

Västra Götaland, Sweden

Västra Götaland – winter

General overview

Västra Götaland is one of the three most populated regions in Sweden. Situated on the west coast, it encompasses forests and agricultural land, a coastline and an archipelago with small villages, 49 middle-sized municipalities and one large city, Gothenburg (population 564 034 in 2017) (1).

Västra Götaland, home to the largest port in the country, is one of the leading regions in Sweden as far as industry and transportation are concerned. The population of the geographical area of Västra Götaland is 1.6 million. Life expectancy is 83.9 years for women and 80.3 years for men, equivalent to the national figures. The proportion of foreign-born people is 21%, slightly lower than the average for Sweden (22%) (2).

The Swedish health-care system is mainly government-funded and decentralized, financed primarily through taxes levied by county councils and municipalities. All three levels of Swedish government are involved in the health-care system: at the national level, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs is responsible for overall health and health-care policy, working in concert with eight national government agencies; at the regional level, 12 county councils and nine

regional bodies are responsible for financing and delivering health services to citizens; and at the local level, 290 municipalities are responsible for care of the elderly and people with disabilities (3).

Region Västra Götaland (VGR) (4), one of Sweden's largest organizations with 55 000 employees and an annual turnover of SEK 60 billion, is responsible for public organization in the Region. Its governing bodies are the Regional Council (comprising 149 political members) and the Regional Executive Board (comprising 15 political members). Elections to these councils are held every four years.

VGR's main responsibility relates to the health-care sector, which includes 17 hospitals, 200 primary-care centres and 170 dental clinics. Research, innovation and education are also major responsibilities of VGR. The region is home to the renowned Sahlgrenska University Hospital and several science centres. VGR has a national mandate to take the lead in the regional development of several areas, such as business, culture, environment, public transport, public health promotion and human rights.

The political vision of VGR is currently "to provide a good life". In 2003, the Swedish

Parliament decided on a public health policy with the overarching goal, “to create the societal conditions for good health on equal terms for the entire population”. The policy had a clear focus on public health promotion and all sectors of society were required to recognize their responsibilities in reaching the goal. The policy was reviewed in 2008 and minor changes made. In 2017, the Swedish Commission for Equity in Health published the report entitled, *The next step towards more equity in health in Sweden – how can we close a gap in a generation?* (5), which could lead to further amendments of the policy, including a stronger focus on health equity.

Several VGR committees are formally responsible for public health, namely, the five health and medical care committees and the Public Health Committee. Together with the municipalities, the health and medical care committees coordinate and agree on frameworks for local public health work, which is financed by both VGR and the municipalities on an equal basis. The Public Health Committee acts as a strategic engine in relation to public health promotion in the region, creating policy frameworks, initiating new methods of working and monitoring the development of population health.

Public health promotion focuses on creating equal access to preconditions for good health throughout the life-course.

Reducing school failures – an overall priority

The *Regional development strategy of Region Västra Götaland 2014–2020 (VG2020)* (6) stipulates that skills and competencies in the population are crucial for the future development and growth of people, companies and institutions. The link between education and health is strong, representing a visible social gradient. One of VGR’s overall priorities is, therefore, to reduce school failures and increase the number of school leavers eligible to study at a higher level. It is obvious that finding the right solution is the responsibility not only of the municipal school system but also of VGR, both as a leading partner in regional development and as a health authority and health-service provider. To achieve long-lasting, sustainable commitment, VGR needs to acknowledge the importance of cross-sector cooperation both within the organization and with relevant statutory and non-statutory stakeholders. It is important that action taken in this area be both generic and specific. Cross-sectoral action has been identified in five areas, namely:

1. promotion of sustainable cross-sector cooperation;
2. promotion of mental health and fight against the consequences of mental illness;
3. stimulation of the joy of studying;
4. reduction of the negative impact of migration on school achievement;
5. reduction of the impact of social determinants and risk factors for disease.



Strengths

Västra Götaland’s strengths include:

- ✓ strong development potential (the business sector is highly influenced by research and development);
- ✓ fast-growing tourism, cultural and creative industries;
- ✓ a high standard of health and steadily increasing life expectancy;
- ✓ health indicators with positive trends (fewer people smoking, fewer people drinking alcohol and no increase in obesity).



Aspirations

VGR is aiming to:

- ✓ fight exclusion and segregation, and strengthen the link between education and working life;
- ✓ strengthen the possibilities for children and teenagers to take part in cultural activities;
- ✓ strengthen primary-care services in addressing mental health.



Challenges

These are:

- ✓ the persistent problem of matching the demand for a skilled, experienced and highly educated workforce while many seeking work today have low levels of education and no experience of being in the Swedish labour market;
- ✓ the need for continued strong and forceful innovation to maintain sustainable development in the region;
- ✓ increasing inequity throughout the region, particularly that resulting in failure to graduate from school to institutions of further education.



Potential areas of collaboration

VGR is interested in collaborating with other RHN regions in the following areas:

- ✓ health and education (with a view to implementing the region's strategy and action plan, "Joint action for reducing school failures");
- ✓ the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) (7) and regional development (particularly in connection with the process of establishing a new regional development strategy for Västra Götaland);
- ✓ health equity (in particular, the importance of addressing gaps in knowledge, trust and language that affect people's access to health-care services and treatment).



Working groups

VGR is interested in participating in working groups on:

- ✓ the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (7)/ equity;
- ✓ the all-of-government approach/intersectoral action;
- ✓ education and health.



People active in the Regions for Health Network (RHN)

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