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November 2006

Policy Report 2006 Sweden

European Observatory on Homelessness

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Summary

Before the election in September 2006 and the shift of governments that followed, the most important up-coming issues with regard to homelessness in Sweden the past year concerned public housing and possible state monitoring of housing allocation. For over a decade public housing has become ever more detached from the social objectives of the municipality, implying that municipal housing companies (MHCs) have ceased to take responsibility for people who are homeless and unable to obtain dwellings on the private housing market. In April 2006, the Ministry of Society Building and Environment published a report which concluded that the municipalities, which are responsible for housing provision in Sweden, fail to live up to their duty. Therefore, it suggested that the central state should monitor the planning activity and, importantly, that municipalities should be obliged to run housing service agencies that organise housing queues in which vacant flats are allocated in time order but with possibility to give precedence for households with special social reasons. Furthermore, it should be mandatory for MHCs to allocate at least half of their flats through these housing service agencies, and all landlords with more than 20 flats allocated in other ways should determine their rules of eligibility and allocation and report them to the municipal agencies. However, the new conservative government will probably put an end to this virginal reform process.

In the past year, immigrants whose asylum applications had been rejected but who had not left the country got a second chance through a temporary legislation, valid from mid November 2005 to April 2006. The new option entailed that over 4,000 hidden refugees received residence permits. To the extent that these people will be housed according to the regulation of refugee reception, the hidden homelessness has indeed decreased, at least temporarily. From April 2006 on, a new system for appealing a rejection decisions by the Migration Board has been introduced.

The general election of central and local parliaments took place in September 2006, which explains the relative lack of actual suggestions and reforms in the preceding it. However, central and local bodies were encouraged to reduce the number of people on social security, such as sickness benefits and social assistance, and to extend the labour force. Whether there are negative consequences with regard to people's possibilities to pay their rents and keep their homes is not clear, but the general number of implemented evictions through the enforcement agency has rather decreased in recent years.

The number of dwellings in the country has been growing, due to the fact that more dwellings have been built than demolished in recent years. Still, most people live in parts of the country where there is a shortage of dwellings. Despite fewer formal evictions, more available dwellings, and – up to 2006 – a reduced number of immigrants, the number of homeless people known by the local social authorities and/or the NGOs in April 2005 had risen severely since the 1999 count. A probable reason is that it has become more difficult for homeless people to be accepted as tenants even by the public landlords. The agency conducting this count, the National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW), officially recognised that counteracting homelessness must include housing policy changes and improved access to regular housing.

The central state is funding a third wave of local projects to counteract homelessness since 2005, the aim being to develop new methods for this endeavour. However, there is not very many news in these projects. A review of the evaluations of projects funded 2002–2005 confirms problems

rooted in the power imbalance between social authorities and public landlords, who control access to dwellings. Another conclusion is that the former tend to utilise their housing staircase more as a means to control the lifestyles of their homeless clients, than as a way to help them obtain regular housing.

According to a central state investigation on evictions and homelessness among families with dependent children, about 1,000 children are affected by evictions each year. The investigation was finalised in October 2005 and its suggestions are being considered in the Government. Another investigation deals with the role of public housing in Sweden, taking into account the decision of the EU Commission that the state should not support housing companies unless they serve as 'social housing', that is, provide housing for people who are economically disadvantaged and because of that have difficulties to obtain housing in the private rental market. Swedish municipal housing companies will not do that. Hence, they must either change their letting policies and increase their social responsibility or stand by themselves without any special support by the authorities in terms of legal or economic advantages or influence over the rent level. This investigation, however, will not publish its results and suggestions until May 2007. The new government is likely to change its directives, since the political parties that are in power from October on strive for even more reduced state involvement in the housing sector.

Introduction

The general process of reform on a national basis in Sweden follows a formal procedure with the following elements: on its own initiative or as a reaction to political debates, incidents, assessed changes etc. the government commissions a parliamentary group or an individual to carry through an investigation, the results of which are published with suggestions of change in one or several reports. Besides the title, these have a series number, for instance, 'SOU 2005:88'. The government can also ask officials in the ministries to conduct such an investigation, and it will then be published as a government report, designated as for instance 'Ds 2006:9'. Both kinds of reports are today published on the net as well as printed and are mostly submitted to various bodies, associations, municipalities, universities etc. for comments, normally within three months. Then the ministry in charge of the issue reviews the suggestions of the report and submitted comments and may (or may not) submit a proposition or bill to the parliament for a possible change of legislation, funding etc. At this stage there is a substantial degree of veto power with the government, which may choose not to issue a bill according to the suggestion. This happened, for instance, with the reforms suggested by the Committee for the Homeless 1999–2001 (see Sahlin 2004a).

The Parliament also considers a number of suggestions, submitted as motions by its members. There are standing committees in the Parliament for housing and for social issues that once a year articulate their considerations on submitted motions in comprehensive statements, backed up by arguments and references to previously determined positions and policies or to proceeding investigations. These statements are published as standing committee reports (for instance 2005/2006 BoU:08 or 2005/2006 SoU:01). A review of the report of the Standing Committee on Housing on issues regarding homelessness and housing allocation made up a substantial part of the Swedish policy update two years ago (Sahlin 2004b).

At the level of government, the Social Democrats, supported by the Left Party and the Green Party, has been in power 1994–2006. In Sweden, elections for the national, county council and municipal parliaments take place at the same day in the middle of September every fourth year. The election on 17 September 2006 affected policies in two ways, except for its result. Concrete suggestions and decisions on, and implementation of, reforms and changes that are expected to be controversial, including budget cuts, may have been postponed until after the election, and – according to the opposition parties – the Government might obscure negative information on problems with finances, production etc. in the country. For instance, more people were being offered job training in order to reduce the rate of 'overt' unemployment the past year than in the previous ones (*Statistics Sweden 2006b*), and reports on the financial situation tend to be more optimistic the year preceding the election. Another feature of the election year is that media events may influence the political debate, which in turn might lead to future reforms via electoral pledges.

When the Social Democrats started up their campaign in February 2006, the NBHW had recently published the results of its counting of homeless people, which revealed that the number of homeless people had increased substantially since 1999. In a broadcasted interview, Prime Minister Göran Persson claimed that homelessness would be a crucial issue in the election debate:

“The fact that there are homeless people in Sweden is a disgrace and something that the municipalities must do something about /.../ Obviously, the problem is not solved. And it is primarily found in our big cities. This happens in a period of time when the economy is improving, not least in the municipal housing companies and in the municipalities. Therefore I think this is a shame for all of us, painful to see and experience” (www.sr.se)

Persson also made a hard attack on the municipal housing companies in the start-up meeting for the election, according to a newspaper report (*Dagens Nyheter 16.2.2006*). Nevertheless, homelessness did not become a big issue in the political parties' speeches and debates. A possible explanation is suggested in an editorial claiming – with reference to the major charity NGOs in Stockholm – that the street homeless were temporarily being cleared away in the city, just because the general election was approaching (Lifvendahl 2006).

