

# Swedish framework on service users' participation in social work practice and education

This paper provides an overview of the national legislation concerning participation of service users in Swedish social work practice and social work education.

## 1. Participation of service users – national legislation and social services

Focusing on participation of service users this chapter describes the Swedish Act of Government, the social service system, the governmental body directing and following up the public welfare administration, the legislation that regulation social services and social work. This chapter ends with a short passage form the governmental proposal for a new Social Service Act.

### Act of Government

In the Swedish Act of Government, *regeringsformen* (SFS 1974:152) describes how the country is to be governed, what rights the citizens have and how the public power is to be distributed. All public power in Sweden is based on democracy and this is clearly defined in the first articles in Chapter I of the Swedish Act of Government:

All powers are based on the will of the people.

Besides democracy do the Swedish Act of Government rests on the fundamental values of equality, solidarity, and security. The second article in Chapter 1 states the following:

All public powers shall be exercised based on respect for the equal value of each individual and on the freedom and dignity of everyone. The society shall promote participation and equality for all, and the rights of the child. The society shall eradicate discrimination on grounds of sex, colour, national or ethnic origin, lingual or religious identity, disability, sexual orientation, age, or other individual circumstances. (...)

This paragraph is also addressing participation for all citizens.

### The Swedish social insurance system

Sweden is generally described as a universal welfare state. With a system of benefits and services corresponding to citizens' need in all ages. The Swedish welfare system is financed by the tax system (Esping-Andersen, 1990). In Sweden, social insurance is individually based and includes both universal and income-related benefits. Universal benefits are paid to everyone independent of economic conditions. Universal benefits include for example, child allowance and guarantee pension. Income-related benefits compensate the loss of income when individuals are unable to support themselves. Means tested benefits include housing allowance maintenance support (Government offices of Sweden, 2016).

Rights for income- and means-related benefits are based on residence and employment in Sweden. (Government offices of Sweden, 2016). The Social Services Act (SFS 2001:453) is the ultimate safety net in the society. This law regulates support given to individuals who have no possibilities to provide for their own needs.

Official governmental reports in the field of welfare have highlighted the importance of service user involvement since 1991 when the first governmental report on service user's involvement was published (Eriksson 2018a). Service user's involvement is also clearly addressed within laws and guidelines framing social work.

### **The National Board of Health and Welfare**

The National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) is the government's body for directing and following up the public welfare administration. The National Board of Health and Welfare can therefore, through its publications, state a more precise direction for how the country's welfare organizations should act (Socialstyrelsen, 2013).

National Board of Health and Welfare (2013) highlights six arguments for working with service user influence (1) democratization, (2) legitimacy, (3) efficiency, (4) equalization of power, (5) increased quality and (6) strengthened position for the individual.

### **Social services and the Social Service Act**

Social services are municipal social authorities that provide various support and services to citizens in order to combat poverty and social inequalities. Social services are

primarily regulated by the Social Services Act (SFS 2001:453) in Swedish Socialtjänstlagen shortened to SoL. Professional social workers work within the social services, within the juvenile system, in schools, at hospitals, in treatment centers or in different NGOs. The Social Services Act frame the work done by social worker in all these professional settings.

Social services rests on the values of democracy, equality, solidarity, and security and is utterly about combating poverty and social injustice through self-help (Denvall et al. 2016). In Sweden are social work organized in order to facilitate help for self-help. In the portal section of The Social Services Act (SFS 2001: 453) are the help for self-help dimension and focus on freeing individuals and groups' own resources, to promote an independent life clearly described.

The portal paragraph of the Social Service Act (SFS 2001:453) define the objectives of the social services as follows in Chapter 1, Article 1:

Public social services shall, on the basis of democracy and solidarity promote individuals

- economic and social security
- equal living conditions, and
- active participation in the life of the community

With due consideration for responsibility for the individual for his or her own social situation and that of others, social services shall be aimed at liberating and developing own resources among individuals and groups.

