, the system of wage setting and working time was decentralised. Instead of a centrally agreed national salary scale, with a fixed progression, an individualised pay

²⁰² *EIRO Industrial Relations Profile: Sweden July 2009*

²⁰³ *EIRO: Representativeness study of the European Social Partners Organisations: Education Sector-Sweden SE 1001019Q 21.04.2011 Matts Kullander and Elinor Häggebrink*

²⁰⁴ *Teacher Policy Reforms in Sweden: The Case of Individualised Pay, Annelie Strath, Swedish Ministry of Education and Science, December 2004 International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO, Paris, December 2004*

system was introduced. Thus, the collective agreements beginning in 2000-2005 set minimum wage levels for entry point teachers and an agreed minimum after 5 years of employment. The working time system was divided into an agreed regulated time when the teacher was at school and an unregulated working time, to give a more flexible approach to pupil learning.

At local level, the individualised wage negotiations are usually carried out in two phases. There is first a dialogue between the school principal and the teacher based on a review of performance, when the school principal presents a wage proposal. The teacher can then ask for advice from the union. The role of the union here is to ensure that the pay review is conducted in a fair manner and on the basis of agreed criteria. The second phase consists of negotiations between the local municipality and the local unions concerning the proportion of the municipal budget to be allocated to teachers' salaries and how it should be distributed across schools and individuals. The proportion of the municipal budget allocated to teachers' salaries is approximately 22%.²⁰⁵

It was expected that these reforms would lead to greater wage differentials in the teaching profession but actually the reverse has happened. Because of shortages of qualified teachers, municipalities have needed to raise the salaries for entry point teachers and the raises for experienced teachers have flattened. Thus salary differentials remain relatively small and do not reflect individual teachers' achievements. Teachers and unions hoped that the individualised system of pay determination would lead to an upwards wage drift and would collectively increase beyond what was previously agreed at central level.

While the spread of salaries has not evolved in the way expected, the individual teachers appreciate the system as it gives a regular opportunity for dialogue between the teacher and the school principal. A survey conducted for Lärarförbundet in 2004, found that 60% were in favour of the reforms.²⁰⁶

Collective Bargaining since the financial crisis

Sweden underwent a major banking and real estate crisis in the early 1990's when the country suffered from a large budget deficit and economic downturn and large-scale unemployment. Since then, Sweden has reformed its banking system and built up a budget surplus so it was better able to confront the 2008 financial crisis than many other European countries. It also benefitted from being outside the Euro zone. By the second half of 2009, the economy was again showing export led growth and the high unemployment rate of 2009, which reached 8.6%, dropped back to 7.4% by December 2012. Hence the financial crisis has not had a major impact on education apart from in 2009.

²⁰⁵ calculations provided by Jörgen Lindholm

²⁰⁶ Hur ska lönen ;sättasen attitydundersökning bland lärare, augusti 2004, Lärarförbundet, Stockholm



Partly as a consequence of the financial and economic crisis, but mainly because of demographic factors and decreasing numbers of pupil numbers, two-thirds of municipalities reduced their investment in education in 2009 and there were cuts amounting to Kr. 1 billion or USD 140 million. 1500 teachers were given notice of termination.²⁰⁷

At the March 2010 conference of EI affiliates from the OECD, Eva-Lis Sirén, President of Lärarförbundet highlighted the need to convey a simple message, through simple methods with the campaign slogan 'Don't let the children pay for the crisis!' This managed to reach new groups and supporters, focusing their attention on the need for funding and resources. The Union worked with other NGOs and also corporations to raise awareness of the problems of education during the moment of crisis. The union relied on the mobilization of different strata of society to support continued investment in education is the way out of the crisis – "Everything starts with a good teacher"!

The teaching profession has been losing its status and teacher training courses are only just being filled. Teachers' salaries in Sweden have increased more slowly than in comparable professions²⁰⁸ and are below the OECD average. The only exceptions are in cases where there have been acute shortages of teachers, as in the case of early childhood teachers in Stockholm where there were substantial rises.

In May 2010 and again in September 2012, new collective agreements were signed which sought to address this problem "and why they obviously did not satisfy all the demands from the trade union side, they cannot be described as negative or affected by the crisis".²⁰⁹ However, the two teachers' unions had needed to threaten strike action and the agreement was only reached through mediation.

There is a tradition in Sweden that the wage agreements in the export-based industries are used as a benchmark for other sectors. In 2012, the industry norm was 2.6% but the teachers were finally able to negotiate a new 4- year agreement with an increase of 4.2% backdated to April 2012, which is the highest increase for any sector, plus an agreed increase in 2013 which would at least meet the industry norm. In 2014 and 2015, no fixed percentage raise was negotiated leaving wage increases to be agreed at local level.

One of the union's main focus since the start of the financial crisis has been to carry out a public awareness campaign about the value of education and the role of teachers in ensuring quality education. Lärarförbundet launched the campaigns "*Do not let the children pay for the crisis*" and "*It all starts with a good teacher*", which they consider have

²⁰⁷ Report of EI Conference of Affiliates in the OECD 8-10 March 2010 New York p. 4

²⁰⁸ EIRO: SE12090191 19.10.2012 Elimia Johansson and Hjalmar Eriksson

²⁰⁹ Report to author from Jörgen Lindholm, International Relations Secretary, Lärarförbundet, January 18th 2013

influenced the political leadership of the municipalities and helped reach a successful outcome to the 2012 negotiations.

One of the future challenges remains how to increase the attractiveness of the profession and to create a more positive public debate as to how to raise the quality of education through increasing the salaries and status of the profession. With this in mind, Lärarförbundet have launched a new campaign "Ten thousand Swedish Kroners More".

Education expenditure and GDP growth

| % of government expenditure on education | % GDP spent on education | GDP % Growth |
|--|--------------------------|--------------|
| 2007: | | 2.7 % |
| 2008: 13.1 % | 6.8 % | -0.4 % |
| 2009: 13.2 % | 7.3 % | -5.1 % |
| 2010: - | | 5.5 % |
| 2011 | 5.1 % | 4.0 % |

Source World Bank/IndexMundi

²¹⁰ Education International, *Synthesis Report of Conference for Affiliates in OECD Countries*, New York, 8-10 March 2010 p.4