

# National report for Sweden

By Cecilia von Feilitzen, interviewed by Leslie Haddon

Contribution to the European report:

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## 1. The Internet

### 1.1 Children's Internet access

All ISPs in Sweden offer firewalls and some, like the largest, Telia, have safety tools, although Tele2 do not.

### 1.2 Findings on children's access to the Internet and online technologies

In Sweden, 89% of 9 to 14 year olds, 92% of 15 to 24 year olds and 93% of 15 to 19 year olds had access to the Internet at home in 2006 (*Nordicom-Sveriges Mediebarometer 2006*).

As for Internet access at school, *IT och skola 2005* reports that in 2005, about 9 out of 10 computers in Swedish schools had Internet access, with an average of 9 students per computer in primary school (grades 5 through 9) and 4 students per computer in secondary school (grade 11). These figures were the same in 2001. The survey does not address the distribution of computers, e.g., if there were some schools with fewer computers.

There is currently no data about Internet availability in other places, but the Internet can be accessed from many places in Sweden, such as libraries, cafés, department stores, food stores, railway stations, etc.

Access to computers at home did not differ between 17 year olds in practical or vocational secondary schools and those in theoretical secondary schools in Stockholm in 2007 (according to von Feilitzen (2007), all students have computers in their homes). However, 10% of children in Sweden do not have home computers: Do these children have poor parents? Are they immigrant girls? Are they school drop-outs? More research is needed to answer these questions.

### 1.3 Findings on children's use of the Internet and online technologies

On an average day in 2006, at any given location in Sweden, the Internet was used by 63% of 9 to 14 year olds, 84% of 15 to 24 year olds, and 86% of 15 to 19 year olds. Of course, these figures fluctuate at different times of the year.

The average time per day spent on the Internet in 2006 was 77 minutes among 9 to 14 year old Internet users, and 132 minutes among their 15 to 24 year old counterparts. The corresponding figures among all Swedish children aged 9 to 14 and 15 to 24 were 43 and 97 minutes, respectively. Distribution figures are also available, e.g., how many children were heavy consumers (*Nordicom-Sveriges Mediebarometer 2006*).

Access to online technologies among boys and girls is the same, however boys are more likely to have a computer of their own or a computer in their bedroom. The percentages of boys and girls who use the Internet every day are also roughly the same, although boys tend to use the Internet for a longer time during an average day than girls (*Nordicom-Sveriges Mediebarometer, 2006; Ungar och medier, 2006*, von Feilitzen (2007)).

von Feilitzen (2007) found that boys have much greater IT skills than girls, and are also making use of technological advantages more often (for example, downloading different things, viewing films, making phone calls, working with homepages, etc.).

#### 1.4 Internet and media content for children

The PSB provides many TV programmes for young children up to about age 9. Beyond this age they provide only some programmes for children because the children start to be interested in adult programmes. Commercial channels provide programmes for children up to 12 years of age. Children can see kid's programmes on TV4, the commercial public broadcaster (i.e. it has adverts). Children can also watch some soap operas and drama series with young characters which are transmitted from the UK.

The Public Broadcaster also provides broad online content for children, but there are no figures showing which sites children visit most often. There are many other commercial sites for children, such as Disney, Barbie in Swedish, Facebook, YouTube, My Space, and several Swedish ones.

The Consumer Council, academics and the press are debating the consequences of the commercialisation of childhood. Our research, conducted on focus groups of 17 year olds and 45 to 55 year olds, contained many questions on advertising and consumer society. Our findings suggest that the public itself is not very concerned about these effects.

Younger and younger children are being targeted by the commercial media. However, there is a law in Sweden which prohibits advertisers from targeting those younger than 12. Many adverts aimed at younger children can be found on the UK channels shown in Sweden and on the Internet, but they are not on Swedish TV and Swedish websites.

#### 1.5 Opportunities experienced by children online

Children mainly use the Internet for social networking with friends (both old and new, as well as distant ones) and entertainment, games and fun. As they get older, children use the Internet to find like-minded people, to listen to music and to find many kinds of information. This includes information for schoolwork, as well as 'societal information' related to entertainment and practical things. Often what kids and adults define as 'information' differs.

Parents and other adults generally believe that the Internet mainly provides informative and educational opportunities for children. They often fail to understand how children can amuse themselves and socialise so much on the Internet. (These statements are a summary from several sources.)