By and large, this update report follows the structure recommended in the guidelines, but since housing policy is regarded by the author as being more important for homelessness and currently also more lively in the Swedish debate and subject to change, compared with health and employment issues, more space will be allocated to that topic than to the others. Data collection is dealt with only briefly, since it is the main topic of the statistics report this year. A short section on changes of the asylum policy and practice is added.

Health and Social Protection

Public Health Policies

The Parliament accepted in 2003 the Government's Bill on Public Health. Thereby it agreed to the following national goal for public health: “to create social conditions for a good health on equal terms for the whole of the population”. Among eleven “goal areas”, No 2 (“economic and social

security”) may be of relevance for homelessness as it includes work against child poverty which has been acknowledged as an important social problem in recent years.

Efforts to Reduce (Costs for) Sick Leave

The Government underlines on its website the “work line”: “Everybody who is able to work and contribute to his/her maintenance should do so according to his/her ability” (www.regeringen.se). When people get ill and have to refrain from work, their salary is withheld the first day and then reduced to 80 percent. After three weeks, they get sickness benefits instead (with 80 percent of their ordinary income, up to a limit) from the social insurance office, if they can verify in written that according to a medical doctor they are unable to work – and if the social insurance office accepts the doctor’s certificate. Some years ago, it was constructed as a serious social and economic problem that too high rates of people were on sickness benefits, and the Government determined as a goal that the proportion of the labour force being absent from work (and on sickness benefit) due to illness in 2002 be halved by 2008. These efforts should not imply an increased number of people who were approved disability allowance. The means to obtain this goal are of several kinds, but the National Social Insurance Board (NSIB) (2006) uses as an indicator the number of days for which sickness benefits are being paid during a year.

Since this goal was adopted, many doctors complain that their certifications on illness and their assessments of their patients’ inability to work are frequently ignored by the social insurance offices, leaving the diseased or disabled individuals without means for their subsistence. In 2005, 12,500 individuals were refused sickness benefits despite medical verification on inability to work, which was four times more than in 2003 (*Göteborgs Fria Tidning* 23.6.2006). Although some of these people may return to work, find a new job, or get support from family members or the social services until they recover, many are deprived of all kinds of income. This happened to more than 1,000 people in 2005 and probably had an impact on their ability to pay the rent etc. (*Göteborgs Fria Tidning* 23.6.2006), but the extent of these consequences is not assessed. Nevertheless, the Government and the NSIB (2006) seem confident that they will reach the goal.

Another expression of the same endeavour is a reinforced effort to find and prosecute ‘social insurance cheats’. The NSIB has employed 300 officials who only search for frauds, who receive social insurance (mostly benefits for parents who stay home to take care of children who are ill) without being entitled to it, and special prosecutors have been appointed to deal with the suspected crimes. Although only a minority of the reported cases actually entails convictions in court, the NSIB reckons that the initiative will be highly cost-effective (*Dagens Nyheter* 20.7.2006).

Child Poverty

In a governmental report published in 2004, *Economically Deprived Children* (Ds 2004:41), experts and researchers demonstrated that poverty and homelessness exist among children today, especially those who live with single mothers and immigrant parents. According to a study by Salonen (2006), published by Save the Children (*Rädda Barnen*) the absolute number of poor children grew with 10 percent between 1991 and 2003; in Malmö, 31 percent of all children are poor. The risk of being poor is higher among children with single parents and four times higher for children born abroad or with parents born abroad than for those with parents born in Sweden.

Between one third and one quarter of all children with single parents in the three big cities (Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö) are poor (Salonen 2006).

In 2006 the Government has divided off a billion SEK to poor families, including extra housing allowances and support for single parents, where the other parent cannot afford (or refuses) to contribute sufficiently to the children's maintenance, and to higher child allowances (which is a universal benefit, eligible for all children). However, since many municipalities reduce the social assistance to recipient families with the same amount of money that they are granted through the increased allowances, the latter may not improve the situation of the poorest families, but rather the finances of the municipalities (Gornitzka & Salonen 2006).

Health Care for Rough Sleepers

Since 2001, rough sleepers and shelter residents may turn to a specific medical outpatient clinic in Stockholm, *Hållpunkt Maria*, which provides general medical treatment and care and also some social support. The activity has now become permanent and has inspired an akin project, headed by the City Mission, in Göteborg. Except for trouble due to complicated systems of distributing citizens between different "care centres" and long waiting lists, the most poor have difficulties to pay their fees for ordinary visits with doctors. In addition, those who sleep rough may find it practically hard to ask for and comply with appointments and to keep their medication in a safe place. *Hållpunkt Maria* and its followers in Malmö, Göteborg, Kristianstad, Enköping and Västerås (www.ki.se/odont/dentalcare/hemlosa.html) in general also try to develop more personal relationships with their patients and encourage more frequent follow-up visits, than do regular care centres.

In Västerås, a local project since 2005 provides health care to "50–70 people who are sleeping rough or in temporary shelters ... and who have no previous contact with doctors" (NBHW 2006a, p. 17). The aim is to improve their general health state through visits to a doctor and to a nurse, who once a week receive this kind of patients. The project is carried out jointly by the county council and the local social authority with funding from the NBHW.

Dental care

In general, the social insurance for dental care is very limited, except for children and youth below the age of 18. Most dentists are private practitioners and work for profit and there is no regulation of prices for dental treatment. Elderly people and those who due to chronic illness and medication have special needs for dental care (for instance many people who are chronically mentally ill) are eligible to subventions and it is possible for poor people to apply for social assistance to exceptional and necessary costs. However, since the previous ceiling for costs for dental care and subventions of dental examinations were abolished, many people have withdrawn from regular examination of their teeth and cannot afford the wanted treatment when the situation becomes acute. This has led to a situation where poverty may be visible in the face. Central authorities highlight, that "although the general state of the teeth of the population is good, there are threatening clouds, for instance that the consumption of dental care has decreased, especially among youth and people with weak financial resources" (NSIB & NBHW 2006, p. 2). The analysis of a national survey

shows that “there is a clear correlation between having a weak financial position and refraining from dental care” (NSIB & NBHW 2006, p. 4). Every fourth respondent in the survey claimed that they had had to refrain from dental care for economic reasons.

