

Crime prevention in Sweden

Current status and development needs 2021

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English Summary

Summary

This report is part of a series of annual reports that the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (*Brå*) has been commissioned by the government to produce every year since 2017. The main purpose is to provide a picture of crime prevention in Sweden, but it shall also provide a more detailed description of this work with consideration to the targets of the government's crime prevention programme *Tillsammans mot brott* ('together against crime', 2016/17:126). The background material for the report comes from Brå's development work, external monitoring, surveys and interviews, from digital network meetings with county administrative boards and the police, and from virtual meetings, conferences and presentations during the past year, where Brå has come into contact with more than 1,000 people who work with crime prevention.

National initiatives

Since 2018, all of these annual reports have included a chapter that describes those national initiatives that are deemed to be of particular interest and that have the potential to improve and increase the efficiency of crime prevention.

During the course of 2020, a range of new national initiatives were introduced, with both the primary and indirect aims of strengthening crime prevention. Many of these initiatives concerned the issue of children and adolescents who commit crimes. Other focus areas in 2020 included narcotics, the prevention of violence, organised and economic crime, and work to prevent recidivism.

Because national measures need to be knowledge-based, this year's report contains a review of the national initiatives brought up by Brå in the annual reports in 2018 and 2019. In this year's report,

we examine whether these initiatives have since been subjected to any form of follow-up, evaluation or review, and, if so, which results emerged. Of the national initiatives that Brå has looked at, more than half have either fully or partly been subjected to some form of follow-up. This can be seen as a positive result. At the same time, however, there are few evaluations, follow-ups and reviews that provide answers to questions about how crime has been affected. Instead, the focus is often on organisational conditions and implementation.

Brå's development work in 2020

During 2020, Brå continued to develop the support to, and coordination of national, regional and local crime prevention.

The authority coordinated different forms of support and dissemination activities, in collaboration with other national authorities. One example of this was the production by Brå of short information films concerning methodological support together with the Swedish Economic Crime Authority, the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, and the Swedish Gender Equality Agency.

Brå's support for the regional coordination functions of the county administrative boards has continued since 2017, and in 2020 the police's regional crime prevention coordinators formed a natural part of this network and were involved in the mutual sharing of experiences. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the support for regional actors changed during the year by being conducted in digital form.

Brå also provided support for actors on a local level – for example, the work that has begun concerning youth robbery, with the purpose of reinforcing the knowledge base in this area. Brå has also updated

the methodological support concerning the prevention of recidivism, and work began in the autumn concerning problems with the use of motor vehicles. In this regard, the *Samverkan i lokalt brottsförebyggande arbete* ('collaboration in local crime prevention') handbook has been revised and is now available in an online version.

To support the development of working methods and approaches, and to provide stimulation for evaluations, Brå has provided support to the evaluations of the *Sluta skjut* pilot project, where the GVI method has been tested in Malmö. These evaluations, which comprise both a process assessment and an effect assessment, show that the strategy has been able to be transferred and implemented in the Swedish context. They also show that there had been a reduction in the number of shootings in Malmö during the project period, although it is difficult to prove that this reduction can be attributed to the project. On the whole, however, there are good conditions for further testing of the strategy, both in Malmö and in other locations in Sweden.

Brå has provided basic training in crime prevention for the fourth consecutive year, and Brå's advanced course was held for the second consecutive year, with good results. An evaluation of the training performed during the year shows that the knowledge acquired also adds value to practical work in the longer term.

During 2020, Brå worked to spread good practice in various forms, allocated funds for evaluation, and produced a number of reports related to the field of crime prevention. The hundreds of reports from evaluations now constitute a knowledge bank on Brå's website.

Regional crime prevention

A key role in the support for local crime prevention is provided by the county administrative board and the police's crime prevention coordinators.

In 2020, the county administrative boards continued their crime prevention remit by further developing networks, training courses and methodological assistance in order to support local actors. The county coordinators are considered to be well

established in their roles, and several have now worked in their roles for at least one year. They also have high levels of knowledge, and continually engage in further training. A majority of both municipal coordinators and municipal community police officers also feel that they can receive support from the county administrative boards. In 2020, the county administrative boards conducted several activities that reinforced the work with crime prevention. Examples of this include training initiatives, supporting the local development of crime prevention in schools, the problems with the use of motor vehicles, and the work to prevent violence. There are, however, indications that the conditions of the county administrative boards to provide specific support for crime prevention on the local level are gradually deteriorating, even though they can still be regarded as sufficient.

