

# Welfare between Social and Human Rights – Charity in the New Social Landscape of Sweden

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*Welfare states in Europe and around the world are experiencing growing numbers of people with limited or unclear rights to public welfare within their borders. These are refugees, undocumented migrants, EU-migrants and other groups of displaced or deprived people seeking a better life. In Sweden, this situation is trying the highly held principles of social and human rights, as charities are becoming an increasingly important complement to rights-based public welfare services. This article will show how eight different City Missions in Sweden are seeing a new role for themselves in an emerging social landscape. The findings will be analysed in terms of social and human rights, using the classic theories of T. H. Marshall as well as more recent research.*

**Keywords:** Social rights, human rights, charities, non-profit, welfare state.

## Introduction

The development of the modern welfare state in the twentieth century was driven by several shifts in the roles of, and relations between, the state, the family and the individual within what was in time to become known as the welfare mix. One such shift was when the individual citizen became a bearer of rights to basic levels of welfare, from previously having been just a potential benefactor of charitable help in times of need, typically in return for adherence to a code of norms and morals (Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1986; Lundberg and Åmark, 2001). The shift from charity to rights was never complete in any modern welfare state, rights to welfare services and benefits have always existed alongside charitable aid for certain situations and certain individuals, in welfare states of all regime types. Different welfare states do, however, have different distributions between rights-based and other welfare and the Scandinavian countries are often said to stand out as having the most universal social rights (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Those are social rights expressed as entitlements to public welfare schemes: both social insurance systems, benefits and assistance, as well as essential services like health and social care. These are, in the Scandinavian countries, universal in that they are addressed to a large segment of the populations, not just a residual, and that the access to them is relatively unrestricted by means testing. Although no country has ever provided welfare services and benefits solely based on social rights, Sweden has been described as the country that has, historically, come the closest (Johansson, 2001; Lundberg and Åmark, 2001). This means both that Sweden has a universal welfare system with relatively few means-tested services and

benefits and that the need for social aid through private charities has been relatively limited. Another, perhaps less obvious, effect of this type of welfare state in Sweden is that the social rights of primarily Swedish citizens have laid the moral foundations for active support for human rights, both domestic and abroad. Boräng (2015) explains this by describing how the universal principles of Swedish welfare institutions have been transferred to Swedish migration policies, shifting social rights for citizens into human rights for refugees. The social rights to welfare are tied to citizenship and a relationship of reciprocity between state and taxpaying citizen but they inspire human rights extended to all (Dean, 2007). These Swedish ambitions for human rights have not least influenced foreign policies since the Second World War, from early and continued work within the UN as a self-proclaimed 'moral superpower' to today's advocacy for children's and women's rights within what is presently labelled 'feminist foreign policy' (Trägårdh, 2018).

A growing group of non-citizens with welfare needs living in Sweden has in recent years created a new social landscape, where the social rights to basic levels of welfare are limited or unclear for a significant number of people in the country. The single largest portion of this group is asylum seekers. More than 160 000 sought asylum in the record year of 2015, but a more normal number would be around 30 000 per year, based on statistics of the last twenty years (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2021). The rights of asylum seekers are less limited and better defined since their human rights as refugees are institutionalised to the point of resembling social rights. They are also a very small group of clients for the City Missions, only about one percent of their aid goes to asylum seekers (Sveriges Stadsmissioner, 2017, 2021). Other groups, like vulnerable EU-citizens, undocumented migrants and third country migrants have a much more perilous situation as they are not apparent rights bearers in the Swedish welfare system. There is also a growing element of 'non-take-ups', a diverse group of people who for one reason or the other has fallen outside the social security systems (van Oorschoot, 1991). The group of non-take-ups illustrate that although citizenship is important, it is not the only thing deciding the realisation of social rights. It is also noteworthy that the guiding principle for the welfare responsibilities of Swedish municipalities is residence rather than citizenship. Regardless, the present situation has stressed the significance of human rights in welfare policies and it has also renewed need for charitable aid unattached to rights and provided by charitable organisations. The aim of this article is to show how the emergence of this new social landscape has effected charitable organisations working with the most marginalised people living in Sweden today. Some of these people have little or no contact with public sector welfare institutions or authorities, which makes the charitable organisations important sources of information about new social problems, which is needed for a more complete understanding of what is here referred to as the social landscape. This article will present some pieces of information provided by representatives of city missions in eight Swedish cities. Their descriptions of new clients, problems and conditions are not enough for a definitive conclusion about change in the Swedish welfare state, but they provide complementary information that is not captured in reports and statistics on public welfare and social spending.

