



POVERTY REPORT 2017

Sveriges
Stadsmissioner

Foreword

When the first city missions were founded in the Swedish cities, Sweden was changing. Urbanisation led to migration, from rural to urban areas, and the consequent homelessness, unemployment, need of subsidy, supervision and support. This was during the 19th century, and Stockholm's Stadsmission (Stockholm City Mission) was founded in 1853. Time passed, the needs continued and increased and more city missions were formed, including Malmö Stadsmission in 1916 and Gothenburg's ecclesiastical city mission in 1952.

Today, we once again see city missions being formed. Last year, 2016, Eskilstuna Stadsmission and Örebro Stadsmission were founded. We recognize the changing times with increasing migration, homelessness, poverty and the need for guidance and support.

The welfare state that was built up during the folkhem (people's home) era is not sufficient. The public sector, we now understand, is not able to take on all the tasks of welfare. New groups in need of support are added and there are people who do not fit into the mould organised by the public sector.

This report describes the reality that we in Sveriges Stadsmissioner (National Association of Swedish City Missions) encounter - one of increasing vulnerability, exclusion and poverty. People who fall through the cracks, where no one takes overall responsibility.

We must stop turning a blind eye to the fact that people today, in Sweden in 2017, are going hungry!

Poverty in Sweden is real. Research carried out by Associate Professor Magnus Karlsson and colleagues at Ersta Sköndal University College gives numbers to the vulnerability the city missions meet. But the politicians show no willingness to act. We in the National Association of Swedish City Missions believe poverty in Sweden must be taken seriously!

The government's report to the UN on Swedish work on Agenda 2030 states that there is no absolute poverty in Sweden. It also claims that the public social security system creates protection for everyone and counteracts economic vulnerability.

The city missions do not agree with this description given to the UN. We in the city missions see poverty on a descending scale from vulnerable people on long-term income support, via the unhelped citizens and the vulnerable EU citizens, to the virtually destitute migrants without papers.

We believe that the government and the responsible minister must set up a commission with the task of, in close cooperation with civil society actors, mapping poverty in Sweden - a mapping beyond the statistics of the social services, based on a relevant definition of poverty in Sweden. This could be the basis for how poverty in Sweden can be measured and, accordingly, discussed and managed.



Lotta Säfström, chairperson of The National Association of Swedish City Missions

This is what the city missions' face in Sweden today

The city missions' task is to prevent need and relieve suffering. In practice, that means urgent work on food, warmth, clothes and sometimes - sleeping accommodation. As well as long-term change work where each person is met on the basis of their unique situation and opportunities. The city mission workers try to find paths where doors have been closed, to guide people to empowerment.

In 2012, a collaboration began with researchers at Ersta Sköndal University College on mapping the city missions' operations for particularly vulnerable groups. **The groups that we chose to measure were (1) people who live on long-term financial assistance; (2) vulnerable EU citizens; (3) migrants without papers, i.e. irregular refugees; and (4) those who fall through the cracks.**

Those who fall through the cracks

People from different walks of life who are Swedish citizens and should probably receive support from the Swedish welfare system, but for various reasons do not get it, come to the city missions. Their stories highlight system failures that mean they do not receive Swedish welfare. It may be a case of falling between two types of public aid (e.g. student grants and financial assistance), or of ending up in an "alternative economy", such as through debts or undeclared work, that makes everyday life possible and that then creates even greater vulnerability and makes it impossible to seek help as there is no appropriate information to provide.

Or they may simply lack the ability or will to navigate the welfare systems (or, alternatively, these systems have not been made available to them). For whatever the reason, they live on very small means and are often outside of the labour market.

As they do not receive social support and often lack accommodation, there is no data to collect on these people; they are not included in any official statistics. These people live from day to day, under the minimum level of social assistance, in real poverty. Often without work, without a home, without social support, they live on casual work, undeclared work, donations and the efforts of civil society.

