Sweden - country profile

1 General background and who’s who. A 2030 Agenda Expert Network had been created but the Swedish Library Association showed no interest in leading/organising the SDG network. Nevertheless, interest remains and the need for coordination is sheer. Green library objectives are an important part of the library agenda towards the attainment of SDGs; nevertheless, there is a need to concentrate on social and economic sustainability in addition to environmental sustainability, since the three aspects are intertwined. The situation in libraries mirrors the national HLPF review, which tends to focus on the environmental pillar rather than the socio-economic pillar. It is a fact that a consistent part of Swedish libraries is acting in a convincing and active way; nevertheless, in some of them activities are still lagging behind.

2 SDG priorities and policies in Swedish libraries
It is more than likely that SDG-oriented projects should focus on:
— Debates on SDGs with citizens,
— Projects in co-creation with partners/citizens (digital inclusion; digital citizenship),
— Pursuing green library objectives (such as energy saving infrastructure, waste management, SDG policy with staff).

A quick glance at the orientation of SDG-oriented projects in Sweden would show that the following SDGs are preferred:

- SDG 4. Quality Education: Inclusive education to enable upward social mobility and end poverty,
- SDG 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities: Making cities safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable,
- SDG 12. Responsible Consumption and Production: Reversing current consumption trends and promoting a more sustainable future,
- SDG 16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: Inclusive societies, strong institutions and equal access to justice.

3 SDG-oriented projects

1. Library’s Digital Centre closes the digital gap for elderly citizens (SDG 4, 9, 10, 11, 17).
Digitisation is no longer a new phenomenon in Sweden and the pace of social transformation is increasing with each passing year. Since 2017, through their Digitalisation Strategy, the Swedish Government has been working to become the world’s leader at creating opportunities through digitisation. One of the five main pillars of the Strategy is to ensure everyone is offered the opportunity to improve digital competencies.

An annual survey of the internet habits of Swedish people reveals that as many as 95% of Swedes use the Internet, 9 out of 10 own a smartphone, and more than 90% have a computer at home. Digital exclusion is diminishing but is still significant, with about a million Swedes living with limited access. Exclusion is particularly clear when analysing the use of public digital services, such as e-services in health care or tax authorities. The elderly are one of the main vulnerable groups who are at risk of digital exclusion.

Within Helsingborg, a city in the south west of Sweden, the Helsingborg Public Library is working intensively to bridge the digital divide among its 150,000 inhabitants. The library provides access to digital information and technology on site, as well as supervision and training by the library staff.

1 https://librarymap.ifla.org/stories/sdg/0/Country/Sweden
In 2018, as the result of collaboration with the Helsingborg Digitalisation Department, the library opened its Digital Centre, equipped with trained staff and technology such as computers, scanners, printers, and tablets. Serving approximately 200 visitors per day, the Centre is located on the library’s premises and keeps the same service hours. In collaboration with the Helsingborg Healthcare Department, the Centre’s staff also works off-site to reach the elderly at senior citizens’ meeting points, such as recreational facilities, pop-up events and the library’s bus, among others.

The Library’s staff explained what drove the Centre’s creation: “Simply providing access to ICT and broadband is not sufficient to close the digital gap. Instead, citizens need access to a place where tools are located as well as hands-on training, such as using a computer and other tools, surfing the internet, and accessing online public services. Access to the Digital Centre helps increase digital literacy of this and other target groups and creates stronger civic engagement by involving citizens in the co-creation of new services. As part of the collaboration with HBG Works Innovation Hub, our Centre also functions as a test site for new digital services developed by the municipality. While our primary target groups are senior citizens, those with a migrant background, children, and young adults, we are open to all groups.”

Programme evaluation results show that a major portion of the Centre’s users are becoming increasingly self-sufficient when it comes to the use of technology and digital services. The value of the Digital Centre’s services is especially high among seniors. A 70-year-old user shared her experience: “As a senior citizen it is harder to be updated when it comes to all things digital. The Digital Centre at the Library is perfect for me and I can easily get the help I need.”

While the Library’s Digital Centre did not close during the pandemic, in addition to regular services it began offering digital courses like Talk Digital, covering content on a variety of topics and skill levels. In 2020, a national survey revealed that during the COVID-19 pandemic older people in particular started using digital services more frequently than before, or tried them for the first time. Elderly people have also used digital healthcare services more during the pandemic with 7 out of 10 accessing a digital health care service.

The library’s Digital Centre has contributed to an increased use of digital tools and expanded the possibilities of the internet and technical upskilling among elderly people in Helsingborg.

**4 Funding sources and evaluation.** Normally, SDG-oriented activities would be funded by the cultural departments of national and local agencies. It should be also evaluated whether the setting up of complex projects being funded through EU resources would be a challenge worth undertaking by small public libraries.

Evaluation is carried out only in case of additional funding provided to libraries and is meeting the criteria set up by the funding agency/institution. Other kinds of SDG indicators may be difficult to apply because they are not connected with library activities.