Research about Internet uses from an adult perspective suggests that as children grow older they employ a wider range of online technologies. *Nordicom-Sveriges Mediebarometer 2006*, for example, shows that the use of various Internet applications like emailing, search engines, online newspapers, chatting sites, online banking and games, is more varied among 15 to 24 year olds than among 9 to 14 year olds. However, research which is from the children's perspective and takes into account the fact that younger children are active for shorter periods of time might produce different findings.

Boys use the Internet more frequently and for longer intervals for leisure than girls, although both genders use the Internet for studies to roughly the same extent. Boys display much greater IT skills, which lead them to download music, films, games and data programmes and use the computer to watch movies, play games, shop, make phone calls and work with homepages much more than girls. As for online information searches, the most pronounced gender difference is boys' inclination to search for erotic content (von Feilitzen, 2007).

17 year olds in practical/vocational secondary schools and those in theoretical secondary schools in Stockholm used the Internet for the same amount of time in 2007. Both groups used a variety of online functions, including social, entertainment, and practical or informative

websites. However, 'practical' pupils were more inclined to play computer games, while 'theoretical' pupils showed a greater inclination to use scientific and political information on the Internet (von Feilitzen, 2007).

## 1.6 Risks experienced by children online

It is difficult to determine the risks children encounter online due to the lack of prior research. However, there is evidence that parents are much more fearful than children about the risk that children will see sexuality and pornography on the Internet and that children would meet unknown strangers from the Internet in real life (*Barnens eget liv på nätet, 2003; Ungar och medier 2006.*).

The SAFT 2003 reports that:

- Among 9 to 16 year olds who chatted on the Internet, 36% had been invited to a face-to-face meeting and 26% had met someone in real life that they first met on the Internet.
- Among 9 to 16 year old Internet users, 32% had received unwanted sexual comments at least once and 13% had received such comments more than 5 times.
- Among 9 to 16 year olds who use the Internet, 26% had accidentally ended up on a website with violent and gruesome pictures.

The Eurobarometer survey from 2005-2006 found that 44% of parents/guardians think that their child has ever encountered harmful or illegal content on the Internet

## 1.7 Internet regulation and promotion

The Swedish government plays a very small role in regulating the Internet. It polices illegal content and has a special police unit devoted to child pornography. In general, if something is forbidden in society it is also forbidden on the Internet, but overall there are few special laws relating to the Internet. The one exception is legislation from 2006 related to downloading and file-sharing music; this became illegal when music shops began closing, and there was a case where a youth was prosecuted for illegal downloading.

There is currently no public discourse comparing what is illegal and what is harmful. Some debates exist about what could be harmful for children, although Sweden tends to take its lead from the EC. There was a heated debate in autumn 2008 in one of Sweden's largest newspapers about how Internet violence was connected to hardcore porn. Boys were sending hardcore pornography links to each other. There have also been discussions about young teenagers socialising in Internet communities where users judge how attractive their peers are, often posting semi-naked pictures of themselves. The problem is that these teenagers may not fully appreciate that these images are now in the public domain, which has led to discussions about teenagers' awareness of Internet privacy. In general, children have to be careful about what they do online since their actions may have consequences later, like preventing them from getting a job.

There is a major discussion of cyber-bullying since many children are bullied online, and new research on this from a Masters thesis is forthcoming.

Some existing laws in Sweden are not taken seriously, and when authorities try to enforce them they often fail. For example, the producers of a very violent and racist computer game were taken to court by a senior legal authority, but nothing happened. Video and online games have classifications which are organised by the industry, but these are only advice. Sweden does not have a regulator like OfCom in the UK.

a) There was a major effort to get IT into schools at the end of 80s and the beginning of the 90s. The ITIS (IT in Schools) initiative aimed to train all teachers in IT so that they could use it in lessons. In the 90s this was extended to include the Internet as well.

b) This task was given to the Media Council, which provides advice, brochures, leaflets and runs a website. The Media Council also has a campaign called 'Young Internet', which sends

staff to many regions in Sweden to run seminars. In general there is a heavier focus on encouraging enlightenment and awareness than on regulation. Even the US regulates more than Sweden, which is a change from the past when Sweden had a reputation as a highly regulated country. This may be explained by changes in government; the Social Democrats were in power for a long time before a right-wing government came to power for a period in the 70s and started to abolish regulations. From the 80s onwards there was less and less regulation in relation to consumers and media usage, and a new liberal view emerged which remained when the Social Democrats regained power. This may also reflect new liberal thinking throughout Europe.

c) Media literacy has been on the agenda since the 1960s. In 2000 the new school curriculum made media education compulsory. The meaning of the term 'media text' has also been expanded to cover drama, pictures, audio, etc. However, media only exists as a part of other subjects such as English and History, which means that no one feels responsible for teaching this material. There may be many individual teachers who are enthusiastic, but overall the teaching of media literacy is uneven and receives no overall support. Only a few teacher training courses have media education modules, and these are usually optional. Often middle-class teachers find it difficult to talk about popular culture because it involves a different form of cultural capital.