This situation has been considered by a special government committee that is investigating possible forms of support for dental care (The Dental Care Investigation). This committee has previously suggested subventions of regular preventive examinations of the teeth, and the Government proposed such a reform in March 2006. By the end of June 2006 the committee delivered its second partial report, *Support for Health Promoting Dental Care* (SOU 2006:71), in which it recommended certain subsidies for the costs for expensive dental treatment for people 20–64 years old from 2008 on.

Dental Care for Homeless People

Primarily due to the high costs for dental care (and difficulties to be approved social assistance for more than the most urgent measures) many people who have been homeless for a long time have seriously damaged teeth, which causes pain as well as shame and shyness (de Palma & Nordenram 2005). As a response to a pilot study of the health conditions, including dental status, of 35 literally homeless people in Stockholm (Halldin et al 2002) – homeless people are in some cities offered dental care free of charge in special units. The initiative was originally taken in August 2002 by a couple of dentist researchers in Stockholm, Patricia de Palma and Lars Frithiof (who were in 2005 awarded by the National Association of Dentists for this project), and is now permanently subsidised by the Stockholm county council. However, the idea has caught the attention of NGOs as well as authorities in other parts of the country, and similar facilities are now available in Göteborg since June 2003 and in Malmö since March 2005; in Umeå homeless people can attend a general dental clinic free of charge. In Uppsala and Lund NGOs and dentists are preparing similar arrangements for homeless people.

In January 2003, those originally involved in the Stockholm project, including two medical doctors working with homeless patients free of charge, organised a “Network for dental care for homeless people” for improving the health conditions of the homeless with special focus on their physical and dental status. The network also includes dentists working for profit in the concerned cities (www.ki.se/odont/dentalcare/hemlosa.html), and although most of these activities are supported, for instance, by county councils and the City Mission, the concerned dentists work without salary.

Mental Health Care

In Sweden, the county councils (which charge taxes) are responsible for medical treatment, the 290 municipalities should provide social support, housing and regular activities for people with disabilities, while the central state and NSIB provide pensions, social insurance, project funding, recommendations and legislation. Like in other policy fields, however, a ‘national coordinator’ has been appointed for psychiatry issues (Anders Milton). In 2003, this person and his office were commissioned to review work forms, resources, staff and competences within care, social support and rehabilitation of people with psychiatric diseases and/or disabilities. In the years 2005–2006, the Government grants 700 million SEK for targeted initiatives aiming at offering care, activities

and housing for people who are mentally ill or disabled. These include special projects for people who besides these problems are homeless (www.regeringen.se).

In a report on central state governance of psychiatric issues (National Psychiatry Coordination 2006) five main problems were identified: Great differences in quality and content; the main actors themselves determine the extent of their responsibility; insufficient or absent coordination and cooperation; and very deficient knowledge on what is being done, what works and on how to implement new knowledge (National Psychiatry Coordination 2006, p. 10)

The report presented several recommendations for what central state governance should imply, including reinforcement of the citizen's perspective as well as users' influence, that psychiatric issues be gathered within a special unit in the Government, earmarked funding, and mandatory agreements between counties and municipalities on the distribution of responsibility for care and services for those mentally ill (National Psychiatry Coordination 2006, p. 11-12).

The late government suggested that people referred to in Law on special support for people with disabilities (LSS) should have the right to attend organised activities, or that activities should be organised for them (National Psychiatry Coordination 2006, p. 11-12). Since the law was adopted in 1994, it has formally included people with lasting physical, mental and 'social' dysfunctions, although the latter group has often been excluded in practice. LSS ensures right to housing for disabled people but the problem remains that it only applies to special housing, that is, it does not entitle them to access to regular housing with normal tenancies.

Personal Agents (*personliga ombud*)

The system with 'personal agents' was introduced as an experiment in 1996, as an element in the 1995 Psychiatry Reform, which aimed at improved integration of people with mental disabilities or illness. As the project turned out well, state funding for it was extended to cover all the country in 2001. The system has been in action for several years in many counties, sometimes run by NGOs, sometimes by the municipality, and in 2005 there were 295 personal agents (each agent serves a number of clients). The kind of work carried out by the personal agent is a kind of case management and overlaps to some extent the one provided by support workers and voluntary contact persons, but it is distinctive in that the client is the "principal", in the same way as in relation to a lawyer (NBHW 2005). This means that the personal agent is not subordinated to any authority but should instead represent the client and his/her interests in contacts with, for instance, social authorities and hospitals, that is, work for the rights and legal security of their clients and for the satisfaction of their needs and interests to the extent that the latter want or allow it (www.personligtombud.com). The idea is to empower people who suffer from psychiatric illness and ensure that they get the support, care (and housing) that they are entitled to.

In a forthcoming research review, the task and practice of personal agents in Sweden are compared with the functions of a broker and an advocate, respectively. The actual approach depends partly on the client's access to complementary networks and care providers. In organisational terms, they make up a hybrid between voluntary and public sector work, and their independent or loosely coupled relationship with social and mental health authorities contributes to their being unique in the current landscape of care and support (NBHW forthcoming a).

The government has been supporting the system with personal agents all along, financially as well as through education, information, etc., but it has not, as was suggested in the 1995 Psychiatry Reform, made it mandatory for municipalities or made it a right for psychiatric clients. However, as an evaluation (NBHW 2004) confirmed that it is cost-effective for the counties and municipalities – not least have the costs for hospital care been reduced for the concerned clients – it is now proposed that the municipalities should be obliged to run a system of ‘personal agents’. In addition, it should target also people included in ‘circuit 3’ (*personkrets 3*) in the Law on special support to people with disabilities (‘LSS’), that is, those who have lasting ‘social’ disabilities (including substance abuse problems) (National Psychiatry Coordination 2006, p. 11-12).

Social Assistance

There is according to the Social Services Act a right to social assistance for subsistence costs including rent, for those who cannot support themselves. The municipalities decide the amount that is deemed to be necessary for individuals and various kinds of households for a day or month etc. in their jurisdiction, but since 1998, the central state determines a minimum, the ‘national standard’ (*riksnorm*). Like for sickness benefit, however, the Government has set up a “halving goal” regarding social assistance/welfare, despite the fact that this is paid for completely by the municipalities, the criterion being the costs re-counted as the number of individuals 16–64 years old being maintained completely through social assistance during a whole year. This objective concerned 1999–2004, but has been renewed. In the Budget Bill for 2006, it was admitted that the policy had failed; the number of ‘whole-year-equivalents’ had declined with only 24 percent, from 115,400 to 88,000. And yet the number had not been lower since 1991 than it was in 2003. In 2004, however, the number increased again (Gov. Prop. 2005/2006:1, Appendix 1). Coinciding, if not solely caused by this government goal, there is currently a fashion within local social authorities of closely monitoring clients’ job-seeking, and to demand as a prerequisite for social assistance that it takes place through their daily presence in certain localities, where they have to queue for using computers to look and apply for job options (*‘Skärholmsmodellen’*). Since the clients risk being denied social assistance, they are in no position to question or negotiate the demands. In several ways these activities resemble the old work tests that were used to distinguish the ‘deserving’ from the ‘undeserving’ poor (see Hjertner Thorén 2005).

