

# Summary

## THE MANY FACES OF INTOLERANCE

The Living History Forum is working to monitor intolerance in society that spans the past to the present day. Part of this work is to survey, on a recurring basis, how well democratic values are rooted in society and to keep a watchful eye on intolerant tendencies. This was first surveyed in 2003 and repeated in 2009. The current study comprises the first stage of a long-term plan.

The purpose of this survey is to describe and assess the prevalence of tolerant and intolerant attitudes of upper secondary school students to different groups in society who encounter prejudice, discrimination or other forms of victimisation. In this survey we chose to study the attitudes of the students to Roma, Muslims, Jews, non-European refugees and people with homosexual preferences.<sup>1</sup>

The report has been given the title *The many faces of intolerance* to emphasise the fact that intolerance is a complex, changing and hard to encapsulate phenomenon which is directed at different groups in society with varying intensity, takes different forms and is expressed in different ways on different occasions. It includes structural patterns and temporary opinion trends.

Where the line between tolerance and intolerance should be drawn is open to debate. In

this survey we chose to present the results divided into three categories: positive, ambivalent and negative attitudes. Tolerant and intolerant attitudes constitute the extremes of positive and negative approaches, respectively.

We consciously refrained from creating measurements of general intolerance and have reported the different measurements of attitudes to immigrants, Muslims, Roma, Jews and homosexuals separately because we consider these to be distinct dimensions of opinion.

## ORGANISATION OF THE SURVEY

Statistics Sweden was responsible for selecting the sample and collecting the data in schools. Head teachers and class teachers were contacted by Statistics Sweden, whose field staff then visited classes and handed out and collected questionnaires. Statistics Sweden compiled data files and removed identity data. A reference group of researchers worked with the Living History Forum to assist in designing the questionnaire. The results were analysed and the report was written by sociologists linked to the Living History Forum.

The survey covered a total of 4,674 upper secondary school students in years 1 and 3 at a total of 154 upper secondary schools in Sweden, i.e. 16 and 18 year-olds. Widespread questionnaire

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<sup>1</sup> The Living History Forum intends to initiate a separate study on the attitudes of young people to people with disabilities.

fatigue among head teachers particularly in the cities combined with extended work experience periods for students on vocational programmes contributed to quite a high non-response rate on the part of schools and classes alike. The data was calibrated to ensure the generalisability of the results.

Students' attitudes to vulnerable groups were measured using a large number of questions and attitude-related statements and were analysed using statistical methods. The survey was designed in order for particular comparisons to be drawn with the student survey carried out in 2003 by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) on behalf of the Living History Forum (Ring and Morgentau 2004).

### **POSITIVE, NEGATIVE AND AMBIVALENT ATTITUDE PATTERNS**

The quantitative measurements of the attitudes of the students differed for the five groups the students were asked about. Variations were large between students with positive and ambivalent attitudes. More than half of all students had a positive attitude to homosexuals whilst only a quarter of all students had a positive attitude to Roma. The proportions with positive attitudes to immigrants, Muslims and Jews, respectively, fell somewhere in between. Around half of the students surveyed expressed an ambivalent attitude to Muslims, Jews and Roma, respectively. A significantly smaller proportion of students were ambivalent in their attitude to homosexuals.

There were consistencies in the negative attitudes of students to vulnerable groups. Just under a fifth of all students expressed negative attitudes to immigrants, Muslims, Jews and to homosexuals. A larger proportion had a negative attitude to Roma. These comprised a quarter of all students.

### **GENDER AND AGE**

Distinct patterns emerged when student attitudes were compared with regard to gender and age. The results showed unambiguous and large differences between the attitudes of girls compared to boys. The girls had significantly more positive attitudes to each and every vulnerable group than the boys did.

There were also differences in the attitudes of the students in the different years. Students who were 18 years old and in year 3 at upper secondary school had predominantly more positive attitudes to each and every vulnerable group than the 16 year-old students in year 1.

### **NATIONAL BACKGROUND AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION**

A more complex pattern emerged when student attitudes were compared with regard to religious affiliation and national background. Students with a foreign background were, not unexpectedly, in the majority among those with a positive attitude to both immigrants and Muslims. The proportion with a positive attitude to Muslims was substantially less than the proportion positive to immigrants. This correlates with the fact that the students with foreign backgrounds include Christians, among whom a large proportion had negative and ambivalent attitudes to Muslims. A larger proportion of these students also had a negative attitude to Roma compared to the other students.

Students with a Swedish background were in the majority among those with a positive attitude towards homosexuals, whilst the attitude to homosexuals among students with a foreign background demonstrated an equal distribution between positive, negative and ambivalent.

Students with a Swedish background demonstrated a higher proportion of similarly ambiva-

lent attitudes to immigrants, Roma and to Muslims. An ambivalent attitude to Muslims was also clearly discernable for students who were members of different Christian faith communities and those who had no religious affiliation.

Just over half of the students with a Swedish background, members of the Church of Sweden, or those who had no religious affiliation expressed an ambivalent attitude to Jews. Just over half of the students with Islamic beliefs expressed a negative attitude to Jews.

## **PARENTAL AND STUDENT EDUCATION**

In comparison to students on vocational programmes, a higher proportion of the students on academic upper secondary school programmes had highly educated parents. The survey demonstrated a distinct correlation between attitudes to vulnerable groups, the educational level of the parents and the educational programme of the student at upper secondary school. Students with highly educated parents and those in academic educational programmes had a more positive attitude to each and every one of the five vulnerable groups in comparison to students with parents who were not so highly educated and those on vocational study programmes.

