



Sweden

## Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children

A Study of National Policies

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May 2007



On behalf of  
**European Commission**  
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities





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## Summary

The Swedish economy is currently developing well and the growth rate for 2006 was 4.4 %. The demand for labour has increased dramatically during the past six months, which has led to an improved employment rate and lower unemployment. Economic development therefore currently goes hand in hand with the government's strategy to promote social inclusion via employment.

The poverty rate among children is higher than among the adult population. The rate is particularly high for small children aged 0-5 years old. The poverty rate for this group was 15.5 % in 2004. As a consequence of the economic crisis during the 1990s, economic hardship among children increased during the first part of that decade, with a peak in 1997. Thereafter, the figures have decreased and are now back to pre-crisis levels.

Around 25 % of all Swedish children have some kind of foreign background (born outside the country, or with at least one parent that was born abroad). Economic hardship among children with a foreign background is much more common than those children whose parents were both born in Sweden. Children living in single parent households are likewise more exposed to economic hardship. There is no indication that the gap between different categories of children has decreased over time. On the contrary, there are signs pointing towards an increase. For example, economic hardship among children with a foreign background is more common now than before the 1990 crisis, while it is less common among children without a foreign background.

The extent to which children are exposed to economic difference varies greatly between different neighbourhoods, i.e. there is a substantial spatial segregation. This segregation is closely related to ethnic segregation. In some of the most extreme districts in the three largest cities, around 90 % of all children have a foreign background and around 60 % of the children in these areas suffer from economic hardship.

Swedish children are nevertheless doing well in an international comparison and Sweden comes out as number two in a recent comparison of EU Member States.

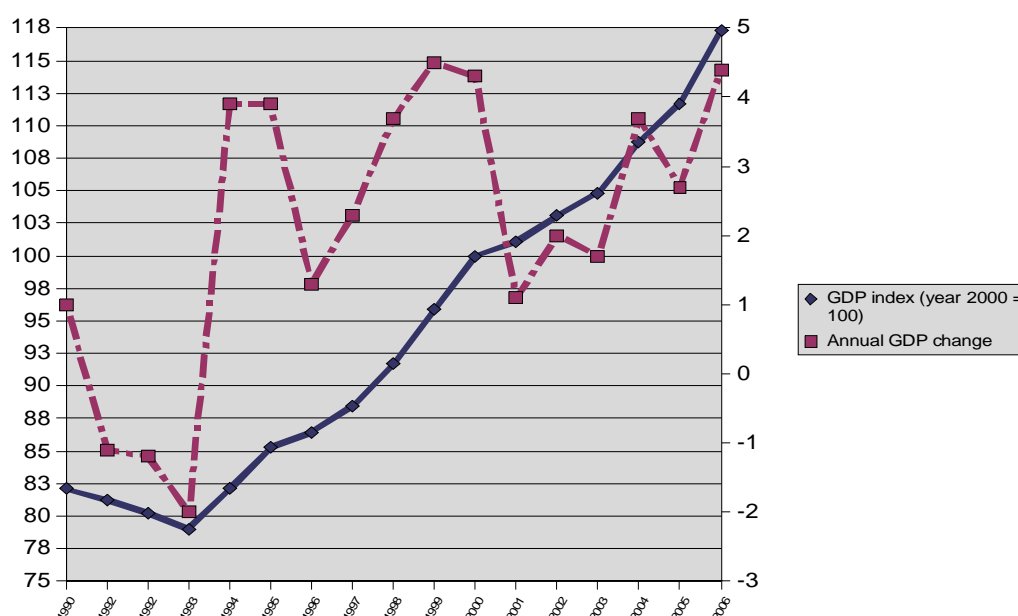
Sweden has a general and comprehensive policy in order to promote child wellbeing. This policy is complemented with targeted measures for the most vulnerable individuals. The municipality has an overarching responsibility for child wellbeing and services related to children. Variation in service provision between municipalities, however, has led to a situation where children are treated unequally depending on where they live. Child policy is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the CRC). The implementation of the child perspective could nevertheless be improved, particularly by listening better to children's own views.

Sweden has, not least because of the rich access to register data, a well developed monitoring system. The Government has nevertheless taken action to further improve the monitoring system, particularly for children that are exposed to various kinds of risks. There is also a need to improve the monitoring of the quality of public services, such as day care centres and pre-schools.

## 1. General trends – economic growth and promotion of employment

The Swedish economy is still going strong. The growth rate for 2006 was 4.4 % and the growth rate for this year is expected to be 3.7 %. This is also expected to continue in 2008 and the growth rate for that year is estimated at 3.3 %. This development has also recently been translated into an increasing demand for labour.

**Figure 1: GDP per capita (thousand SEK, in year 2000 prices) and annual change in GDP per capita (per cent)**

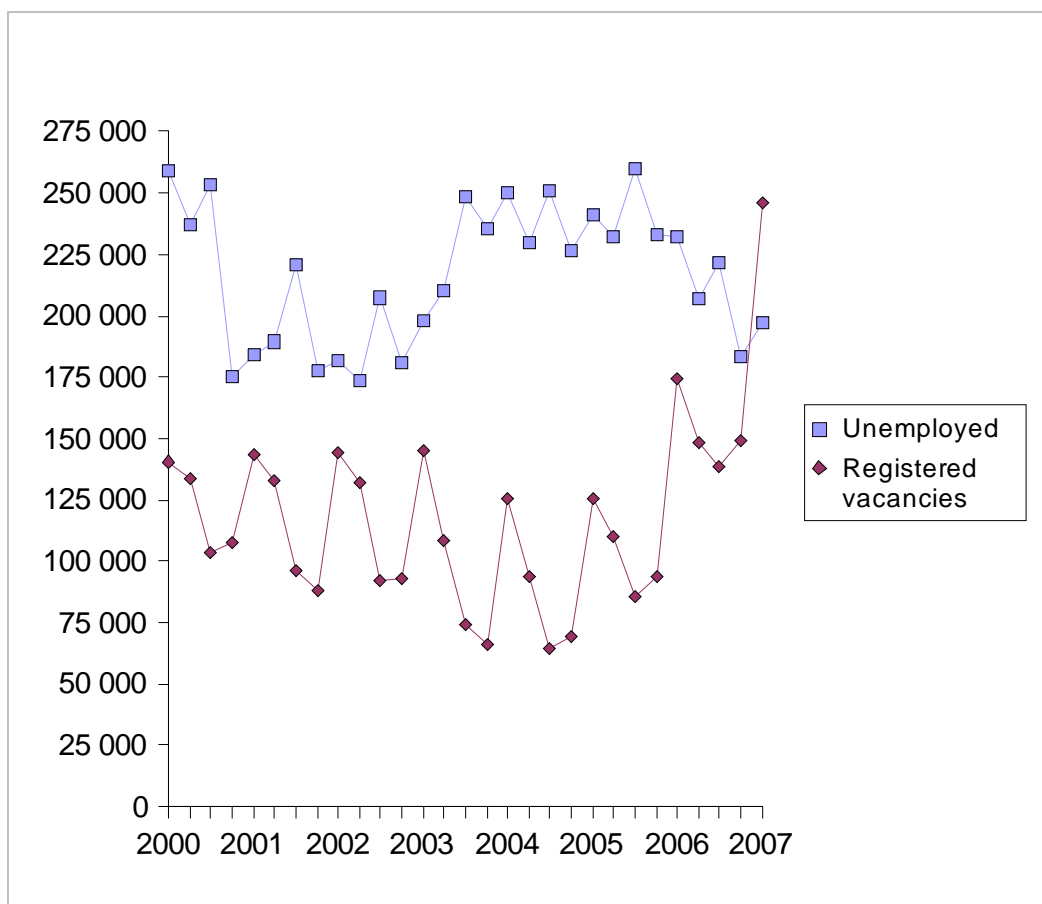


Source: Statistic Sweden

The Labour Market Board (AMS) presents, on a regular basis, statistics on unemployment, job seeking, and the number of people engaged in activation measures etc. Figures from the AMS are based on the number of people that actually have contact with the employment agency, which among other things means that they are not comparable with figures from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figure 2 shows the number of people that are unemployed and looking for a job. Levels have been rather stable in the last couple of years, hovering around 225 000 to 250 000. However, there has been a quite dramatic decrease during the past twelve months and the figures are now below 200 000. What has changed even more dramatically is the number of vacancies, having risen from around 100 000 to 250 000 during the first quarter of 2007. The number of vacancies is now larger than the number of people registered as unemployed. According to the LFS the unemployment rate has gone down from 5.4 % in the last quarter of 2005 to 4.5 % in the last quarter of 2006.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In 2005 the Swedish LFS was adjusted in order to meet EU requirements, which among other things means that figures from before the first quarter of 2005 are not comparable with later figures and that figures from the 'new' LFS are not yet adjusted for season variations.

**Figure 2: Number of people that are registered as unemployed, participating in activation programmes and the number of registered vacancies at the Labour Market Board first quarter 2000 to second quarter 2006**



Source: Labour Market Board, [http://www.ams.se/admin/Documents/ams/arbdata/arblos/2006/adata\\_riket0703.xls](http://www.ams.se/admin/Documents/ams/arbdata/arblos/2006/adata_riket0703.xls)

### 1.1. Boosting employment – the new government’s main strategy

Boosting employment and getting more people into paid work is the new government’s main strategy against poverty and social exclusion. In a way, the Government is putting almost all its eggs into one basket. The Government uses a wide range of measures that makes up a mix of ‘sticks and carrots’, in order to facilitate a positive labour market development. Without going into details, the policy can be summarised as follows: First, taxation policy is changed and a so-called ‘job deduction’ is introduced, which basically means that income from work is taxed at a slightly lower rate than incomes from other sources, including pensions and benefits (basically, all transfers and benefits are taxed in Sweden, with child allowance, social assistance and housing allowance the only benefits that are not taxed). Secondly, activation policies are more focused on getting people into the regular labour market. The Government has introduced so-called ‘new start jobs’, which means that employers employing a person that has been long-term unemployed get a deduction on the payroll tax, with the deduction lasting for as long as the employee has been unemployed. In addition, immigrants and individuals that have been engaged in different kinds of activation programmes are eligible for ‘new start jobs’. Regarding immigrants, it is the Government’s aim to speed-up the process that takes them into the labour market. Thirdly, unemployment benefits have been reformed in several ways. The increase of the maximum daily

amount that the former government set was inhibited, which means that monthly incomes over 20 075 SEK were not covered by the insurance. Those persons covered by the unemployment insurance are guaranteed 80 % of their former income for the first 200 days. Thereafter, the replacement rate is lowered to 70 % and after 300 days down to 65 %. As indicated by the newly released budget proposal, the Government will continue to reform the unemployment insurance and a 300 day limit for the insurance has been suggested. Individuals still out of work after 300 days shall be directed to some kind of activation programme. At this stage, it is not completely clear how this system is supposed to work. Stricter rules are also implemented when it comes to the unemployed person's rights to limit their search for jobs to the type of job that they are trained for or have experience in. New rules have also been implemented that increase the pressure on the unemployed to search for jobs across the whole country.

