

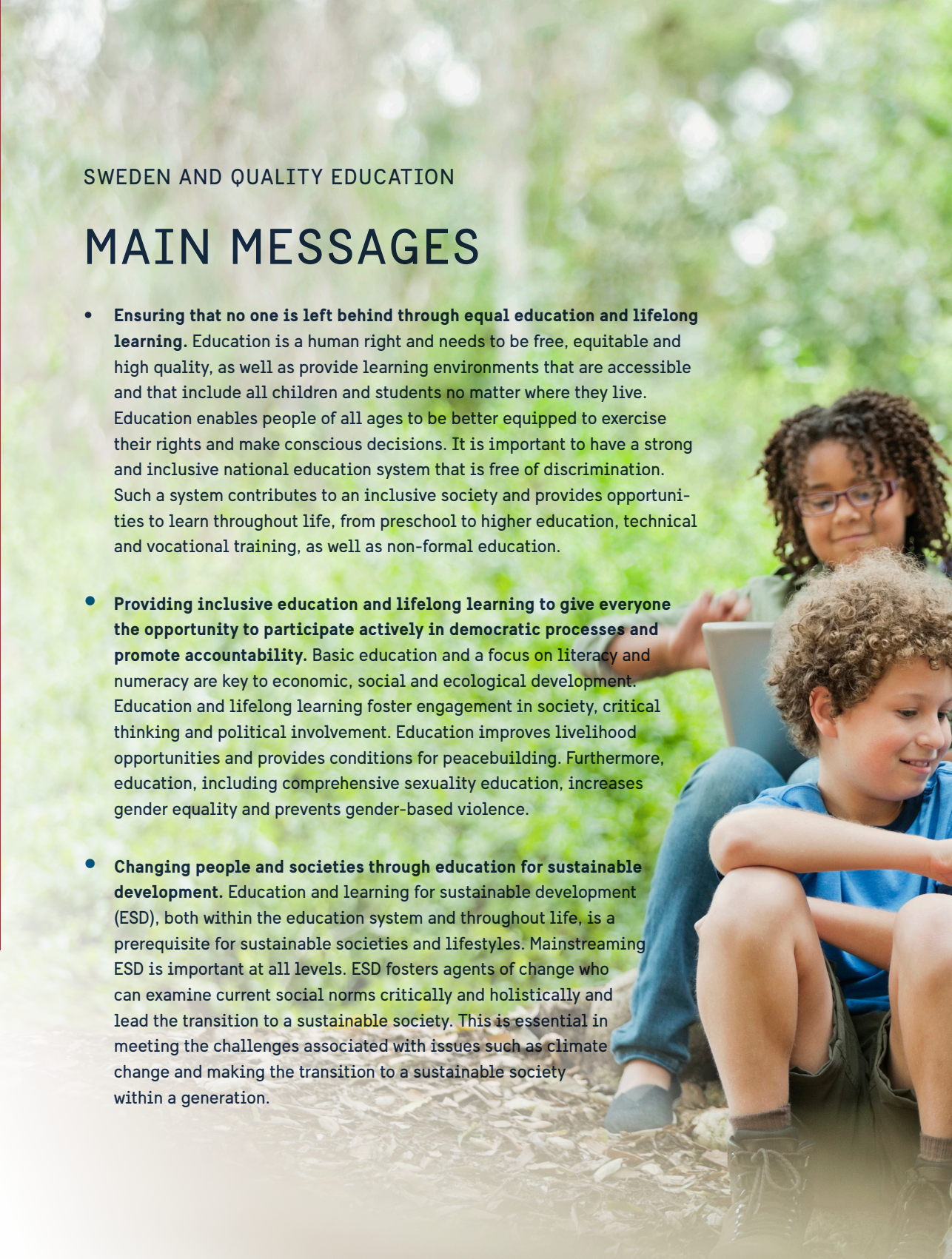
4 QUALITY EDUCATION



SWEDEN AND QUALITY EDUCATION

MAIN MESSAGES

- **Ensuring that no one is left behind through equal education and lifelong learning.** Education is a human right and needs to be free, equitable and high quality, as well as provide learning environments that are accessible and that include all children and students no matter where they live. Education enables people of all ages to be better equipped to exercise their rights and make conscious decisions. It is important to have a strong and inclusive national education system that is free of discrimination. Such a system contributes to an inclusive society and provides opportunities to learn throughout life, from preschool to higher education, technical and vocational training, as well as non-formal education.
- **Providing inclusive education and lifelong learning to give everyone the opportunity to participate actively in democratic processes and promote accountability.** Basic education and a focus on literacy and numeracy are key to economic, social and ecological development. Education and lifelong learning foster engagement in society, critical thinking and political involvement. Education improves livelihood opportunities and provides conditions for peacebuilding. Furthermore, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, increases gender equality and prevents gender-based violence.
- **Changing people and societies through education for sustainable development.** Education and learning for sustainable development (ESD), both within the education system and throughout life, is a prerequisite for sustainable societies and lifestyles. Mainstreaming ESD is important at all levels. ESD fosters agents of change who can examine current social norms critically and holistically and lead the transition to a sustainable society. This is essential in meeting the challenges associated with issues such as climate change and making the transition to a sustainable society within a generation.



