



**Ministry of Health and Social
Affairs**

Division of Family and Social Services

Sweden has about nine million inhabitants and about two million are children between the ages of 0-18 years.

The word “street children” is not used in Sweden. If someone uses the phrase street children in Sweden most people usually refer to children in other parts of the world. In a Swedish context the discussion is about whether children who, more or less, are spending time on the street are considered being homeless or not.

Sweden has a well established social system. According to the provisions in the Social Services Act (SSA) in Sweden a child who is at risk is entitled to the support that he or she needs. There is provision in the SSA stating that professionals who through their profession come into contact with children and young persons at risk are obliged to report this to the social services. It is then the duty of the social services to investigate and assess the needs of the child/young person and if necessary offer interventions or other measures to help and support the child/young person and his/her family. In most cases services are provided on a voluntary basis, but in certain cases, e.g. when the child/young person is in need of protection, the social services can apply to the administrative court for compulsory measures (Care of Young Persons Act, CYPA).

Swedish children can attend pre-school from the age of 1. Sweden has a nine-year compulsory school attendance from the age of six or seven years old. The public education system is free of charge. This means that the school has a responsibility towards children who do not show up in school and to find out why a child is not in school. Every child has the right to education independent of sex, geographical domicile, social and economical conditions in Sweden. The issue of children residing in the country without a permit is under discussion, particularly their right to attend school. The municipality are obligated to stay informed with the young persons (16-19 years) who do not attend high school. They have to offer an appropriate and individual alternative to the young person. This was clarified in the Swedish national agency for Education in 2005.

1. Please provide, if available, statistics on children working and/or living on the streets. If no statistics are available, please explain what other means your Government uses to estimate the number of children working and/or living on the street.

There are no statistics or nationwide Swedish research among children living and/or working on the street. The number of homeless children are relative limited. However, some information is available.

Save the Children (Sweden) and The Department of Social Work at Stockholm University conducted a national survey about children breaking up from home in 2009. The survey was implemented with economical support from the Swedish Inheritance Fund. The goal was to get an overview about young persons who had left home on their own initiative or because the parents had thrown them out. 1 300 high school students in Sweden reported their experiences of having spent time away from home (at least one night away from home without their parents' permission or because their parents had thrown them out) in a questionnaire. About 11 % of the young persons answering had experiences of breaking up (most common was spending one night away from home without parental permission). About 25 % of the young persons who had left their home for more than one night had slept outside or with a "temporary acquaintance". There were more breaking up situations in the big cities. The young persons had difficulties explaining what kind of situations they had experienced. Some of them had both run away and been thrown out. More girls than boys had experiences of being thrown out. The majority of the 11 % who had such experiences, had one or more experiences and 25 % had experienced four or more situations. The survey showed that breaking up situations is often due to domestic problems.

The social services in Stockholm confirm that there are young persons who leave their home for periods of time. Several of these young persons are living with friends. The social services in Stockholm are aware of handful young persons who are living on the street and are begging to make it through the day. They haven't accepted the social services interventions.

2. Please provide information on projects and good practices undertaken by your Government to protect and promote the rights of children working and/or living on the street.

Sweden has a Children's Ombudsman since 1993. The Ombudsman's main duty is to promote the rights and interests of children and young persons as set forth in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The agency monitors the implementation of the CRC in Sweden. For instance the Ombudsman submits bills for legislative changes to the Swedish Government and promotes the application of

the CRC in the work of government agencies, municipalities and county councils.

The National Swedish Board of Health and Welfare (NSW) are since 2002 commissioned by the Government to collect information about homelessness and developed methods to prevent it. In February 2007 the Government presented a strategy on homelessness for 2007-2009. To prevent children from eviction the strategy included the goal that no child should be evicted. The number of evicted children has declined recent years from 718 children in 2008 to 632 children in 2010. The work against eviction of children is continuing. NSW are going to complete a new survey about homelessness in 2011 and continue ever fifth year.

The social services in Stockholm have well-developed service to find and take care of children that are found in Stockholm city. If a child is missing it is often a parent, friend or the Police that contact the social services. In cases where the child has decided to live with friends or temporary acquaintance, it is more difficult to find the child. The children who are, more or less, living on the street have often refused to accept the help from social services. However, it is still the responsibility of the social services to try to motivate the young person to accept services. If the young person is in need of protection the CYPA is applicable.

The county administrative board in Stockholm accorded money to the project "Inventory of exploitation of children on the streets in Stockholm" in May-Nov, 2010. The purpose was to observe and make an inventory of the number of children that for other reasons than sexual are exploited on the streets in Stockholm. Campaigns with information were shared with people that daily works in street situations. The survey resulted in eight tips and three children were found. The children were begging or playing music. This project is continuing during 2011.

3. Please share the main challenges your Government has encountered when trying to protect and promote the rights of children working and/or living on the street.

The Government has delegated most of the responsibility for the work with homelessness to the municipalities. Stockholms Stadsmission presented in 2011 "Homeless 2011" a report with focus on young persons in homelessness. 166 of 290 municipalities answered a questionnaire. 17 % had noticed an increased level of homeless children under the age of 21 years. Even though most municipalities work hard to prevent eviction, 19 % reports an increased level of families in risk to be evicted.

It is difficult to collect statistics about children in homelessness. There are statistics about homeless adults available, but the statistics about

young persons in homelessness are inadequate, especially concerning young persons between 18-21 years, EU-migrants and young persons who have been thrown out or run away (and not been contacted by the social services). Also there are no reliable statistics on children living with their parents in homelessness and children residing in the country without a permit. The methods of measuring are not reliable, but The National Swedish Board of Health and Welfare are working to improve the statistics.

4. Please indicate by what mechanisms children in street situations, in particular girls, can access child friendly counselling and report alleged violations on their rights.

As mentioned above, the duty to report to the social services is an important means for the social services to become aware of children /young persons in such situations. The general public can also report to the social services if they suspect that a child is at risk.

There are a several non-governmental organizations that support children's rights in Sweden, for example Save the Children and Children's Rights in Society. There are also social emergency services that can help the children day and night. In the bigger cities there are such services focusing on young persons.

According to Save the Children's survey about breakups 40 % of the young persons had met a professional during the episode away from home. 25 % had met a social worker, 20 % a psychologist or counsellor and 20 % had talked to someone at the child psychiatric services. 8 % had contacted an NGO. Girls are more ready to find help than boys.