What we therefore see is a rather concise policy, which aims to make it more profitable to work, lowering the costs of employing certain groups of job seekers and increasing the pressure on unemployed persons to take jobs when offered. The implementation of this policy is well timed, given that there has been a rapid increase in the demand for labour. The acid test of the policy is whether it will also work in less favourable economic situations, with a substantially lower demand for labour.

There are some specific aspects of the recent developments that are relevant from a child/youth perspective. First, there are specific rules for the unemployed with children up to the age of 18. The replacement rate for this group is lowered/terminated not after 300 days, but after 450 days. Specific labour market policy rules are also implemented for those under the age of 25. Payroll taxes are reduced for those who employ youths. The system for reducing the replacement rate in employment insurance is made stricter for youths, with the deduction of the replacement rate from 80 to 70 % taking place after 100 days and the reduction to 65 % taking place after 200 days. These measures are combined with a so-called 'job guarantee' and intensified efforts to match unemployed youths with available jobs.

The Swedish National Strategic Report (NSR) was prepared by a government who was voted out of office two days after they delivered the report. In April 2007, the new government delivered an NSR-update to the Commission. This is not the place to review or critique the NSR-update, but it is clear that the themes of work and employability are the focal points of the report.

## 2. Poverty, social exclusion and wellbeing among children

### 2.1. Incomes and child poverty

The Swedish gini-coefficient has for the last couple of years hovered around 0.25 to 0.26. According to EUROSTAT (on the topic of population and social conditions, domain income and living conditions), only Slovenia has a more even income distribution among European countries. There has been a general growth of real wages during the past five years, an increase that also has affected the lowest income decile. The poverty rate has been stable during the past five years, i.e. things have not got worse, but neither have they got any better.

**Table 1: Mean and median income standard (equivalent disposable income, 1000/SEK, 2003 prices), gini-coefficients, ratio between mean income standard decile 10/decile 1, poverty rate 1996-2003.**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Gini	0.295	0.263	0.258	0.253	0.256
Median	140.9	144.8	148.9	149.8	153.7
Mean income: lowest decile	62.2	58.7	64.8	66.2	68.3
Poverty < 50 % of median inc.	4.4	4.3	4.5	4.2	4.2
Poverty < 60 % of median inc.	8.5	8.6	8.9	8.0	8.5

Source: Income distribution survey 2004

Looking in more detail at the poverty rate in different household types, we generally see that young single adult households and households with children have a higher poverty rates than households without children. This is particularly true for single mothers and, to lesser extent, for single fathers and couples with three or more children. Children are therefore among the high risk groups when it comes to poverty.

**Table 2: Poverty rate (< 60 per cent of median income standard) by household type and age 1996-2001 (individuals aged 20 and upwards)**

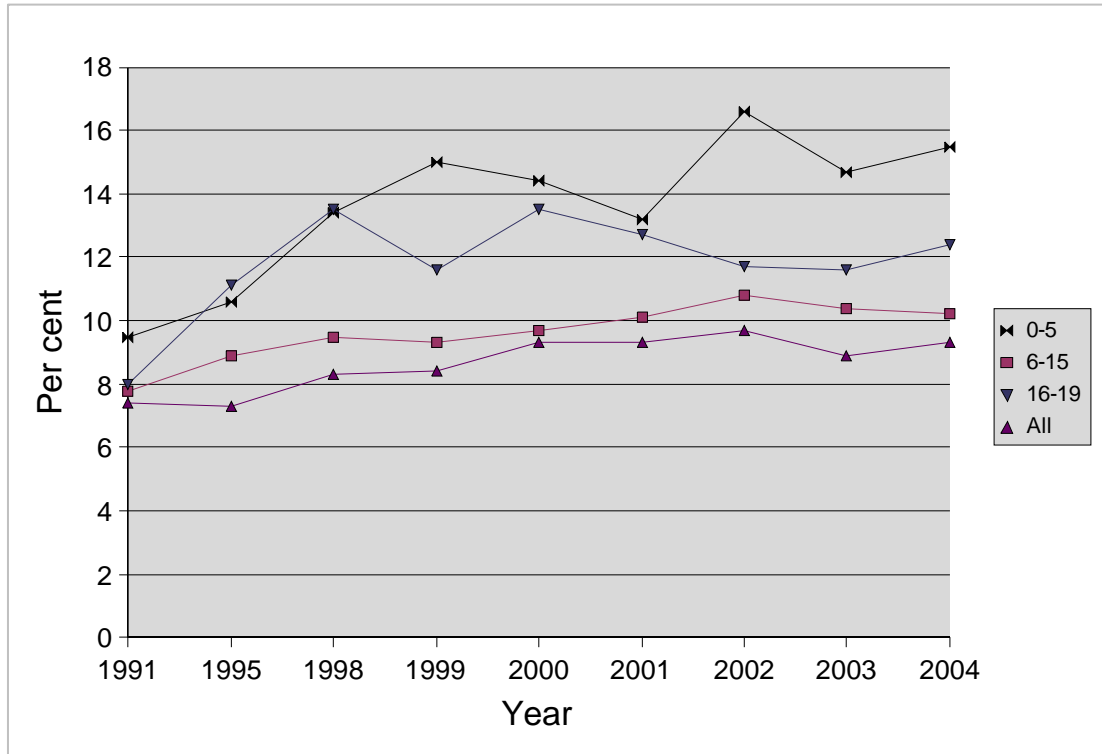
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Single adult – Women	16.9	17.3	16.1	14.1	14.8
Aged 20-29, no children	24.8	25.4	26.1	20.9	26.6
Aged 30-49, no children	7.8	7.0	9.8	9.7	11.0
Aged 50-64, no children	5.8	6.9	6.6	7.6	5.3
Aged 65-74, no children	14.7	17.8	11.7	8.4	9.7
Aged 75+, no children	24.4	25.1	22.3	19.6	18.7
With child(ren)	17.5	16.3	19.6	20.1	22.6
Others	10.9	6.6	10.0	10.0	12.8
Single adult – Men	13.0	14.3	14.6	13.9	14.6
Aged 20-29, no children	19.7	19.5	26.7	22.6	24.9
Aged 30-49, no children	10.4	11.8	9.6	12.0	10.7
Aged 50-64, no children	9.2	12.0	7.8	9.5	8.6
Aged 65-74, no children	7.9	11.4	12.7	11.3	13.3
Aged 75+, no children	17.1	16.1	17.3	12.0	16.1
With child(ren)	8.8	12.0	6.3	8.1	11.5
Others	12.0	9.2	9.8	8.0	11.3
Married / cohabiting	4.7	4.7	4.9	4.5	4.6
Aged 20-29, no children	3.0	3.9	4.6	3.5	6.2
Aged 30-49, no children	3.8	1.6	2.4	1.9	3.4
Aged 50-64, no children	2.6	3.1	2.8	3.0	1.9
Aged 65-74, no children	3.3	3.5	2.4	2.8	2.1
Aged 75+, no children	4.6	5.0	4.7	2.9	3.0
With 1 child	5.0	4.0	5.4	5.0	6.6
With 2 children	6.1	5.7	6.4	5.5	5.4
With 3+ children	11.3	13.4	12.9	11.8	12.2
Others	2.8	2.2	3.2	3.3	2.5
All individuals 20+	8.5	8.6	8.9	8.0	8.5

Source: Income distribution survey 2004

Figure 3 and Table 3 (both below) show the poverty rate among children in different age groups, as well as in the total population. Looking first at the total figure we can see an increase from 7.4 % in 1991 to 9.3 % in 2004. The poverty rate among children is considerably higher and the gap between children and the adult section of the population has increased over time. The increase in child poverty is clearly connected to the economic turmoil during the 1990s. It is mainly among the youngest children that we see an increased poverty rate. In 2004, just over 15 % of all children below the age of six were poor. The most probable explanation for the increase of child poverty among young children is that these children often have young parents and it is young people, during the observed period, that have found it increasingly difficult to establish themselves on the labour market.