SWEDEN ON TARGET FOR SDG 4: EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING ESSENTIAL FOR REDUCING INEQUALITIES

Education is a human right and a cornerstone of democracy, gender equality, equity and the capacity to achieve sustainable development. Knowledge and quality education are essential for broad and inclusive societal engagement, critical thinking and political involvement. The Swedish education system provides access to education for all children, young people and adults throughout life, irrespective of where they live and their socio-economic conditions. In a global perspective, Sweden fulfils most targets but several challenges remain.

Sweden at work nationally

Sweden has a well-developed education system for all children, young people and adults regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age. Primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schooling is free of charge, and primary and lower secondary school education is compulsory. Student aid is available to all. Tertiary educa-

tion is free of charge for national and EU/EEA and Swiss citizens. Scholarships are available to international students. Access to university and technical and vocational training, without an upper age limit, offers a lifelong opportunity for higher education and learning. The level of education in Sweden is high and has increased significantly in recent decades. A total of 41 per cent of the population has at least two years of tertiary education and a third of the population has three years or more of tertiary

education. More than 70 per cent of the adult population participates in some form of education in any given year. A substantial share of the adult population, but also many children and young adults, participates in Swedish liberal non-formal adult education (*folkbildning*). In 2018, more than one million people participated in courses arranged by folk high schools and study associations.

However, to fully implement SDG 4, Sweden needs to address some important challenges, including: a) increasing equity in schooling and combating school segregation to ensure high quality education for everyone, b) increasing the number of qualified teachers and improving the quality of teaching, c) improving learning outcomes, d) ensuring that education and learning environments are inclusive and accessible to all students and responsive to their needs and circumstances, e) widening participation in higher education, and f) increasing the proportion of women professors.

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is a long-term commitment for Sweden and is incorporated into regulations at all levels of the Swedish education system. ESD needs to be comprehensive and include economic, social and ecological aspects as well as pedagogy, didactics and sustainability competencies. The Swedish Government has appointed a national coordinator for ESD in formal, informal and non-formal learning environments. Implementation and evaluation schemes are under way but need to be further developed and scaled up. The work of Swedish higher education institutions in furthering sustainable development has been evaluated and institutions are now working together to highlight contributions and share good practice. More knowledge is needed about schools' ESD efforts.

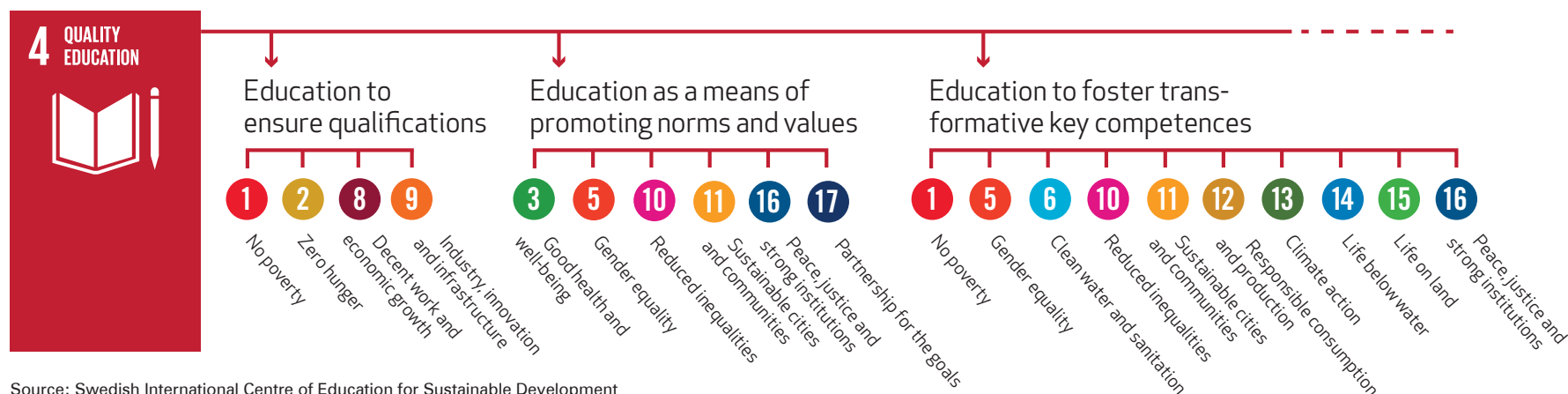
Sweden at work globally

Education is an important area in Swedish development cooperation. Swedish support has contributed to stronger, more effective systems and institutions improving the quality of education in several partner countries. Sweden works to promote equitable and inclusive quality education at all levels for children, young people and adults – regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age – from early childhood and throughout life. Sweden applies a holistic approach to learning, with a focus on strengthening national education systems, including teacher training, at all levels – from preschool, through to primary, secondary and higher education, adult education, technical and vocational training and non-formal education. Free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, completed by all girls and boys, is a priority. Particular attention is also being paid to education in conflict and post-conflict contexts and humanitarian crises – situations in which girls and women are particularly vulnerable.