The ex-Government intended to stick with its goal and to strive for it primarily through initiatives to enlarge the labour force and to facilitate the introduction on the labour market. In spring 2005, it appointed an investigator to consider how the transition from social assistance to work can be facilitated. The committee is expected to deliver its report in November 2006 (Gov. Prop. 2005/2006:1, Appendix 1, p. 7). The new government is likely to reinforce this policy.

The urge to save money and reduce the number of individuals on social security and/or assistance target several authorities and support systems at the same time. This is a probable reason, according to respondents in a survey conducted by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities (*Svenska Kommunförbundet*) that it may fail. The number of people who are being denied sickness benefits and unemployment insurance has been growing since 2003, which respondents in the municipalities highlight as at least a part of the explanation that it has proven difficult to reduce the number of people depending on social assistance for their subsistence (Swedish Association of Local Authorities 2004). However, the municipalities, in turn, have become more restrictive in

approving applications from new clients (Gov. Prop. 2005/2006:1, App. 1, p. 15). With reference to the above-mentioned survey, it is claimed in the investigation by the Ministry of Finance that in municipalities expecting declining costs for social assistance, the most important reasons are “changed methods, improved cooperation with social insurance and labour offices and tighter rules for the right to social assistance” (Gov. Prop. 2005/2006:1, App. 1, p. 17).

Support for Women Exposed to Domestic Violence

According to a recently published investigation, the support provided by the local social authorities to women victimised in close relations is unevenly distributed across the country and too discretionary. The valid Social Services Act states that these authorities ‘ought to’ consider that such women may be in need for help, but the report suggests that they ‘shall’ provide support for both these women and possible children involved in the situation, that all cases should be reported in regular statistics, and that they should be handled according to ‘knowledge-based guidelines’. If necessary, municipalities should cooperate in organising sheltered housing for wanting women and their children (SOU 2006:65).

Data Collection

As mentioned above, improvements are suggested regarding the statistics on women offered sheltered housing after leaving a home where they were victimised. The investigation of evictions and homelessness among families with dependant children suggested regular statistics on such evictions and homelessness and on measures taken by the local social authorities to counteract these problems. It also proposed better and regular statistics on the development of the secondary housing market (SOU 2005:88). Up to the election the leaving government was considering the suggestions but did not take any decisions with regard to them.

Since 2002, the NBHW has a general mission by the Government to “continue the development work” on methods to counteract homelessness. In early 2005, the NBHW was further charged to implement counting of homeless people in 2005 and 2007. The board should report to the Government by the end of 2008. The news and details of the mapping of homeless people in 2005, compared with the previous ones in 1993 and 1999, are presented in the Statistical Update Sweden 2006 (see also Statistical Update Sweden for last year, Sahlin 2005b).

Employment

In general, the rate of people who are ‘occupied’ (self-employed or employed, even if they were temporarily absent from work) have increased in recent years and in the beginning of July 2006 it was 77.4 percent of the population 20–64 years old; the Government’s goal being 80 percent (Statistics Sweden 2006b). The rate of unemployed (of the whole labour force) was 5.8 percent (260,000 people) in the first quarter of 2006, but among youth 16–24 years old, it was 13.5 percent (Statistics Sweden (2006a). However, these figures improved dramatically in the second quarter of

the year, to 4.8 percent and 12 percent, respectively, which is partly due to new labour programmes introduced in January 2006 (Statistics Sweden 2006b).

The employment rate among immigrants and youth fell with more than 20 percent between 1999 and 2004, and especially young immigrants (20–24 years old) are very vulnerable to recessions in the economy. This is the main reason for increased costs for social assistance in 2004 (Gov. Prop. 2005/2006:1, App. 1), which in turn indicates a growing risk for problems to obtain and keep housing.

Housing and Housing Rights

In the parliament year 2005/2006, all motions regarding homelessness were treated (and rejected) by the Standing Committee on Social Issues (2005/2006 SoU:01). Among these were the suggestion by the Left Party to introduce a right to (independent) housing and one by the Liberal Party on right to support in housing and various other suggestions on improved work for offering homeless people independent housing. All motions were rejected “against the backdrop of proceeding work in this field”, that is, that the Government is already considering reforms and measures to counteract homelessness. However, the Parliament approved a general contribution of 10 million SEK (about 370,000 €), suggested in the Government’s Budget Bill (Gov. Prop. 2005/2006:1), which will probably again be spent on local homelessness projects through the NBHW. This grant is already quite an institution, as the Government each year since 1999 has allocated 10 million SEK for homelessness work.

Housing Supply

Housing Production

After a decade of almost no housing production, the trend turned in the beginning of the 2000s. Since 2000 the number of dwellings has increased with 2.6 percent, and 117,000 new dwellings have been built (and 15,600 have been demolished). In all the three big city regions the number of dwellings has increased with four percent or more (Statistics Sweden 2006d). The current forms of subventions, that is, investment subsidies for the production of rental dwellings in areas where there is a shortage of housing and ‘investment stimulation contributions’ for the production of rental dwellings in regions of growth and to students’ housing with altogether 1,050 million SEK will remain, and the ex-Government was convinced that its goal that the construction of 120,000 new dwellings should be started 2003–2006 would be obtained. (Ministry of Society Building and Environment 2006a). The new government has decided to terminate these subsidies from 2007 on.

In a debate article in July 2006, representatives for NBHBP (including its director-general) warn against an increased level of housing production, which allegedly is the goal of the building industry. This might lead to an oversupply of small flats for young single people, whose number is expected to be reduced within a decade, and to a shortage of labour force and financial resources for necessary rebuilding and renovation of existing housing. In addition, claim the authors, housing production does not suffice to reduce homelessness.

“It is not sufficient to just build dwellings. They must be offered in the housing market to those who need housing. Housing segregation is a serious problem. Landlords find it hard to accept those who have not got a stable salary to pay their rents with. Social authorities still often have to take the housing responsibility for vulnerable groups.