In 2019, the The Swedish Police created the role of regional crime prevention coordinator, whose job is to coordinate and support the authority's preventive work. The police regions have reached different stages in the execution of this work, and the work itself is accorded varying degrees of focus by the police regions. With regard to the activities conducted by the police regions during the course of the year, they have been aimed partly at creating consistency and raising the status of the crime prevention within the authority, and partly at increasing the competence of those who perform the work. The police regions have also conducted activities aimed at the local level, such as training initiatives in collaboration with the county administrative board, and have also arranged presentations and conferences aimed at community police officers at both the municipal and area level.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on work at the regional level

In the most recent survey, both the county administrative boards and the The Swedish Police regional crime prevention coordinators were asked questions about how the COVID19 pandemic had affected their work. The overall picture is that the pandemic had a noticeable effect on the work of the county coordinators' work, but only a moderate effect on the work of the police's coordinators. Half of the county coordinators stated that they had spent less time on crime prevention during the first 7–8 months of the pandemic (approx. March to October). Seven in twenty stated that they had spent the same

amount of time on this during the pandemic. However, many stated that crime prevention had been afforded the same priority during this period, which may be interpreted as meaning that the temporary crisis situation had only affected what the coordinators' working hours had been spent on. None of the police regions' coordinators had spent less time on crime prevention issues during the pandemic.

Local crime prevention

With regard to crime prevention on the local level, municipal community police officers and municipal coordinators are key actors. Since 2017, therefore, they have been asked to participate in Brå's survey of the processes, organisation and content of the work with crime prevention at the local level. Brå's annual reports concerning crime prevention describe how this had developed between 2017 and 2020, with reference to selected indicators for successful

work. These indicators provide an overall view of the development during the period 2017–2020. The results here concern those county coordinators who completed the questionnaire (not municipal community police officers).

Development of the conditions of the municipalities

Based on what have previously proved to constitute conditions for successful crime prevention, the indicators that show how the presence of some of these conditions has developed since 2017 are presented here.

An overall assessment of the indicators in Table 1 suggests that the municipalities' conditions for conducting knowledge-based work have remained at a relatively stable level since 2017. There are however signs that certain conditions have improved slightly.

TABLE 1. Indicators for the development of the municipalities' conditions to perform knowledge-based work, 2017–2020. Number and proportion per year.

	2017 (number of respondents = 253)		2018 (number of respondents = 269)		2019 (number of respondents = 227)		2020 (number of respondents = 292)	
	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion
Municipalities/districts with a crime prevention coordinator (or equivalent function) who works at least 50% FTE with these issues	No data		91	34%	92	41%	106	36%
Municipal coordinators who have ever attended training in crime prevention	101	40%	94	35%	111	49%	141	48%
Municipalities/districts with a local crime prevention council (or equivalent strategic collaboration organisation)	212	84%	231	86%	191	84%	263	90%
Municipalities/districts with current collaboration agreements	224	89%	248	92%	198	87%	255	87%

The proportion of municipalities that have a co-ordinator (or equivalent function) for at least 50 per cent FTE appears to have remained at a stable level since 2017. However, more than half of the responding municipalities do not have this function, which means there is much room for improvement.

The number of local coordinators who have undergone training in crime prevention has increased since 2017. This rise appears to have plateaued since 2019, which is likely to at least in part be due to the higher response rate in 2020. Here too there is room for improvement, as around half of respondents still stated that they have not taken part in such training.

The vast majority of municipalities have a local crime prevention council (or equivalent strategic collaboration organisation), and this remained at a stable level between 2017 and 2019, before increasing in 2020. The results suggest that it has become more common to have this type of collaboration organisation.

There are also many municipalities that have collaboration agreements, and here too the result has remained at a stable level since 2017. The fact that the results differ from year to year could be due to varying lengths of work cycles.

In last year's report, Brå confirmed that there were differences between the municipal groups² with regard to these indicators (Brå 2020a). Following 2020's questionnaire survey, it is clear that these differences remain. In other words, it remains the case that coordinators in large city municipalities generally have better conditions to work in a knowledge-based manner compared to coordinators in other municipalities.

Development of the municipalities' knowledge-based work

As previously mentioned, working with a knowledge-based approach involves working in accordance with the model that is described in the *Samverkan i lokalt brottsförebyggande arbete* handbook (Brå 2020e), taking local conditions into account. This handbook presents an overview of the development of municipalities' knowledge-based work, using three indicators.

The overall assessment of the indicators in Table 2 suggests that no unambiguous results can be seen concerning the development of the knowledge-based work since 2017. There are certain positive tendencies, although the results also show enduring difficulties in conducting the *entire* knowledge-based process.

TABLE 2. Indicators for the development of knowledge-based crime prevention in municipalities and urban districts, 2017–2020. Number and proportion per year.

