

EAPN Sweden

Poverty Watch 2023

The poverty issues can't be ignored-we have to have a strategy to combat poverty now!

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Summary

This report takes a stand for the poor people in Sweden. The number of people affected about this amount to 1,8 million. This is the figure for the relatively poor, and of those are 300 000 people in absolute poverty. In addition, we also have the unknown, i.e., the ones who do not exist according to the Swedish authorities.

When you are looking at the poor and the relativity its important to have knowledge how wealth is built in the society. In Sweden we have no tax for capital gain, only for income.

This means that we have many that are record-rich in a short period of time. Since 1990, the gap between rich and poor has widened. In terms of purchasing power, this means that the person who is worst off has a disseminated income of 30% of the person who earns the most. (Source: The Swedish agriculture university) It means that the people who lives in exposed residential areas have so little to live on that they are worse off than people living in the countryside. Not even in the wealthiest areas in Malmoe and Gothenburg do the rich get an income that matches the richest in Stockholm. In Stockholm even it is at a few blocks where the rich reside.

When it comes to intersectionality it was not that many differences. Poverty is still a factor for single parents, young people, and immigrants. Low education level also means that you probably are more affected. Sickness and difficulty in social integration also means that you have experience of poverty, hence you are not available in the labor market.

EAPN Sweden demands that the government takes a stand for the poorest people and acknowledge that they exist. We need a strategy to combat poverty, even in a rich country as Sweden.

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EAPN Sweden's Poverty Watch 2023

INTRODUCTION

The focus of the report is to describe the poor economic situations today. Unemployment, illness, disability, and addiction make it difficult for people living in poverty to get out of it on their own, and this should of course also be considered in a report of this kind. By people living in poverty, EAPN means Sweden, those who live in both relative and absolute poverty. Poverty reduction, or if you like, a focus on how people can get an education, get a job, and thus get the economic conditions to live a better life is not the focus of the political discourse today. The government, which has now been in power for a year since the 2022 election, governs with an ideological foundation based on right wing-populism, nationalism, and social conservatism. They believe that social problems can be explained by differences in ethnicity, nationality, and the social group one is born into, not primarily the economic conditions that are supposed to provide a good life. The political discussion is about how we can lower taxes for middle-class income earners, compensate for expensive electricity costs for the upper class and how we can reduce fuel costs for people in rural areas. The poor people in vulnerable areas are only used as a background when it comes to explaining Sweden's huge wave of shootings, explosions, and other violence for which organized crime should be held accountable. One of the EAPN's tasks is to describe the living conditions of poor people. More, many more, people must be involved in solutions to how we can change, improve, and twist the political conversation and decisions so that everyone can share in the prosperity that still exists in a country like Sweden.

The poor are finding it increasingly difficult, even if their numbers are not increasing significantly. Reduced benefit levels, stricter rules for income support, a broken employment service, overburdened and understaffed social services, courts, police officers... The list of how the Swedish authority has changed from being a functioning apparatus that has solved its tasks in a reasonably good way to going on its knees and almost succumbing to more residents with greater problems is also mainly noticeable among those seeking help. Staff turnover and staff shortages meant that the police in Sweden could not deliver passports to Swedish citizens. Trains are often cancelled due to a shortage of train drivers. And this is services that should be of use to all citizens. For years, the authorities that are supposed to help the most vulnerable have suffered from substandard facilities, incompetent staff, and poor leadership. The problems they create are, of course, legion. But those who have nothing, the poor, are the ones who suffer the most. Cheating with social support in

general, organised crime and a feeling of not getting help are also obstacles to giving the poor the help they should be entitled to.

In this report, we have chosen to talk about **the poor** throughout. It's a word that everyone understands and doesn't write around about the state of things. Sometimes terms such as "economic vulnerability" are used, which in practice means poor people. Sometimes you are counted as a recipient of social assistance when you use the Swedish Social Insurance Agency's system for health insurance, parental insurance, etc. That group of people is not only made up of poor people but can have a relatively high income, so when we describe this, the term "welfare recipient" is used, although it may seem to be misleading because insurance is not benefits, but in modern political parlance, these people are called that. The number of "welfare recipients" has fallen drastically since 2006 and continues to decline. This is the result of a deliberate and active policy.

We have also chosen to take a closer look at different groups of poor people – we know, for example, that the measure "ethnic Swedes" and "foreign-born" is 1:7, i.e. there are 7 times as many foreign-born people living in relative poverty and in the group who were born in Sweden. There is also a difference between women and men, between those who work and those who do not have a job or a pension. Rural versus urban and vulnerable residential areas are also important aspects to consider if you want to take poverty issues seriously.

According to the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, the standard of living has fallen by 15 percent for people living in smaller urban areas and in sparsely populated areas, while the dramatic deterioration in living standards has occurred in the vulnerable residential areas. **There, the figure is as much as minus 27 percent and when they measure the standard of living compared to those who have the most the difference is 70% i. e. if the richest people have €100 the one who lives in a vulnerable area has €30 to live on. It is a deliberate policy from the right-wing of the parliament, hence we had a majority of right-wing since 2006. The policies are harsh on the poor, who is considered to be lazy and lean on the rich who has a difficult time and are considered hard working.**

At the same time as the poor is falling in income, those who have capital income have become increasingly rich, Sweden has during about the same period gone from about 30 billionaires to over 500, **an increase of just over plus 1500%!**

GENERAL TRENDS AND EXTERNAL EVENTS THAT AFFECT THE WORK AGAINST POVERTY.

