

Citizen dialogue

Translated from
Swedish to English
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Uppsala Talks about begging

*Citizens' action proposal to deal with
the begging problem*

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Vetenskapsrådet

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A special thank you!

This report is a summary of the discussions and conclusions that the participants in the citizens' dialogue "Uppsala talks about begging" came to. Participants are protected by anonymity and therefore their names will not be mentioned even though this is actually their report. We would still like to thank the 60 participants who for three full days generously contributed their time and commitment to learn more about the particularly vulnerable EU citizens and to discuss the causes and consequences of begging. They did this in a spirit of openness and with the goal of trying to find solutions that can both work in practice, but which can also contribute to shaping the society in which they themselves want to live and be a part. For the researchers, these participants best represent the deliberative citizen!

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Finally, we want to clarify that the researchers who compiled the report are responsible for any inaccuracies in it.



SUMMARY

After listening, pondering and discussing for three days questions about how Uppsala municipality should handle the particularly vulnerable EU citizens who beg in Uppsala, the participants in "Uppsala talk about begging" have summarized their opinions based on the following questions:

- What is the problem?
- Whose responsibility is it to solve the problem?
- What should Uppsala Municipality do?

On the one hand, the participants believe that begging on the streets should not be acceptable and that it is important to counteract the factors that contribute to the increase in begging. Instead, it wants to increase EU support for, and demands on, EU citizens' home countries in order to be able to reduce the root causes of the problem, poverty and discrimination against EU citizens in the long run, and to increase the economic means of subsistence for this vulnerable group.

On the other hand, the participants agreed that it is not an option to accept that there are individuals living outside Swedish society on our streets. It is believed that it is our duty to help those who are in this country and who live in a vulnerable situation. However, it is believed that there should be limits to the generosity we show this group. This means, for example, that EU citizens who come here should respect the time limit for them to stay here, which is three months, and that those who come to Sweden must follow Swedish laws and regulations.

Within the framework of these basic conditions, the participants could agree that the following measures should be implemented in Uppsala municipality:

- *Establish a legal parking space for caravans*
- *Keep the operations at Natthärbärgen and Crossroads*
- *Exert pressure on the EU and its home countries*

In addition, a majority of participants agreed that further action should be taken:

- *Educational activities aimed at younger children*
- *Targeted resources from authorities*
- *Alternative occupations for adults*
- *Friendly town in Romania*

Finally, some of the participants strongly advocated the following measures:

- *Schooling for older children*
- *Access to interpreters within the municipality*
- *Dialogue between politicians and EU citizens*
- *Registration, border controls and time limit*
- *Prohibition of begging*

INTRODUCTION

Background

Ideally, a citizen dialogue should have a broad representation of different citizens. Inclusion is important because it creates the conditions for many different perspectives and issues that are relevant to the issue to be highlighted. A citizen dialogue should also influence the way in which citizens engage and discuss the issue, as well as the decisions that politicians make. These are the principles that have guided the design of the citizen dialogue "Uppsala talks about begging".

In the citizens' dialogue that took place in Uppsala in January and February 2016, the focus was on the current and partly urgent issue of what should be done about the situation around the EU citizens who are in our immediate area and mainly support themselves through begging.

In the citizens' dialogue Uppsala Talar om tiggeri, about 60 randomly selected citizens participated for two weekends (3 days) in various panel discussions with politicians, officials, researchers and experts interspersed with discussions in small groups. After the participants on the first weekend had the opportunity to delve into the issue and ask questions to the panelists, the last weekend was devoted to discussing a joint report. The report is based on discussions based on three questions: What is the main problem, as the citizens see it, with the situation with begging and the vulnerable EU citizens who are in our immediate area? Who is responsible for the situation that has arisen? What measures should be taken, in the short and long term, to address the problem (s)?

Purpose

The main purpose of this report is to summarize the proposals for action that emerged in the discussions between the citizens who participated in "Uppsala talks about begging". The report is written to be disseminated to both decision-makers and a wider circle of citizens in Uppsala County. The content shows the possible paths that decision-makers can take but is not intended as a document that will determine what should be done about the issue of begging. The proposals should instead be seen as an illustration of what happens to opinions when citizens are given the opportunity to both inform themselves and, together with others, discuss various aspects of a particular political issue.

The results are not definitive, but changed circumstances in the matter may affect how citizens view their current positions.

In any case, the results of this report are important and show a possible way forward when it comes to issues of begging and how we should deal with and respond to vulnerable EU citizens. It is the participants' hope that the report will be supported in the decisions that politicians make in the future.

