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## Choice and dignity

### How Sweden cares for older people

"When you're on your own, it's good to have a place like this where you can drop in and meet people. We get meals prepared for us. And we can do some cooking ourselves." Viggo Henningsen is in his eighties. With his friends, he is sat around a table, eating the biscuits they have just made.

Viggo attends a centre for elderly people in Nacka, Sweden. It offers care in people's own homes as well as a place where people can meet during the day. There are also residential facilities for the elderly. All in all, it is a good illustration of Sweden's policy of enabling older people to continue living in their own homes for as long as possible, even if they are in need of extensive care and social services. Over 90% of the elderly in Sweden choose to stay put, and residential care is seen as an option to be used only when all alternatives have been exhausted - mainly in the case of dementia. A small but increasing number of municipalities, including Nacka, have introduced client choice models, which entail opening up all or part of the care to competition. Public and private providers all receive the same payment from the municipality for standard services. By law, quality norms are the same for the private providers as for the public ones.

As part of the European Commission's social inclusion programme, expert peer reviewers from other EU countries visited Sweden in September 2007 to examine its system of care for the elderly. They drew a number of lessons, some of which could be transferable to other countries:

- A precondition for real choice by consumers of care is full information about what is available. But complete information about care for the elderly is also very complex. "One-stop shops" could draw the information together and help users and their families to arrive at a choice. Needs assessment must be related to the care that is provided afterwards. It was noted that universal access to services is a major Swedish achievement. Besides, the usefulness of linking health services with social services was recommended to Sweden for consideration.
- Dignity is very important in care for the elderly, and this issue needs more examination at the European level in future. Staying on at home is many elderly people's preference, but some may opt for residential accommodation, because it provides more safety and security. The participants praised the way in which Sweden strikes the balance between care at home and residential care.
- Quality must be measured if it is to be achieved. There have to be quality indicators, and it was suggested that these might be set at the European level. A sufficient supply of well-qualified staff is essential. Good pay, good status and good

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training are needed. The issue of quality leads to the financial sustainability of care services which has been well studied in Sweden, and participants were able to draw valuable information from those analyses.

- The right balance between central direction and local autonomy in care provision needs to be struck. It was felt that countries could usefully examine this question together.
- The use of private providers in some Swedish municipalities was of great interest to many of the participants, as was the number of private companies interested in providing care in Nacka. In most other countries, there is under-provision. Moreover the use of technology in care services is being studied in a number of the peer countries, and indeed in EU-supported projects, and this information could be shared.
- Some countries have a strong history of formal care, and some of informal care, mainly by family members. Mutual learning could take place at some point between those two models, but the balance may need to be different in different cultures. In this respect, personal budgets could be an interesting complementary instrument between formal and informal care. Personal budgets allow individuals to use a virtual account to buy care, employ care assistants or pay for personal services suited to the person's needs.

For more information on the Peer Review and to download all relevant documents, please consult: <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews/2007/freedom-of-choice-and-dignity-for-the-elderly>

## A decent place to live

### How France is dealing with substandard housing

In France these days, a decent place to live is seen as a basic human right. In fact, a statutory right to be housed was introduced on 5 March 2007. So how does France go about tackling substandard housing, of which it still has plenty? An action plan to gradually eliminate unfit dwellings went nationwide in 2003 and forms part of France's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The emphasis is very much on consensus, rehabilitation and preserving the social fabric of communities. But strong back-up powers to enforce improvements and protect tenants are available when needed.

In September 2007, experts from across Europe met in Paris to take a close look at the French approach to housing improvement. The peer review was one of a series held by the European Commission as part of its social inclusion programme and its open method of coordination. The aim was to see what lessons the peer reviewers could take away from France for possible transfer into the practice of other EU countries, and also what advice they could give their French hosts.

The French approach consists of a package of work methods and powers: as a starting point it involves preliminary mapping of unfit housing, providing a cartography of areas which might be at risk. An essential instrument of the authorities is the possibility to oblige owners to carry out essential work. Targeted expropriations are possible while the occupants' right to temporary or permanent rehousing is guaranteed. Public authorities provide financing for accelerated remediation of unfit, unhealthy or dangerous accommodation as well as increased subsidies to both owner-occupiers and landlords, for necessary repairs. The grouping of housing refurbishment operations with other structural work, such as urban renewal, takes into account the broader local context. Most important appears the coordination of the services concerned, with strong cooperation between the State and local government, and the establishment of local work programmes and local work tools. Last but not least the French authorities seek partnerships with other actors in housing, health, social inclusion,



justice and the police - notably in order to combat exploitative landlords, known as "sleep merchants".

After discussions and site visits, the peer reviewers identified a number of key lessons:

- There is a clear concern to improve housing conditions throughout the EU. However, national conditions, systems and starting points vary considerably.
- France's emphasis on the preliminary mapping of possible substandard housing was generally admired. Some peer countries felt that it could usefully be built into their own practice.
- The Danish system of administrative registers containing detailed information on all dwellings that is constantly updated, attracted attention.
- To tackle substandard housing a full legal toolkit that is effectively implemented in practice is needed, as is the earmarking of sufficient financial resources,. However, the latter is sometimes difficult to achieve. Furthermore a small set of basic housing standards, varying from one country to another in line with differences in income levels and culture, is useful.
- The French policy contains a number of provisions aimed at supporting tenants that in the short term can be negatively affected by measures against substandard housing that could inspire other Member States (e.g. legal provisions aimed at safeguarding the tenant's interests in her/his contractual relationship with her/his landlady/landlord, the provision of temporary accommodation, suspension of rent payments, counselling...).
- Public sector housing has an important role to play in improving housing quality. While home ownership may be desirable in itself, it does not necessarily guarantee that owner-occupiers can afford to maintain the housing stock in good condition. This is particularly the case in the less prosperous EU countries.
- EU partnerships to combat substandard housing could be considered, together with Europe-wide networking of experts. As the present review concentrated on tackling the existing problem of substandard housing, a future exercise might focus on prevention.
- Housing issues should be mainstreamed into social inclusion policy, at all levels of government. Within the EU social inclusion strategy, housing could be a subject for a special focus during one year. Social inclusion concerns should always be taken into consideration when decisions are made on housing policy issues.
- There is a need for tools to evaluate the economic, social and health effects of public policy interventions on housing. These could usefully be developed at the European level.
- A good social mix in housing is vital (ghettos, whether on the basis of income, class or ethnicity, are to be avoided) as is environmentally sustainable housing.
- In many EU Member States a policy shift from demolition and new building to housing remediation, where possible (and it is not always possible) has taken place for both social and economic reasons.

Further information on this Peer Review as well as all relevant documents can be found at: <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews/2007/national-action-plan-against-substandard-housing>