**Figure 3: Child poverty rate (<60 per cent of median income standard) by age, 1991 – 2004**

Source: (Salonen 2006)



**Table 3: Poverty rate (<60 per cent of median income standard) by age 1991 – 2004**

Age	Year								
	1991	1995	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
<b>0-5</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>16.6</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>15.5</b>
<b>6-15</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>10.8</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>10.2</b>
<b>16-19</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>12.4</b>
20-24	10.9	16.4	17.4	16.0	17.3	16.8	20.8	18.1	21.6
25-34	6.7	7.4	8.6	9.0	9.5	9.4	11.4	10.1	11.1
35-44	5.3	7.5	7.9	7.5	8.2	7.5	7.8	7.5	7.8
45-54	3.3	3.7	4.9	4.9	4.9	5.1	5.3	5.0	6.0
55-64	3.6	3.8	3.9	4.1	3.9	5.4	4.4	5.0	3.7
65-74	7.2	3.8	3.7	5.0	6.6	7.4	5.9	5.1	5.0
75+	3.7	6.8	9.3	10.4	15.2	15.5	14.1	11.6	11.8
0-19	8.4	9.9	11.3	11.3	11.7	11.4	12.5	11.7	12.0
20-64	5.5	6.9	7.6	7.4	7.7	7.8	8.5	7.9	8.5
65+	12.3	5.1	6.6	7.7	11.0	11.6	10.1	8.4	8.3
<b>All</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>9.3</b>

Source: (Salonen 2006)

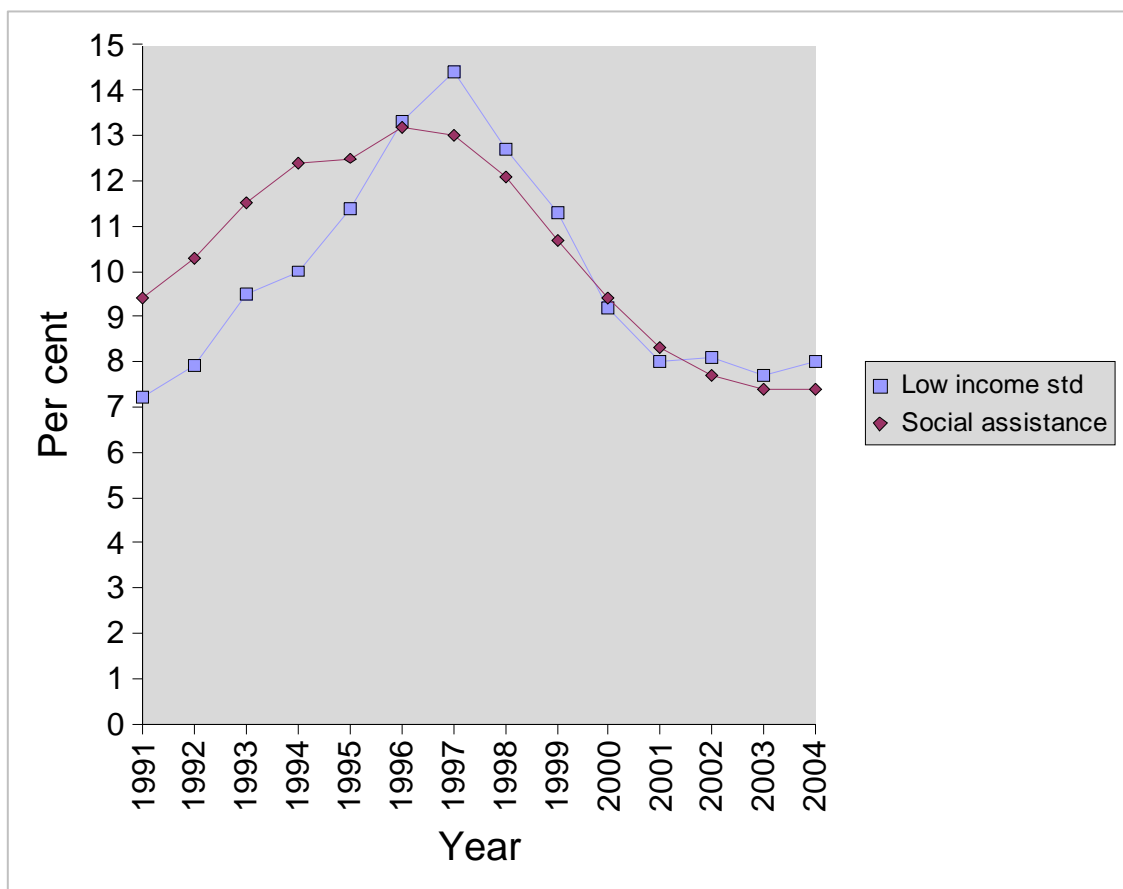
## 2.2. Economically vulnerable children

Since 2000, Save the Children has published four reports concerning the economic situation of children. The reports contain thorough statistical analyses based on register data, which means that the total population is covered, i.e. the presented figures are not based on survey data. Two measures of economic vulnerability are used in the reports. The first is called 'low income standard' and is essentially calculated by two components; the first is the norm for social assistance developed by the National Board of Health and Welfare; and the second is an estimation of housing costs (which are not part of the norm for social assistance). Housing costs are estimated as the average cost for a dwelling that meets the basic requirements regarding the norm for 'crowded housing'. The low income standard measure can be seen as an absolute poverty line, or at least a kind of absolute poverty line, since it is not relative to median income. This is not the place to go into the extensive debate about absolute and relative poverty, but suffice to say that an appealing feature of an absolute measure is that it facilitates a more straight forward interpretation of changes over time. The low income standard measure is not something that has been invented by the author of the Save the Children reports, but rather calculated by statistics Sweden have used and currently use in compiling annual income statistics, as well as several governmental reports by researchers and by the National Board of Health and Welfare. What the Save the Children reports do in a thorough way is to use these statistics to give a clearer picture of the situation among children.

The second measure used in the report is the actual take-up of social assistance, in this case the number of children that live in households that are dependent on social assistance. Using this measure as an indicator of economic hardship has both strengths and weaknesses. Its strength is that it is based on 'double acknowledgement', namely those who receive assistance have acknowledged themselves as being in need of aid and they are also acknowledged by society, via the implementation of political decisions, to be eligible for aid. The weakness is of course that the more generous the norm for social assistance gets, the more people will receive social assistance. Those who receive aid will also be better off in a more generous system. It is therefore not without complications to use social policy outcomes as a measure of economic hardship. However, there are no indications that social assistance has been increasingly generous since the early 1990s; if anything, the opposite is true. Another argument for using social assistance as an indicator of child wellbeing is that social assistance is a strong indicator of other types of welfare problems. Children that live in households receiving social assistance are more often exposed to drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, mental illness, attempted suicide and violence. They are also less successful in school (Socialstyrelsen 2006).

The percentage of all children in the 0-17 age range that live in households with an income below the low income standard threshold and the percentage that live in households receiving social assistance are shown in Figure 4 (below). The figures cover the period from 1991 to 2004. Both curves give basically the same information regarding changes over time, namely that there is a dramatic increase of children exposed to economic hardship during the first part of the 1990s, an increase that reaches its peak in 1997. Thereafter, a rapid improvement occurs and by 2001 the figures are back to approximately the same levels as in 1991. What we therefore see is the dramatic impact of the economic crisis, with skyrocketing unemployment, stagnant wages and welfare state cut backs. If we can learn anything from Figure 4, it is that a healthy and growing economy is essential for the economic wellbeing of children.

Figure 4: Children living in low income standard households and in households that have received social assistance. Per cent, 1991-2004



Source: (Salonen 2006)

The overlap between the low income standard measure and social assistance dependency is rather low, as can be seen from Table 4. It can therefore be seen that, to a large extent, it is different people that are affected by the two measures. One important reason for this fact is that some of people that receive social assistance are lifted above the low income standard threshold. Another reason is the by now well known problems that are connected with the income poverty measures (Bradshaw & Finch 2003, Halleröd 1995, Halleröd & Larsson 2007). In the Save the Children reports the term *economic vulnerability* is used for children that live in households that either have an income below the low income standard threshold, or that live in households that, at some point over the course of a given year, have been dependent on social assistance. Due to the low overlap between income poverty and social assistance, a substantial number of children are defined as being economically vulnerable. However, the overall trend over time remains the same. Around 15 % were economically vulnerable in 1991, more than a fifth of all Swedish children fell into this category in 1997, while in 2004 we were back to a level below 15 %.

**Table 4: Income poverty and social assistance among children in the 0-17 age range, Sweden, 1991 – 2004.**

Year	Low income standard	Social assistance	Low income standard AND social assistance	Low income standard AND/OR social assistance (Economically vulnerable)
1991	7.2	9.4	1.7	14.9
1997	14.4	13.0	5.0	22.3
2000	9.2	9.4	3.2	15.3
2003	7.7	7.4	2.4	12.8
2004	8.0	7.4	2.4	13.0

Source: (Salonen 2006)

Sweden is one of the countries in Europe that has the highest proportion of immigrants and around 25 % of all Swedish children in the 0-17 age range have, as can be seen in Table 5 (below), immigrated or have at least one parent that has immigrated to the country.

**Table 5: Percentage of children by ethnic background, 2003**

Age	Born abroad	Born in Sweden but both parent's born abroad	Born in Sweden but one parent born abroad	Both parents are native born Swedes
0	0	12	12	76
1-5	3	12	11	74
6-12	5	9	10	75
13-17	9	6	10	76
<b>0-17</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>75</b>

Source: (Barnombudsmannen 2004)

Looking at the overall poverty figures, regardless of what measures are used, we can observe that immigrants suffer from a much higher poverty rate than that for native born Swedes. This is, of course, also true for children, something that is clearly revealed by the figures in Table 6 (below). All four columns in the table largely tell the same story. If we compare the extremes, namely children whose parents were both born in Sweden, with children that are born abroad and who have recently arrived in the country, we see some dramatic differences. Among the former category, less than 8 % are defined as being 'economically vulnerable'. The corresponding figure for the latter category is some 67 %. If we look at those who are below the poverty line and at the same time have received social assistance, the relative difference is even bigger. Less than 1 % of children with native born parents are found in this category. Among the newly arrived, the figure is 23 %. The longer that children have lived in Sweden, the better their situation. However, even children that have lived in Sweden for ten years or more suffer from a much higher poverty risk than children with native born parents.