Activities shall be based on respect for individual's self-determination and privacy. ( 1:1 SoL)

Participation of service users is evident in this overarching and inclusive law text that governs the implementation of social work in Sweden. The support must be designed so that it strengthens individuals' opportunities to live an independent life, according to the Social Services Act chapter 1 and 1§ (SFS 2001:453).

Anyone who is unable to meet their own needs is entitled to support services in order to ensure a reasonable standard of living. The first section in chapter 4 of SoL concerns entitlements of services:

Persons unable to provide for their needs or to obtain provision for them in any other way are entitled to assistance from the social welfare committee towards their livelihood (livelihood support) and for their living in general.

Through the assistance, the individual shall be assured of reasonable standard of living.

The assistance shall be designed in such a way as to strengthen his or her resources for independent living (4:1 SoL)

The rights to support have restrictions. In the first instance individuals must support themselves or obtain support from their families. It is when individuals have no possibilities to provide for their needs, by themselves or based on support from their family, due to unemployment, disability, illness, work-related injuries, old age, or other valid reasons that they are entitled to support.

Social services assess and distributes support provided by the Swedish public social service insurance (socialförsäkringen) to individuals and families unable to provide for their own needs.

The Social Service Act is providing laws around responsibilities for municipalities and different sorts of social authorities that governs the work done by social services.

Although the SoL applies to all Swedish citizens, it is also focused on special provisions for certain groups. Chapter 5 - Special provisions for different groups, provide laws governing social services for 7 groups of individuals: 1) children and young persons, 2) older persons, 3) persons with impairments, 4) substance users, 5) persons giving care or support to close kin, 6) victims of crime, 7) indebted persons.

### **A new The Social Service Act - the state's public inquiry**

A proposal of a new Social Service Act (SOU 2020:47) is out for consultation. This proposal explicate participation for service user in a stronger sense than the present Social Service Act (SFS 2001:453). In Chapter 14 of the state's public inquiry (SOU 2020:47) - A knowledge-based social service is the following relationship between professionals and service users proposed:

Service user participation in evidence-based practice means that the professional and the individual create something together, instead of that the professional do something with or for the service user. The role of the professional is among other things to contribute with knowledge about interventions and treatment methods, explain their advantages and disadvantages and encourage the individual to take an active part in decisions about interventions. The person concerned contributes with their experiences of living with the problems and describes their needs, values, and wishes. In this way are the person involved and their motivation increased. The professionals can in addition to this also generate knowledge by systematically following up how it goes for the individuals.

The proposal indicates forthcoming changes in how service user's participation is addressed in social work practice in Sweden.

## 2. Participation of service users –national training regulations

This chapter account for national and local training regulations in social work education indicating participation of service users.

**National Intentional Learning Goals (ILO)** National regulations for social work education are stated in the The Higher Education Ordinance (högskoleförordningen) (SFS 1993:100). The following National Intentional Learning Goals indicating participation for service users:

- Knowledge and understanding demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the interplay between individuals and groups of individuals social situation, living conditions, physical and mental health, and functional ability in relation to societal and other underlying factors.

### *Skills and abilities*

- demonstrate the skills and abilities required to develop and carry out social work at different levels of society in the cooperation with the people concerned (service users).
- demonstrate abilities to identify, structure, investigate, and evaluate services (insatser) on the individual, group, and societal level.

### *Judgement and approach*

- Demonstrate the ability to take a holistic view of human action and the basis of relevant scientific, social, and ethical aspects, with particular regard to human rights.

### **ILOs for the social work education at Jönköping University**

The social work program at Jönköping University is also having a local goal explicating participation for service users.

### *Local goals for education in Social Work at JU (2020)*

- Demonstrate the ability to see welfare interventions in a global and intercultural perspective, and the ability to perform welfare work that includes people and that counteracts exclusionary conditions.