### **Social and human rights**

The fact that social and human rights apply differently to different groups of people does not mean that the two types of rights are fundamentally different and separate. To the contrary, the here-described situation with non-citizens with welfare needs illustrates how

entwined and complementary social and human rights are. Social and human rights exist in a civilising mesh that holds societies together. This interrelationship was in its basic form drawn up already in T. H. Marshall's (1950, 1965) pioneering writings on social citizenship in the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties.

One of the principal contributions of Marshall was that he tied civil and political rights to the social rights to basic welfare, arguing that one of the sets of rights could not function without the others (Dean, 2007; Friendly, 2020). Social rights are needed to 'civilise' the citizenry, raising the common man to the level of 'gentleman', which is a 1950's and quite British way of saying that the working classes are empowered and enabled to practice their civil and political rights (Marshall, 1950, 1965). The most basic levels of human rights, the rights to life and autonomy, are covered by Marshall's civil rights and to his political and social rights are added layers of rights that are sometimes and sometimes not included in today's use of the term human rights. It is, in other words, not easy to study social and human rights separately, but the lesson from Marshall is that we need not to, as he did not (Lister, 2005; Dwyer, 2010).

There is, however, one distinguishing feature that in practical terms separates some rights from others; social rights are intrinsically associated with public expenditure while human rights are not (Sen, 2004; Dean, 2007). Social rights are, partly or fully, limited to citizens because they, in a more direct way than human rights, cost money. To enforce human rights naturally also costs money but such enforcement is not part of a mutual give-and-take between the state and the taxpaying public, the way social rights are. Public costs for the welfare of non-citizens can be motivated by human rights but human rights do not legitimise the costs like social rights do. The matter of money therefore creates a hole in the mesh of rights and this hole is in Sweden increasingly being filled by non-rights based charity provided by organisations like the City Missions.

### **'Insider' and 'outsider' groups**

A somewhat simplified description of rights in a welfare state would be that social rights are enjoyed by a more or less well-adjusted group of 'insiders', while those not living up to the norms and requirements of the welfare state become 'outsiders' only covered by universal, but looser, human rights. By 'norms and requirements' is here meant the old Marshallian ideal of the wholesome and civic worker, who intuitively sees social rights as both a tool and a motive for self-improvement and the advancement of society (Marshall, 1950; 1965). We have, of course, long since passed this idealised vision for social rights and now realise that this ideal is unobtainable for many citizens for a wide range of reasons. Still, persistent morals separating 'worthy insider' recipients of welfare from 'unworthy outsiders' still exist in modern welfare states, not least the Nordic ones. It has been shown that some 'outsider' groups, like people in homelessness, are more often overlooked and receive more stigma in Sweden than in liberal welfare states like the UK or the USA, in large part because homelessness becomes more of a personal failure in Sweden (Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 2014). This is not to say, of course, that British social policies towards this group is particularly inclusive, 'irresponsible' behaviour is often punished by removal of social rights – see, for example, Dwyer *et al.* (2015). It shows, however, that the insider/outsider problem is more severe in countries like Sweden, while countries like the UK and the USA struggle with social problems also among the 'insiders' – for example, the working poor (Bergh, 2015).

