



Growing holes in the welfare network

Poverty watch 2020

**There is real poverty in Sweden.
Almost 2 million people are affected.
This fact can no longer be overlooked,
but must be handled by society.
Especially by those responsible -
politicians and authorities.**

This report aims to show facts as well as experiences and knowledge we encounter about poverty, and to provide suggestions for measures and solutions. The starting point is our members 'and participants' experience of economic, social and physical / mental problems linked to poverty. The user's experience of interventions is absolutely crucial in identifying the measures needed to combat poverty and which have an effect.

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1 Introduction

EAPN Sweden is an independent part of the European Network for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, the European Anti-Poverty Network. EAPN Sweden consists of about 40 organizations at local, regional and national level that work against poverty and social exclusion, through activities in the form of practical and social support and community and opinion formation. The majority of our members and participants have their own experiences of economic and / or social exclusion.

We can state daily that poverty and exclusion are growing in Sweden. The ongoing covid-19 pandemic is also contributing to that development. It is an experience that is also reflected in current statistics from e.g. Eurostat. Sweden is one of the few countries in the EU where the risk of poverty and social exclusion increases. But for many it is a partially invisible problem.

This report aims to show facts as well as experiences and knowledge we encounter around these issues, and to provide suggestions for measures and solutions. The report is also part of the joint survey of the poverty situation in Europe carried out by EAPN. The focus is on our members 'and participants' experience of financial, social and physical / mental problems. As a basis, we have started from the problems and discussions we encounter in our operations and in the dialogue process we carry out every year to give people with their own experiences of poverty and social exclusion the opportunity to raise problems themselves and propose solutions. The quotes in the report are taken from this year's dialogue process. The user's experience of support measures is absolutely crucial to identify the measures that are needed and that give the intended effect.

In summary, it is about the existence of real poverty in Sweden that can no longer be neglected, but must be managed by society, above all responsible politicians and authorities.

6. Measures to combat poverty

We can no longer turn a blind eye to the fact that poverty is growing in Sweden. It is not just a question of numbers in the statistics, but it is about people, terrifyingly many people, whose living conditions are unsustainable. Society, authorities and politicians must see the reality, ie that the safety nets do not last fully. One problem is the low degree of organization among poor and vulnerable groups, which makes it difficult to design measures and means that the pressure for improvement is not so strong. The trend towards increased user influence is an important step in the right direction. Resources are also important for the voluntary organizations' supportive and opinion-forming work.

A clear strategy is needed to combat poverty

A complication regarding the poverty problem in Sweden is, as shown above, that there is confusion in the general debate about which concepts should be used and how poverty should be measured. The problem of poverty risks disappearing due to the confusion between the concepts. This, combined with the great invisible poverty, makes it difficult to discuss and draw up relevant action plans to combat poverty. This is also one of the reasons why Sweden lacks concrete goals and indications for how poverty reduction should be measured. This relationship needs to change.

EAPN Sweden calls for a broad societal debate on how our welfare systems must be equipped to fight poverty - EAPN Sweden wants to see a policy that reduces poverty.

EAPN Sweden therefore proposes an action plan to combat poverty.

Action plan to combat poverty

• EAPN Sweden demands that the Parliament decide on a national action plan to combat and reduce poverty.

It must contain:

- That a relevant definition of poverty in Sweden is developed and clear goals are set for how poverty is to be combated and how this is to be measured.

- That the government makes a comprehensive survey of poverty in Sweden. The government must not limit itself to social services statistics, but must also include those that are not always visible in the statistics, for example: working poor, long-term sick, families with children and low-income pensioners.

- That in this survey they collaborate with the actors of civil society and make use of their experiences and knowledge. This includes a direct dialogue with vulnerable people on their terms. EAPN has developed a model for such a dialogue.

- That the government rectifies the current system errors / system deficiencies in our welfare systems, and develops strategies that counteract these, e.g. by clarifying the authorities' responsibility that the individual does not end up "between the seats", without

support from the various welfare systems. That the welfare system is designed in a way that makes it more predictable, accessible and thereby safer for those who need to take part in welfare.

- That the social insurance system's low benefit levels for pensions, sickness benefit and unemployment are adjusted so that they ensure the opportunity to live a dignified life with full participation in society. This also applies to the ceiling for wage subsidies and other labor market policy subsidies and the daily allowance for refugees.

- That the low benefit levels of income support (social assistance) are raised and adapted to general living costs and current needs in today's society. That the support is designed so that it contributes to strengthening the individual and his or her ability to live an independent life and participation in society, e.g. by being able to provide temporary support without the requirement that the individual must first be totally destitute.

- That the government ensures that efforts made to mitigate the effects of the covid-19 pandemic are inclusive and do not further contribute to increasing gaps and social and digital exclusion for individuals and groups.

- Protective measures and restrictions in community service and contact opportunities due to the pandemic must be reconsidered when the conditions change and eliminated when the need no longer exists. Opportunity for personal meetings without requirements for technical competence or equipment must be the main principle.

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- Housing guarantee - right to housing. An active housing policy against poverty, segregation and exclusion. Efforts against homelessness. Better opportunities for adapted housing. The model "Housing first" is available as an alternative in all municipalities.

- That society should work for everyone's right to livelihood and participation, through work, support or employment adapted to each person's abilities and needs.

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EAPN Sweden

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