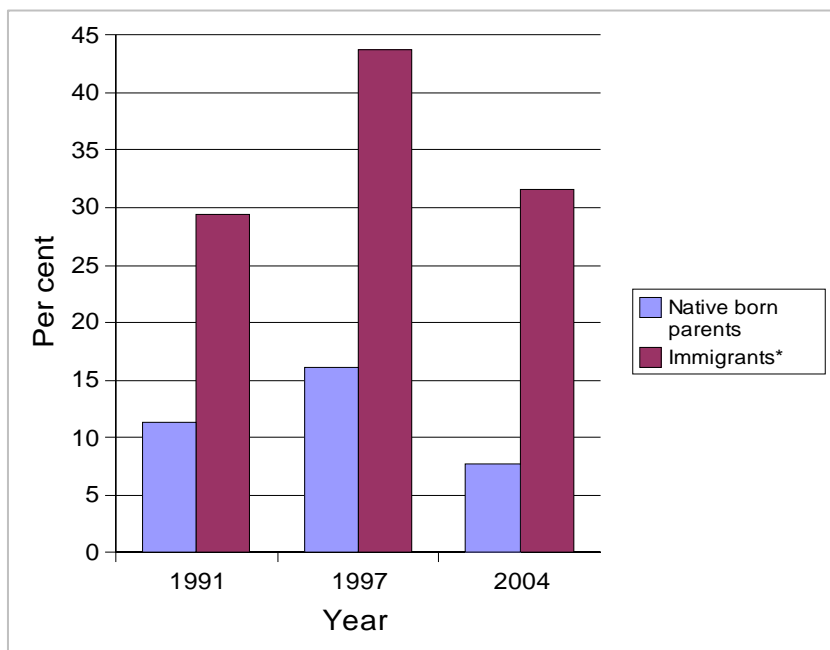
**Table 6: Economically vulnerable children (aged 0-17) by ethnic background, 2004**

Children's ethnic background	Income Poor	Social assistance	Income poor AND social assistance	Income poor AND/OR social assistance (economically vulnerable)
All children	8.0	7.4	2.4	13.0
Both parents born in Sweden	4.7	3.8	0.8	7.7
One parent born abroad	15.7	14.8	5.9	24.6
Both parents born abroad	23.9	27.2	10.7	40.4
Children born abroad	27.0	33.7	13.5	47.2
Arrived to Sweden 0-2 years ago	46.1	43.9	22.9	67.1
Arrived to Sweden 3-5 years ago	25.2	40.9	14.2	51.9
Arrived to Sweden 6-9 years ago	19.0	28.4	8.9	38.5
Arrived to Sweden 10+ years ago	11.4	20.1	4.9	26.6

Source: (Salonen 2006)

Figure 5 (below) shows the percentage of children that are suffering from economic vulnerability (low income standard and/or social assistance) in 1991, 1997 and 2004. The figure discriminates between children with native born parents and children that either have immigrated themselves or have at least one parent born abroad. The development over time follows the well known pattern for both groups. However, we can also see that children with native born parents have a better situation in 2004 compared with 1991, but that the situation for 'immigrant' children is actually worse. The ethnic cleavage has therefore increased over time.

**Figure 5: Economically vulnerable children - percentage, 1991, 1997 and 2004.**



Source: (Salonen 2006)

That single parents are exposed to poverty is a well established fact - one that is naturally of importance for child poverty. However, the link between poverty and household constellation is rather complicated for a number of reasons. Sweden has not conducted an official census since 1990, which means that we lack basic knowledge about household structures. It is possible to ascertain most households with children from income registers and with help of the annual income survey, for example, it is possible to estimate the structure of households. Using register data on child poverty will nevertheless suffer from an overestimation of the number of single parents. This is particularly the case in households where the parent that has custody is first divorced and thereafter begins to share the household with a new partner but without being married. This situation links to another problem, which is much more difficult to do anything about. Many children are living in increasingly complex family situations when parents are divorced, remarried and when they have half-siblings and step-siblings. In these complex family situations, several distinct household budgets are involved, along with a complex web of personal relationships. What is really needed is to investigate the extent to which children get access to the resources that are available and sometimes dispersed in the different households of which the child is part of. It would seem that we do not currently have that knowledge.

Even though one has to be cautious when investigating children's household situation, it is likely that the information we have is an important indicator of children's living conditions. Statistics about children that have been subjected to hospital care show that children living in single adult households are more often treated because of psychiatric diagnoses, suicide attempts, road traffic injuries, violence, accidents, intoxication, alcohol and drug related diagnoses (Socialstyrelsen 2006). In 1991, 16 % of all children in the 0-17 age group lived with a single parent. In 2004, the corresponding figure had risen to 22 %. In 1991, more than one third of all children in a single adult household were defined as being 'economically vulnerable', while only 10.6 % that had cohabiting parents were given the same classification. In 2004, both figures were lower but the difference remained around the same (Salonen 2006).

Table 7 (below) also shows the economic vulnerability risk for children with native born parents versus immigrant children. Very few children with cohabiting native born parents are found in this category, while more than a fifth of all children with a native born single parent find themselves in this category. For immigrant children with cohabiting parents the figure is even higher, at above 25 %. The troubling group is immigrant children with a single parent; every second child in this group is counted as being 'economically vulnerable'.

**Table 7: Percentage of economically vulnerable children by household type and ethnicity. 1991 and 2004**

Year	1991	2004
Single parent	34.6	28.5
Cohabiting parents	10.6	8.7
Cohabiting parents – both native born Swedes		3.5
Single parent – native born Swede		22.8
Cohabiting parents – immigrants		26.8
Single parent – immigrant		50.3

Source: (Salonen 2006)

### 2.3. Spatial segregation

Economic vulnerability among children varies greatly between municipalities and, particularly in the larger cities, also within the municipalities. Economic vulnerability can be seen in Table 8 (below) in the three largest cities (Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö), where around a quarter of all children are found in this group, almost twice as many as in other parts of the country. Although the economic situation for children is worse in the largest cities, the majority of all economically vulnerable children actually live outside these three cities (only around 15 % of all children in the 0-17 age group live in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö). The remark on page 85 of the ‘Ending Child Poverty within the EU?’ report, namely that “almost all children living at risk of poverty are based in the biggest cities” seems to be a rather exaggerated.

**Table 8: Economic vulnerability among children (aged 0-17) divided by regional differences.**

	2000	2004
Largest cities (Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö)	27.7	23.7
Suburban municipalities	11.8	9.7
Larger towns	14.4	12.3
Middle sized towns	13.2	11.3
Industrial municipalities	12.2	10.7
Rural municipalities	15.1	12.5
Low population density municipalities	15.0	13.1
Other larger municipalities	12.3	10.7
Other smaller municipalities	15.3	11.2

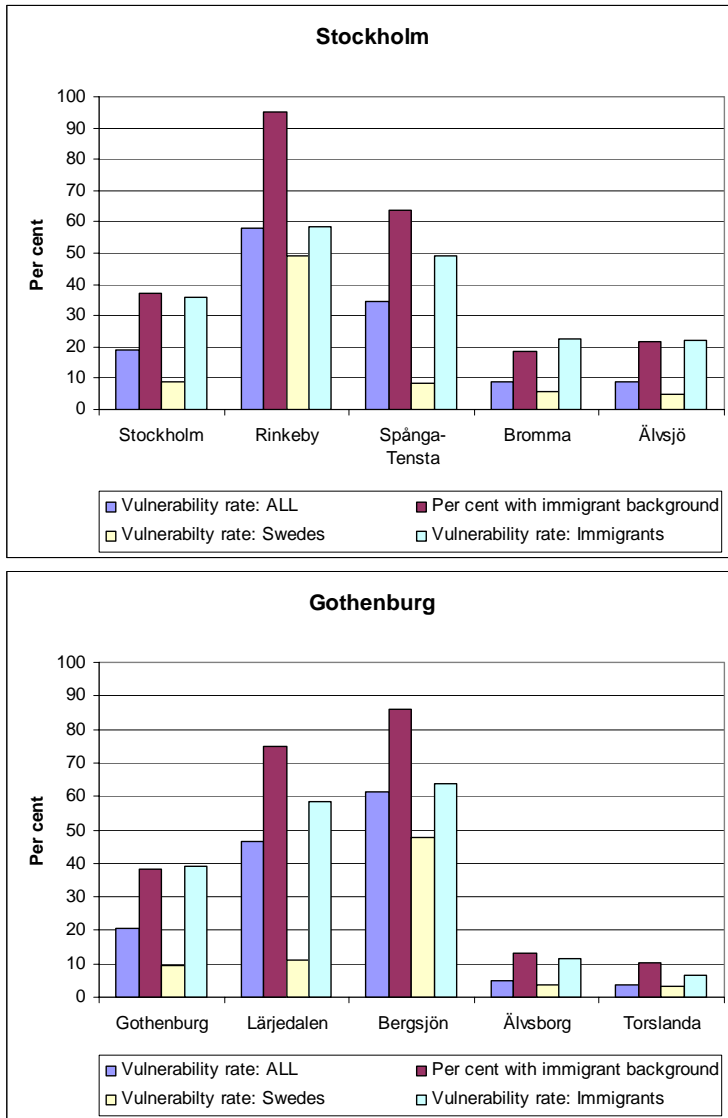
Source: (Salonen 2006).

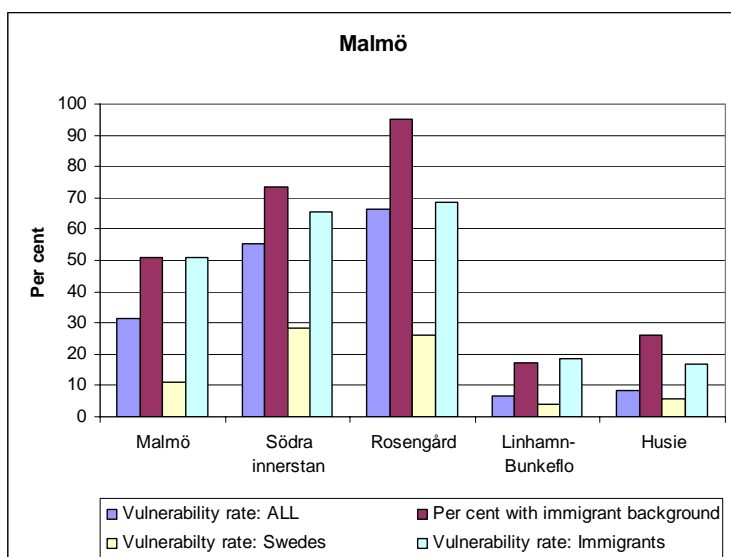
The spatial component of child poverty serves as a good indicator of overall spatial segregation. It is in the suburban areas around the three largest cities that we find some of the municipalities with the lowest rates of economic vulnerability. The lowest vulnerability rate, 4.8 %, is found in Lomma, outside Malmö. Kungsbacka, outside Gothenburg, and Täby, outside Stockholm, have just slightly higher vulnerability rates. Other suburban areas are found at the other end of the spectrum. Botkyrka, outside Stockholm, has a vulnerability rate of 24 %, a figure that only is surpassed by Malmö’s 31 %. Figure 6 (below) shows the economic vulnerability rate for Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. Within each one of these municipalities four districts have been chosen, the two with the highest and the two with the lowest vulnerability rates. In the richest districts, the vulnerability rate varies between 3.5 % to almost 9 %. In the poorest districts it varies from somewhat over one third in Spånga-Tensta (Stockholm), to two thirds in Rosengård (Malmö).