The city missions meet them every day, they come to get food and warmth and to be a part of the city mission community. They live in economic and social vulnerability and great exclusion. One of Stadsmissionen's main objectives is to build relationships, create trust and encourage them to take one or two steps nearer society and its efforts. This requires both empathy and guidance, a few steps forward and the odd step back. It also requires good knowledge of Swedish bureaucracy and law, building relationships with social service workers and being a bridge builder between the participant and the public system.

In Stockholm and Gothenburg, a quarter of all operations go to those who have fallen between the cracks. All in all, 14% of the total number of operations go to this group.

An example: Sara, 50 years old, is tossed back and forth between authorities

Sara, 50 years old, has not had a salary for four years. She suffers from fibromyalgia syndrome and mental ill health. At the beginning of the year, she applied for Stadsmissionen's food bag. The bag, which she collects once a week, enables her, her daughter and grandchildren to eat their fill.

- City Mission staff help me with contacts with authorities. I go to Mikaelsgården almost every day. I have neither money in my pocket or my own home, so that's why I hang around there. I must get support somewhere, says Sara.

Previously, Sara worked as an assistant nurse at Uppsala University Hospital and as a personal trainer in both spinning and core. The day she began to get pains in her body, Sara did not want to listen to them and worked even harder. The shifts followed on from each other, sixteen hour work periods were not uncommon. But then the day came when her body could not take any more. She collapsed at work and was in hospital for a month. She had crashed.

- It was only when I hit the wall that I realised that I needed to take it easy. My brain had stopped working. I could no longer pass the trays to the patients because my hands were shaking so much. I was drained.

Today, Sara gets by on money from friends and family. At night she sleeps in different places, mostly at her daughter and grandchildren's place, but also with new friends and acquaintances. Sara generously shares the food bag with her family.

- It feels good to be able to contribute something. The children are so small, just 1 and 3 years old. Last week I got formula and nappies for them. It feels good that I can help as well. Sara describes how she is tossed back and forth between the different authorities in Uppsala. Between health insurance office, county council and municipality. All of them point to each other. Sara has an income today of zero kronor.

- It feels like the Swedish authorities have taken my life from me, says Sara. She quietly continues to describe the vulnerability that homeless women in particular face. Sometimes the men that Sara stays with try to touch her body. The times she says no she is beaten.

Still none of her relatives, apart from her daughter, know that she is homeless. She has lost contact with those she knew in the past.

- I don't want my relatives to see me like this. Please, I am ashamed! She makes daily visits to Stadsmissionen's activity centre for the homeless and socially vulnerable, Mikaelsgården, and is given a food bag once a week.

- Stadsmissionen means so much! I feel better mentally when I am here. The staff is so caring. They help me to push the authorities when I can't manage it any more. I don't know where I would turn to otherwise. This is my second home.

Sara is really called something else.

People who live on long-term financial assistance

Research from Ersta Sköndal University College shows that 56% of all registered city mission activities go to people who live on long-term social assistance.

According to The Social Services Act, social assistance is actually a temporary support. Among those who find themselves in a crisis that makes them eligible for social assistance, many escape from their vulnerable life situation after a reasonable period of time. There is however, a group that slides in and out of social assistance on a regular basis, and others that never overcome social and economic vulnerability. As social assistance is not sufficient to support a person (or a family) for a longer period of time, the individual's material situation is worn down: s/he is forced to live hand to mouth and usual investments such as winter shoes, glasses and the like cannot be afforded on long-term social assistance.

Figures from The National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) show that about one third of those who receive social assistance (just over 4% of the population) get it for a long period, and this proportion has increased in recent years.

In 2015, there were 41,585 people receiving long-term social assistance in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Uppsala, Linköping, Västerås and Kalmar. In the smaller cities, by far the largest part of city mission operations is directed to this group - 88% of operations in Kalmar and 74% in Västerås.