## **CHARACTER OF THE SCHOOL**

The schools' social, economic and cultural character and the conditions governing ability to provide a good education vary. With the help of record data and questionnaire data, indices were designed describing the socio-economic characteristics of the schools and their pedagogic environments.

Correlations between the character of the school and the attitude to vulnerable groups were relatively weak. The results did however reveal

that students attending schools with students from areas with a high level of well-educated and well-off people, as well as schools with high average grades and a high proportion of qualified teachers, did show more positive attitudes than students attending other schools.

The average grade in the upper secondary schools for the year leaving school in spring 2009 was the school measurement that had the greatest significance for attitude to each of the vulnerable groups studied. The lower the average grade in the school, the more negative the attitudes were among the students. The higher the average grade in the school, the more positive the attitudes were among the students.

## **SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

The internal environment within schools varied considerably. From the young people's answers it was clear that verbal abuse was part of everyday life in many upper secondary schools. Bullying appeared and one in ten upper secondary school students had themselves been the victim of bullying on more than one occasion. Order in the classroom during lessons was far from taken for granted. At the same time the majority of students said that they are content at school and three in four students had confidence in their teachers.

The school environment measurement that had the greatest significance for attitude to vulnerable groups was an index which combined students' assessment of calmness in class and the number of teachers who encouraged critical thinking in their students. The correlation between this index and measurements of attitudes to vulnerable groups was clear.

In schools where there was order in class during lessons and where teachers encouraged critical thinking in their students, the proportion with tolerant attitudes was larger than in schools

where the environment was characterised by serious verbal abuse and bullying. The correlations between attitudes and school environments were most distinct for the three indices that expressed attitude to immigrants, attitude to Muslims and attitudes to Roma.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHING**

In terms of school teaching relevant to this study the majority of upper secondary school students said they had been taught about world religions, about the Jewish genocide carried out by the Nazis in the second World War and about racism and colonialism. A third of upper secondary school students had been taught about the UN Declaration of Human Rights but only a few had been taught about Sweden's national minorities.

Students who had not received any teaching on these subjects had either a more ambivalent or a more negative attitude to all the vulnerable groups. Upper secondary school students who had received teaching on these subjects showed more positive attitudes. The more teaching on racism and the Holocaust students had received, the more positive student attitudes were to immigrants, Muslims, Jews and homosexuals. The more teaching on human rights the students had received, the more positive the attitudes were to homosexuals. There was no distinct correlation with teaching on any of these themes and attitudes towards Roma.

## **INTEREST IN SOCIAL ISSUES**

A number of questions were used as indicators of interest in social issues. The points of view demonstrated to have the most distinct correlation with attitudes to vulnerable groups were attitudes to human rights and the perception that racism is a problem in Sweden.

The majority of students expressed unequi-

vocal support for the human rights asked about and the principle of all people being equal. The majority of the students who valued human rights highly had a positive attitude to homosexuals and to immigrants. The majority of students who did not value human rights so highly had negative attitudes towards immigrants, Muslims, Roma and homosexuals.

A quarter of all students regarded racism to be a problem in Sweden. The majority of those who considered racism to be a problem had a positive attitude to homosexuals. The majority of those who did not consider racism to be a problem in Sweden had a negative attitude to immigrants and Muslims. The correlations were weaker for attitudes to other groups.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FRIENDSHIPS**

The results showed a clear link between having a friend who belonged to one of the vulnerable groups and the general attitude to how people with the same background were valued. Those who had a friend who was homosexual were markedly more positive to homosexuals. It was more common for girls to have a homosexual friend than it was for boys. It was among girls that tolerant attitudes to homosexuality were in the majority.

Young people who had one or more friends who were African, Jewish, Muslim or Roma tended to have a more positive attitude to people with these backgrounds compared with those who did not have friends with these backgrounds. The link was strongest for friends with a Muslim background and the assessment of Muslims in general. The link was weakest for Roma.

The results also showed that students with a Swedish background who had friends with an immigrant or Muslim background often had more tolerant attitudes to immigrants and to Muslims than those without friends with an immigrant background.

## **DEGREES OF INTOLERANCE**

One route to learning more about students with negative and intolerant attitudes is to examine other related values. Two measurements of different kinds could be seen to have a strong correlation with primarily the attitudes of boys to vulnerable groups. The first concerned students' view of which characteristics they respect and admire in others. The second measurement concerned the requirements the students think a person must meet to be able to call themselves Swedish. The answers to the two batches of questions were subjected to factor analysis, which resulted in four indices concerning the respected characteristics and two concerning "Swedishness".

Of the four indices, the one on respected characteristics was found to most clearly correlate with attitude to vulnerable groups, expressed primarily in qualities that have to do with physical strength, appearance and celebrity, but also in characteristics such as patriotism, religious belief and strong leadership. The students with a Swedish background who had high values for this index also had a higher degree of negative attitudes to all the vulnerable groups.

Of the two indices concerning criteria for being able to claim to be Swedish, the strongest correlation with attitudes to vulnerable groups were for those students who expressed nationalistic requirements. It was students with a Swedish background who had high values for this index that had concomitant negative attitudes to every one of the vulnerable groups.

There are grounds for returning to carry out continued analyses of these values and the people who hold them.

## **CHANGES IN PATTERNS OF ATTITUDES OVER SIX YEARS**

A number of the same attitude-related statements were repeated from the survey in 2003. This enabled a comparison of how boys and girls at the same ages and in the same years at school responded on the two measurement occasions within a six-year period. The comparison of the two surveys showed that the proportion of people who expressed tolerant attitudes to homosexuals had increased significantly during the period. For attitudes to Jews and Muslims small changes in a negative direction could be observed between the students' responses in 2003 and 2009.