The Sweden Democrats are the party that made the strongest gains in the 2022 election. The Liberals, Moderates and Christian Democrats chose, based on support from the Sweden Democrats, to form a coalition government with an internal government in which the four parties will negotiate on the political issues. After the election, they negotiated an agreement between the parties, the so-called Tidö Agreement. (Source: Regeringen.se.) This has fundamentally changed Sweden and the political issues that have been discussed since the election. The Sweden Democrats are not part of the government but have this agreement. This means that they cannot be held accountable for what they propose in reports to the Parliaments Committee on the Constitution.

The other parties are in opposition. The Social Democrats, who advanced in the election, are the largest opposition party with about 32 percent of the votes. (Source: Val.se.) It is a finding that identity politics had a greater impact in the 2022 election than in the 2018 election, both through the formation of the Nyans Party (a new political party for immigrants) and the success of the Sweden Democrats. In the 2022 election, the other established parties focused on winning the votes of the middle class by promising lower gasoline taxes, lower energy costs, and lower or not increased income taxes. The Sweden Democrats' big breakthrough in the election, they became the second largest party in the Parliament, and the subsequent government base means that the focus of politics is shifted from being about the level of education, combating unemployment, preventive work, etc., to being about ethnicity and a sharpened view of immigration, immigrant, and crime policy. A number of proposals concerning, for example, visitor zones, deportation due to misconduct (e.g. substance abuse problems or prostitution) and reduced opportunities for interpreters are just a selection of the new government's proposals for improved integration and reduced poverty in vulnerable residential areas. A restrictive immigration policy and a restrictive policy in the political area of poverty in general is the motto of the new government in all the policies it implements.

On the positive side, however, several ministers were appointed at the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs with the task of reducing the number of people with mental illness, substance abuse and other forms of social difficulties. We have also got a minister for the elderly who will make life easier and better for the country's pensioners. Pensioners are a group that has improved in 2022 through increases in the guaranteed pension and improved support to cope with housing costs, so-called housing supplement (Source:

pensionsmyndigheten.se). However, these increases have been eroded due to high inflation.

Another major change is the government's ambitions when it comes to repatriation (i.e. returning to the country you came from) and deporting as many people as possible who do not have a residence permit or work permit in Sweden. It should also be possible to revoke a permanent residence permit if you have lived your life in such a way that you are a burden on Swedish society, so-called bad behaviour. This has upset many organizations that work with people who are in various forms of vulnerability, where poverty is a common denominator. And the issues of poverty are given a pronounced ethnic dimension that has not previously existed in the implemented, albeit rhetorical, policy.

We have many long years ahead of us in which municipalities and regions will have to cut back on public welfare. According to Statistics Sweden, there is a shortfall of SEK 34 billion to prevent the public sector from declining. And that's not counting the current inflation. (Source: Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, SKR). This will not lead to an increase in poverty in Sweden. It is a lack of political will from the right-wing parties, hence they prefer to turn over these services to the private sector.

Sweden has many different political crises to deal with right now. We have a wave of acts of violence perpetrated by very young perpetrators. It is being shot, blown up and burned on a scale that no country in Western Europe has seen before. This is often linked to the fact that we have ethnic groups that take advantage of the fact that there is a market for illegal goods, such as narcotics, and that the public sector is used for organised crime. Some researchers and debaters claim that it is the clan division that has paved the way for the criminal networks that control this. The police warned of this development as early as 12 years ago, but nothing has been done to counteract what is now a reality. Koran burnings and other abuses against Muslims have also had a major impact in international media reporting and in our vulnerable neighbourhoods. The delayed membership in NATO, which Turkey has secured, has also meant that the tensions between mainly Muslims and "other Swedish citizens" increasingly explain things with ethnicity. What is worrying is that this is happening at the expense of, for example, combating poverty and ensuring that the welfare system works.

RECEPTION FROM AUTHORITIES AND DIGITALISATION

A tendency that our participants and members often testify to is the obstacles to seeking help and support from society. Above all, there is a lack of

knowledge and support in seeking the help you are entitled to. The major changes that the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, and others have implemented under the call for "digitalisation" and the hunt for benefit cheats have taken place on behalf of the government and parliament (see the so-called January agreement, Regeringen.se). The result of these ambitions to streamline operations and give private actors assignments has led to standardized formulations and an impersonal treatment of all users. This particularly affects people who have difficulty absorbing information, and that is a major shortcoming. It has also led to poor people being excluded from many of society's efforts because they do not dare to use them. A concrete example is information from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (Source: Fountain House in Malmö, EAPN Skåne).

Digitization has also led to many people lacking a so-called Bank-ID, a need to seek care, etc. This is because it costs money to get ID and then not only for the card itself, but you have to have a smartphone to have bank ID and it is not good enough with any phone, bank ID requires NFC (a kind of security code) and to get a bank ID (ie a digital ID card) you must have an account in a bank, with money on it. And to get a bank account, you need to have a registered address. To be able to log in to almost all government agencies, it is currently required to have a bank ID, and this means that many are not allowed to participate. At the Employment Agency, you cannot choose to meet a person who will help you with how the system works, but you will be referred to the website and then you should be able to log in. (Source Arbetsförmedlingen.se).

The non-cash payment system is another area where some people are behind. Many shops and banks have stopped using cash altogether, citing ATMs, but they don't accept coins. The only bank that does this is Forex bank and they charge a 15% fee for depositing money (Source: Forex.se). This is a problem for those who often get paid in cash or collect money. The Swish function (a form of transfer between each other's accounts) and PayPal also requires a smartphone. Libraries (which are a mandatory activity for all municipalities in Sweden) have been commissioned to provide "digital help" but few of the participants in EAPN's member organizations are aware of this. And it doesn't help those who can't afford a phone, or who can't get an ID card due to financial problems. (Source: EAPN et al.).