A survey in the 1970s which asked schoolchildren if they had ever discussed the media in school got very different results when it was repeated in the 1990s; the findings suggest that there was actually more media literacy in the 1970s.

## 1.8 Parental mediation

The figures below are the parents' answers from *Ungar och medier 2006*:

- 80% of parents of 9 to 16 year olds have rules about what children can do online and how long they can use the Internet.
- 80% of parents of 9 to 16 year olds talk about what their child does on the Internet. 30 to 40% do so often, 30 to 40% do so sometimes and 10 to 15% discuss this occasionally.
- 60% of parents are with their child when he or she uses the Internet at least once a month, compared to the 10% of parents who are with children every day and 40% at least once a week.

Parental mediation is slightly lower between the 9 to 12 and 13 to 16 year old age groups, according to the parents' answers as reported in *Ungar och medier, 2006*. The differences are bigger when looking at the children's answers.

## 1.9 Media literacy

Several questions have been posed to children aged 9 to 16 and 13 to 16 in various studies. (The following examples are all from *Ungar och medier, 2006*.):

In 2006, 9 to 16 year olds were asked if they have experienced bullying on the Internet. 16% answered yes (more 13 to 16 year olds than 9 to 12 year olds, and more girls than boys). In the same year, 13 to 16 year olds were asked if anyone on the Internet had engaged in talk about sex against their will. 15% answered yes (many more girls than boys). In 2006 13 to 16 year olds were also asked if they have come into contact with sex and porn sites on the Internet. 37% answered yes (many more boys than girls). Those who answered yes were also asked how they experienced it, with fixed multiple choice responses. The answers here are difficult to interpret because the original question does not specify whether the encounter with these sites is intentional or inadvertent, and furthermore since the respondents were allowed to mark several response alternatives. However, at least one quarter of the 37% who answered yes found the sites disgusting (many more girls than boys).

The same study also asked if the teenagers had made a date with anyone in real life whom they had previously only contacted via the Internet. 9% answered yes, with more heavy Internet consumers responding affirmatively than light consumers. 11% answered yes to a

similar question about Internet chat sites in the same questionnaire. Most often those who went to a real life meeting brought a peer along, but a small percentage said they went alone. Most respondents found that that the meeting was fun, or that nothing in particular happened. None chose the response: "the person I met said mean things to me" and "the person I met tried to do me harm".

Questions about coping strategies are not related to the aforementioned questions, but are more general, asking for example if a child talks with his or her parents about Internet use or what rules the parents have for the child's Internet access.

The EB 2007 focus groups of children aged 9 to 14 have shown that:

- In all group categories there is a sense of what is right and what is wrong concerning Internet use. Even if the awareness of actual risks is relatively low there is an awareness of the fact that things might happen.
- This does not, however, affect behaviour in any notable way.
- Children with a strong sense of self-awareness and self-esteem do not experience any real risks. Children who might be at greater risk are those with low self-esteem looking for confirmation and support or children with a weaker social network.

Eurobarometer 2005-2006 shows that 64% of parents/guardians think their child knows what to do if uncomfortable online, while 31% think they do not.

#### 1.10 Factors shaping public discourses about the Internet

In contrast with the UK, the media are more likely to call a researcher or an expert than an NGO if they want some further comment for their news story.

BRIS (Child's Rights in Society) has a popular general Helpline where children can talk about all their problems. Save the Children had a hotline for several years where people could report on 'bad' things from the Internet, but the organisation did not have the resources to maintain it. Its website now says that if people find something with illegal content they can report it to the police; if they find paedophilic material, they should call the European organisation ECPAT. Closing this hotline is perhaps indicative that they are not very worried about Internet dangers.

There have been media discourses about sex and paedophilia, online violence, stranger danger, and increasingly about cyber bullying and giving out personal information.