The second bar in the figure also shows the percentage of children that are born outside the country or have at least one immigrant parent. The third and fourth bars in the diagram show the vulnerability rate for ‘Swedish’ children and children with ‘immigrant backgrounds’ (they are of course all Swedish children). In both Rinkeby (Stockholm) and Rosengård (Malmö), more than 90 % of all children have an immigrant background. Also, in the other districts with a high vulnerability rate, a large majority of all children have an immigrant background. In the rich

districts, less than 10 % of all children have an immigrant background. Torstlanda district in Gothenburg has the lowest immigrant rate, at just 3.1 %.

**Figure 6: Examples of spatial segregation in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. Per cent, 2004**





Source: (Salonen 2006)

Swedish children in richer areas are better off than Swedish children in poorer areas and immigrant children in richer areas are better off than immigrant children in poorer areas. However, in all districts, immigrant children have a higher vulnerability rate than Swedish children. The smallest difference between Swedish children and immigrant children is found in two of the poorest areas, Rinkeby (ratio 1.2) and Bergsjön (ratio 1.3). These figures reflect the fact that families that have the resources to leave these areas do so and the ones that are left are highly selected. The fact that the large majority of all children in these areas have immigrant backgrounds is an effect of this process; the Swedes that are left in these areas are mainly poor. It is also in the poorer areas that we find the largest differences between immigrant and Swedish children. The ratio between immigrant and Swedish children in Spånga-Tensta is 5.9 and in Lärjedalen, this ratio is 5.2. These differences within districts exemplify how distinct the borders between rich and poor areas are.

## 2.4. Indicators of school and care activities

The number of children in day care and/or preschool has increased quite dramatically, from 76 % in 2000, to 83 % in 2006. The high coverage means that the quality of preschool activities is of utmost importance for the majority of Swedish children. The same is of course true for older children in primary and secondary schooling. Looking at the number of personnel per child, shown in Table 9 below, which can be seen as a proxy of quality, we can see that the figures remain rather stable.

**Table 9: Indicators on day care and school situation. Per cent, 2000 - 2006**

	2000	2003	2005	2006
Percentage of children aged 1-5 attending day care / preschool	75.7	82.3	83.4	83.3
Percentage of pupils in ninth grade that are eligible for secondary education	90.4	90.7	89.1	
Girls	92.0	91.8	90.5	
Boys	88.8	89.7	87.7	
Percentage of 16-19 year olds attending secondary schooling	75.9	77.0	76.7	76.8
Percentage of 20 year olds that are eligible for tertiary education	59.2	59.9	63.4	63.5
Women	66.5	64.7	67.3	67.6
Men	54.1	55.3	59.8	59.5
Percentage of pupils in special school (mental disabilities)	1.4	1.6	1.6	1.8
Number of full time workers per child in preschool	4.1	4.0	3.8	4.1
Number of enlisted children per staff member (full time) in after school care	18.1	18.9	19.2	22.4
Number of pedagogic personnel per 100 pupils in preschool and primary school	7.7	8.0	8.1	7.8
Total cost for school and day care as percentage of the municipalities total operating budget	45.0	44.7	45.1	50.7

Source: <http://www.kommundatabas.se/kdbs/framekomdb.aspx?sw=1280>

The percentage of children that having completed primary school are eligible for secondary schooling has somewhat decreased. The decrease has been larger among girls than among boys, but girls are still doing better than boys. The percentage of the 16-19 year olds that attend secondary school is nevertheless stable over time at a rate of just above 75 %. The percentage of 20 year olds that are eligible for tertiary education has increased, particularly among boys. Girls are again doing better, however.

The number of children in special school (children with some sort of mental disability) has increased by 0.4 % since 2000. In 2006, close to 2 % of children in primary school were going to this type of school. These are fairly minor but not unimportant figures. It is not likely that we have had such a rapid increase of children with mental disabilities in such a short space of time. It is more likely that this development is a consequence of better tools to diagnose children, which in turn means that more children now get adequate help. However, it could also be that it is becoming increasingly difficult to give adequate support to children within the ordinary school system, which could lead to a pressure to find fitting diagnoses in order to get access to the resource available within the special school. This is not an unproblematic development, not least

because of the stigmatisation often connected with both the diagnosis and the schools. To clarify, I am not talking about children with severe handicaps here, but rather concerns relating to children that with better support would be able to attend regular schools. Today there is no concrete knowledge about how to interpret the development, but it is certainly worth continued observation and discussion.

## **2.5. Other indicators of living conditions and child wellbeing**

From 2001 onwards, the Swedish Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) has been supplemented with a child survey (Child-SLC). In cases where the (adult) SLC respondent had a child in the household aged between 10 and 18, an interview was also conducted with the child. Before the SLC, in 2000, a comparable supplement had been added to the Living Conditions Survey (LNU), but I won't go into details about the differences between these two surveys here. In a report based on the Child-SLC and Child-LNU, children were defined as 'economically exposed' if they lived in a low income household (the fifth with the lowest income) that also lacked an economic buffer. Large differences were, as expected, found between children living in different circumstances.

Jonsson and Östberg (2004) examined the degree to which economically exposed children suffered from other types of wellbeing problems. The main conclusions from their study can be summarised as follows: It often seems like parents, possibly with help from other close relatives such as grandparents, protect children from the consequences of economic hardship, which means that they carry the burden of economic hardship themselves, to a certain extent.

Economically exposed children nevertheless have to forego consumption and activities that are common among their friends. They are also less active during their leisure time and they are seemingly less socially integrated. However, economically exposed children do not report more problems related to the school than other children. Even though the data do not include information on actual school achievement, they do indicate that the school environment to some degree levels out the difference between children in different economic circumstances. Health problems, psychological distress and psycho-somatic symptoms are more common among economically exposed children, particularly among girls. The differences when it comes to psycho-somatic symptoms and low psychological wellbeing between children that are economically exposed and children that are not economically exposed are shown in Table 11 (below). The results emphasise the negative effect of economic hardship on children's wellbeing.

**Table 10: Economically exposed children in different sub-groups. Data from Child-LNU 2000 and Child-SLC 2001, 2002**

		Percentage of economically exposed children	Percentage of all economically exposed children
Household type	Both biological parents (70.1 %)	5.6	51.2
	Single mother (14.8 %)	21.1	40.6
	Single father (4.2 %)	6.5	3.5
	Remarried mother (8.5 %)	2.7	2.9
	Remarried father (1.9 %)	4.7	1.2
	Others (0.5 %)	9.1	0.6
	All	7.7	100.0
Ethnicity <sup>a</sup>	At least one native born parent (89.1 %)	4.9	60.0
	Immigrants from the Nordic countries, western Europe and the US (2.5 %)	13.2	4.5
	Immigrants from other countries (8.4 %)	30.7	35.5
	All	7.3	100.0
Socio-economic class	Upper and middle class (22.8 %)	1.0	3.8
	Lower middle class (33.4 %)	4.3	22.7
	Self employed (13.2 %)	0.7	1.5
	Blue collar workers and lower white collar workers (30.6 %)	14.8	72.0
	All	6.3	100.0
Unemployment <sup>b</sup>	No parents unemployed	6.0	64.4
	At least one of the parents unemployed	33.3	35.6
	All	8.5	100.0
	The interviewed parent unemployed during the 1990s	16.9	50.8
	The interviewed parent not unemployed during the 1990s	5.6	49.2
	All	8.5	100.0

<sup>a</sup> Only data from child-SLC

<sup>b</sup> Only data from child-LNU

Source: (Jonsson & Östberg 2004)

**Table 11: Psycho-somatic symptoms and low psychological wellbeing among children aged 10-18, Per Cent (figures are proxies derived from diagrams)**

	Economically exposed	Not economically exposed
Recurring headache	17	12
Psycho-somatic symptoms	36	28
Feeling low	23	15
Tense/nervous	29	21
Irritated/grumpy	15	29
Low wellbeing	15	29

Source: (Jonsson & Östberg 2004)

Table 12 (below) shows to what degree children in families that receive social assistance and low income families (not receiving social assistance) are exposed to risks regarding mortality and health problems. The population is made up of children that were in aged 0-15 in 1990 (n= 1 196 780). In all cases, children living in households receiving social assistance are more exposed to these problems than other children. This is not the case among children that live in low income households that do not receive social assistance. The difference between these two categories is probably explained by two factors: First, low income measures are always contaminated with a substantial measurement problem. Secondly, among households with social assistance we find individuals that are, to a large extent, exposed to a wide range of different welfare problems. A lack of money is only one of several difficulties they face. This is of course not true for all recipients of social assistance, but it is nonetheless true for a significant part. It is plausible to expect that the accumulation of welfare problems is less common among low income households that do not receive social assistance (Halleröd and Larsson 2007).