	2017 (number of respondents = 253)		2018 (number of respondents = 269)		2019 (number of respondents = 227)		2020 (number of respondents = 292)	
	Num- ber	Pro- portion	Num- ber	Pro- portion	Num- ber	Propor- tion	Num- ber	Pro- portion
Municipalities/districts that have performed a mapping of local crime problems in the past year	177	70%	155	58%	145	64%	192	66%
Municipalities/districts that have performed a cause analysis of local crime problems	No data		110	41%	98	43%	136	47%
Municipalities/districts that have performed a follow-up for crime prevention measures	114	45%	81	30%*	No data		132	45%

* In 2018 the option 'partly' was included, which was used by 38 per cent of respondents. This can be assumed to have reduced the proportion of respondents who answered 'yes', but also the proportion of those who answered 'no'. In 2017 and 2020, only the options 'yes' and 'no' were offered.

² A description of the division of the municipal groups can be found in *Det brottsförebyggande arbetet i Sverige. Nuläge och utvecklingsbehov 2020*.

Having performed a mapping of the local crime problem appears to be broadly equally common in 2020 as in 2017, whilst it was somewhat less common in the intervening two years. This may be attributable to the mappings being performed once every two or three years, and does not necessarily mean that the municipalities neglected to do them.

Brå has previously established that cause analysis is felt to be one of the more difficult stages in the knowledge-based process, and this would still appear to be the case because it is considerably less common to have conducted a cause analysis than to have performed a mapping. The conducting of cause analyses does, however, seem to have become more common – there has been an increase since 2018 in both the number and proportion of respondents who stated that they have done this.

With regard to the final stage of the process – the following-up or evaluation – here too there has been a fall-off among some of the respondents, relative to how many had performed a mapping. This suggests that this stage may also be associated with certain difficulties. The trend over time should, however, be interpreted with great caution, as there are only two completely comparable points of measurement.

With regard to knowledge-based work, the differences between the municipal groups that were identified by Brå in the previous annual report still remain. Here too it is primarily the large city municipalities that appear to conduct both mapping and cause analysis to a greater extent than other municipal groups. On the other hand, the differences are less clear with regard to follow-up and evaluation.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on work at the local level

In the most recent survey, municipal coordinators and municipal community police officers were also asked questions about how their work had been affected by the COVID19 pandemic. The results show that the local coordinators were generally more affected by the pandemic, relative to the municipal community police officers.

The municipal coordinators who spent less time on crime prevention matters during the pandemic

mainly state how they either entirely or partially had to switch work duties, and instead had to work with (for example) continuity planning, personnel management and crisis management, or coordinating the municipality's internal work concerning the pandemic. Several of them did, however, continue to work with crime prevention matters, although to a lesser extent – for example, due to certain activities being no longer possible to perform or needing to be postponed. The responses from the municipal community police officers generally indicate that cancelled activities did not mean that they themselves were ordered to perform alternative work duties, but that the municipalities were so preoccupied with pandemic-related issues that they had no time for crime prevention.

Brå's assessment

It is Brå's assessment that a positive development is taking place in Sweden's crime prevention, although many of the challenges that have previously been identified still remain, albeit to varying degrees.

On the national level, important initiatives were implemented during the year by a range of different organisations that are deemed to contribute to a more knowledge-based approach to crime prevention. The assessment of the regional work is that it has continued to develop in a positive direction; despite the pandemic, more initiatives that reinforce crime prevention have been conducted. Working together with the police, the county administrative boards have implemented several collaborative initiatives in order to jointly support the work on the local level – both strategically and more operationally. With regard to the development at the local level, the assessment is that crime prevention has not undergone any major changes since the previous year, and that the local capability is inadequate, which results in certain difficulties for the performance of knowledge-based crime prevention.

On the basis of the results of the annual report, Brå's assessment is that there are several challenges that need to be overcome in order to strengthen the work at all levels. The most important development requirements for all actors at the national, regional and local levels are presented here:

1. Need for greater capability and more measures

New legislation that regulates the municipalities' crime prevention is currently being developed, as is the Swedish Police new crime prevention strategy. This means there is a need for several actors to make adequate preparations. This involves increasing the capability by means of skills development, planning for wide-ranging support, and ensuring the availability of resources to enable the work with crime prevention. In many cases, the conditions are insufficient for it to be possible for the knowledge-based work to be performed with good quality, and the conditions vary throughout the country. Brå has a confident view both of the strategy being developed by the The Swedish Police for its own crime prevention and of the public investigation that is currently considering how municipalities can be given statutory responsibility for crime prevention. The Swedish Police needs to conduct with more crime prevention measures, and not wait for the strategy and its implementation. It is Brå's hope that this will increase the capacity for well-targeted, knowledge-based crime prevention.

