



School Meals in Sweden

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Sweden - general facts

Population: 9 million

Immigrants: 10 %

Language: Swedish

Family structure: >80 % of women work outside their home

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Sweden is the fifth largest country in Europe, but the population is small, about 9 million people, and one fifth are immigrants in other words, every 20th person

More than 80 % of women with children under 7 years of age, also work outside of their home and the great majority (78%) of children under 17 live with both parents.


Compulsory School

9 years
7-16 years olds

The school year is divided into two terms

Most schools are municipal
4 % are independent schools

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Compulsory schooling last for 9 years and is divided into nine grades for children between the ages of 7-16 years,

The children usually start school in the autumn, the year of their 7th birthday if the parents so wish, a child may start one year earlier

The school year is divided into two terms, autumn and spring, with about 178 school days. The autumn term lasts from the middle of August to the middle of December, and the spring term from the beginning of January to the beginning of June.

Most schools in Sweden are run by the local authorities and only 4 % are independent schools.

Compulsory School

Textbooks, school lunches
and school transports are free of charge

The local authorities are
responsible for the school

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Instruction, teaching material, school lunches and school transports are free of charge at all levels of the regular school system.

The State defines the overarching goals and guidelines for school activities, and the local authorities are responsible for putting them into effect. However, compulsory school can be organized in various ways.

98 % of compulsory school leavers go on to the 3-year upper secondary school, which offers both academic and vocational programmes.

History

1842 Malnutrition; school meals funded by charity

1937 Support from the government
to school meals service

1945 Advice that school meals should
provide a third of daily requirement

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In an international perspective Sweden together with Finland are quite unique with free school meals and providing meals to schoolchildren has a long history in Sweden and I would like to give you a short background.

In 1842 the compulsory elementary school was introduced. At that time Sweden was a poor country and malnutrition was a major public health problem. This was also an important reason why a large part of the population emigrated to America. In Sweden, meals were served to the poorest schoolchildren and this was usually funded and organized by charity organizations.

In 1937 the government was concerned that many children were poorly nourished and started to give some financial support to school meals services, however, the support was modest, and the service was only slowly developed

In 1945 advice was given from the government that a school meal should provide one third of the total daily calorie requirements

History

1946 Regular support from the government

1973 All schools in Sweden provide meals to all pupils

1998 New law - school must offer free meals in compulsory school

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In 1946, support from the government was introduced on a more regular basis and to a larger extent. The service then increased at a faster pace, but it was not until 1973 that all schools finally provided meals every day to all pupils


In the beginning of the 1990's some local authorities suffering from bad economy, started to charge for the school lunch. There was a political reaction and as a consequence, every local authority are since 1998 by law obliged to serve free meals in compulsory schools.

However, they do have the freedom to set a tariff for the lunches in upper secondary schools (age 17-19) and nowadays about 27 of total 290 local authorities are doing that. It cost between £15-£75 per term and per pupil.

In 2001, Sweden adopted specified Guidelines for school meals and I'm soon going to tell you more about it. Apart from nutritional recommendations, advice and guidelines have also been produced during the years regarding kitchen planning, production control, cooking methods, storage, temperature etc.

Today

5 500 schools serve meals
1,2 million pupils
175 schooldays per year
Food ingredients cost 50p to £1.0 per meal


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The schools and local authorities have a shared responsibility to provide school lunches. The budget for school meals are in reality handled by the school headmaster by delegation.

Over 5500 schools across the country serve school lunches 175 days per year to about 1,2 million pupils between the ages of 7 to 19 years

The majority of the local authorities run their own school catering service, but over the last ten years it has been more and more common with private catering contractor

95% of the staff are females and most of them work part-time. Compare to UK we can't employ any less than 4 hrs. And as well as in the UK we do have problems to find staff.

The food cost for the ingredients in a Swedish school lunch is on average 60p, with a range from 50p to £ 1.0 per meal. However, a limited budget does not automatically mean lower quality. In many schools the foodservice staff are cooking magicians meals. The total cost is approximated to £ 270 per pupil and per year

Catering service

6 out of 10 primary and secondary schools
do not have a kitchen

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6 out of 10 primary and secondary schools do not have a kitchen in which to prepare meals the food would then be cooked at another schools' central kitchen, packaged into containers and most of the time distributed hot. However, we do not transport potatoes, rice, pasta and vegetables.