**Table 12: Relative risks regarding mortality 1993-2002 and health problems 1993-2002 among children in families that, to different degrees, have received social assistance and families with low disposable income.**

		Boys		Girls	
		n	Odds ratio	n	Odds ratio
Mortality	Social assistance				
	10 months or more	77	2.3	35	2.1
	1-9 months	158	1.7	77	1.6
	Low income				
	2-3 years	41	n.s	23	n.s
	1 year	44	n.s	34	1.6
	Others	1 267	1	658	1
Psychiatric illness	Social assistance				
	10 months or more	388	3.6	426	2.5
	1-9 months	824	2.7	1 052	2.2
	Low income				
	2-3 years	160	n.s	224	n.s
	1 year	163	n.s	235	n.s
	Others	4 337	1	6 850	1
Suicidal attempt	Social assistance				
	10 months or more	154	3.4	319	3.0
	1-9 months	350	2.7	809	2.7
	Low income				
	2-3 years	60	n.s	160	n.s
	1 year	66	n.s	171	1.2
	Others	1 797	1	4 253	
Injuries related to violence	Social assistance				
	10 months or more	191	3.1	58	5.3
	1-9 months	362	2.1	95	3.0
	Low income				
	2-3 years	82	n.s	24	n.s
	1 year	62	n.s	21	n.s
	Others	2 425	1	493	1
Alcohol or drug related illness	Social assistance				
	10 months or more	311	4.1	184	3.1
	1-9 months	627	2.9	462	2.7
	Low income				
	2-3 years	106	n.s	74	n.s
	1 year	115	n.s	93	n.s
	Others	3 062	1	2 414	1

Source: Socialstyrelsen 2006

## **2.6. Refugee Children**

The number of lone asylum seeking children, namely children that arrive to the country without any other family members, has increased rather dramatically. A year ago, around 30 to 40 children arrived each month. In autumn 2006 that figure increased and in December 2006, 141 children arrived. The figure for January 2007 was 129, February 2007, 116 and March 2007, 111. Taking care of these children is a demanding task and many municipalities hesitate to engage in this task. The problem is to arrange acceptable reception camps for these children and then to arrange some kind of more permanent foster care as soon as possible. The Government has recently put more pressure on the municipalities and also increased the subsidies to municipalities that receive these children.

## **2.7. International comparison**

Even though the situation for many children in Sweden can certainly be improved and needs to be improved, Sweden performs well in an international comparison of children's wellbeing. Bradshaw et al (2007) rank Sweden as number two in the overall assessment of child wellbeing within the EU. Sweden holds this position together with the Netherlands (no. 1) and Denmark (no. 3). There is a substantial gap to Finland in fourth position.

**Table 13: Swedish children’s wellbeing in a European context**

Domain	Sweden's rank	No. of countries
<b>Overall child wellbeing in the European Union</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Material situation in the EU</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>25</b>
Deprivation	1	24
Child income poverty	4	24
Children in workless households	-	
<b>Child health in the EU</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>25</b>
Health at birth	2	25
Health behaviour	7	22
Immunisation	8	25
<b>Education</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>20</b>
Educational participation	1	19
Educational attainment	5	20
Educational outcome	6	19
<b>Housing and environment</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>25</b>
Quality of local environment	2	25
Housing problems	3	25
Overcrowding	8	25
<b>Risk and safety</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>25</b>
Accidental and non-accidental deaths	2	23
Experience of violence	2	22
Risky behaviour	11	24
<b>Subjective wellbeing</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>24</b>
Personal wellbeing composite	5	24
Self-defined health	9	21
Wellbeing at school	10	22
<b>Civic participation in the EU</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Children's relationships</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>23</b>
Relationship with peers	3	22
Relationship with parents	12	19
Family structure	20	22

Source: (Bradshaw et al 2007)

Where Sweden does not come out that well is with civic participation and children’s relationships. Concerning civic participation, it seems as though it is the extremely low level of interest in political matters in general that explains the low overall score. The main problem when it comes to children’s relationships is the relationship with parents, while relations with peers seem, in comparison with other countries, unproblematic. The basic problem is family structure relating to the high prevalence of single parent families and step families. We know that children in these kinds of families are more exposed to different kind of problems. However, a causal link between family type and child wellbeing is not given. Divorces are caused by conflicts and family problems, which are factors that affect children’s wellbeing negatively. It could therefore be that the link between divorce and children’s wellbeing is spurious, i.e. it is not the divorce itself that affects children negatively; it is the problem that contributes to the divorce that has the negative

impact. In research on the long term impact of divorce during a child's upbringing, it was found that the negative impact came from the conflict between parents, rather than the divorce itself. In fact, there was even a positive impact of divorce (Gähler 1998, Jonsson & Gähler 1997). So, the conclusion is that it is better for the child if the parents divorce rather than stay together and continue to fight. I will not go so far as to say that I am convinced that divorce is unproblematic, but I am not convinced that this is a particularly good indicator when comparing children's wellbeing.

### 3. Policies to Promote Child Wellbeing

Family and child policies are largely an integrated part of the general, universalistic welfare policy that signifies what we can call the Swedish welfare state model. In the NSR-update the Government strongly emphasises that it will continue to work in line with this tradition. The main building blocks for this policy are:

- General Child allowance. The allowance goes to the parents (most often the mother). It is not income related and the principal purpose is not to even out differences between rich and poor families, but between families with and without children. The amount is related to the number of children and after the first child an extra allowance is paid for each child (see below). For children that continue to secondary school, the child allowance is extended to cover the three year period of secondary schooling. However, the allowance is renamed the 'study allowance'.

No. of children	Child allowance	Extra allowance	Total sum
1 <sup>st</sup> child	1 050	-	1 050
2 <sup>nd</sup> child	1 050	100	2 200
3 <sup>rd</sup> child	1 050	454	3 604
4 <sup>th</sup> child	1 050	1 314	5 514
5 <sup>th</sup> child and additional children	1 050	2 364	7 614

- Parents are entitled 480 days of parental benefit. The parental benefit is equally divided between the parents. However, one of the parents has the right to transfer all but 60 days to the other parent, which in practice means that most men give up most of their parental leave. For the first 390 days, the benefit is income related (80 % of previous income). During the course of the remaining 90 days, the benefit is paid as a very modest flat rat subsidy of 60 SEK per day.
- Parents are eligible to temporary parental benefit until the child reaches the age of 12 (in special cases, this is extended until the age of 16). Temporary parental benefit makes it possible to take care of children when they are sick, or for other reasons when they are in need of special care. The benefit is 80 % of the lost income.
- Means tested housing allowance for low income families with children.
- Day-care for all children. The municipalities are obliged to offer day-care for children from the age of 1 to the age of 6. Day-care is not provided free of charge, but the maximum charge is set to 1 260 SEK for the first child, 840 SEK for a second child and 420 SEK for a third child. A fourth child is free of charge. Charges can vary between municipalities.
- Free of charge preschool is offered to all children from the age of 4.
- After school care is offered to all children from the age of 6 to the age of 12. The maximum charge for after school care is set at 840 SEK for the first child, 840 SEK for a second child and 420 SEK for a third child. A fourth child is free of charge. Charges can vary between municipalities.

- Free school meals are provided for all children in day care, preschool, primary school and secondary school.
- Dental care is free of charge up to and including the year a person reaches the age of 19.
- Healthcare is organised by the county councils. In most councils, healthcare is free of charge for persons up to the age of 20, but there are some differences between councils.
- Children with mental disabilities and/or severe physical disabilities are covered by the law concerning support and services to people with disabilities (LSS). LSS gives rights to:
  - consultancy and personal support from professionals such as psychologists, speech therapists, physiotherapists etc;
  - personal assistance, guide service and contact persons to facilitate daily activities;
  - carers in the home (to help ease the workload for parents);
  - short-term care outside the home (provides change of milieu for the child and recreation for parents);
  - after school care for children over the age of 12, also provided during school holidays;
  - if the child cannot live in the parental home they have the right to alternative housing; and
  - when the child reaches adulthood, they have the right to their own housing.

Targeting the alleviation of poverty and social exclusion is largely avoided. Besides social assistance, housing allowance is basically the only measure that is means tested. Recent Government discussions have included dismantling this system and instead increasing the general child allowance for single parents (who are about the only ones eligible to housing allowance). However, the motive for such a reform is not the wellbeing of children. It has been suggested rather as a measure to get rid of poverty traps for individuals in a low income family that goes from unemployment to employment. It can also be mentioned that the Children's Ombudsman (see below) has reacted strongly against this idea, emphasising that children in single adult households are already an economically vulnerable group and policies that further undermine the economic situation for single parents is unacceptable from a children's perspective.

The way I interpret the main strand of the governments policy is that children are poor and excluded because their parents are poor and excluded. Children are best helped by helping their parents, with the best way to help parents by promoting employment. Experience from social work also, to some degree, supports this view. Besides the fact that employment usually leads to an improved economic situation, it also strengthens a parent's authority and enables them to be positive role models for their children (c.f. Mayer 1997).

### 3.1. Spatial segregation, culture and housing

The problem of spatial segregation has been a political topic for quite a while, but it seems to be an extremely hard problem to solve, not least because it has both a socioeconomic and an ethnic component. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that our knowledge of neighbourhood effects is rather limited. Research has, as far as I know, not been able to provide conclusive results (Brännström 2006). The current Government strategy seems to be to promote employment, particularly among immigrants. Specific programmes aimed at targeting the effects of spatial segregation are currently underway. However, the programme for metropolitan areas (storstadsatsningen) initiated in the 1990s and terminated in 2004 has not been replaced with any other similar programme.

An example of the importance of specific programmes, such as the programme for metropolitan areas, can be found in Botkyrka (Stockholm). The example is also an illustration of the importance of policies that promote access to cultural activities. Botkyrka is often recognised as one of the most problematic of Stockholm's suburb municipalities. Large numbers of houses in the municipality were built during the late 1960s and are typical example of the so called 'million-programme' that was launched during the 1960s and early 1970s in order to solve the housing shortage problem. In a way, Botkyrka became an example of the modern suburb, harbouring all the typical suburb troubles such as unemployment, low income households, immigrants without any connection to Swedish mainstream society, social unrest, and high crime rates etc. One very difficult problem to solve for a municipality such as Botkyrka is the vicious circles that these problems cause, as well as the perception of these problems. People that live in a malfunctioning social environment usually try to leave that environment once they have the resources to do so. The same logic prevents people that do have resources moving into such an area. The result is a selection mechanism, increasing the proportion of people that in one way or another can be described as 'resource weak'. It is pivotal for a municipality such as Botkyrka to break vicious circles of this kind. One way that Botkyrka tackled the problem was to use the metropolitan programme to invest in cultural activities and environmental development. The municipality therefore developed a strategy of strengthening cultural institutions such as libraries, theatres and other cultural activities. Such activities gave an input to resource weak areas, in addition to a signal to the people in these areas that they are important, valued, and that they do not only constitute a problem. The municipality has also taken advantage of the fact that the 'million-programme' was based on the idea of concentrating housing in geographically small areas, which meant that big housing complexes were built. Today this is not, to put it mildly, generally seen as a very successful strategy. However, one result was that large areas were left unexploited. These areas are today increasingly preserved as green open spaces. The long term impact of the effort to improve both cultural life and the environment is seen as an important factor to change the image of the municipality, from being a place filled with ugly housing and where nothing happens, to a place that offers a pleasant environment and a place offering lots of activities. This is an essential component in order to break the vicious circle described above.