The report shows that there has been a positive development in regional support, while Brå's survey reveals certain tendencies for the county administrative boards to take on more and more tasks. In the long term, there is a risk that this will lead to the regional crime prevention coordinators devoting more time to other work, and that certain crime prevention measures will not be able to be performed. Brå believes that priority must be given to the main task of supporting and developing the knowledge-based work process, and of adapting this support in accordance with local and regional requirements, so as to provide good conditions and to ensure that the work does not become a channel for different initiatives that lead to an increase of the perspective-crowding that Brå has described in previous annual reports.

It is Brå's assessment that actors at all levels need to prepare themselves for an increased need for support, and they must therefore consider how they can meet the need for their support for the knowledge-based work in municipalities and local police districts.

2. The entire spectrum of measures needs to be used

Brå's assessment is that only a limited amount of all the measures available in the broad spectrum of crime prevention measures are actually used. For complex problems, the entire 'toolbox' must be considered in order to be made use of. This does not mean that more measures must be used, because an assessment must always be made to determine which measures will have the greatest effect in order to have an impact on the cause of the crime problem that has arisen. It is important to choose from the whole spectrum when, for example, deciding which measures to use in order to prevent young adults engaging in criminal behaviour, or when working to prevent domestic violence.

The same also applies to situational work, where broad-ranging assurance-generating measures are often given priority over targeted measures for the prevention of specific crimes. Brå also considers that all actors must become better at mutual collaboration in order to be able to contribute with different elements that complement each other and that broaden the spectrum of possible measures, instead of several actors doing more of the same thing.

3. Need for evaluation of the effects of crime prevention on crime

A recurring element of this year's report is the knowledge-based crime prevention process, which means that actors adopt a systematic approach in order to address a problem. This creates the conditions to achieve targets and to examine the effects of the work.

Even if many initiatives are followed up, Brå sees a lack of evaluations that aim to find out how the initiative shall prevent crime, and the evaluations that are conducted are too seldom scientific evaluations. It is Brå's assessment that crime prevention so far has not been performed with a knowledge-based approach to a sufficient degree, even though there are a range of good examples of actors who have a well-functioning process and whose crime prevention achieves positive effects. Brå sees that evaluations and follow-ups are far too often missing at the national, regional and local levels, and that, when they have been performed, they all too seldom examine how crime has been affected.

More actors need to find ways of systematically following up their work. The governance needs to be strengthened so that follow-ups and evaluation become a natural part of crime prevention.

Brå realises that all of this is resource-demanding, and it is not necessarily the case that all work needs to be evaluated; instead, it needs to be considered which measures are most in need of being evaluated. An overall assessment of the findings of Brå's investigations, external monitoring and dialogues with crime prevention actors suggests that more effort should be made in investigating how measures actually have an impact on crime.

If evaluation and follow-ups are to be more easily integrated into crime prevention, it is important that the national level (including Brå) can, to a greater extent, conduct effect evaluations of measures at all levels (national, regional and local), make contributions to evaluations, share knowledge of the results from completed evaluations, and offer methodological support to regional and local crime prevention actors concerning how they can conduct simpler evaluations. As an example, the methodological support developed by the Swedish Police needs to be evaluated on a continual basis.

At the regional level, it is important to have knowledge of, and to support local actors in how to develop, evaluations and follow-ups, as well as to establish (or continue previously established) collaborations with educational institutions in order to further increase the capability for following up measures.

It is recommended that actors at the local level have collaborative agreements or similar steering documents that clarify and ensure that local crime prevention measures are followed up or evaluated, that ensure that there is a local organisational capability to conduct the follow-ups and evaluations, and to ensure that this competence is involved in the work at an early stage.

4. The pandemic has revealed the importance of a robust organisation

The pandemic has had an impact on crime prevention both regional and local levels, but the county administrative boards and, above all, the municipalities are those that have been affected the most, in that their regular work duties were either changed or completely replaced. However, a clear picture emerges from the report: that those municipalities and local police districts that ordinarily prioritise crime prevention issues have continued to give them priority during the pandemic. This suggests that an established organisation has greater capacity to deal with unforeseen situations – with regard to both crises and crime prevention. Even though the COVID19 pandemic is an extraordinary situation, it is Brå's assessment that established and well-functioning organisations will have greater capacity to continue to conduct crime prevention of good quality, even when faced with other unforeseen situations in the future. In the example of handling social unrest and shootings, it has been seen that knowledge-based crime prevention and a well-functioning organisation with regard to crime and security have made it easier to deal with acute situations and to work with broad-ranging, preventive measures.



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