WHO IS POOR?

Who is considered poor in Sweden depends on who you ask and how you count. Some researchers believe that civil society is exaggerating when we say that poverty is around 17-18 percent. But the fact is that when the EU, through Eurostat, the UN, the Nordic Council, and others, assesses how many people

are poor in Sweden today, most end up at around 17 percent. For 2023, Central Statistics Bureau in Sweden also has statistics showing that about 17 percent are poor. This is how many of Sweden's population live in relative poverty. This means that about 1.8 million people (we have just over 10 million inhabitants) have less than 60% of the median income to live on. The median income in Sweden in 2021 was SEK 33,400/month before tax. This means that if you have a monthly salary or other income that is less than SEK 20,040/month before tax, you live in relative poverty (Source: Scb.se).

The disposable income is at most about SEK 13,500 for those living in relative poverty (i.e. after tax and it will be about SEK 20,000 before tax) (Source: Carina Mood, Stockholm University).

Since 2015, the Swedish City Missions, one of Sweden's largest charities, has described in its own poverty report what they see and experience, combined with an assignment to Statistics Sweden (SCB).

They describe what they see and what they work with as follows: "The City Missions' poverty measurements say something important about what the City Mission in Sweden does for the most economically vulnerable. Since measurements started in 2015, we have been able to draw attention to the fact that the most common effort we make is related to food; cooked food, meal kits and subsidised food.

Over 70 percent (72%) of our efforts are related to food. The most common group we help is people who live on long-term income support. It is a large group of people who, after many years, have an eroded economy after living on a low level of financial support, a form of aid whose whole purpose is to be temporary. We have also drawn attention to the fact that just over ten per cent of those who receive grants from the City Mission are people who have rights in our welfare system that have not been met: "the unhelped". (Source: The Swedish City Missions' poverty report 2022 and 23).

EAPN Sweden can only agree with these observations. What it means for people to live in long-term poverty is described by those who themselves are most affected, but there are big blank spots when it comes to statistical data and research based on data. So we can easily stand by what we say; 17 percent are poor. Relatively!

BEING RELATIVELY POOR

Those who want to downplay poverty in Sweden and instead explain various social problems with ethnicity, crime, etc., often point out that there is no

material poverty in Sweden. We in the EAPN, with our members and participants behind us, can say with absolute certainty that no, there is material poverty! Children who wear sneakers in minus 25 degrees, single mothers who haven't seen the inside of a hair salon in 10 years, families who have never been on vacation, fathers who feel forced to move far away from their children to support them, yes the more times we talk about the consequences of living in poverty, the clearer it becomes that it exists!

Today, children have schooling, mothers have temporary jobs with sometimes high salaries, they live with hot and cold running water, fathers come to visit their children even if the trip is expensive. And even the poor create their own societies where vulnerability is reduced.

When we compare with the very richest who go on vacation every vacation, i.e. 5 times a year. There are those who eat meat every day. There are those who bet SEK 100,000 on a wedding or graduation celebration. They live in a house, have a car, a summer cottage, a caravan, or a boat. It is relative prosperity that we are talking about. The starting point is not to describe people's luxury or misery and claim that everyone has it that way. It is a sliding scale, from those who live without anything to those who are well off materially.

We note that RELATIVE poverty is a concept that is relevant to use. The standard of living that is generally accepted must be possible for most of the population to have, at least if one strives for an equal Sweden. And remember!

17 percent, or about 1.8 million people, live in relative poverty. In Sweden. (2021).

WHAT IS ABSOLUTE POVERTY?

In 2021, just over 3 percent of all people in Sweden aged 16 and older lived in material and social deprivation. This corresponds to approximately 300,000 people. The proportion is the lowest in the EU. "But material and social deprivation is almost seven times more common among foreign-born persons than among native-born persons in Sweden". (Source: Statistics Sweden, 17 Oct 2022).

Low-income standard, which is an absolute measure, is used in Sweden to classify households with low incomes. The measure describes how well the household's income is sufficient to pay for essential expenses such as housing, home insurance, childcare, local travel, and so on. A low-income standard means that the income is not enough to pay these living expenses. In Sweden, 6 percent of the population has a low-income standard. (Source: Statistics Sweden).

In addition, our members and participants would like to insist, based on their own observations, that the number of unregistered cases is high. In fact, we don't know who is seeking help from society and who should do so. Those whom the City Mission in its report calls "the unhelped". This is another dimension of the issue of poverty, where we do not know whether there is research or not. Anyone who does not get help can be helped by others than by society, stay away from trust, lack of trust, etc. There are probably several reasons for this, and one thing we can say: there is no shortage of people who are poor even though they are helped by society, and there are those who do not accept or accept help and who are also poor.

IN NEED OF INCOME SUPPORT

During the period Jan-August 2023, an average of 91,593 people per month lived on income support in Sweden as a whole. This corresponds to just over 1% of the adult population. A person who receives income support receives it from the municipality where they are registered. There is a national standard that most municipalities follow. This is the recommended amount per month that an adult or child should have. In December 2022, the national standard was raised by 8.6%, among other things, after pointing out from EAPN Sweden, that it needs to follow the price trend in Sweden. Unfortunately, inflation was higher than that.

The text are in Swedish but the numbers are the interesting bit in the tablet.

One group that is not included are those "who keep their noses above water" and do not apply for income support even if they would be entitled to it.