When it comes to housing policy, the Government has initiated a programme in order to fight homelessness. According to the National Board of Health and Welfare, there are around 17 800 homeless people in Sweden in an average week. This is an increase of around 2 000 - 3 000 persons per week since 1999. This figure is based on a rather broad definition of homelessness and of those defined as homeless, around 3 200 people were living in hostels (härbergen) and around 400 were living without any shelter. Compared with 1999 levels, the number of people living in hostels has trebled, while the number living without shelter has increased only marginally. The Government aims to improve the cooperation of all partners involved in the housing market,

to ensure that the social welfare office intervenes at an earlier stage when someone is at risk of being excluded from the housing market. Even though the Government is announcing this as a new policy, I would say that it is a policy that has been implemented at the local level in some municipalities for several years. What the Government is doing now is to encourage other municipalities to adopt a more comprehensive approach. Around 30 % of all homeless persons are parents to children under the age of 18. Even though most of these parents do not have custody of their children, the situation is also problematic from a child perspective.

Today around 1 000 children live in a household that has been forced to move because of eviction. The Government goal is to push this figure down to zero – no children at all should be evicted from their home. Whether this strategy will work or not is of course an open question. A possible problem is that the Government is, at the same time, increasing the number of rental apartments being transformed into building-society apartments (bostadsrätter). Since those with the weakest foothold on the housing market are often restricted to rental apartments, this development might decrease the supply of rental apartments and therefore increase exclusion from the housing market.

### **3.2. Children and public services**

Most children spend a large proportion of their lives in activities that are organised by the municipalities, i.e. day care, school, after school care etc. Other activities such as sport, leisure and culture activities are also, if not directly organised, largely dependent on support from the municipalities. It is important for all children, particularly for children that live in less wealthy families, that these activities are of the highest possible quality. While much of the policy today focuses on parents, there seem to be very few initiatives directly focused on children living in poor areas. Policies that strengthen parent's situations, whether financially or socially, will in most cases also benefit the child(ren). However, this is not necessarily the case and often depends on how the parents decide to use the extra resources made available to them. One way of directly improving the circumstances for children — and to possibly counterbalance the negative impact of economic vulnerability — is to increase the quality of services provided directly to children living in poor areas. This is already undertaken to some extent. At the state level there is a tax redistribution system that transfers tax money from richer municipalities to poorer municipalities. At the municipality level there are various systems used in order to allocate more resources to, for example, schools that are located in low income areas and/or areas with a high proportion of immigrants. According to the Children's Ombudsman, a policy that is more focused on improving services to children in poor areas is nevertheless needed.

To a large extent we currently lack basic knowledge about the degree to which policies promoting culture, sport and leisure activities are successful in reaching those children most at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The Government has at least acknowledged this problem as far as sport is concerned and has initiated a public investigation. One of its main tasks is to look at tools that are useful to evaluate if and how sports activities are promoting social inclusion.

In addition to the general approach, in its NSR-update the Government also emphasised that targeted measures are needed in order to reach the most vulnerable sections of the population. The Government has, for example, initiated a programme for juvenile care, in order to strengthen the 'care chain'. Young persons are to have a coordinator who coordinates various measures from the various agents in the care chain.

Children's rights are strongly emphasised, reflecting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the CRC). In every instance, no matter what kind of decisions that are made, authorities are obliged to investigate the consequences for children. When there are conflicts between children's interests and interests of other groups, priorities should always be given to children. It is of course extremely difficult to evaluate to what degree children's interests are always put first, partly because it is not always that easy to know what children's, or anybody else's for that matter, *true* interests are. However, regulations such as these most certainly strengthen the position of children and, most importantly, makes it impossible to neglect children's interests. Save the Children emphasise, however, that the implementation of the 'child perspective' could be much improved and that children themselves should be invited to be active partners in the process to a larger extent than is currently the case. Save the Children also emphasise that the need to listen more directly to children is relevant not only in relation to general policy making, but also in more specific situations involving children. Examples of specific situations are custody conflicts between parents, when children have been subjected to crime and when the authorities, usually the social welfare office, take action directly related to the child (e.g. by taking a child into custody). In addition, the Children's Ombudsman emphasises that the needs expressed by children themselves should be given more attention. The Ombudsman argues, for example, that children's needs should be given larger weight in decisions concerning social assistance. In today's newspaper (18.05.2007) it is reported that the National Board of Health and Welfare is also adopting this view. Time will tell if it will also be implemented by Government and the parliament. It is Parliament that decides on a minimum norm for social assistance. The municipalities can decide on a more generous norm, but not stricter.

I think one could summarise the criticism against the way the 'child perspective' is implemented in the following way: Children's interests should be guaranteed via the use of scientific knowledge, knowledge based on experience (*beprovad erfarenhet*) and children's own viewpoints. Today it is some scientific knowledge, a lot of experience but too little of children's own viewpoints.

The Social Welfare Act states that it is the municipalities that have the ultimate responsibility for children's wellbeing and that, in each decision they make, they are obliged to first and foremost look towards the child's interest and wellbeing. During the course of their professional activities, people encountering children that they suspect are a victim to abuse, violence or any other type of serious mistreatment, are obliged to report back to the social welfare office, who then has an obligation to investigate. Note that this rule is not restricted to professionals that work with children; it covers all professionals dealing with human relationships, e.g. psychologists, family advisers, people working in criminal care etc. Private citizens are not obliged to report the mistreatment of children, but they are in any case urged to do so.

The system for delivering social services and care in Sweden is very decentralised, with the municipalities as the main providers. Swedish municipalities are rather large in comparison with most other countries in the EU, but at the same time they differ dramatically in size. Stockholm, at one end of the spectrum, has more than 760 000 inhabitants. At the other end, Bjurholm has only around 2 500 inhabitants. However, the median value for Sweden's municipalities is just above 15 160 inhabitants. The municipalities have taxation rights and most of their financial means comes from a flat rate income tax that is usually somewhat above 30 % of income (the 'municipality tax' also covers taxation aimed at counties at the semi local level). Swedish municipalities are, according to the Swedish constitutional law, self governed. For this reason the municipalities have substantial influence over central parts of the Swedish welfare state. There are mainly two ways that the State can influence the municipalities. First, the State is, via the national parliament, the only political body with legislative power, which gives a substantial say on welfare policies administered at the local level. The Social Service Act, laws that regulate the

rights for disabled persons, and School Law are examples of state regulations concerning activities that fall under the responsibility of the municipalities. Secondly, the fact that the State subsidises welfare policies administered on the local level also provides the State with means to influence policies that formally do not fall under their administration. The logic is that the State allocates money to the municipalities earmarked for specific purposes, for example increasing the number of teachers in schools. The municipalities can do as they like, but if they want the money they have to do as the State tells them.

A system in which the municipalities are financed via local income taxation will inevitably lead to large differences between the municipalities and there is a risk that municipalities with 'a service demanding population', namely a high share of children and elderly in the population and/or a weak labour market, will also have a fragile taxation base. Thus, municipalities that are facing a high demand when it comes to services and income support are also in many cases the ones that are least capable of meeting these demands. The State has decided on a system of income equalisation between municipalities, in order to even out differences between municipalities, which in short means that municipalities with a strong taxation base have to transfer money to municipalities with a weaker taxation base. The consequence is twofold. First, the economic differences and associated differences in the services that are provided are minimised. Secondly, the difference in taxation level is fairly limited.

Even though the State can use different tools to minimise differences between municipalities, there are substantial differences between municipalities concerning quality of services, organisation of services and the size of users' fees, which means that children face different realities when it comes to social services, depending on where in the country they live. For example,<sup>2</sup> in 2005 there was an average of 3.8 children aged 0-5 years per full time employed in preschools. This figure varied from 4.9 in Haninge, outside Stockholm, to 2.8 in six municipalities in the northern part of Sweden. However, it is hard to see a clear geographical pattern. Other aspects than geography seem to be more important. If we look at the municipalities costs per inhabitant for leisure activities (of which a large proportion is related to youth activities and sports), it varies from 127 SEK per year in Strömstad to 2 505 SEK in Leksand (Leksand is a small municipality in the middle of the country that is most famous for its very successful ice hockey team, which probably explains the high costs). The corresponding figures for cultural activities are 365 SEK in Nordanstig municipality and 3 132 SEK in Vara, both of which are fairly small rural municipalities. It is not obvious what causes these large differences. There is a relationship between the taxation power in the municipality and the number of preschool children per full time employed, indicating that preschools hold higher standards in richer municipalities. However, there is no relationship between taxation power and the expenditure per capita on leisure activities and cultural activities. Thus, decisions regarding these kinds of expenditure are to a large extent depending on policy priorities made at the local level. This is of course a part of our democracy and if the inhabitants in a municipality do not like the policy they have to vote for somebody else in office. The problem from a child perspective is that children are not allowed to vote.

According to Save the Children is the decentralization of social services a growing problem leading to a situation in which children in different municipalities are not treated equal regarding education, social services, social assistance etc. Hence, Sweden is not living up to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child when it comes to equal treatment of all children.