The report will primarily be handed over to politicians and officials in Uppsala municipality, but will also be sent to nearby municipalities and the government for consideration. The report will be available to the public via links on Uppsala Municipality's and Uppsala University's website.

RRESULT

What is the main problem with begging?

Begging is not acceptable in Sweden. It is a result of conditions that Uppsala municipality has difficulty influencing.

Although everyone agrees that we do not want a society where someone needs to beg, the problem that is highlighted is not primarily the begging that takes place on our streets, but the poverty and discrimination of Roma in countries such as Romania and Bulgaria. Discrimination and exclusion give rise to other serious societal problems such as lack of education, crime and people being forced to support themselves through begging. In addition to the outright discrimination against Roma in their home countries, EU funds set aside to support the Roma population were also mismanaged.

Who is responsible for those who beg on our streets?

Although the main responsibility for the wider issue of begging does not rest with the municipality of Uppsala, the municipality nevertheless has an obligation to provide some assistance to the particularly vulnerable EU citizens who are here.

The main responsibility lies with the home countries of Romania and Bulgaria and the solution is for these countries to take strong action against discrimination against the Roma population. It is the responsibility of home countries to safeguard the rights of vulnerable EU citizens with regard to healthcare / health and education.

The EU has a responsibility to put pressure on its home countries by demanding measures to strengthen the position of minority groups and to take political and economic sanctions when they mismanage their mission. The Swedish government, in turn, has a responsibility to put pressure on the EU to take action against Bulgaria and Romania.

Sweden's municipalities have a responsibility for the particularly vulnerable EU citizens who are in Sweden.

Citizens have a responsibility not to contribute to the spread of discrimination and prejudice specifically against the Roma population in our society.

WHICH MEASURES SHOULD BE TAKEN BY THE MUNICIPALITY?

Below are the measures recommended by the citizens who participated in the citizens' dialogue. The proposals for action have been divided into three categories according to the amount of support they received: (i) Unanimous proposal (ii) Majority proposal (iii) Minority proposal

Unanimous proposal

Proposal 1. Establish a legal parking space for caravans

A legal parking space should be set up, above all for caravans, but where there is also access to both smaller cabins and tents. Staff must be available at the site, partly to organize with line-up, payment (a symbolic sum), etc., but also to inform about rules and create a safe environment for the residents. Ideally, responsible staff should speak Romanian. The site must be open to all, not just EU citizens, and must provide access to toilets and showers. It shall be prohibited to build your own accommodation on the site, the area shall be drug-free and the prohibition on littering shall apply. The parking lot should move around to different areas to prevent the development of a slum area. One possibility is to collaborate with private actors such as with existing campsites around the county.

The arguments for a legal parking space are to help EU citizens get tolerable conditions when they are here. Other advantages that are highlighted are that should it reduce the littering of public places, it is more economically advantageous than regularly paying for evictions and with such an organization, society can have better control over what happens. The argument against a legal parking space is that more EU citizens would apply to Uppsala and that they thereby indirectly provide an incentive for continued livelihood via begging. To avoid this, aid must be limited so as not to perpetuate their exclusion by creating incentives to continue begging.

Proposal 2. Retain the operations at Natthärbärgen and Crossroads

The operations at Natthärbärgen and Crossroads will continue to be conducted as before. These activities are needed as a complement to a legal parking space because not everyone has access to their own caravan, tent, etc.

However, the night shelter should be opened up and accessible to everyone, not just EU citizens, and introduce a time limit of three months for how long you can stay at the shelter (with the proposal that accommodation can be booked for one week at a time). A Romanian-speaking person should be employed by Crossroads to strengthen and develop the business and the relationship with the residents. New and larger premises must be arranged for both Crossroads and Natthärbärgen. One proposal is to use demolition properties. The activities currently underway at Crossroads should continue, such as breakfast and clothing packages.

The municipality should utilize the knowledge and experience that exists within Crossroads and Natthärbärgen to develop the activities. Offer staff training that can help them manage and respond to the target group. This can create better relations and understanding between EU citizens and Swedish citizens.

Proposal 3. Exert pressure on the EU and its home countries

In parallel with the municipality taking measures and efforts to deal with the situation and create decent living conditions for EU citizens in our vicinity, politicians at municipal and national level should act to ensure that the EU and home countries take measures to address the basic problems of discrimination and poverty.

Specifically, clear requirements should be set for the way in which home countries deal with the rights of minority populations. The EU is called upon to impose political and economic sanctions when home countries do not live up to their commitments. In order to implement effective pressure, municipalities may need to coordinate, which should be done via Sweden's Municipalities and County Councils (SKL). Sweden can act as a role model when it comes to efforts against the target group.