HOW MANY PEOPLE LIVE "ON WELFARE"? (OF THE WORKING-AGE POPULATION)

The total number is 708,249 FTEs, which corresponds to 12% (a decrease of 1.2% since 2021). It is not easy to determine how many people receive income

Riksnormen för försörjningsstöd 2023

Tillsammans med skäliga kostnader för vissa andra behov avgör riksnormen nivån på försörjningsstödet. Beloppen bestäms av regeringen inför varje nytt kalenderår¹.

I riksnormen 2023 har normens samtliga poster räknats upp med 8,6 procent jämfört med riksnormen för 2022.

Riksnormen för ett hushåll utgör summan av de personliga kostnaderna för samtliga medlemmar i hushållet och de gemensamma hushållskostnaderna enligt följande tabeller.

Personliga kostnader per hemmavarande barn och skolungdom, kronor per månad								
Ålder	0 år	1-2 år	3 år	4-6 år	7-10 år	11-14 år	15-18 år	19-20 år
Summa personliga kostnader	2 420	2 700	2 410	2 700	3 380	3 890	4 390	4 430
Utan lunch 5 dagar per vecka	2 270	2 480	2 210	2 410	-	-	-	-

Personliga kostnader vuxna, kronor per månad		
	Ensamstående	Sammanboende
Summa personliga kostnader	3 490	6 300

Gemensamma hushållskostnader, kronor per månad							
Antal personer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Summa gemensamma kostnader	1 130	1 250	1 580	1 790	2 060	2 330	2 510

För att beräkna den gemensamma hushållskostnaden för hushåll med fler än 7 personer lägger man till 180 kronor för varje ytterligare hushållsmedlem. Det motsvarar skillnaden mellan hushåll med 6 respektive 7 personer.

support (what used to be called social assistance). It's not like everyone lives on benefits.

What you must remember is the figure of 17% or 1.8 million people. There are so many people living in poverty in Sweden and having a hard time financially. And 300,000 live in absolute poverty, 600,000 in economic vulnerability and 300,000 people (including children) live on income support. 708,249 FTEs live on some form of "compensation". And they sometimes belong to several groups at the same time of these "measures" that we have calculated. Added to this are the "working poor" (those who work but do not have a high enough wage), poor pensioners and the number of unreported "unhelped" who have no support at all, as well as the group of refugees. It is probably not impossible to say that those living in relative poverty amount to 17%, as Eurostat does. We in the EAPN note that there are a lot of people.

WHO'S RICH?

For us to gain perspective on the problem of poverty in Sweden, it is also worth seeing how the rich are doing. Is there a definition of being rich?

Having SEK 5,000,000 (5 million or €500,000) in capital income means that you are considered rich in Sweden in the eyes of the public, according to the association rikatillsammans.se (Rich together)

"In a global comparison, inequality in Sweden is still quite small, but two groups stand out. The richest have withdrawn, thanks to large capital incomes. At the same time, the poorest have been left behind by long-term unemployment and reduced levels of unemployment insurance and health insurance. This has created concerns about political unrest and social tensions. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), among others, has called for political decisions to reduce the Swedish gaps. Source: Forskning.se, The New Poverty, by Carina Mood and Jan Jonsson

In Sweden, several books and writings were published in 2022 on the theme of wealth and poverty. Greedy Sweden by Andreas Cervenka is one of the books that has received a lot of attention. He writes, among other things:

"For a long time, Sweden was known as one of the world's most equal countries. But in the last few decades, something has happened. The gap between the super-rich and the rest of the population has widened rapidly. The share of the economy owned by the richest per thousand is higher than in the United States, and Sweden has more dollar billionaires than Japan and Brazil. Sweden is a country where taxes on labour are among the highest in the world, but where assets are taxed significantly lower than in many other countries. It

is a country where in 2021 there is housing fever, stock market fever and crypto fever. Simultaneously. (sic!) Where the hunt for quick money has become a new popular movement. In 1996, there were 28 billionaires in Sweden. Today, there are 542 of them. Together, they have become 30 times richer in 25 years. At the same time, the proportion of Swedish households at risk of poverty is higher than ever. Quote from the book Greedy Sweden by Andreas Cervenka

From a poverty perspective, it may not be a problem that Sweden has gained 514 more billionaires since 1996, most of whom have become rich in the 2000s, but the book Greedy Sweden describes that political decisions are made to benefit those who have saved capital. The book aroused great interest in Sweden, as it had an ambition to enlighten about what happened in Sweden when we left the epithet "the world's most equal country" behind us. The think tank Kataly's anthology "Class in Sweden", which has parts of the trade union movement behind it, points to the same thing.

The rich have become richer and the poor poorer.

According to Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, the most common way to get a fortune is to inherit it (Source: Unequality.com). In Sweden, inheritance tax has been abolished. Capital income is taxed little or not at all compared to the tax on labour (source Skatteverket.se). Of the 7 richest women in Sweden, 6 have inherited their wealth. (Source Aftonbladet.se)

When we ask our member organisations about wealth, few believe that you can get rich by working. Young people want to become professional footballers or gangsters. Many people play at various online casinos in search of wealth. This is disheartening in the perspective that you don't have an ambition to get rich from work in your life, but that it's all about getting by. Working equals being poor. Rich people don't work, they live on their capital. (Source: Verdandi's social outreach).

"Gasoline prices are rising. Politicians debate compensation for drivers.

Electricity prices are rising. Politicians are debating compensation for homeowners.

Food prices are rising, bread, butter and milk will soon cost twice as much as last year.

But stop now, say the pros, now it is not possible to compensate more because then we will get an inflationary spiral.

Source: Letter to the editor in Kommunal's newspaper Kommunalarbetaren

HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU HAVE AS A POOR PERSON IN SWEDEN?