Barker (2017) as well as Mostowska (2021) have shown how conflicted local authorities in Sweden have been in addressing Roma EU-migrants who come to the country to ask for money in the streets. This ‘outsider’ group fail to qualify as rights holders since they clearly differ from the traditional ‘insider’ ideal of the civic worker and authorities would rather practice ‘benevolent violence’ to remove them than provide them with public welfare (Barker, 2017; Mostowska, 2021). Swedish concern with EU-migrants differs, in other words, from those in, for example, the United Kingdom: in that Sweden specifically objects to ‘outsider migrants’, who receive almost no public benefits, while welcoming the working ‘insider migrants’ that are sometimes considered ‘benefit tourists’ in the UK (Bruzelius *et al.*, 2016). Although the Swedish Welfare State is perhaps best known for a large public sector and high taxes, certain ‘outsider’ groups like people in homelessness have always relied in large part on charitable organisations, just as in otherwise very different liberal welfare states like the British (Karlsson and Vamstad, 2020). These organisations are in most cases well-established, well-functioning and, supposedly, run by well-intended people, like in the case of the Swedish City Missions in this study. The aid they provide is, however, principally different from public benefits provided to most other groups, because it is funded by charity and not taxes. Parsell and Watts (2017) illustrate this using charitable aid for the homeless in Australia and they argue that such aid might do more harm than good as it strips the homeless of dignity and autonomy, while replacing any public effort to grant them social rights. The new social landscape and the new role for aid organisations like the City Missions described here might reflect a re-negotiation of a division between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ that is, in itself, not at all new to the Swedish welfare state.

One important aspect of the here suggested changes in the welfare state is that they are not caused by radical change in policies at the national level or by welfare state retrenchment in terms of cuts in welfare spending. Spending on social welfare has, at the national level, remained at the same high level during the last twenty years and the public support for the universal welfare state remains strong (Svallfors and Tyllström, 2019; Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2020). The changes described in this article are all observed at the local level, where the City Missions try to meet the welfare needs of new and old groups. There are some indications in the interviews that social services at the local level are becoming more restrictive in their role as gatekeepers between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. This seems to be a part of a new social landscape in these eight cities, just based on these interviews.

### **The City Missions and charity in Sweden**

The Swedish City Missions are a rather unusual type of aid organisation in Sweden as they represent what has been described as an Anglo-American charity tradition (Lundström and Svedberg, 2003). Charity itself has had a contested role in the Swedish welfare state, as it has been associated with moralism and patriarchal power-relations of the pre-welfare state society (Vamstad and von Essen, 2013). Still, the City Missions and a handful of other similar organisations have co-existed with the public welfare institutions throughout the history of the welfare state. They have traditionally served marginal groups of people who are entitled to basic welfare through social rights but that have for one reason or the other fallen out of the public welfare systems, like people living in homelessness due to drug use or mental health problems (Karlsson and Vamstad, 2020). Their non-rights based aid has

Table 1 City Missions included in the study

	Donations*	Employees	Volunteers
Stockholm	153	566	344
Gothenburg	51	247	280
Skåne	15	107	160
Linköping	27	96	90
Uppsala	10	64	45
Kalmar	5	17	143
Västerås	4	17	65
Eskilstuna	3	14	40

\* Millions of SEK, 1 SEK = \$ 0.11

thus been a complement to the public sector, but they are increasingly helping people who are also recipients of public benefits and entirely new groups of people-in-need that have few or unclear social rights in Sweden (Karlsson and Vamstad, 2020).

