

National Poverty Watch Report

Sweden

Problems and challenges

Poverty has grown in recent decades. But it is still largely a hidden problem that is not fully reflected in the statistics available. Most of the above are those living at or under the poverty line but do not seek or for various reasons do not receive any support if there is, or can not get enough support. It is about **working poor** with low and or periodic income, long-term illness, families with children (mainly single parents), poor pensioners (mainly women). Particularly vulnerable, of course, are the vulnerable EU citizens and the **undocumented refugees**.

The fact that poverty is now perceived as a real societal problem in the population is also confirmed in the large-scale survey conducted during the year where 45% of a representative sample of Sweden's population believes poverty is a fairly or very big social problem in Sweden today?

According to the EU statistical body, 13% of Swedes lives in "**risk of poverty**" (2015), and 1.3% of Swedes are living in **severe poverty**. That is, income below 60 percent of the median income.

The fact that the government claims in its UN report on Agenda 2020 that the general social security protection creates security for all and counteracts economic vulnerability is not correct.

A growing problem is those that ends up **without support**, between different welfare systems because of conflicting rules, lack of knowledge of the individual or ignorance the staff, etc. More and more voluntary organizations are those who has to give support instead. In the big cities, Stockholm and Gothenburg, for example, one quarter of the City misson's efforts go to those who fall between the chairs.

The other problem is that the **benefit levels are too low**. Above all, it applies to those who live on long-term social benefits. Research shows that 56% of city missions' all reported efforts go to people who live on long-term financial assistance. According to the Social Services Act, economic assistance is ment to be a temporary support. However, there are many who never get rid of social and economic vulnerability and dependence. Since financial assistance is insufficient to provide a person (or family) for an extended period of time, the individual's material and psychosocial situation is worn down: they are forced to live for the day, and ordinary investments such as winter shoes, glasses or the like can not be paid with long-term financial assistance. The National Board of Health and Welfare's figures show that about one-third of all those who receive financial assistance (which is just over 4% of the population) get it for a long time, and that proportion has increased slightly in recent years.

A specific problem is the housing shortage and the **high housing** costs for low and average income. The lack of affordable housing strengthens vulnerability and further complicates the ability to get rid of poverty trap.

Another complication is that there is a confusion in the general debate about the concepts to be used and how poverty is to be measured. This, in combination with the great invisible poverty, makes it difficult to discuss and establish relevant action plans to combat poverty. This is also one of the reasons why Sweden lacks concrete targets and indications of how poverty reduction is to be measured.

EAPN Sweden therefore recommends:

- The government makes a **comprehensive mapping of poverty** in Sweden, which is not only limited to social services statistics but also includes those not always seen in the statistics, for example, working poor, long-term illness, families with children and low-income retirees.
- In this survey, they should interact with **civil society actors** and utilize their experience and knowledge.
- To develop a **relevant definition of poverty** in Sweden and set clear and measurable goals for how to measure and eliminate / combat poverty.
- That the government is investigating the **current system failures / system deficiencies** in our welfare systems and developing strategies that counteract these including clarifying the authorities' responsibility to cooperate so that the individual does not end up "between the chairs", without support between the various welfare systems.
- The **social insurance system's benefit** levels are adjusted so that pension levels, sickness compensation, etc. ensure the opportunity to live a dignified life with full participation in society.
- The politicians should work for everyone's right to support and participation through work, support or employment
- Low levels of compensation and social benefits are raised and adapted to general living costs and current needs in today's society.
- That the parliament decides on a **national action plan** to abolish poverty.