## 2 The Educational system

### 2.1 General education

The literacy rate is generally high in Sweden, and almost everyone can read.

In 2004 we conducted a study about animated programmes that addressed parents of 4 to 11 year olds; 9% had the basic 9 years of compulsory primary school, 46% had 10 to 12 years, or the equivalent of secondary school, 19% had at least started university or college (meaning 13+ years of education) and 26% had some exam from a university. Therefore, about 25% had higher education about 10% had lower level education. The Social Democrats' goal is to send 50% of people to university.

My generation, now in their 60s, experienced the most significant change by moving from a more elitist education system where pupils could end primary school after 4 or 5 years and where 10% of people went to university. Mass education had already grown in popularity at the beginning of the 50s. Hence there is a larger gap between the older population and their parents than there is between younger parents and their children.

Until recently, secondary schools were more theoretically orientated. Now students can study a range of more practical subjects such as learning the skills for becoming a motor mechanic or an electrician. These used to be taught in vocational school but are now available in secondary school.

## 2.2 Education and the Internet

When comparative data was last collected in 2000, Sweden and other Nordic countries ranked high in Europe in terms of percentages of computers connected to the Internet in schools attended by pupils aged 15 and up.<sup>1</sup> Most schools now have broadband, and in homes there is 60% penetration.

## 3 Wider society

### 3.1 Social change

- a) One of the most significant and rapid social changes in Sweden occurred in the 70s when women started to go out to work; by end of the 70s the majority of women were employed. At the same time, more children were put in pre-schools.
- b) Sweden has been very enthusiastic about the Information Society, and the former Prime minister declared that Sweden needs to be a leading country.
- c) There is no discourse about Sweden being 'left behind'.

When the Social Democrats were in power for a long period Swedish society was more homogeneous and people did not talk so much about class. The work ethic was that everyone should have the same salary for the same work. In the 70s this changed with the implementation of a right-wing government, and there was a continuously changing climate throughout the 80s and 90s. Everyone now pays more attention to the market and must negotiate individual salaries for themselves, which has led to a larger income divide. Directors and chiefs and private businesses have high salaries, whereas female nurses, for example receive low wages. Immigrants often find it difficult to get good jobs in relation to the level of education from their own country, frequently occupying ghettos in the suburbs and not speaking fluent Swedish.

Most children live in cities and towns. Industrialisation came 100 years later in Sweden than the UK (in the 1800s). By the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a majority of the population was still living in rural areas, but many had moved to towns. Throughout the 1900s there was a successive decline in the rural population and only a minority worked in agriculture after World War II. About 5% of the population currently works in agriculture.

The problem with these numbers is that the government has reclassified people. There are fewer manual workers than in the past, but statistics on class lump low status service jobs together with manual labourers. Thus, we can say that 50% of the population is 'working class'.

Sweden has long been one of the most tolerant countries, allowing more immigrants and refugees to enter than Norway, Finland and Denmark. There have been successive waves of immigrants, with refugees from the Baltic States after WWII, in the 60s from Greece and Turkey and in the 80s from Asia and Latin America. Perhaps 15% of the adult population is either first or second generation Swedish, and this could rise to 25% among children.

New data about attitudes to immigrants shows that about half of Swedish people think that Sweden should not allow so many immigrants and refugees. The other half, comprising those with higher education, people from big cities and young people, are more positive and more tolerant. The Lapps form an older minority group.

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<sup>1</sup> Eurydice, 2004

### 3.2 Role of the state

On the whole there is a high level of free speech. When countries are compared in this respect, Sweden usually finishes high on the list. However, self-censorship is an issue, meaning that some issues may not be raised.

## 4. Other factors affecting children's online experiences

Children start learning English as a second language when they are 10 years old, so many people can speak fluent English. Swedish people tend to be anglophiles, which is perhaps less true of older Swedes.

There is a 'bedroom culture' in Sweden. In the 1950s many families lived in small spaces and therefore children went out. From the 70s onwards much larger apartments were built so that children also had more indoor space. There was no widespread fear among parents that it was dangerous to go out. Parents tend to ferry their children around in the car to sports centres, but this is because of the impracticality of children travelling to these places and not because it is viewed as dangerous.

Children have a good deal of technology in their homes. Items like PCs are not bought to occupy or entertain them, but because everyone has this technology and it is considered good for the child. As parents buy more and more equipment they often give older versions, like the old TV set, to their children. More than 90% of households with 9 to 14 year olds have at least 2 TV sets.

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