The City Missions are rooted in a Christian charity tradition and not a human rights tradition but they are increasingly thinking and working accordingly to a human rights rationale, something also reflected in their policy documents (Sveriges Stadsmissioner, 2018). This is, for example, illustrated in their use of human rights documents like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Vamstad, 2018). It is, in other words, not entirely correct to view them just as the non-rights-based complement to the rights-based public welfare, the City Missions support and advocate for their clients using human rights arguments. Furthermore, they are also nearing a social rights rationale in their work. City Missions in cities like Stockholm, Gothenburg and Linköping today run homeless shelters and other aid and welfare institutions on contracts from the local authority, contracts usually won through competitive tendering with other organisations or for-profit businesses. These City Missions are thus providing aid not based on charity but because they are paid to, thus operating as professional providers of services that are often rights-based. This is in itself unusual in Sweden, as only about three percent of publicly funded welfare is provided by non-profit actors (Sivesind, 2017). Many services contracted to the City Missions are also directly aimed at the groups that are not covered by public services and benefits, making the City Missions agents for public support for people-in-need that the public sector cannot assist directly. We have, in other words, an emerging situation where the public sector more often must work outside the mutual relationship with taxpaying citizens that define social rights, instead providing assistance for mostly non-citizens, through non-profits, out of consideration of human rights.

This study includes eight City Missions in Sweden. They vary significantly in size, as seen from Table 1.

The numbers in Table 1 are based on the annual reports of 2019 since the annual reports for 2020 are unrepresentative due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Public funding is not included in Table 1 as conditions for public funding vary significantly between cities and City Missions. The larger City Missions receive considerable amounts of income by performing contracted services for local government. The Stockholm City Mission, for example, made an additional 54 million SEK selling services to public institutions in 2019

Table 2 Interviews as coded in the results

	Stockholm	Gothenburg	Skåne	Linköping	Uppsala	Kalmar	Västerås	Eskilstuna
Director	A1	B1	C1	D1	E1	F1	G1	H1
Other	A2		C2	D2	E2		G2	H2

(Stockholms Stadsmission, 2020). The three smallest City Missions make little or no money from providing such services. A survey of the annual reports of these City Missions show that they have mostly had a slow but steady increase in donations and number of employees and volunteers over the last ten years. There has not, however, been any radical increase in resources that would suggest they are equipped to take on a new, more demanding role in the local community.

Methods

This article is part of a research project focusing on help-giving rationales in Swedish public and non-profit organisations, a project funded by the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare. In this project, we interviewed politicians and leading non-profit representatives on both local and national levels about their motives to support vulnerable citizens and non-citizens (undocumented refugees and vulnerable EU migrants). The empirical data presented in this text contains fourteen qualitative interviews with strategically selected leading representatives (director and/or head of social interventions) at eight City Missions in Sweden (Stockholm, Göteborg, Skåne, Uppsala, Eskilstuna, Västerås, Kalmar and Linköping – briefly characterised in Table 2). Informants were coded as seen in Table 2.

The interviews were performed late in 2017, using a semi-structured and theory-driven interview guide. The guide focused on rationalities for social interventions (e.g. Why does your organisation help undocumented refugees? How do you consider the division of labour between public services and non-profit organisations when aiding vulnerable groups in society? How do you regard social rights and human rights in this work?) All interviews were conducted in person by one of the authors, except for one conducted by telephone. The interviews lasted forty to ninety minutes and were audio-recorded and later transcribed into text. Each text was read and discussed by both authors.

The qualitative data were analysed in two stages, representing a two-part research question. First, we considered the question of how work is developing at the City Missions more broadly, keeping an open mind to any changes that could be interpreted and giving meaning in the second stage. Secondly, we considered what these changes could tell us about the distribution between charity and rights-based welfare services and benefits in the Swedish welfare state. The combined results of these two stages allowed us to identify a series of recurring themes in the content, themes that are presented and further elaborated in the following section. The analysis of the interviews required a critical perspective on the descriptions made by the interviewees. One can assume that it was in the interest of the interviewees to make their situation seem serious, and thus in need of further aid and support. We could hardly ‘test’ their descriptions and altogether avoid this limitation. However, our ambition has been to separate straight descriptions of their



everyday activities and their value judgements about them. It is our qualitative analysis, therefore, not direct claims from the interviewees, behind suggestions in the article that the situation has become more serious, for example.

## Results

The collected data from eight different City Missions in cities around Sweden show clear consistency in the results they provide. There are indications of several common trends in the interviews, both within each locality and between them. The recurring themes in the interviews are as follows.