Different groups in the population are affected by poverty in different ways. Families with children, pensioners, refugees, homeless, unemployed, sick people who are uninsured, people who have sickness compensation or activity compensation (those who were previously called early retirees)... The list goes on. In Sweden, there are also "people in the labour poor", i.e. you have a job but the income is too low for it to be enough. Of course, all these groups have their own problems and are affected by poverty in different ways. But how much money a poor person has is relevant to those of us who don't pay scientific attention to these issues. The examination that follows should not be seen as a completely unambiguous statistical survey, but as an attempt to describe how much money we are talking about. And different events in life require different amounts of money. But this is also true for the rich.

1.8 million live in relative poverty, of whom 300,000 live in absolute poverty.

One way to measure how much money is the minimum you can live on in Sweden is to calculate the so-called standard amount. The flat rate is the minimum amount you can have to pay your bills, wear clothes on your body, and eat food. The lump sum is also known as the minimum subsistence level and is set by the bailiff. The size of the lump sum depends on the size of your family. A "normal" family with two adults and two children should have about (depending on how old the children are) SEK 15,136 a month (or SEK 498/day) to live on to make ends meet. A refugee family, on the other hand, receives SEK 208 per day according to the Swedish Migration Agency's compensation models. In other words, there is a big difference between the minimum subsistence level for those who live and work here and for those who are waiting for a decision on a residence permit. These amounts include housing costs.

Another way to calculate how much money the poorest people in Sweden have been to look at the so-called national standard. It determines the amount of income support. For 2023, the national norm is: SEK 4,520 for one person/month excluding housing costs, i.e., far below the normal amount of SEK 5,158, the National Standard 2023 (Source: Socialstyrelsen.se).

It cannot therefore be said that this is the lowest remuneration. It depends on the context in which the income is to be counted and who has it. But it can be said that those who have it hardest are the refugees. Their daily allowance is the lowest you can receive as financial support from society.

The difference for a person living in absolute to relative poverty is thus large, 2130 SEK/month for a refugee (plus rent) up to a disposable income of 13 300. The national norm is SEK 4 520 plus rent and electricity.

DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PEOPLE WITH POVERTY AS A COMMON FACTOR

We like to divide poverty into different concepts. Child poverty is a term used by Save the Children and other organisations to describe the situation of children in Sweden today. According to Eurostat, about one in five children lives in poverty. That is, in a school class of 20 children, there are 5 children who live in such conditions that you only get the bare necessities to live a good life. Staff at schools testify that there are more children who eat more food at school. Especially on Mondays and Fridays. (Source: Aftonbladet.se.) Some municipalities and schools have introduced school breakfast so that children can cope with a full school day when they do not get breakfast at home. (Source: All About School). The proportion of children who participate in planned leisure activities is low in disadvantaged areas. 23,000 children in Sweden do not attend preschool. 20 percent of those who do not attend preschool come from poor families. Another group of children who do not attend preschool are those who are foreign-born, they are also about 20% and in families that have not immigrated the figure is 5%. (Source: Statistics Sweden).

Another concept that we use in Sweden is food poverty. It should describe that you can't afford to eat until you're full or can't afford to eat every day. There are no official statistics that support the assumption that this group of poor people is increasing, but we can state that with high inflation and higher energy prices, 2130 SEK per month for a single refugee, 4620 SEK per month for a single person on income support and 5717 SEK per month to live if you pay to the Enforcement Authority.

Food prices have risen dramatically in 2022-23 and this has consequences for those who already had none before the war in Ukraine broke out. It also means that there are more groups of people who can't eat until they're full. Phenomena such as food banks that distribute food and where you must show proof that you do not have enough to support yourself create space for more and more people to eat until they are full. The Salvation Army, the City Mission, several free churches, and the Church of Sweden testify that their collected funds are not enough for everyone, but several people have to turn around every day because they do not meet the requirements for low income or simply because it is not enough for everyone who seeks help. In the queues to the soup kitchens, lunches that were previously aimed at people who have been

homeless and vulnerable people other than the financial, pensioners, families with children, refugees, etc., are mixed. 72% of the City Mission's activities are about support for food in various ways.

The most basic foods have increased by between 15-48% in price and the national standard was raised by 8.6% in 2023. (Source: Statistics Sweden and the National Board of Health and Welfare).

A third term that we use today to describe poverty is energy poverty. The group affected by energy poverty is often people who live in their own homes that they own where the heat is powered by direct electricity. For example, it could be pensioners who live in their houses that they have done all their lives and that they have paid off over a whole working life.

But now energy costs are so high that pensioners with low pensions cannot afford to heat their house. That means living in cold houses, showering infrequently, and cooking without electricity. All to make it as cheap as possible. It is also a group that rarely applies for housing supplement. (Source: Swedish Pensions Agency).

Energy poverty also includes the increase in fuel prices, which means that people living in sparsely populated areas are facing a sharp increase in costs. In 2023, several attempts have been made by the government to lower the cost of fuel, despite this, prices continue to increase.

The cost of heating has also increased, the price of district heating has increased by an average of 20% (source: SEB)

Rents have also risen by an average of 4.12 per cent. Especially in southern Sweden, rents have increased markedly by an average of 6 percent. (Source: Hyresgästföreningen.se (The Swedish Union of Tenants Rental).

We can thus conclude that there are at least 3 different terms to describe those who are affected by poverty in different ways. But poverty also leads to lower quality of life in areas other than food and housing. Children cannot participate in extracurricular activities in the same way as other children. Pensioners cannot participate in society in the same way as others and break the loneliness that we know causes great human suffering. Low-income earners are stressed, and mental illness is on the rise.