Entering the regular housing market must become easier, and everybody must have the possibility to demand a dwelling on the regular housing market. A modern housing assignment agency and reinforced housing allowances are urgent reforms.” (Uusmann & Hedemo 2006).

The new government will probably listen to this kind of analysis even less than the Social-Democrats used to do.

Booming Property Prices

In recent years, prices for real estates and owner-occupied flats in Tenants’ Owner’s Societies, have grown substantially, partly due to the very low National Bank interest rate. According to Statistics Sweden (2006c), the prices for owner-occupied single-family houses increased 110 percent on average between 1995 and 2005, although the inflation was only 10 percent in the same period.

There have been concerns that high property prices might cause problems for households with high loans, which they may not be able to pay if the interest increases. While a slight increase of the interest rate since June 2006 is expected to ‘cool’ the real estate market and entail lower prices, on the other hand, this might reduce the value of purchased property below the one of existing loans and entail a situation of crisis for many households.

Higher market values also mean higher property taxes. On average, these have increased, but on the other hand the rules for taxation have been adjusted in recent years. The tax rate for single-family houses is today one percent of the ratable value, but is reduced if it exceeds four percent of the owner’s income. The non-socialist parties pledged that the property tax should be maximum 5,000 SEK/year (about 540 €), regardless of the owner’s income, if they won the election (Nycander 2006), but now when they are in power, they have postponed this measure somewhat.

Vacancies and Shortage

The number of municipalities where there is a shortage of dwellings is increasing, and according to the latest housing market survey, 63 percent of the population live in municipalities with a shortage of housing, while only 11 percent live in municipalities where there is a surplus of dwellings (NBHBP 2006, p. 27). Reduced vacancies are partly due to demolition of houses in municipalities with letting difficulties in recent years. Nevertheless, an additional 2,800 dwellings are planned to be demolished in 2006 (NBHBP 2006, p. 36). Since 2004, there is a state company aiding municipalities with shrinking population to convert their vacant municipal dwellings (*Statens Bostadsomvandling AB*); the aim being to contribute to a balanced housing market in these places. However, there is also an on-going conversion of private rental dwellings to owner-occupied Tenants’ Owners Societies, which is increasing the segregation especially in the three big cities. Many other municipalities are selling public housing to private housing companies (NBHBP 2006).

Although a good supply of rental dwellings is a precondition for eliminating homelessness, according to the NBHW account of the 2005 count, homelessness exists also where there are vacant flats (NBHW 2006b). A good explanation for this situation is that the systems for housing allocation are deficient (Sahlin 2006).

Housing Allocation

The main problem for homeless people in Sweden is the absence of any public control over allocation even of public housing, which implies that public and private landlords compete for the same kind of tenants, and that the chances for housing decline rather than grow with the waiting time. In January 2006, only 8 (of 290) municipalities had any municipal housing assignment agency; four of these belonged to the Stockholm housing assignment agency (NBHBP 2006, p. 92), which allows the landlords to freely decide the criteria and income limits for accepting applicants (see Policy Update 2004, Sahlin 2004b).

National Coordinator of Housing for Youth

Last year, the Government appointed a National Coordinator of Housing who during three years should suggest measures to facilitate young people's access to the housing market. The commission includes:

- mapping obstacles for youth's acquiring of own dwellings;
- mapping and disseminating knowledge on successful initiatives, private as well as public;
- review the need for national, overarching information on vacant dwellings and consider in what form such a service could be performed;
- appreciate necessary measures to stimulate moving and start 'chains of moving' (M 2005:1, p. 10)

By Christmas 2005, the National Housing Coordinator submitted a partial report to the Government (M 2005:1). The main obstacles found in the investigation is a shortage of dwellings of the kind that young people can demand. Often they have only temporary and/or low-income jobs or are unemployed and in general they cannot afford to buy their homes or rent newly-produced dwellings, even if they had been accepted by the landlords. Other observations concern the existing mechanisms for housing allocation:

“There are today not the same structures on the housing market as previously with municipal housing assignment agencies, housing queues and rules of precedence which to a great extent favoured vulnerable groups. Access to information on vacant flats is difficult to get with few towns providing municipal or private service where information on vacant flats is gathered. Personal contacts have become ever more important and is a common way to get a tip on vacancies, both on the lease market and the market of sublet dwellings.” (M 2005:1, p. 19).

In addition, housing companies have different systems for allocation and demand different qualifications with applicants. Many young people are in practice referred to a black housing market, where they have to pay for contacts as well as contracts which anyway remain very uncertain as tenancies (M 2005:1, pp. 23–25). Although there are no clear-cut suggestions of reform in this report, some ideas have been highlighted and formulated in other contexts.

Rent Loss Guarantees

Some municipalities offer landlords a rent guarantee for an introductory period as a tool to make them accept homeless people with low or uncertain income or with poor records as rent-payers. The absence of references and stable income is also a serious problem for many young people who lack permanent employment. In April 2006, the late government explicitly recommended rent guarantees for youth, so that “a landlord should not appreciate that those who have difficulties to obtain an own dwelling make up a greater financial risk for rent losses than others” and declared that it intended to suggest a special contribution of 100 million SEK/year in 2007 and 2008 to cover economic losses for municipalities that offer rent guarantees to youth (Ministry of Society Building and Environment 2006a, p. 2 and Press Message 18 April 2006). Not surprisingly, this was not included in the budget submitted to the Parliament by the new conservative government.

Parliament Debate on the Housing Market and Homelessness

As a response to a Parliamentary question by a member of the Liberal Party, the Parliament debated homelessness and the housing market in February 2006. Considering that landlords are becoming ever more particular in their selection of new tenants and increase their demands on stable income and on the absence of previous unpaid debts (*betalningsanmärkning*), the MP asked:

- “1. What measures does the Minister of Society Building intend to take with reference to the situation for the homeless?
2. Will the Minister take any initiative so that the Parliament will have the possibility to deal with any suggestion during the spring term in order to improve the situation for housing applicants and homeless people?” (Parliamentary Question 2005/06:230)

In her reply, the Minister of Society Building, Mona Sahlin, referred to the Government’s goal for housing production and to investigations on public housing that she had commissioned, and added: “My intention is to submit for comments a suggestion on a clarified municipal responsibility for planning and implementing a working housing provision” (Minutes from the Parliament 2005/06:75, p. 2). This was not, however, enacted before that government was discharged.