1. There is more for the City Missions to do.
2. They cater to partly new groups of clients.
3. They cater to partly new needs.
4. They have a partly new relationship with local government.
5. They are changing the way they see themselves and their role in the local community.

These themes are here presented and analysed individually, beginning with the important role of the City Missions in the new social landscape.

### *The growing importance of the City Missions*

The growing importance of the services provided by the City Missions is experienced and described both by the leading representatives of the local City Missions and their central organisation. The City Missions have historically catered to marginal groups of people who for various reasons have failed to receive support from the public sector (Lundström and Svedberg, 2003). This seems to be changing as the missions are now coping with both deeper and more widespread poverty in groups they had previously not encountered. Interviewee A1 described a situation of 'structural homelessness' due to poverty, not just mental illness or drug abuse as would have been the case ten or fifteen years ago. She says:

We face changes in society that affect the welfare systems and the risk of being pushed out [of the systems] comes nearer for some groups [...] we see this, through our work, in structural homelessness due to poverty, there is a fear of 'outsidership' that is real, more so than for previous generations.

(Interview A1)

Interviewee C1 voiced the sentiment of many of her colleagues when she said that her City Mission has gone from being a complement to being a welfare actor that permanently provides basic aid and services to a small but significant and distinctly noticeable segment of society. She brings up vulnerable EU-migrants, often Roma people, saying that 'we were jumping over people laying in the street' while the local authority did not assist this group (Interview C1). The City Mission both approached the local authority for a partnership and provided 'traditional social work, food, housing when it was cold, and some sort of counselling'. Charity is, in other words, forming a partnership with rights-based welfare institutions. Interviewee E1 described how this new situation has forced the organisation to grow; the need for funding has led her City Mission to branch out into new service areas that the city may finance. This in turn requires more staff and facilities, which then require

further funding and so on. Many of the City Missions no longer have the option of being a small, charitable complement to the predominately public welfare state. The growing role of the City Missions also puts a strain on volunteers, who find themselves doing more for clients with worse problems alongside a growing cadre of professional staff. Interviewee H1 stated that her volunteers were 'losing energy' as demand for their unpaid work is growing. Interviewee A2 anticipated an even heavier case burden in the future; she mentioned specifically the tens of thousands of people who are expected to go underground as they are denied asylum in Sweden in the coming years. She and several other managers and chairpersons of City Missions around Sweden are beginning to think about ways to prioritise between groups of people, which is a clear change from their previous open door policy. She says:

We have for a number of years been blessed to have grown in the pace that we have wanted to, so our prioritisation has not been so painful, but that is not how it will be [...] the Migration Authority has a prognosis of how many that will disappear when they are denied asylum [...] 60000 new undocumented people living mostly in the big cities.

(Interview A2)

It seems, in other words, that the City Missions, like the public welfare office, may have to start filtering people with welfare needs according to factors such as legal status. This is, of course, in itself an inherent risk with charity-based aid: it can respond to strain by becoming more selective or conditional.

### *New groups of people in need*

The hundreds of thousands of people from places like Syria and Afghanistan that have sought refuge in Sweden in the last decade represent just one of several groups of clients that are new to the City Missions. Many of the people seeking aid at the City Missions today have limited or unclear rights to public welfare services. Vulnerable EU citizens, undocumented migrants and third country residents of other EU countries have different levels of access to support from the public sector, and the interpretations of their rights differ markedly between different local municipalities within Sweden. The local practices also change over time as local authorities can expand or limit the group of clients to which they offer aid. EU citizens that are economically inactive (and that are considered to lack feasible opportunities for gainful employment) actually have among the least access to Swedish public services: as they are expected to rely on social services in their home countries (SOU, 2016: 6). This situation is not unique for Sweden – the rights status of migrating EU citizens is widely contested across Europe (Bruzelius *et al.*, 2016). The Swedish City Missions meet and aid large numbers of EU citizens, mostly homeless Roma people who can be seen begging in the streets all over Sweden. These people cannot seek aid from the social welfare office, and the City Mission has become a semi-institutionalised go-between between the local authorities and this group of people in need; the local authorities support the City Missions so that they can provide meals and shelter to the Roma people. Interviewee H1 described how this support sometimes has unwritten demands attached – the local authorities expect the City Missions to 'solve the problem' of very visible beggars and illegal settlements. This is a good illustration of how public money comes with demands and how the principle of Christian charity becomes