Total voter turnout fell in Sweden in the 2022 election (Source: Val.se). Voter turnout fell most in constituencies and constituencies where those with the lowest earners and/or the greatest need for social support live. In other words,

we have a group of people who are not involved in influencing society in the decisions that affect them the most. Source: val.se.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISPARITIES IN POVERTY.

Poverty also differs geographically. For example, there is a big difference between Malmö municipality, which has the highest proportion of poor people in Sweden, and Vellinge, which has the lowest proportion of poor people, the measure is 1:7, i.e. there are 7 times as many poor people in Malmö. These municipalities are located next to each other in the southern part of Sweden. (Source: The City Mission's Poverty Report 2022). The proportion of benefit recipients (that is, everyone who receives income support, sickness benefit, parental benefit, etc.) was lowest in municipalities close to urban areas, 10.4 percent, and highest in rural municipalities and commuter municipalities in areas close to urban areas, at 15.9 percent. The highest number of "social assistance recipients" was found in Perstorp municipality and lowest in Danderyd. (Source: Statistics Sweden. And is calculated on the number of people who live during a whole year, i.e. full-year equivalents) Malmö has the highest number of poor people in all of Sweden, and Vellinge, which borders Malmö, has the lowest number of poor people. Segregation hits some municipalities hard.

Those with the highest standard of living (20-25% above average) in all of Sweden are located in an area in central Stockholm. No other region in Sweden, not even the wealthiest parts of Gothenburg and Malmö, has such a high standard of living as the most exclusive parts of the capital. In sparsely populated areas, the standard of living is 15 percent lower. (Source: https://www.agrifood.se/Files/AgriFood_Rapport20202.pdf)

COUNTRYSIDE

A geographical area that exists throughout the country is so-called rural areas. Those who live in rural areas, i.e. in sparsely populated areas or in smaller towns, have a standard of living that is 15 percent lower than those who have the highest. This means that they have 850 SEK to live on when the one who has the most has 1000 SEK. The problem of poverty in rural areas extends largely beyond one's own private economy. Services, such as gas stations, grocery stores, banks, post offices, etc., have largely disappeared. In the same way, municipal services are largely concentrated in the urban area of the municipality. In addition, many smaller municipalities form associations of municipalities in different areas so that there is a school or other service in one of several possible localities. This is to be able to have as low a tax rate as possible, even if the tax levy is higher in sparsely populated municipalities. (Source SKR.se)

Rural areas have also increasingly become an area where young people feel more hopeless than before.

VULNERABLE RESIDENTIAL AREAS

In Sweden, there is a wild and heated debate about the so-called "vulnerable residential areas". Almost every municipality has one on the outskirts of the central town. The metropolitan areas of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö have the most applications, according to the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and Lund University in collaboration with Agrifoods

Facts about particularly vulnerable residential areas:

A geographically defined area characterised by a general reluctance to participate in the judicial process. There may also be systematic threats and acts of violence against witnesses, injured parties and injured parties in the area. The situation in the area makes it difficult or almost impossible for the police to carry out their mission, which requires regular adaptation of working methods or equipment. Many times there has been a normalization, which has led to neither the police nor residents reflecting on the unusual situation in the area.

A particularly vulnerable area is also, to some extent:

- Parallell social structures
- extremism, such as systematic violations of freedom of religion or
- fundamentalist influence that restricts people's rights and freedoms
- Persons travelling to fight in conflict zones
- A high concentration of criminals

A further aggravating circumstance is the presence of other sensitive areas in the vicinity of a particularly sensitive area. Then there is a risk of collusion between criminals or networks in the areas. The situation is considered urgent.

Source: Police

According to researcher Martin Nordin, associate professor at Lund University, the vulnerable residential areas have lower incomes than, for example, the inner cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. The income gap is as high as 70 per cent and the trend has been downward since 1990, when the difference was 7 per cent. That is, those who live in the most vulnerable areas live on 30% of what those with the highest standard of living live on, converted to money, which means that a family in, for example, Rinkeby has an average of SEK 300 while a family in exclusive Easter malm has SEK 1000.

Deprived neighbourhoods are also vulnerable to multidimensional poverty: high levels of ill health, low voting rates in general elections, high unemployment, etc. But what is in focus right now is the explosion of crime that these areas have given rise to. It spreads insecurity throughout society, but for the poor there is nowhere to go, and those who have tried are quickly drawn into the criminal networks. Sweden has 61 areas that are classified as vulnerable to varying degrees. It affects 550,000 people. Areas are also characterised by a high proportion of foreign-born persons, parallel social systems and difficulties for the police and other authorities to act.

POOR PENSIONERS, DO THEY EXIST?

One group that is not poor to a greater extent than others is pensioners (17% Source: Statistics Sweden), but they have less opportunity to influence their income. An increase in the guaranteed pension and an increase in the housing supplement have strengthened the incomes of the poorest pensioners, but now a rampant rise in food prices has eroded this increase in income (scb.se). We have the association "Granny Patrol" which has drawn attention to the situation of pensioners by demonstrating outside the parliament building for a long time. They say that the increases that have been made are not enough. The dramatic drop in income that women suffer when they retire is too great in relation to what they earned before they retired. It is also the case that foreign-born people are poorer to a greater extent than those who have their roots in Sweden. It is largely about the level of education and the opportunity to get a foot in the door of the Swedish labour market. (Source: Statistics Sweden). They are also more likely to be so-called 'unemployed'. And all this together also means lower pensions and low or no occupational pensions.