Vulnerable EU citizens

EU citizens have the right to reside and seek work in another EU country in accordance with the EU free movement directive. When an EU citizen has found work or is studying, s/he has the right to Swedish welfare. An EU citizen who is not working or studying does not have the right of residence and, therefore, does not have the right to Swedish welfare and protection.

EU citizens without work, studies and residence permits are often extremely vulnerable, without accommodation or the opportunity for permanent provision. They come to Sweden to seek work but, once in Sweden, there are few opportunities, the labour market is demanding and complex and the bureaucracy is virtually impenetrable. The responsibility of the public authorities for this group is unclear - some municipalities offer subsidised simple accommodation, in other places no help is given.

The number of vulnerable EU citizens was highest in 2014-16, estimated at 4,500 people. About a quarter of the city missions registered operations directed to vulnerable EU citizens during the past year. This includes the Crossroads operation in Eskilstuna, Gothenburg, Kalmar, Linköping, Malmö, Stockholm and Uppsala, where EU citizens are given help with CV writing, registering on the labour market and guidance on the conditions in Sweden and the Swedish labour market.

Activities to get EU citizens in work have had some effect, see more at www.sverigesstadsmissioner.se

Migrants without papers = irregular immigrants

People residing in Sweden despite their asylum application being refused can live many years hidden in Sweden. This group is among the most poor, without any possibility to get provision other than through the efforts of civil society, the goodwill of individual Swedes or exploitation in casual work. The group is difficult to define as the people in it are by definition undocumented. The National Board of Health and Welfare estimated that in 2010 the group included 10-50,000 people, today it can be assumed to be much bigger.

Migrants without papers are by definition a particularly vulnerable group, without rights and without the possibility of provision through self-help or societal assistance. Although laws have been introduced that give children without papers the right to health care, dental care and schooling, and adults also have the right to urgent health and dental care, they are even more vulnerable as the police look for migrants without papers at workplaces, in the register of the Board of Health and Welfare, in schools and among the activities of civil society. The vulnerability is total, the poverty is absolute.

The city missions meet the target group but, as they do not ask for visitor status or identification, they may not always know if the person is a migrant without papers. In the study, only 3% of city mission operations were attributed to this target group, with almost two thirds being in Stockholm.

The City Missions operations

Ersta Sköndal University College's mapping of the work of the city missions focuses on five main types of operations. These types of operations are conducted at all city missions. At the smaller city missions, work takes place in an open meeting place where all socially and economically vulnerable people are welcome. As a city mission grows and develops, the meeting places tend to become more target group specific, but the same kind of work is carried out for every target group. For example, Kalmar has long had the Lotsen open meeting place, and now more targeted activities are directed to vulnerable EU citizens at certain times in Lorensberg Church. In other locations, there are open meeting places for different target groups, such as Unga Forum for children, youths and families in Malmö, and Äldrecenter and Klaragården for homeless women in Stockholm.

The five main operations are (1) food or food subsidy; (2) material support such as clothing, hygiene articles, second-hand furniture for new accommodation, etc.; (3) financial support/subsidies; (4) authority contacts concerning financial vulnerability; (5) inclusive/participatory activities.

Food or food subsidy

Almost two thirds (2/3) of all the 200,000 registered activities in the mapping consisted of the distribution of food or the subsidy of food. This is the most common activity. Four of five (4/5) activities in Skåne (81%) were to do with food, and 72% in Gothenburg. Subsidy or distribution of food to people with long-term financial assistance made up a third (34%) of all reported activities.

Socially and economically vulnerable and marginalised people come to the city mission open meeting places. Here the visitors will often be served the only warm meal they will have during the day. At the open meeting places they can also be part of a community, get warm, perhaps get some sleep and wash themselves or their clothes. Meal times encourage conversation, and the meetings between the visitors and Stadsmissionen staff are central. These recurring meetings build a relationship and trust that makes it possible for Stadsmissionen staff to conduct professional social work, with the ultimate objective of guiding the visitor out of their vulnerable situation. It may be a matter of contact with authorities, financial and legal advice, etc.