conditioned when infused with the logic of social rights characteristic for the public welfare state.

The vulnerable EU citizens have become a whole category of clients that is relying almost entirely on the City Missions, the Swedish Red Cross and some other aid organisations. The group is large – almost half of the distributed meals at the City Missions go to EU citizens – and is described as ‘difficult’ to assist by many City Missions (Karlsson and Vamstad, 2020). Part of the difficulty lies in finding funding to support them. The public sector is, as we have seen, reluctant to provide aid, the general public is unwilling to donate to causes involving the homeless Roma, and corporate donors are also not interested in associating themselves with this group. Several directors of City missions report that some donors specify that they do not want their gifts to go to this group, a condition that the City Missions refuse to accept. Interviewee A1 described how donors have recently become much more open and outspoken about wanting their aid to go to Swedish recipients, following a political shift in Sweden:

Political parties in the election campaign pointed at specific vulnerable groups as part of society’s problem. This was entirely new to me. We noticed immediately that some of our facilities helping these groups were attacked by stone throwers, it lifted the lid of what is allowed.

(Interview A1)

This political shift also influenced their fundraising campaigns:

Even established donors questioned if they could aid EU-migrants. [...] People call in, commenting our fundraising saying, ‘that looks like an EU-migrant, I do not want to give to those’. A much larger part of the public now wants to direct their donations to certain groups and not to others. Today we can no longer have fundraising campaigns saying ‘help us get the [Roma] beggars of the streets’, there has been a shift and people do not want to see them or help them.

(Interview A1)

Similar testimonies come from City Mission managers around Sweden, which seems indicative of growing divides between categories of people in need in Sweden. The single largest category of recipients comprises people with long-lasting financial problems, a traditional group of poor people that is not new to the City Missions. What is new, however, is the severity of their problems and the way that they now seem to be in a permanent state rather than facing periodical difficulties to pay bills or buy food. Interviewee B1 described how some of the clients at her City Mission are single parents who already receive several different public welfare benefits but who still struggle to feed their families at the end of the month. The new challenges with new groups of clients are, in other words, not just a matter of people coming from other countries; there also seems to be a domestic development toward more people being permanently on the outside of normal social and economic life, more dependent on charity. This is not least true for the group of non-take-ups, people who are eligible for different types of social security and benefits but who do not, for a mixed set of reasons, apply for them (van Oorschot, 1991). Whether this development is caused by changes in practices at local welfare offices, or other changes in the supply or demand of support, is difficult to decide based on information from the City Missions. There are no

general changes in welfare policies or legislation that could explain the situation they are describing. That significant groups in need rely on organisations such as the City Missions is, however, a clear sign of a de-unification of the lower socio-economic classes, in a country where they have historically been unified through universal public welfare based on social rights, as theorised by Marshall (1950). The representatives of the City Missions have seen relatively little of undocumented migrants but they expect this group to grow. However, it is difficult to say exactly how large this group is today, as the City Missions usually do not differentiate between categories of people: they do not know the legal status of people sleeping in their shelters and they do not seek to find out.