Majority proposal

A majority of citizens agreed on the following measures

Majority proposal 1. Educational activities aimed at younger children

Most participants believe that EU citizens should not bring their children to Sweden when they come here to beg, but still believe that the municipality must take greater responsibility for the children who are here after all.

They want children of EU citizens who are here to be offered the same opportunities as unaccompanied refugee children. Even if in practice it involves short pedagogical efforts, it can have a great impact on a child's development seen from a longer perspective.

The educational activities should be organized by the municipality but in collaboration with civil society (eg teacher students) and should include several parallel activities. One proposal is to create meeting places between the target group's children and other children in Swedish society, e.g. through open preschool. Another proposal is to conduct targeted educational activities for the group, but to locate the activities at schools in order to open up for meetings between different children. Pedagogical efforts should preferably take place in the vicinity of the site.

Majority proposal 2. Targeted resources from authorities

The current structure with special police officers working directly against the target group and the social services' efforts should continue to be conducted in the same way as before. With a similar approach, the county council should employ a nurse who works specifically with the target group with outreach activities and preventive measures in health and sexual counseling. The target group should be offered basic health care and preventive wellness. An ambition should be that people working towards the target group should have the necessary language skills, but when this is not possible, interpreters should be used.

Majority proposal 3. Alternative employment for adults

In order for the target group to be given an alternative to begging, they should be offered the opportunity to take specific job assignments, e.g. cleaning of the site, building simpler cabins on the site or performing minor work for private actors: washing windows, cutting grass, etc. Another proposal is that the municipality in collaboration with civil society offers

financial compensation for participation in educational activities, e.g. reading and writing courses or training in specific crafts. The training initiatives can be arranged at Crossroads and could partly also be financed through grants from the public.

It is important to have an active dialogue with the target group to see what they themselves want and can do in the form of help for self-help. It is possible that they themselves have job proposals that they can perform, similar to previous efforts with the manufacture of wooden tools. Before any individual effort is implemented, it is important to ensure that it has been anchored in a dialogue with the target group.

Majority proposal 4. Town of twinning in Romania

Uppsala municipality should start a collaboration with a twinning municipality in one of the home countries. A twinning site makes it possible to organize fundraisers directly to specific organizations and activities in the home countries. The collections will be made by the EU citizens themselves and the money can go to poverty reduction, schools, agriculture, etc. A proposal is to arrange a gala for fundraising for the twin town during the Culture Night in Uppsala.

The municipality should investigate the possibilities of using EU funds to create a twinning exchange.

Minority proposal

A minority of participants argued for the following measures:

Minority proposal 1. Schooling for older children

Compulsory schooling must apply to all children who are in Sweden, regardless of the length of stay. The motivation is that children should not be affected by the parents' choices and life situation, but should be offered the same right to education as all other children.

The arguments against the proposal are that it will be too expensive and complicated to offer special schooling to the target group's children. The problems that are highlighted include the problems of getting a Romanian-speaking teacher at short notice and that it is unclear how it affects existing school classes when it becomes more fluid who is in the class and that the target group's children have the opportunity to come and go to a greater extent than other children.

Minority proposal 2. Access to interpreters within the municipality

It is important that municipalities, authorities and civilian actors make an effort to find interpreters who can facilitate contacts and understanding between Swedish actors and the target group.

Minority proposal 3. Dialogue between politicians and EU citizens

Politicians who decide on issues that directly affect the situation of EU citizens are urged to create space for direct meetings with EU citizens and to visit them at Crossroads / Night Hostel. Meetings and dialogue are crucial for creating understanding and knowledge about the life situation of EU citizens.

Minority proposal 4. Registration, border controls and time limit

A requirement for ID and registration of those staying in the municipality should be introduced, and a municipal coordinator should be responsible for registering arrivals, as well as communication and information to the target group.

The argument for a registration is that it is otherwise impossible to maintain the current 3-month rule with regard to free movement.

Minority proposal 5. Prohibition of begging

A ban on begging should be introduced in Sweden to clarify the rules that apply here and to send a clear signal that people should not make a living from begging. A ban forces politicians and citizens to focus on finding a more long-term and sustainable solution for the EU citizens who are in our immediate area. As there is evidence of a link between begging and criminal networks, a ban could also reduce criminal activity. There are examples from other countries where a ban on begging has had positive effects.

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The report is part of a larger research project carried out at the Department of Political Science / Uppsala University, in collaboration with the University of Canberra and with the support of the Swedish Research Council. Read more at: www.statsvet.uu.se/uppsalatalar.

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