Sweden's bilateral cooperation includes support to strengthen national education systems in a number of countries including Afghanistan, Cambodia, Tanzania and South Sudan. Sweden also supports UNESCO in its leading role in the implementation of SDG 4. The Swedish Government is a major donor to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and has contributed to national education plans in some 65 of the poorest countries, many in areas of protracted crises. Sweden also provides substantial core support to UNICEF and the World Bank Group, both of which allocate a large share of their funds to education. Support is also provided to the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) programme, which concentrates specifically on protracted

crises situations. Strengthening the empowerment of women and girls is a priority area for the Swedish Government. This is supported, for example, through comprehensive sexuality education programmes, contributing to changing discriminatory gender norms that hinder girls and women from completing their education. Sweden promotes mainstreaming and scaling up ESD action to enhance knowledge and skills related to the three dimensions of sustainability and to climate change, human rights and equality, and to strengthen the work on values and democracy.

Connecting the dots¹



Source: Swedish International Centre of Education for Sustainable Development

Education is both a goal in itself and, as a development multiplier, key to achieving all other SDGs. Access to education is crucial for reducing inequality within and among countries. SDG 4 specifies that what is needed beyond access to education is quality education. In other words, education should not only convey existing knowledge and social norms, but also foster transformative key competencies.²

Education to ensure qualifications

The role of education in ensuring qualifications by conveying existing knowledge contributes to poverty eradication (SDG 1), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), development of resilient sustainable agriculture (SDG 2) and innovative industry and infrastructure (SDG 9).

Education as a means of promoting norms and values

SDG 4 also addresses the role of education in promoting particular sets of norms and values. Education is therefore also crucial to healthy lives and well-being (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5), social and economic equality (SDG 10), norms and attitudes inherent to sustainable inclusive communities and societies (SDGs 11 and 16), as well as to develop and safeguard inclusive, effective and transparent institutions including understand and promote sustainable development policies and practices (SDG 16, 17).

Education to foster transformative key competences

Education enables and empowers people to make their voices heard and recognised, and contributes to inclusion, justice and equality (SDGs 1, 5, 10, 11 and 16). Critical engagement with the present and past is also crucial for ecological sustainability (SDGs 6, 12, 13, 14 and 15) as current lifestyles are unsustainable. Education for sustainable development (SDG 4.7) fosters transformative key competences that are needed to engage with the complex interrelations among the issues addressed by the SDGs.

¹ This section is based on analysis by the Swedish International Centre of Education for Sustainable Development (SWEDES). For more information on their work visit the SWEDES website www.swedesd.uu.se.

² UNESCO. 2015a. Education 2030: Icheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4. Paris: UNESCO. UNESCO. 2015b. Rethinking Education: Towards a Common Good? Paris: UNESCO.



Sweden and empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality

Sweden is well placed to implement the 2030 Agenda. The peaceful and democratic conditions that have long characterised our country, our openness to collaboration and cooperation with others, at home and abroad, strong local self-governance and a dynamic business climate have combined to create a solid foundation for peace, sustainable development and the welfare of our people.

However, Sweden is also working hard to address existing inequalities; it is committed to reducing income disparities, providing equal opportunities for people with disabilities, LGBTI people, minorities and newly arrived immigrants, achieving equity in health services and providing equal opportunities for lifelong learning throughout the country. Segregation and housing affordability are growing challenges in urban areas. Despite explicit feminist policies, women and men in Sweden are still not paid equally for equal work. Sweden still has a great deal of work to do.

To tackle these challenges, new partnerships are being formed and there is a growing awareness of the urgency to act now. Swedish municipalities and regions are committed to sustainable development. Large parts of the Swedish business community see sustainability as a competitive advantage. Sustainability is increasingly being integrated into the core of business models and is driving new innovations. Trade unions are pushing for social dialogue and decent working conditions. Civil

society is paving the way through its own efforts and by pushing decision-makers to act. More than ever before, young people are recognised as key to transformative change, and the large and growing number of older people are actively contributing to society in many different ways. The Swedish research community contributes cutting-edge research on sustainable development. More than 60 Swedish government agencies have signed a joint declaration of intent to implement the 2030 Agenda and are now finding new ways to collaborate to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Sweden's ambition is to be a leader in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Implementation involves a step-by-step approach towards a modern and sustainable welfare state, nationally and as part of the global system. Multilateral cooperation is perhaps more important than ever in the modern era. Sweden's development cooperation focuses specifically on supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development. Sweden's ODA amounts to 1 per cent of its gross national income (GNI). Sweden is active in many different international organisations and international financial institutions and wholeheartedly supports the ambitions for reform and modernisation of the UN system so that its operations contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.



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