For example, our regulations do not allow us to keep the potatoes hot for more than one hour.

All experience also indicates that a kitchen for preparing food results in higher quality, and that is not more expensive and the pupils eat with greater appetite.

The guidelines for school meals

Recommendations about energy and nutrients

Two choices of a prepared hot main course

Buffé of vegetables

Low-fat milk and water

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The Guidelines for School Meals are developed by the Swedish Food Administration and contain dietary recommendations about the amount of energy and nutrients in a lunch for different age groups. They also contain factors to consider when planning a meal. A school lunch should consist of: a prepared hot main course, bread with low-fat margarine, a buffé of vegetables, It is also emphasized that a main course can include a vegetarian option and of course are vegetarian, multi-cultural and special dietary items available for those who require it

Low-fat milk and water and no other drinks should be served on a regular basis. Orange juice may be served occasionally. The most common type of milk, is the one with 1,5% of fat, because the European Union subsidizes that milk higher than the low-fat milk 0,5 % of fat Organic milk is getting more and more popular, together with organic potatoes, carrots and white cabbage.

The guidelines pay attention to organic foods, but point out that research shows no nutritional differences between organic and conventional grown foods. To serve organic foods cost a little bit more.

The guidelines for school meals

Bread with low-fat margarine

Portion sizes

Plate model

Nice and pleasant environment

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Recommended portion sizes are given. For example the goal is that each pupil consumes 125 grams of fruit and vegetables and one slice of bread for lunch. It is common to start the servery with fresh vegetables to encourage the pupils to eat more.

It is also suggested that at least two different prepared hot main courses are provided, so that pupils can choose what they like the best.

The plate model should serve as help for healthy eating. It shows the amounts of food pupils are wise to put on their plate and eat each day.

The lunch should be served in the middle of the day, and that means not earlier than 11.00 a clock.

Pupils should also be given enough time and space to eat meals in a nice and pleasant environment.

Putting into practice

Quality of school lunches varies

The guidelines are not compulsory

To offer free school lunch is mandatory

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Now, all this sounds very good.

However, we do know that quality of school lunches can vary a lot between different local authorities as well differ from school to school. And the situation is that even if most schools say that they are aware of the guidelines and that they follow them to some extent. It is not compulsory to do that. Now it is only mandatory to offer a free school lunch, whatever the quality of it may be and that is of course a problem.

Especially, when half of Sweden's 290 local authorities also lack a nutritional policy objective for school meals.

When the local authorities are forced to make savings, the provision of school meals is often threatened, as it is not considered to have higher priority than costs for teaching.

The School Restaurant

Noisy, messy and stressful

There is a queue

Not enough time to eat

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The pupils often complain about the environment in the school restaurant. That it is noisy, messy and stressful because the lunch break is short and most of the time they have to wait in line to get the food. There is not enough of time to eat and enjoy the meal.

So do they eat their school lunch or ship it? Consumption studies show that 85% of all pupils eat something every day, but most of them eat just 70% of the nutritional requirements.

The amount of school food produced is based on the fact that one out of five pupils skips school lunch every day. Therefore the situation sometimes arises that there is not enough food to go around when popular meals are offered. Such serving may be pizza, hamburgers, kebab, pasta and boiled rice pudding. I would say dishes that seems to be very popular here too.

Drinks?

95% of schools serve milk for lunch every day

The pupils drink 0.18 litre milk on average

The milk consumption is lower if squash
and juice are served as well

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What about drinks then?

95 % of all schools serve milk for lunch every day, mostly from a milk bar. On average the pupils drink 0.18 liters i.e. less than a glass. In schools where squash and juice are served, the milk consumption is even lower

In a recent project three types of milk 0,5%, 1,5%, 3% were introduced to the pupils to chose between. The milk was also properly chilled. The result was that the pupils drank less squash/juice and even less water.

New and more appetizing glasses also raised the consumption of milk. No soft drinks or such as coca cola are ever never served for lunch.

It is therefore obvious that changes in consumption can be altered by small means and that several other improvements may be attacked in a similar manner.



This is the logo for the School Meals Supporters.

The School Meals Supporters want to improve and safeguard school meals.