The suggestion that all municipalities should organise a housing queue was ridiculed by an MP from the Moderate Party (Conservatives) from Malmö, where the MHC caused a serious scandal in winter 2005 (see Sahlin 2005a, thematic paper for WG1):

“/.../ the Minister wants public housing to carry out a social housing policy. And this frightens me. I remember from my youth the municipal housing company in Malmö being forced to act as a municipal cleaning woman with mismanagement, destruction, disrepute and empty flats as a consequence. Are we going back to that? Now the municipal housing company in Malmö is a well-run housing company.” (Roswall in Minutes from the Parliament 2005/06:75, p. 4)

He further referred to an agreement between this MHC and the Tenants’ Association on the introduction of “a form of rent settlement which by and large means ‘market rents’” and claimed that

“the resistance against municipal housing allocation agencies is nowhere as strong as among the Social Democrats in Malmö” (Roswall in Minutes from the Parliament 2005/06:75, p. 4).

The Green Party, however, agreed with the Minister of Society Building that public housing should have a social role, since “it has not opened up in such a way that people really have the possibility to live in public housing” (Minutes from the Parliament 2005/06:75, p.4). The short debate in the Parliament provides an apt illustration of how the politics of homelessness reflect general political dividing lines, as does a note on the internet when a Left Party MP observed that the same day as the Parliament rejected this party’s suggestion on a legal right to housing, members from the non-socialist parties put a bowl in the localities and asked for candy gifts to the homeless.

Government Report on Housing Allocation

In April 2006, the Ministry of Society Building and Environment published a report and suggestions on improvements of the municipalities’ policies of provision and allocation of housing, *Fair and Equal Terms on the Housing Market* (Ds 2006:9). Although the case is not mentioned in the report, the origin was the disclosure in winter 2005 of discriminating and humiliating practice of housing allocation and exclusion in one of the country’s biggest municipal housing companies, MKB in Malmö (see Sahlin 2005a). The content and essence of this report might be regarded as a turning point in the Government’s attitude to state involvement in the housing market and as an initiative to regain public knowledge on and monitoring of housing allocation. The suggestions were submitted for comments, but a possible proposition was not written before the Social-Democrats lost the election in September 2006.

It was suggested in the report that the national housing policy goal should guide the municipal work for housing provision, and that its meaning should be clarified through the following addition to the first clause of the 2001 Law on housing provision (*Bostadsförsörjningslagen*):

- “The municipality’s work with planning, preparing and implementing measures for housing provision shall provide preconditions for stimulating and safe housing and building environments and a sustainable development. In this work, the municipality shall
1. actively work to obtain dignified and equal living conditions and
 2. especially promote good growth conditions for children and youth, **counteract discrimination and homelessness** and see to it that the elderly’s needs in society are satisfied.” (Ds 2006:9, p. 83. Emphasis added.)

The reason was, according to the report:

“Housing should ... be allocated on equal and fair terms and without any kind of discrimination. Households with low income and/or special needs should get special attention. This concerns, above all, low-income families with dependant children and in particular families with many children, certain groups of elderly people, people with disabilities, youth and the homeless. For these households, it can be difficult to claim their interests, especially where there is a shortage of housing. The needs of these people should be made visible and be taken into account in the municipalities’ planning and implementation of housing provision” (Ds 2006:9, p. 85).

Despite the fact that a law on the municipality’s responsibility to plan for housing provision was re-introduced in 2001, only 63 out of 290 municipalities complied with its rule that “guidelines

for housing provision” should be adopted by the municipal parliament within its term of power (four years). Hence, it was now suggested that the central state should monitor the municipalities in this regard, and that the latter must submit their guidelines to the county administrations.

Most importantly, it was proposed that **all municipalities** (unless the Government accepts an application to be excepted) should **organise ‘housing service agencies’** (*bostadsservice*) on their own or jointly with neighbouring municipalities. This agency should provide information for house seekers on how to get access to housing in the municipality, including local landlords’ principles of allocation, and on relevant legislation, housing allowances etc. All landlords with 20 flats or more not allocated through this agency were intended to be obliged to **settle their ‘principles of allocation’ and to report them** to the housing service agency (pp. 87–94).

Above all, this agency should **organise a housing queue**, in which everybody would have the right to register (pp. 87–94); “nobody should be excluded” (p. 54). The landlords could determine rules for access to their flats, but these should be “reasonable and must not be discriminating” (p. 93), and the housing service agency should also work for that property owners accept as income not only a salary from an employment, but also social assistance, unemployment insurance, housing allowance etc. The agency would be allowed to charge the housing applicant a fee of maximum 3,000 SEK (about 325 €) when accepted as tenant for a flat that had been allocated through it.

It was further suggested that MHCs should be **obliged to report at least half of their vacant flats** to this new agency for allocation. The idea was that the agency should allocate vacant flats to applicants in the housing queue in time order, although with the possibility of giving precedence to “those who for social reasons are in urgent need of housing” (p. 95), and the preconditions for being allowed precedence in the housing queue should be evident for the public. The housing service agency was also intended to allocate flats needed by the social services as trial flats, training flats, low-threshold housing etc. “The ways of allocating this kind of housing must be clearly defined in relation to the regular housing allocation” (p. 96), and if problems emerged, the agency should follow up their assignments and contribute to their being solved.

As mentioned above, these suggestions were never converted into a formal proposition to the Parliament before the Social-Democrats lost the election.

Proceeding Investigation on Public Housing

In October 2005, the Government appointed a special investigator to review the preconditions for public and municipal housing (Gov. Dir 2005:116) and to consider necessary changes in the legislation for tenancy in general and public housing in particular. Furthermore;

“The investigator shall especially consider the importance of the municipalities’ ability to utilise their housing companies as a housing-policy tool, e.g., as a tool to promote integration and counteract homelessness, but should also review the complications that this might imply (Gov. Dir. 2005:116, p. 12).

The investigator shall describe what conflicts of interests and goals that might exist, e.g., the question whether public housing shall have clearer housing-social goals versus the fact that municipal housing companies today both compete on the same housing market as pri-

vate companies and provide rent standards for the private rental sector” (Gov. Dir. 2005:116, p. 16).

Part of the background are recent EU-decisions on the prerequisites for state support to housing. In principle, the central and local state is not allowed to support specific companies that compete with others on the market. However, in July 2005 the Commission stated that services of general public interest, including social housing, would be excepted. Social housing, according to this decision, is

”... providing housing for disadvantaged citizens or socially less advantaged groups, which due to solvability constraints are unable to obtain housing at market conditions” (EU-Commission July 2005).

Currently, however, a great proportion of the Swedish MHCs distance themselves from any ‘social responsibility’ other than what every landlord or property owner should take, which definitely makes them ‘non-social’. Still, there are some benefits attached to the status of ‘public housing’, for instance the possibility to get central state support in situations with high vacancy rates. The investigator was intended to deliver his report in May 2007 (Ministry of Society Building and Environment 2006b), but the change of governments will probably imply new directives. The future of public housing has probably never been more unclear than now (November 2006).