### *New social problems for the City Missions*

The new groups of clients bring with them new types of social problems. Interviewee E1 described how the typical client at the mission has changed. The typical client used to be an elderly homeless man with a drinking problem, but now they see many young men with a much more complicated drug addiction and often with different types of mental problems. She says that they now must deal with youth issues, drug addiction and mental health issues, three areas of social work that are traditionally among the core responsibilities of the public sector (Interview E1). Even people eligible for public assistance must volunteer to receive it: interviewee E1 described how a woman with mental health issues was found sleeping in their yard:

It was a young woman who we judged was very, very ill mentally, she could easily have been assaulted [...]. The social services arrived, looked at her where she lay, asked 'do you want help', got no answer, and said 'she does not want help, there is nothing we can do, it has to be voluntary'.

(Interview E1)

Similarly, a disoriented elderly man was brought to them by the police:

The police asked, 'can we come in with this person, we have nowhere else to go' [...] it was an elderly man they had assisted the eviction of and the police wondered 'what should we do with him, where should we put him' and then they come to us.

(Interview E1)

Representatives of many of the other City Missions also describe the growing number of rootless young people at their facilities. The needs of these people are not met by the public sector because they are not Swedish citizens, or for some other reason. Growing social problems outside the reach of the public welfare system are representative of the growing needs of non-citizens and the growing dependence on charity for the welfare state as a whole. Interviewee E1 said that while they used to meet people with one type of addiction they now face desperate young people who 'take everything'. These can be difficult to handle and several representatives describe how their City Missions are no longer just soup kitchens and shelters; they are providers of relatively advanced social work. Interviewees G1 and G2 (interviewed together) described how this development has especially put a strain on their volunteers. The growing number of clients with limited or unclear legal status and social rights to welfare has increased the need for the City

Missions to have legal expertise. Most City Missions do not have the resources to provide legal assistance but interviewee A1 said that her organisation has hired four new civil rights lawyers in recent years, which is an entirely new development for them. She also stated that the City Missions seek to become more activist in promoting human rights through legal action; the professionalisation of the City Missions is also, to some extent, part of a wider juridification of social work in civil society.

### *New relation to the public sector*

The changing role of the Swedish City Missions has also brought about a new relationship with the public sector, which is still the dominant welfare provider in Sweden. The changing relationship is most clearly seen at the local level, as most welfare services and benefits are provided by the 290 municipalities in Sweden. The relationship with the public sector and the local authorities is distinctly different in the eight cities included in this study. Some City Missions have only an informal relationship with the local authority and its welfare institutions while others have entered into different types of contractual agreements with them. Interviewee C1 saw her City Mission as a competitive service provider in the publicly funded welfare market; the mission has a good understanding of local social problems, it is rooted in the community and has better values than competing corporate institutions that seek a profit, according to her:

Up to perhaps the year 2000 or so we were a complement [to the public sector], we would just be there, be good, hand out food and clothes and so on, but around that time we changed direction by saying 'we are on this market, we do good social work, we want to be an actor'. I cannot understand why we should sit on our hands when corporations move in, they are listed at the stock exchange, they are here for the profit, is that OK? [...] They will not reach these people but we do.

(Interview C1)

Not all City Missions participate in public tendering processes; it is more common that they have formal but more general agreements, or partnerships, with the local authorities. The trend is, however, that the relationship has become more formalised and that the City Missions have become more institutionalised as local service providers. A reason for this is that they cater permanently to groups entitled to basic welfare through social rights. This has created a curious situation where the local authorities form formal and informal agreements with organisations like the City Missions, to address social problems that they are themselves hindered to work with but that charitable organisations are open to engage. The limited reach of the social rights based, public welfare has, in other words, provided space for the charities to grow.