Inclusive activities

The second most common operations were inclusive activities, 16% of all reported operations. These activities were mostly directed to people with long-term financial assistance.

Activities at the open meeting place are inclusive. Everyone's right and opportunity to take part, showing respect for each other, and an inviting attitude are important parts of the meeting place. Conflicts that arise are handled professionally and on the basis of each individual situation. Sometimes a person who has acted violently or disrespectfully may be excluded for a period. After a conversation and the re-establishment of mutual respect, the visitor is welcome back to Stadsmissionen's open meeting place. The door can be closed temporarily, but is opened when the visitor is ready to act correctly again.

Activities and excursions are also arranged at the open meeting places in order to further strengthen inclusivity, participation and community. In St John's Church in Gothenburg, Friday's music event creates a cosy Friday feeling, and the skiing trip a feeling of pride. Another example is when Kalmar Stadsmission's director celebrates Christmas Eve, firstly at the Lotsen open meeting place and then at home.

Excursions create an additional community feeling and the participants are expected to take responsibility for its planning and their participation. Unga Forum in Malmö provides vulnerable families with children with short excursions that other families with the economic means would see as family activities. For example, a trip to Kolmården Wildlife Park.

Material support

The proportion of activities to do with material support was somewhat smaller still, 14%. The activities made up an equal proportion in all groups. Kalmar Stadsmission reports a particularly small proportion of material support in relation to other activities (2%), while in all other cases the corresponding share is approximately 10-20%.

Material support involves applications for such things as clothes, hygiene items and Christmas presents. The application itself is an action that may be rejected. "Material support" is however defined in the mapping on the basis of the number of distributed material support actions.

Financial support

In general, the city missions are restrictive in giving financial support, which may only be applied for on rare occasions and is for particularly vulnerable groups with no access to other support. Migrants without papers are in general the most vulnerable group, and received financial support to a greater extent than others. 15% of all activities for migrants without papers were made up of financial support.

Contacts with authorities

An important part of escaping from vulnerability, especially for people on long-term income support and for those who "fall between the cracks", occurs when Stadsmissionen staff make contact with authorities and thereby act as a bridge between the individual and the public agencies.

Many of Stadsmissionen's visitors have been in contact with the social, health care or psychiatric services, but have not received the help they are entitled to. It may be that contact has been made and an appointment booked, but because of their situation - sickness, mental ill-health, dependency or practical circumstances- they have not managed to go to the appointment. And the authority has then closed the case.

In other instances, people have been passed around between different authorities such as health care, psychiatry and social services, but none of these have taken responsibility for them - even though each individual authority has acted in accordance with existing rules and laws. This can have disastrous consequences, such as when a violent person in mental ill-health is looking for emergency help but is informed that s/he can have an appointment next week, or even later. For others, the consequence is that they must try to survive on zero income and sleep on the sofa of an acquaintance, sometimes with the risk of abuse and violence.

Stadsmissionen's operations can be about aiding the individual to get an investigation and a psychiatric diagnosis. For example, Åke was helped by Uppsala Stadsmission and finally got a diagnosis that opened the way to treatment, support and accommodation.

The people that the city missions meet do not fit into the moulds that the authorities work from. Their cases are complex and cooperation between social, legal and financial advice has been shown to give good results. For example, a young woman came to Unga Forum at Skåne Stadsmission with her children. The father had disappeared. Stadsmissionen staff managed to locate the father, and work with him on debt relief and his role as a father. One of the children was given a place at school, while the mother herself arranged a pre-school place for the other. In the end, the mother had the time and strength to seek work and sort out her situation on her own.