Housing Exclusion

Homeless people are generally victims of housing exclusion: many of them have lost previous housing through eviction and all of them are more or less excluded from access to housing, at least temporarily. In the housing market survey of 2006, 10 percent of the responding municipalities told that it had become easier to acquire dwellings for homeless people in the past year, while 28 percent found that it was more difficult than before; 45 percent reported no change (NBHBP 2006, p. 115).

Evictions and Homelessness among Children

In 2004, the Government appointed a special investigator to analyse and suggest how measures within social services to prevent and counteract homelessness and evictions among families with children could be developed. The investigator initiated some special studies, which confirmed that about 1,000 children were struck by evictions in 2004 and that landlords were quite restrictive towards poor families. The final report was delivered in October 2005. The conclusions were that the existing legislation (Social Services Act) should be sufficient to guarantee that children are not evicted, but the local implementation, organisation and primarily the local housing policies are deficient; “The housing market at large, the municipal housing policy and the possibilities for people with small income to obtain housing must therefore be attended to” (SOU 2005:88, p. 24). The investigator suggested regular statistics being gathered on evictions and the household composition of the targeted tenants on the level of municipality and on measures taken by local social authorities to prevent and counteract evictions, especially of children, and that “NBHW and NBHBP be commissioned to jointly map and continuously study the extension and development of the secondary housing market” (SOU 2005:88, p. 24). A number of considerations and “judgements” in the report are also of interest here, such as:

“that the municipalities must use the housing policy tools that exist, take a greater responsibility for housing provision, underline their housing companies’ social responsibilities through owners’ directives and develop the knowledge of social authorities on the living conditions in the municipalities and make use of it in housing planning /.../ that the local social authorities ... should reconsider their dual role as landlord and social service. The municipalities should work for that the secondary housing market is minimised and that the tenants obtain first-hand leases” (SOU 2005:88, p. 24).

Similar suggestions have been voiced previously, for instance by the Committee for the Homeless (SOU 2001:95), without being listened to.

Homelessness Projects

Local Projects 2002–2005

By the end of 2005, evaluations of a number of local cooperative projects funded through the NBHW 2002–2005 were finalised, and summaries, analyses and conclusions are presented in a net-published report (NBHW 2006c). The ten main conclusions are, according to a draft:

- Homelessness concerns many policy fields; except for social and health policies, it involves policies of labour market, integration of immigrants and schools, and not least housing policies.
- Homelessness is to a great extent a housing problem, and “homeless people emphasise that lacking an own dwelling make up their most important life-problem”
- Homeless people have many and multifaceted problems, which require cooperation between different bodies in the municipality and between the municipalities, county councils and NGOs.
- The homelessness problematic should be highlighted and considered as a special problem area within the municipal activities, and measures should be informed by users’ influence.
- “The local social authorities have no tools for ensuring that households with a weak position in the housing market are provided housing”.
- Measures for housing should be separated from measures for treatment, and “the local social authorities should primarily opt for that people who are excluded from the regular housing market obtain dwellings with first-hand leases”.
- Receiving social assistance must not be an obstacle for access to housing on the regular housing market.
- Measures to counteract discrimination on the housing market are needed, as there is evidence that discrimination occurs against housing applicants with foreign background.
- Evictions can be prevented through cooperation with landlords and through contributions to rent debts.
- The “Child Perspective” must be taken into consideration and include listening to children’s opinions on their housing situation (NBHW 2006c, p. 9–11).

These more general conclusions are based on a thorough review of the evaluations and other documents from altogether 19 local homelessness projects with NBHW funding. An important finding is that cooperation between social authorities and housing companies/landlords is precari-

ous, as the latter determine the preconditions and sometimes refrain from commitments or change the terms to their advantage if, for instance, they feel they do not “trust” the social workers’ judgement (see also Thörn 2006, Knutagård 2006). Different from the social authorities, landlords have nothing to fear from violating or neglecting agreements, and in the current legal situation, they decide for themselves on what terms and for what targets possible cooperation on housing allocation and exclusion takes place (NBHW 2006c).

Another finding is that not very many homeless people involved in the local projects did obtain (regular) housing during the project period and that quite a few were excluded also from the secondary housing market, where they were housed through the funded activities (NBHW 2006c).

Local Projects 2005–2007

In 2005, 13 new local projects (whereof four in Malmö and only two in small towns) were selected for funding by the NBHW. Four of them aim at preventing evictions through what seems to be – according to the information available in NBHW (2006a) – quite traditional methods, including cooperation with the local MHCs who report on people at risk for eviction to the local social authorities which, in turn, try to solve the situation. Four projects are categorised as mainly oriented to housing; three target women and one ‘unintentionally homeless men and women’. One of these – and the only one based in Göteborg – aims at offering homeless women with dependant children ‘alternative housing with elements of support’ with the ultimate goal to provide them with own dwellings; another one (in Stockholm) will use a ‘chain of care’ for helping drug-abusing homeless women; the goal of the third one (in Malmö) is to improve the support for homeless, substance-abusing women, considering their possible exposure to violence and to form ‘sustainable housing alternatives’ for them. The fourth project in this category centres around homeless clients in a category house, which makes up the second step in a local housing staircase. In the official information on these projects there is no information on *how* access to regular housing is supposed to be improved through the projects.

The five remaining projects consist of a mapping arrangement, medical care for rough-sleepers (see above, the subsection on health care for rough-sleepers), activities for vendors of a street paper, recruiting contact persons for homeless individuals and improving the contacts between schools and parents of homeless children (NBHW 2006a).

Asylum Policies

Sweden has a relatively high proportion of immigrants in the population with 11 percent born abroad (www.scb.se), many of whom have been granted asylum. However, in recent years – up to late 2005 – an increasing proportion of the asylum applications has been rejected. Different from the policy in many other countries, rejected asylum seekers are looked up by the police and expelled by force, if they do not leave Sweden voluntarily. Hence, there have been several thousands of ‘hidden refugees’, who are deprived of the minimum rights to temporary housing and subsistence support that apply asylum-seekers, and who also have to hide from the police (and people who might report them to the police). Last year, repeated reports on sometimes brutal expulsions combined with severely questioned decisions in individual cases and the media attention to ‘apa-

thetic refugee children', who had stopped eating, drinking and moving and depended on hospital care for their survival, aroused anger among the population. Beginning in Easter 2005, a popular movement emerged ('the Easter Uprising'), involving the churches, many NGOs and citizens, for a general 'amnesty' for refugees who had been denied asylum but still resided in the country and for a more humane asylum policy, which would consider the children's situation. There were massive demonstrations and a petition, signed by hundreds of thousands of people, was submitted to the Government.