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<sup>2</sup> Data are gathered from kommundatabasen: <http://www.kommundatabas.se/kdbs/framekomdb.aspx?sw=1280>

School policy is one of the new government's most prioritized areas. They have decided that students in primary school shall receive marks from grade six, not as now first in grade eight. The argument is that it shall be easier to identify and help children who are not meet the learning goals. The crucial point here is of course if there are enough resources and expertise available in the school system to provide adequate support to children who are in need of help to meet their learning goals.

The government also wants to boost teachers' status first by demanding that the municipalities only should be allowed to hire teachers with formal education and second by increased wages among teachers. How they will achieve these goals is not clear to me. The government cannot decide about wages and at the end of the day the municipality needs to find someone who can be in the classroom on the day the children arrives.

The government has also announced that they want to reform secondary education so that it will contain three orientations. As it seems they want to make a clearer cut division between vocational and academic education. However, even though the direction is clear, the details are far from clear at this stage. If this policy will promote inclusion and equalize children's opportunities is as far as I understand an open question that very much depends on the details in the implementations phase.

## 4. Monitoring and implementation

At the local level the municipalities are responsible for the wellbeing of the children that stays in the municipality. The municipality is obliged to act in individual cases when a child is mistreated and if the child's wellbeing is endangered. The monitoring system, in this case how the municipality is monitoring the wellbeing of children in individual cases, is largely based on the above mentioned obligation among professionals to report to the social welfare office if they suspect that a child is mistreated.

The State supervises the municipalities via the County Administrative Board, making sure that laws and regulations are actually implemented by the municipalities. During the period 2006-2008, the Government has taken an extra measure in order to strengthen the supervision of the municipalities, making sure that they implement the 'child perspective'. Special emphasis has been given to guarantee the quality of foster homes.

At state level, children's situations are monitored first and foremost via statistical information (largely presented in 'Existing tools to monitor child poverty and social exclusion at national level'). Another important function at the national level is the Children's Ombudsman. The Ombudsman's main duty is to promote the rights and interests of children and young people as set forth in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the CRC). The agency monitors the implementation of the CRC in Sweden. For example, 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 agency also disseminates information on the Convention. A key duty of the Children's Ombudsman is to participate in public debates, promote public interest regarding key issues, and influence the attitudes of decision-makers and the public. However, the Ombudsman does not supervise other authorities and, by law, may not interfere in individual cases. In order to find out their views and opinions, the Ombudsman maintains regular contact with children and young people. The Ombudsman visits children in schools and youth clubs, and children can get in touch with the Ombudsman by letter, phone and through a website. Twice a year the Ombudsman obtains the responses of a number of 'contact classes' to a questionnaire survey. The Children's Ombudsman also has several children's councils and one youth council. Each year the Children's Ombudsman submits a report to the Government. This report addresses the situation of children and young people in Sweden.

The Government office also has a special CRC-coordinator unit, which is commissioned to ensure the child perspective in all decisions made that, in one way or another, concern children.

Although there is a system for monitoring, the Government emphasises the need for an improved monitoring system in its NSR-update, asserting that "Among other things, attention is called to the fact that the child perspective and the child's right to be heard is not adhered to in social services. At the same time as developments take place in the service, attention is called to the fact that there is a lack of systematic follow-up measures, that methods used are not evidence based and the quality of measures vary between municipalities" (NSR-update 2007:p18). In order to improve the situation, the National Board of Health and Welfare has developed a uniformed documentation system (Focus on the Needs of the Child (BBIC)). The idea is that the child's situation shall be evaluated from three perspectives:

- 1) The child's needs: health, education and leisure time, emotional and behavioural development, identity, family and social relations, social behaviour, ability to take care of oneself.
- 2) Parent's abilities: basic care, safety, emotional ability, stimulation, functioning as a role model, stability.
- 3) Family and environment: family background and situation, family network, housing, work, economy, family social integration, local community resources.

The idea is that municipalities follow BBIC when they work with children at risk, in order to implement a uniformed monitoring system.

When it comes to monitoring it is also important to mention the work done by NGOs and particularly Save the Children, whose regular reports on the economic situation of children serves as an important input to the public debate. BRIS (Children's Rights in Society) is another important NGO. BRIS was founded in 1971 and has no party political or religious affiliations. BRIS supports children in distress and is a link between children, adults and the community. The goal of BRIS' support services is to strengthen the rights of children and young people and improve their living conditions, which is undertaken with the UN's CRC as a guide. BRIS supports vulnerable children and young people in particular, and provides opportunities for children and young people to conduct a dialogue with adults. The core of the support services is the Children's Helpline and the BRIS-mail, which children and young people upto the age of 18 from around the country can use to call and email adults at BRIS safely, anonymously and free of charge. In 2006, around 21 000 children contacted BRIS. Besides the Children's Helpline and the BRIS-mail, there is an adult helpline, where BRIS receives calls from adults who need someone to talk with about questions and problems concerning children. In addition to the direct contact with children and parents, BRIS plays an important role advocating children's rights in the public debate (BRIS 2007).

#### **4.1. Monitoring indicators**

Looking in more detail at the main indicators used in the monitoring framework, in the context of policy making, the following remarks can be made:

The availability of population based register data is uniquely rich in Sweden. Much of the monitoring of social conditions is based on these registers, as is a large part of the data presented in this report. However, I believe that they can be utilised more. Since they are annual and cover the entire population, they are also longitudinal. These registers therefore represent panel data, with zero panel attrition and no sampling errors. Better utilisation of these registers means that we can get additional insights into, for example, the duration of child poverty, the causal relationship between economic vulnerability and school achievements, etc. An urgently needed area of knowledge that demands longitudinal data is the time that children live in segregated areas. One of the main features of most segregated areas is the high mobility, which turns them into 'transitional areas'. We therefore need to know how many children live permanently in these areas and how many spend shorter periods of their childhood in a segregated area. We also need to know the differences in long-term child wellbeing between these two groups.

In the governmental report from 2004 on child poverty (Socialdepartementet 2004), the need for longitudinal analysis was highlighted. Another thing that was pointed out in the report was the need to improve register data. The problem today is, as pointed out above, that in some cases it is difficult to identify the correct household unit. The biggest problem relates to unmarried couples without children living in rented apartments. There are also problems for households with children, however. The introduction of a so called 'apartment register' will, to a large degree, solve these problems. This issue has been discussed for a long time and is now on the agenda again, but nothing has yet been decided. It is a politically delicate issue, since the register has been pointed out as being a threat to personal privacy

Survey data are much used and the annual Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) is a frequent source of information. The SLC is an excellent database, covering the period from 1975 onwards. Face-to-face interviews are conducted with a representative sample of the population in the 16 - 84 age range (the upper age limit was abolished some years ago). The SLC also have a partial panel that is re-interviewed every eight years. Data from the SLC can be linked to all kinds of register data (via the so called personal number). There are nevertheless some problems with the SLC. First, it is a survey and as such it has a non-response rate of around 25 %. There is an obvious risk that the poorest and most excluded are to be found among the non-respondents. This is of course not unique for the SLC, only something that we need to remind ourselves about when interpreting survey data on poverty and social exclusion. More troublesome is the uncertainty about the future of the SLC. The Swedish EU-SILC is conducted as an integrated part of the SLC, which has forced Statistic Sweden to amend the content of the SLC to some degree. In combination with the integration of EU-SILC in the SLC, Statistic Sweden has decided to change the method for data collection from face-to-face interviews to telephone interviews. The shift of the data collection method will, particularly since it is combined with the integration of EU-SILC, force Statistic Sweden to make substantial changes and reductions to the SLC. Thus, the unique monitoring system offered by the SLC is now at risk of being largely dismantled, with repercussions not only for the monitoring of children's wellbeing, but for the overall monitoring and evaluation of living conditions in Sweden. If the Government is serious when it comes to the importance of evaluation, they should make sure that the SLC is maintained in the future.

The Government also refers to 'the child living conditions survey'. This is not an independent survey; it is an amendment to the SLC, introduced in 2001 on the initiatives from the research community, rather than the Government. Money from one of the research councils financed the data collection between 2001- 2003 and thereafter Statistic Sweden has maintained the children's part of the survey at its own initiative. If the Government wants to build a substantial part of its monitoring on the child part of the SLC, it needs to make sure that the survey will be carried out in the future. To my knowledge, there are at presents no such guaranties.

Children's alcohol consumption, smoking, and use of drugs are of course difficult to monitor. The Government has chosen to rely on survey data from teenagers that are 15 years old. Such a source can of course give some information, but also contain many reporting errors and biases. To obtain more reliable information, survey data should be combined with other indicators such as statistics of treatments for intoxication etc.

The Government in many respects presents a comprehensive list of monitoring tools. However, there is always room for improvement and, in this case, I think that the monitoring system has a bias towards older children, while there are very few indicators related to small children. One area that could be better covered is the quality of day care services. Since more than 80 % of children aged 1- 6 visit day care centres and/or preschools, the quality of these services are of utmost importance. It is also an area where political decisions can have an immediate impact on

children's wellbeing. The Government wants to use statistics on the number of children that attend these services and also some indicators of the number of personnel per child. It might be more effective if data were collected in a more direct way, providing information about how daily activities function, how facilities are organised, the way children with special needs are treated etc. Investment therefore has to be made in data collection, investments that I believe are of great value, if we really want to know the effects of political measures related to child wellbeing.

Reliable systems for evaluation impacts of policy measures are a recognised weakness. It is very hard to judge whether a specific policy instrument really has an impact or not. This is not something unique for Sweden. Today, there is a clear drive to change this situation and the National Board of Health and Welfare is leading the work towards a more evidence based approach within social work. Personally, for two reasons, I am not very optimistic when it comes to this development. First, the selection effects are always extremely difficult to control, since we almost always only have information about the 'treated' population. Secondly, in cases when classical control group design has been used (there are some studies from the US), the effect of specific approaches has been very difficult to isolate. A developed monitoring system is nevertheless extremely important. It is important because it gives a signal when we are doing something completely wrong. It is important to highlight the kinds of problems that people are facing and also making us understand the kind of societal conditions that generate these problems. It is important because it sends signals to the political system that something has to be done. Even though it is hard to know what exact measure is best, it is often a good choice to do something rather than nothing at all.

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