### *A new sense of identity*

The developments identified and described in this study have also led to a shift in how the chairs and the managers of the City Missions see themselves and their organisations. The emergence of new groups and new needs has made organisations like the City Missions the primary caregivers of relatively large groups of people. Interviewee C1 said that they now must 'take the lead' with the issue of the homeless EU citizens because it is never on

the agenda of the public social services. Interviewee H1 said that they 'own' the issue of poverty locally because they have 'collected knowledge' about the different groups and their often-complex social problems. For some City Missions, this new role has become difficult to handle. Interviewee F2 said that they have a limited staff, balancing many different jobs, as unlike some City Missions they have not managed to scale up to meet the new situation. All the interviewed directors and managers were asked where they saw the situation and their role in it in ten years' time and all of them saw their emerging role as a welfare organisation rather than a charity as permanent and probably evolving further. Interviewee E1 said that she never thought she would see a situation as dire as the present and that she fears it will be even worse ten years from now. She and several other interviewees described how the local social services have shifted focus to their role as gatekeepers between the public welfare system and both new and old groups of welfare recipients, leaving organisations like the City Missions to permanently care for those left on the outside (Interview E1). The City Missions have, in other words, come to see themselves not as a complement but as a welfare actor catering to groups and needs not addressed by the public welfare system. They adjust accordingly in a process of professionalisation, diversification of services and, if possible, growth. There is, however, also a different dimension to their new self-identification, that of being the bearers of humanistic values and human rights. The work of the City Missions rests historically on a tradition of Christian charity in which all people in need are treated equally, regardless of nationality or legal status. This tradition is today presented in terms of human rights, and representatives of the larger City Missions and the national organisation predict that this role will become even more important. A reason for this is what the City Mission interviewees describe as a harsher political climate, a climate in which, in their opinion, the social and human rights of groups of people have come under open scrutiny. Interviewee A1 said that her organisation must step up and voice their opinion not just on isolated issues like homelessness and asylum but on the more general issue of equal human value and equal human rights. She and several other leading representatives see the City Missions becoming more activist and more like human rights organisations than charity organisations.

## **Discussion**

The Swedish welfare state is traditionally characterised by welfare services and benefits provided as social rights to all citizen (Vamstad and von Essen, 2013). The universality of the welfare regime has also been extended to a universal human rights regime that is especially noticeable in international and migration policies (Boräng, 2015). Social and human rights in Sweden reinforce each other much like what's described by Marshall's classic characterisation of civil, political and social rights.

The development described by the representatives of the Swedish City Missions can be summarised as a situation where a weakening of universal social rights leads to greater emphasis on human rights that are less entwined in a relationship of reciprocity between state and tax paying citizenry, and a greater reliance on charitable aid that is not rights-based. The same situation has also led charity organisations like the City Missions to promote human rights, working both in a field where the public sector is absent and in continuously more formal relationships with the local authorities. These relationships also include contractual agreements to provide services, which has led the City Missions to

become more professional, as they compete with other actors, including for-profit businesses.

What is described is a situation where non-right based charity plays an increasingly important role for new – but also old – groups of people in need. This is an important finding from the interview study, that the new division between rights-based welfare and charity is not just a matter of internationalisation or migration. We know from existing research that the Swedish welfare state has a poor performance with groups who signal ‘otherness’ through visible poverty, like the Roma EU-migrants (Barker, 2017; Mostowska, 2021). People in homelessness comprise another group that has been identified as particularly stigmatised in Sweden (Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 2014). These ‘outsiders’ seem to be joined by people in structural poverty and groups that have traditionally been a priority for public social services, like youth and people suffering from addiction and mental illness.

The interviews with representatives of the City Missions suggest that this growth in the ‘outsider’ group follows a stricter gatekeeping of the ‘inside’ by the public social services of the local authorities. These are described as more concerned with protecting public resources from both new and old groups of people-in-need than actively aiding those groups. This is made possible by organisations like the City Missions stepping up as the ‘carers of outsiders’ and this role is established in part because the City Missions seek it and identify with it. The shift from tax-funded aid to charity is not, however, without consequences – it can lead to stigma, loss of agency and a permanent status as ‘outsider’ for those experiencing it (Parsell and Watts, 2017). The shift in roles also leads to a shift in rights and, as a growing number rely on charitable aid organisations, more people have their social rights replaced by much looser human rights. This is an aspect of social and human rights that is often overlooked in the human rights discourse that is so influential in Sweden and other welfare states.

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