The amnesty suggestion was rejected, but as a political compromise, a temporary law was adopted in autumn 2005, implying that decisions to reject especially families with dependant children who had not yet left the country be reconsidered; hence they did not have to hide for this period of time. The law was valid from 15 November 2005 to 31 March 2006 and it was presented as follows in a press message in English by the Migration Board 17 November 2005:

"The groups given increased opportunities to receive residence permits are families with children and persons whose decisions of rejection or expulsion orders have not been possible to implement for medical reasons or due to conditions in their country of origin.

An assessment will be made of the humanitarian urgency of each case. Account will be taken of a child's social situation, ties to Sweden, and the risk of damage to a child's health and development. A prerequisite being that the person has been in the country for a long period of time.

When the Swedish Migration Board assesses a case it must take into consideration whether the person has committed any crime. The Board is also able to deny a person a residence permit for security reasons.

The new assessments will apply to denial of entry and expulsion orders which have come into force but have not been implemented. Those who are registered with the Swedish Migration Board do not need to apply since the assessment will be made on the initiative of the Swedish Migration Board itself. Failed applicants who have gone into hiding in Sweden should register with the Swedish Migration Board in order to have their case activated. Those in hiding should turn to the reception centre where he or she was formerly registered or to the nearest reception centre to be registered.

The registration should preferably be made in person. /.../ The Board will not report to the police authority that a person in hiding has turned up to register with the Swedish Migration Board." (www.migrationsverket.se)

The results of the temporary asylum legislation is quite interesting. It was estimated to give reason for 20,000 applications, but no less than 31,078 cases were opened, 7,593 of which concerned hidden refugees; by 7 June 2006 the number of approved cases was 21,244, whereof 4,450 for previously hidden refugees. During January–May 2006, 13,275 people were received in municipalities, 72 percent of whom had previously organised their own housing with relatives and friends (Migration Board 2006).

After a decade of investigations, debates, and Parliament decisions, a new system for asylum decisions was finally implemented in April 2006, with the new Asylum Act. Now the concept 'refugee' will cover also those who are victims of persecution due to gender or sexual persuasion, and 'other reasons' for need for protection will include serious conflicts in the home countries. In addition, an individual's health status in Sweden might give reason for a residence permit. On the other hand, the possibility to submit new applications for asylum soon after a final rejection deci-

sion has been removed; a negative decision will be valid for four years, during which time the refugee will not be allowed to enter the country again.

At the same time the legal procedure has been changed, so that rejection decisions should be appealed no more to the Alien Appeals Board (*Utlänningsnämnden*), which has now been closed, but to one of three special Migration Courts (in Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö) in which written documents will be considered as previously, but where there will also be oral proceedings.

The Migration Board appreciates that 26,500 refugees will be approved residence permits during 2006 and that around 8,000 households will need housing in 2006. The Integration Board tries to ensure this through agreements with the municipalities, whose refugee reception is funded by the central state. Only 167 out of 290 municipalities had such deals in spring 2006 and the reason to refuse is often shortage of housing (NBHBP 2006, p. 111). However, also among municipalities with agreements on refugee reception 48 percent report a shortage of large dwellings, and 41 municipalities claim that the landlords have raised their demands on tenants' employment and income. Despite these agreements, 11 percent of the receiving municipalities leave it to the refugees to arrange their own housing (NBHBP 2006, p. 112 f.). The new government has decided to close the Integration Board completely.

Conclusion

Despite a quite positive economic development, the old Government had a focus on saving in the public sector and set up as its goal to halve the number of people dependent on social assistance, as well as the number of days for which sickness benefits are paid. The coincidence of such goals may imply that those in need of the concerned benefits are refused financial support to a higher extent than before, since this kind of quantitative goals may be compelling for local authorities and offices and imply that officials use their discretion in ways that are contrary to the individuals' wants and needs.

In addition, the information and accounting for such goals, combined with reinforced measures to control applicants and recipients, may entail that people in need of these kinds of support are being stigmatised and deterred from applying. It has already been observed, that some roofless people abstain completely from contact with authorities as a way to protect themselves from humiliating and degrading treatment. The more suspicious and reluctant providers of service and support appear, the higher the risk that also those clearly entitled to social insurance and assistance refrain from approaching them and from applying for social security and support.

Specific clinics with doctors and dentists for homeless (mostly roof-less) people have been organised in several cities. Such provisions may be necessary as an emergency measure for those who due to poverty and rigid rules should otherwise not be cared for. However, there is also a risk that homeless people are being segregated from regular care provisions and that a situation emerges, similar to the one in the United States, where the most deprived ones may have access to some facilities in some places while a broad layer of poor people remain excluded (see Elm Larsen 2002).

Since 2001, the NBHW is funding local projects to counteract homelessness, and a new group of projects is being financed 2005–2007. However, there is not much to indicate that these projects will succeed in organising permanent housing for homeless people, more than the previous ones. A review of evaluations of state funded local projects 2002–2005 showed, among other things, that the problem with the secondary housing market, which only grants temporary tenancies on special terms, remains and is bound to stay as long as landlords are allowed to maintain their exclusive power to decide whom they want to offer their dwellings.

When this report was drafted in July, I wrote that the good news in Sweden this year for the sake of counteracting homelessness was the growing recognition among central state authorities and the Government that homelessness is at least partially a problem of and for housing policy, and of and for the central state. If not formally submitted, suggestions had been published and made official that indicate a turning point in the homelessness policy field. The Government was planning legislative and financial initiatives to make municipalities take responsibility for housing provision, also for people who are already homeless. Even though the end result was uncertain, the suggestions by the Ministry of Society Building and Environment to highlight homeless people's needs for housing and its urge to subject at least public landlords' discretion to some kind of control and social responsibility, and to make it mandatory for the municipalities to organise housing queues were highly encouraging. However, with the shift of government in September 2006, I have to conclude that these signs of progress are gone with the wind. Instead, the future of public housing and of other means to counteract homelessness is both more uncertain and needs to be assessed in darker shades. To a large extent, homelessness is a problem caused by the forces in the market *per se*, and is certainly not solved by more competition, less public involvement and increased proportions of home-owners on the housing market.

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Abbreviations

NBHP = National Board for Housing, Building, and Planning (*Boverket*)

NBHW = National Board for Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen*)

NSIB = National Board for Social Insurance (*Riksförsäkringsverket*)

MHC = municipal housing company (*komunalt bostadsföretag*)