Pensioners are also a group that is increasingly affected by rent increases and higher energy prices. They can apply for housing supplement, but according to the Swedish Pensions Agency, many people refrain, or do not know that they can apply. Pensioners living in older houses, especially those built in the 60s and 70s, have also been hit by unreasonably high energy costs because the houses were built with direct-acting electricity. Those who can't afford a high electricity bill usually can't afford to change their heating system either. Now, everyone who has had untied electricity contracts has received electricity support, but the worries and indebtedness of the poorest remain. This is a new group of poor people in Sweden. And they're in a trap. They have low costs, or none for mortgages and normally live cheaply in their own homes if the electricity bill is normal. Moving to a rental apartment is not an option because the rent will be high, much higher than the ceiling in the housing supplement that they may be able to apply for.

Other things that affect poor pensioners are the price of medicines. In Sweden, we have a discount system with a share that you must pay each time up to 2350 SEK/year. This means that the cost of going to the pharmacy can be sky-high in a month in relation to income. In addition, some medicines are not covered by high costs even if they are prescribed on prescription. Examples of such drugs are all eye drops, cough medicines, and all varieties of vaginal oestrogen tablets. That is, the kind of medicine that a female pensioner would benefit greatly from.

The situation of pensioners has been discussed extensively and the tax differences introduced by the liberal government Reinfeldt in 2006-2014 have been abolished compared to old-age pensioners, so that they now pay the same amount in tax as an employee with the same income.

On the other hand, no such changes have been made for those who have what was previously called early retirement, now called sickness compensation or activity compensation, but the tax levy is significantly higher. Those who are hardest hit by this are the group of people with disabilities who have never been in working life and who receive the lowest pension. In addition, it is often required that they are part of different work teams for people with disabilities and then receive a very low financial compensation per hour, for example SEK 15 (It is the municipalities that determine the level of compensation). The so-called sickness tax is debated, but the majority in the Parliament has so far chosen to retain the higher tax rate for this group.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

Single women, who have traditionally been those who have worked but still have not received sufficient income, have now been joined by foreign-born men aged 30–49 years. (Source: University of Gothenburg. Who is InWork Poor? A study of profile and income mobility among the working poor in Sweden from 1987 to 2016). They make up 1-2% of the population, their income is below the relative poverty line. People in a low-wage occupation don't earn enough to afford vacations, be sick for a week, or pay an unforeseen debt (SCB.se). If they also have children, it becomes even more difficult. Political poverty is also high. Voter turnout or other engagement is often low – so low that in the last election, around 30 per cent of all eligible voters went to vote in the constituencies where the poorest people live. In other words, 70% abstained.

Women often have lower pensions due to part-time work and low wages. They are now increasingly being found in charity queues at soup kitchens and food banks. (Source: City Mission's Poverty Report 2023)

The key figures for women and men are that 19% of women are at risk of poverty or social exclusion and 17% of men do the same.

YOUNG ADULTS

The group of young adults is not heterogeneous, but there are some common features when it comes to poverty. Many young people are completely unprepared for life as an adult, and this also applies to financial issues. This has left many people stuck in a debt trap. It is easy to shop on credit and easy to borrow money to pay with. But then the loan must be paid and it is far from everyone who does

The Enforcement Authority writes the following in its report on young adults' indebtedness:

Young women's median debt has doubled in the last ten years between 2011 and 2021. The growth is mainly due to consumer debt.

The number of young adults in the age group 18–25 with debts with the Enforcement Authority has decreased by approximately 9,200 over the past ten years. At the same time, the amount of debt in this age group has increased by EUR 410 million.

FAMILIES, SINGLE PARENTS, AND CHILDREN

One group that has steadily deteriorated in Sweden is single parents. Families with children in general are a group that has fewer and fewer margins to draw from. (Source: Save the Children's Child Poverty Report 2022). Mothers are generally worse off than fathers in relation to the general gender pay gap (source SCB.se)

Quote from Statistics Sweden: "One in five people lives in a household that cannot pay a major unforeseen expense, according to statistics from Statistics Sweden. In single-parent households with children, almost half do not have such margins.

Almost 1.7 million people in Sweden live in households that lack a cash margin, i.e. the ability to pay an unforeseen expense of at least SEK 13,000"

"This corresponds to 20 per cent of Sweden's population. Of these, an estimated 187,000 are single adults with children," says Helena Månsson, analyst at Statistics Sweden.

Statistics Sweden's surveys on living conditions (ULF) ask several questions that are used to measure material and social vulnerability.

"Single adults with children stand out in several of the indicators that measure material and social vulnerability. In this group, for example, it is more common than in the general population to have difficulty making ends meet. It's more common for them to fall behind on payments, not be able to afford to spend small amounts on themselves or be able to afford to go on a week's vacation.

Children living in poverty are also on the rise. Many of the children live with foreign-born parents, and for every person born in Sweden, seven foreign-born people live in poverty. And their children grow up in poverty.

Young boys who live in a particularly vulnerable area have their own form of economic vulnerability. They are largely recruited by criminal networks and commit serious crimes when they are young. According to Aftonbladet.se, there are about 1000 children who join a criminal network every year. 1260 people are part of just one of these criminal networks and 570 of them are under the age of 18, and we have about 30 networks (or gangs) In the past, they have been used as errand boys, now they are used as child soldiers. Many of these people are in contact with friends or are related to other criminals.

