

## Malmö – an open city

Malmö's 2018 city budget directly emphasizes, "diversity, equality and openness are a part of Malmö's identity." In addition to the more general focus expressed in the budget, there are several governance and policy documents concerning different areas. Among other things, special strategies exist for the city's work on non-discrimination, gender equality, children's rights, national minorities, violence against women, domestic violence, and sexual health. The more general documents, such as those concerning gender equality and anti-discrimination work, are to permeate all areas of the city's activities, from integration into the budget's various target areas to implementation and follow-up. In the areas that are more specific, such as the city's action plan against violence in close relationships, there are more targeted tools that are available. Malmö's comprehensive work against discrimination is divided into three perspectives:

- The societal perspective - Malmö is to be a city where everyone has comparable conditions for participation in social life regardless of gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religion or other belief, sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.
- The operations perspective - Malmö is to be an open and inclusive city for everyone. A city where equal rights and opportunities are available to everyone and where everyone has access to the support and services they need.
- The employer perspective - The City of Malmö shall be a workplace free from discriminatory structures.

## Housing first - an investment in everyone's right to housing

*Housing first*, a project which started in 2012, offers people who are in homelessness and have compound social problems, an opportunity to get their own housing.

Together with the tenant, the project works to provide long-term and stable housing with the goal that the tenant should in the end have her or his own rental contract. The project is based on the idea that a home is a key basis for an individual being able to take control of her or his own situation more generally. *Housing first* offers continuous support to tenants in the form of discussions, advice and various other

activities. The project also cooperates with the tenant's network of contacts. Together with the tenant and administrators within social services, a residence plan for staying in the housing is established based on the tenant's situation, given her or his own wishes and priorities.

Prior to the start of the project, Malmö established close contacts with Professor Hans Swärd and senior lecturer Marcus Knutagård at Lund University. Both have homelessness as their field of research. *Housing first* is today a well-established and successful model for counteracting homelessness, but Malmö maintains contact with the researchers in order to have access to the latest research and receive support when needed. The accessibility to the workers in the project is highlighted as a success factor for the model. Malmö has therefore been careful not to exceed ten tenants per city administrator, in order to be able to meet the tenants' needs and establish close contacts between the city administrators and the tenants.

Anita Svantesson, the section manager for *Housing first*, describes the importance of engaged homeless persons/tenants:

The wishes expressed by the homeless person in contact with their administrator are very important. Selection for housing is then made through an interview with *Housing first* before a decision under the Social Services Act is made. An important factor in getting a home through *Housing first* is that you are motivated and positive to having contact with the project every week. Often, the person has a long background in homelessness, frequently combined with problems related to addiction and/or mental illness.

People who are eligible for housing are involved in the work in several different ways. Support efforts are based entirely on the tenant's own wishes and take place at her/his own initiative. The model is based on the idea that people know what they need, and the project often encourages tenants to submit comments on how the project can be further developed. Among other things, the transformation period has been extended from 6 months to 24 months based on a tenant's proposal.

The target group has also had the opportunity to influence the project in other ways. As an example, one of the tenants participated in employment interviews concerning recruitment of new employees to the project. Another tenant has been a speaker at a conference for the national network for *Housing first*. Compensation was paid for both of these tasks.

- Anita Svantesson, section manager *Housing first*

Most tenants find that they have a better life after receiving housing through *Housing first*. Many experience improved health because, after many years of various problems, it has become easier to gain access to doctors and dentists. It is also common for tenants to resume contacts with their relatives after a time. In addition, where it is relevant, the housing makes it easier for tenants to maintain or reestablish contacts with their children. It is also not uncommon for those who get access to housing through the project to reduce their substance abuse or in some cases to stop completely. There are many positive factors that are highlighted, all of which contribute to an improved quality of life.

*Housing first* is also positive for the taxpayers of Malmö because the costs for homelessness are significantly reduced for every individual who gets a home and a functioning life. *Housing first* is even positive for property owners, because they would otherwise have the target group sleeping in laundry rooms, stairwells or attics. This results in insecurity among tenants and increased costs for physical security devices and reliance on security companies.

Anita Svantesson, section manager *Housing first*

In other words, the project provides a variety of direct and indirect benefits. The principle of housing for the homeless has positive effects on the tenants' well-being, their contacts with their families, the taxpayers and the property owners in Malmö.

Finally, Anita Svantesson says that employees who work with *Housing first*, experience their work as very stimulating and positive.

On a daily basis they meet tenants who explain how their lives have changed for the better. How their health has improved, how proud they are of their homes, that they feel safer, that they have resumed contact with loved ones and that they have stopped or reduced their substance abuse. Much of the satisfaction at work depends on the success of the tenants.

- Anita Svantesson, section manager *Housing first*

Malmö plans to appoint a service user council during the autumn of 2018 in order to provide residents with an additional opportunity to provide input. The project has also been linked to the municipality's outreach activities in order to reach more people. Malmö is part of the national network for *Housing first*, which enables an exchange of



experiences with other municipalities that work against homelessness in accordance with the same model.

## **The link to human rights and a rights-based approach**

The right to housing and the municipality's relation to this right are complicated. The municipality is not the sole actor in the housing market, and the right to housing is not an absolute commitment but more of a right as a goal or target. However, ensuring the existence of good housing is part of the municipality's welfare mission, and there are measures that need to be taken to promote the right of residents to housing. A first step is, of course, a survey examining how many people lack their own home and an analysis of the possible reasons. Are there certain groups that are outside the housing market to a greater extent than others? The municipality has to work in a non-discriminatory manner in its own operations, and if a particular group is shown to be affected by structural disadvantages in the housing market, targeted measures may be needed to help achieve equality. Homelessness can be divided into structural homelessness, meaning the lack of economic conditions for entering the housing market, and social homelessness, where the causes are social problems in the form of, for example, substance abuse, violence or mental ill-health. A rights-based approach that puts the individual in focus in the analysis and includes participation in the choice of inputs contributes to flexibility and proximity in relation to the service user.

Malmö's survey of homelessness from 2017 shows that 70 percent of homelessness has structural causes, while 30 percent of homelessness has a social dimension such as substance abuse and mental illness. Various types of correlating vulnerability can result in a particularly vulnerable situation and require more complex solutions. Here, a rights-based approach becomes particularly important since finding the right measures requires sensitivity to the individual in focus. In order to deal with, for example, a person with an addiction, another starting point may be required at the individual level and cannot be achieved without the possibility of the individual's involvement and participation. Concerning the examination of structural causes where there is an interplay between the causes, such as various forms of



exclusion and discrimination, other analyses and efforts are required. A rights-based approach can help to prevent and counteract both social and structural homelessness. Efforts in a field of rights may prove to have positive effects also in other areas. One example that can be mentioned is that access to housing has resulted in better health for tenants involved in the *Housing first* project. The project has also resulted in other positive benefits in the form of reduced costs for taxpayers and property owners as well as improved relations between the tenants and their relatives.