Poverty matrix 2017

(Percent of total efforts)

	The unhelped citizens	Vulnerable EU citizens	People living with long-term social assistance	Migrants without papers
Financial support	5	0	3	15
Inclusive activities	22	8	17	25
Food or food subsidy	55	76	59	42
Material support	14	14	15	14
Contact with authorities as a result of poverty	4	2	6	4
Total	100	100	100	100



Poverty in Sweden

The city missions do not meet all - but many - of the people living in social and economic vulnerability in Sweden today. What emerges from the city mission's activities and the research done by Ersta Sköndal University College is that there is poverty in Sweden which is invisible in official statistics. This poverty is unmistakable. It is about people who come to Stadsmissionen for a meal and to get warm. It is people who have nowhere to live. This requires political action.

One problem is the invisibility. Official figures are based on SCB's (Statistics Sweden's) central population database, which is based on registered addresses - thus homeless people are excluded from SCB statistics. Other official figures are based on cases with an authority, and presuppose that a case has been registered that has either been resolved or refused. This excludes those people who "fall between the cracks", and who have not received the contact and help they are entitled to from the authorities. We think that there is a problem concerning invisible poverty that is not included in official statistics.

Despite this problem, the government has reported in its Agenda 2030 report that there is no absolute poverty in Sweden. We in the city missions see that this report is misleading. There is real poverty in Sweden - both in absolute and relative terms.

Absolute poverty is defined internationally by, among others, the World Bank as an income under 2 US dollars a day. This is difficult to apply in Europe.

When the National Board of Health and Welfare uses the term absolute poverty it bases it on an estimate of the necessary expenditure for a reasonable standard of living, a "shopping basket" of what is needed for a reasonable standard of living. This also constitutes the norm for social assistance from 1985. The dimension is absolute in the sense that the poverty line defines the same purchasing power from one year to another and that a person who does not have a given purchasing power is regarded as poor regardless of how many others have it.

Relative poverty is defined as having an income below 60 per cent of the median income, according to the National Board of Health and Welfare. It should be noted that using the same definition, an income below 60 per cent of the median income, the EU statistics agency, Eurostat, speaks of the "risk of poverty". And according to Eurostat figures almost 13 % of Swedes live in risk of poverty (2015), and 1,3 % of Swedes live in extreme poverty.

The poverty issue is conjured away by ambiguity in the concepts.

We in the National Association of Swedish City Missions think that poverty is about not having food for the day. About not having money for the rent and therefore losing your accommodation. About not being able to afford new winter shoes, glasses or other items that need regular renewal. When the financial margins do not exist, so that a sudden dental visit has to be done on credit. When finances do not allow you to be socially active or engage in community activities - which leads to exclusion and thus decreases opportunities in the longer term.

We see today a new kind of vulnerability that has not been present in Sweden for many decades. The public system is becoming increasingly inadequate.

"Every society must be judged by how it treats its most vulnerable citizens", said Tage Erlander in his day. The vulnerability we meet in the city missions would not give today's Sweden a high rating.

Recommendations

The City Missions sees the need for the government to present a national poverty strategy, to be drawn up in dialogue between civil society and the public authorities.

We therefore recommend:

- That a commission is set up with the task of, in close cooperation with civil society actors, mapping poverty in Sweden beyond the statistics of the social services, and to propose a relevant definition of poverty in Sweden, how it is measured and thus can be discussed and managed.
- That parliament, on the basis of the commission's work, decides on a national poverty strategy.
- That the government investigates the current system errors/shortcomings in our welfare system that Stadsmissionen has repeatedly pointed out and produces strategies to counteract them.
- That politicians ensure that levels in the social insurance system ensure that no-one lives below the subsistence level.
- That politicians ensure pension levels that are possible to live on.
- That politicians promote the right of everyone to provision through work, support or employment.
- That responsible authorities coordinate their operations in order that individuals do not "fall between" the different welfare systems.
- That financial assistance is adapted to the cost of living in today's society.



Sveriges Stadsmissioner

The National Association for City Missions in Sweden is working to improve the lives of people who live in vulnerability and exclusion in Sweden, and consists of the local City missions in Eskilstuna, Gothenburg, Kalmar, Linköping, Skåne, Stockholm, Uppsala, Västerås and Örebro.

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