Några av indikatorerna som mäter materiell och social fattigdom (Sverige, 2022)

Indikator	Typ av hushåll	Andel personer (%)	Felmarginal (+/- %)
Saknar kontantmarginal	Samtliga	19,9	(1,0)
Saknar kontantmarginal	Ensamstående med barn i åldern 0–24 år	46,8	(5,7)
Svårt/mycket svårt att få ekonomin att gå ihop	Samtliga	6,7	(0,6)
Svårt/mycket svårt att få ekonomin att gå ihop	Ensamstående med barn i åldern 0–24 år	17,7	(4,4)
Lätt/mycket lätt att få ekonomin att gå ihop	Samtliga	53,5	(1,2)
Lätt/mycket lätt att få ekonomin att gå ihop	Ensamstående med barn i åldern 0–24 år	28,5	(5,1)
Kommit efter med betalningar	Samtliga	6,4	(0,7)
Kommit efter med betalningar	Ensamstående med barn i åldern 0–24 år	13,2	(3,9)
Inte råd att regelbundet delta i någon fritidsaktivitet	Samtliga	6,8	(0,7)
Inte råd att regelbundet delta i någon fritidsaktivitet	Ensamstående med barn i åldern 0–24 år	16,9	(4,5)
Inte råd att varje vecka spendera en mindre summa på sig själv	Samtliga	6,6	(0,6)
Inte råd att varje vecka spendera en mindre summa på sig själv	Ensamstående med barn i åldern 0–24 år	20,0	(4,8)
Inte råd att åka på en veckas semester per år	Samtliga	9,9	(0,8)
Inte råd att åka på en veckas semester per år	Ensamstående med barn i åldern 0–24 år	22,3	(4,8)

UNEMPLOYMENT AND SICKNESS

Unemployment is the factor that has the greatest impact on an individual's ability to lift themselves out of poverty. The ceiling for compensation in the unemployment insurance fund provides a maximum benefit of SEK 26,400 per month. To get it, you need a monthly income for a whole year of SEK 33,000/month. This means that a lower income than the median income leads to lower unemployment benefits, and most people who have unemployment insurance for a longer period are relatively poor. (Source: arbetsförmedlingen.se).

Even in the event of illness, economic conditions deteriorate. A maximum of 80% of the salary is paid during the first 14 days and this is paid by the employer. After 365 days, the compensation is reduced to 75% of a maximum of SEK 1180 per day.

The unemployment rate was 6.4 percent in Sweden in September 2023 and in 2022 it was 8 percent.

REFUGEES, EU MIGRANTS AND UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS

A person seeking asylum in Sweden has SEK 71 per day to live on if they live alone. That remuneration has not changed since 1991. That gives about 2201 SEK/month to have for your living expenses.

Others not included in the statistics are undocumented migrants and EU migrants including people from Ukraine. These have no compensation at all and have their own special shelters and food trucks. They have a very hard time wherever they live. The current government has also put special focus on these groups and that they should not stay in Sweden as undocumented migrants and that people who meet them should have an increased responsibility to report them to the police (the so-called Information Officers Act). This has caused a storm of protest from health professionals and school staff who do not have this obligation today.

The emergence of a shadow society with undeclared work and an informal economy has this group as its main source of recruitment. Organised crime also has a role to play as a source of income for this group, although it is important to point out that they are often not the driving force behind this and are often exploited because of their weak position in society.

THE GOVERNMENT, AGENDA 2030 AND POVERTY ISSUES

The current government has shown that it is not particularly interested in fighting poverty. This is mainly linked to the values of the SD-led government. It is factors other than income and differences in distribution between those who have income and capital that interest the state. In the last budget, the fight against poverty was not given as much space as we in the EAPN would have liked.

The work on key performance indicators according to Agenda 2030 shows that, according to SCB.se, these issues are progressing, even though poverty is increasing and worsening for those who are actually poor.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the most revealing figures in this compilation is that the standard of living based on residential address has such large differences. The vulnerable neighbourhoods become like illuminated hotspots that provide guidance on where to look to see who is poor, and we can also look around in sparsely populated areas and smaller towns to see that the standard of living is unequal. There are neighbourhoods in Stockholm that are wealthy. Very rich. Then there are people who have 30% of their standard of living to live on. In short, we can describe them in brief terms as follows:

1. A single mother with several children living in a deprived area is likely to work in a low-paid job. She probably has no financial margins - if she is also foreign-born, the economic situation is even worse, in fact 7 times worse.
2. A single pensioner with a low pension is likely to be a woman who has had a low-paid job. She has no margins at all and lives from hand to mouth. The food inflation we have seen hits this group the hardest because it does not affect incomes – which are usually on the verge of relative poverty.
3. A retired couple who previously had a reasonably good life has, with the increased costs in general and the increased energy costs in particular, gone from not belonging to the group of poor to doing so.
4. Young boys in deprived areas who are unable to cope with school are often recruited into the criminal gangs that surround them. They have seen poverty and wealth side by side. The richest often live within the same metro line or nextdoor.
5. Men aged 30-49 who have problems with working poorly. Incomes are too low to suffice. Those who are included here often have temporary jobs or live as self-employed as food couriers or taxi drivers.
6. Those who are worst off are those who have no compensation at all.

All these people exist. In our atmosphere. And they are 1.8 million or 17 percent of the population. It is not a small group that can be ignored.

DEMANDS AND AREAS OF POLITICAL DEBATE

EAPN Sweden demands that a poverty panel be appointed to monitor the issues and come up with sharp proposals. We need to know we indeed have poverty in Sweden. We meet Members of Parliament who still do not believe that there are such a population amongst us.

We have an idea for an Ombudsman about the behavioural change that the municipalities and government-based authorities must deal with. A proposal is the civil community should take the lead and systematically collect witness about how the authorities meet and greet the poor.

A second idea is about "Job first". We need to really discuss how people should be able to support themselves with real jobs. And the method we think of is borrowed from the method of housing first for homeless people.

This is the three main objectives we have for Sweden, besides to raise awareness. And that pep-people should be able to do that for themselves and from their own experiences.