The School Meals Supporters were established in the autumn of 2000

The project is led by a steering group with representatives from the Swedish National Farmers' Union and farmer-owned food companies

Vision

Give pupils a pleasurable interest in good food

Ensure that pupils get good food at school,
so that good eating habits are encouraged and the pupils obtain
sound knowledge about food and how it is produced

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The School Meals Supporters vision is to give pupils a pleasurable interest in good food and to work to ensure that they get good food at school.

So that good eating habits are encouraged and that the pupils obtain sound knowledge about food and how it is produced.



The School Meals Supporters target groups are:

Decision-makers - national and local politicians, school headmasters with budget responsibility, catering managers and others who decide over the school's finances and the school meals

Opinion-makers - journalists and others who have the resources to create and form opinion

Personnel in schools - involving teachers, school nurses and catering staff

Parents - a powerful pressure group that politicians listen to

The School Meals Supporters work on the basis of the guidelines, as I already told you about. But also by clarifying facts through studies conducted by others and ourselves about the situation in the schools and by broadcasting this information to the target groups. As well as promote good examples



The website is a forum for everyone who is interested in issues associated with school meals. Such as features reports, facts and news.

A magazine issued twice a year to schools, school restaurants, local authority nutrition managers and politicians who are concerned with education.

Newsletter and press information is published on the website.

The press, specially the local press, is very interested in the school meals, and it is a good subject to work with.

Arrange different types of seminars about school meals.

The pupils´agenda:

- A variety of breads
- Alternative drinks
- A selection of spices
- Breakfast club
- More involvement in the school meals
- A nice menu

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We listen to the pupils to find out what they want.

For example, last autumn the School Meals Supporters invited pupils to give ideas about how to make the school lunches and the environment more tempting and some of their wishes were:

- A variety of breads and not only crispbread
- Alternative drinks, different types of milk + water
- A selection of spices, such as basil, organo and so on
- Breakfast club
- More involvement in the school meals
- A nice menu, where you can read what will be served today



The School Meals Supporters tries to promote breakfast in school.

Many pupils in Sweden do not eat a proper breakfast or even skip it completely. This has been pointed out by the school medical service among others. A recent study among pupils in the 9th grade showed that 1 out of 10 pupils does not eat anything for breakfast.

Serving breakfast in school is becoming more common in Sweden. Some schools serve breakfast before the first lesson, and others in the first long break.

Breakfast in school often consist of chocolate milk with a smörgås (the traditional Swedish open-faced sandwich) many also have filmjök a typical Swedish dairy product resembling yogurt with various types of breakfast cereal. Some schools charge the breakfast, normally 40p- 75p while others serve it for free. The breakfast program has claimed to result in calmer pupils with more energy and also a better environment in the school restaurant at lunchtime.

Snack meals

Snack meals are served at a fixed time
between 1.30 and 3.00 pm

There is a fee



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Snack meals in schools are served at a fixed time between 1.30 and 3.00 p.m. in the afternoon and at a fee. Among the younger pupils in the ages 7 to 10 years (primary school) it is served by the canteen staff in the school restaurant and the snack meal consist of milk, a sandwich and a fruit.

However, the older pupils from 13 to 19 years of age often eat low quality snack meals, partly due to the increasing competition from soft drinks and junk food in school cafeterias and vending machines. It is not uncommon that the pupils themselves run the school cafeteria. Snacks are increasing as well as between-meals among pupils and within the past decade the number of overweight schoolchildren has rose dramatically in Sweden like in other Western countries.

A recent Swedish study about overweight pupils indicated that meals and physical activities in schools are particularly important because they promote pupils from all kinds of social groups. Still, in reality, both school meals and physical activities are scaled down for economical reasons. Schools have a large responsibility to battle obesity and they are optimal in this struggle as the whole population from 7 to 16 years old are reached.

The School Meals Supporters

Increased funding

Greater interest

Influence

"Referral body"

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Results that the School Meals Supporters have achieved of these two and a half years are:

Increased school meals funding by 6 % in a tough economic climate where school meals are low priority.
That is £18 million per year.

Greater interest concerning the issue of school meals. School meals issues frequently appear in the media.

The School Meals Supporters have been established as a "Referral body" to the local authorities thereby increased the potential to influence all issues concerning school meals.

We are also considered to have a lot of knowledge and high credibility about school meals. But there is a lot of work still to be done...