



Reintegration assistance after prison

*Follow-up on the Prison and Probation Service's work
with special reintegration assistance measures*

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English summary of Brå report 2017:15

**The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) –
centre for knowledge about crime and crime prevention measures**

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå)
works to reduce crime and improve levels of safety in society
by producing data and disseminating knowledge on crime
and crime prevention work.

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Summary¹

Within three years of release from prison, two out of five persons commit a new offence sanctionable by prison or probation. For most of these individuals, recidivism occurs within several months after they have left prison (Brå 2017). In order to reduce the risk that individuals who are released commit new offences in connection with release, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service can grant reintegration assistance at the end of their sentence. These measures smooth the transition between prison and life at liberty, and entail a gradual reduction of the Prison and Probation Service's control over the client. The four so-called special reintegration assistance measures are:

- day release;
- treatment period;
- halfway house;
- enhanced day release.

Brå has been instructed by the Government to follow up on the Prison and Probation Service's work with reintegration assistance. In conjunction with this instruction, the Government instructed the Prison and Probation Service at the end of 2015 to develop and strengthen its work with reintegration assistance. Brå's instruction requires us to follow up on the progress of the Prison and Probation Service's development work and to track the scope and nature of the reintegration assistance. We are also meant to report on any impediments to well-functioning and knowledge-based reintegration assistance work. Special attention is to be paid to any differences in working methods in various parts of the country, differences between men and women, and differences for persons from different language backgrounds. The crime victim aspects are to be highlighted, where relevant. Finally, Brå is, as necessary, required to suggest ideas for further development of the reintegration assistance efforts.

As a basis for the study, Brå has visited 13 different facilities – prisons with various security classifications, detention centres, day release offices, halfway houses, and treatment homes. We have interviewed a total of 100 individuals, both staff and clients, at these facilities. Interviews have also been conducted with a number of individuals at the headquarters of the Prison and Probation Service, as well as with other strategically important individuals. In addition, Brå has had continual contact with representatives from the Prison and Probation Service's working group for the development work. Our quantitative source material includes both the Prison

¹ The Swedish original of this summary is available on Brå's website, www.bra.se. Click on the Publikationer tab, then enter the report number in the search field.

and Probation Service's existing statistics and a special order in respect of clients who were released from prison. Brå has also been given access to unpublished data from a study which was conducted on the Prison and Probation Service's research unit. In addition to the above, a survey of the literature in the form of previous studies and evaluations has been conducted.

The four special reintegration assistance measures

The four special reintegration assistance measures impose different requirements on the clients and have somewhat different target groups (see Swedish Prison Act, Chapter 11, sections 2–5 and KVFS 2011:1 FARK Prison). In general, one can say that the measure which places the least demands on the clients is a treatment period, while enhanced day release and halfway house impose the highest demands. The following is a brief description of each reintegration assistance measure.

Day release

Day release entails that the client remains at the prison but leaves during the day to study, work, or participate in treatment (Prisons Act, Chapter 11, section 2). The idea is that the day release will improve the inmate's possibilities to be self-supporting after release (KVFS 2011:1 FARK Prison).

During 2016, slightly fewer than 80 inmates were granted day release. According to the interviews which Brå has conducted with personnel and clients, the content of the day release varies depending on the client's situation. However, the most common type appears to be a day release to enable the client to go to a non-custodial treatment programme. Day release appears to be used largely as a way of being able to offer the client a treatment or training programme which is not available at the prison. In general, the knowledge of how day release can be used is relatively low, as is the demand for such reintegration assistance.

Treatment period

In the event of a treatment period, the client ordinarily lives at a residential care home (known as an HVB) but can also live in a group home (Prisons Act, Chapter 11, section 3). In most cases, the client participates in a substance abuse treatment programme with either a 12-step orientation or a cognitive behaviour therapeutic orientation during the treatment period. During 2016, approximately 300 inmates were granted a treatment period. Although the interest in treatment periods is relatively great, a comparatively significant number of the clients who belong to the target group are not motivated to participate in such a measure but would rather spend their time in prison.

A treatment period is the most frequently revoked reintegration assistance measure. This is probably partially due to the fact that the demands imposed on the inmates are lower than for other measures. Moreover, the target group often comprises addicts who have significant treatment needs and often relapse.

Halfway house

A halfway house is a home with personnel who monitor and support the residents (Prison Acts, Chapter 11, section 4). The house is staffed around the clock. During the day, the client has some form of activity, such as work or treatment. There are halfway houses in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö. All places are designated for men but there is work underway to procure places for women.

Approximately 80 clients were granted access to a halfway house during 2016. The clients with whom Brå has spoken regard their experience with a halfway house as very positive. They believe that it enables them to successively acclimate to daily life outside of the prison. Interest in the measure is great but the general perception is that a very long period of imprisonment is necessary in order for there to be time for a halfway house space to become available.

Enhanced day release

Under enhanced day release, the client lives in their own home. They may only leave the residence during certain established times and to perform activities in the form of work, treatment, or training (KVFS 2011:1 FARK Prison). The client's presence in the home at designated times is verified through electronic monitoring, and attendance at the workplace is verified by, among other things, visits from probation services.

Enhanced day release is the most common release measure. A total of 550 clients were granted enhanced day release during 2016. Inmate interest in enhanced day release is very significant.

Enhanced day release reduces the risk of recidivism

In several studies, Brå has investigated the effect of enhanced day release (Brå 2005b, 2007 & 2010a)². In general, the studies have shown that clients who have had enhanced day release have a lower rate of recidivism than a comparable control group. Brå has not conducted any study following up on the effects of the other reintegration assistance measures, but one study conducted of substance abuse treatment in prisons (Brå 2008b) noted that the effect of this treatment improves if it is combined with a treatment period in a treatment home.

The Prison and Probation Service's evaluation of the effects of all reintegration assistance measures also show that enhanced day release reduces the risk of recidivism (Forstmann & Warner 2016). The study also shows that there is a tendency for day release to lead to reduced recidivism. However, this result is not statistically significant. The Prison and Probation Service's study does not present any effects for treatment time and halfway houses.³

² The first studies referred to intensive supervision with electronic monitoring.

³ One weakness in both Brå's and the Prison and Probation Service's studies is that they do not control for client motivation. This means that the result which emerges can be an effect of the fact that individuals who participate in a special release are more motivated than other clients to change their lives and that this is more likely to be the reason for the effect than the release measure itself.

Percentage of clients who are granted reintegration assistance has declined

During 2016, almost 1,000 clients were granted special reintegration assistance. In 2007, the number was 1,600 clients. In order to assess the scope of this reduction, consideration should be given both to how many people are released and to how many of these people serve a sentence in excess of six months, since clients with shorter sentences are seldom granted reintegration assistance⁴. Nevertheless, Brå estimates that the reduction remains even when these aspects are taken into consideration. In 2007, 35 per cent of all released individuals with a sentence longer than six months were granted reintegration assistance while the corresponding percentage in 2016 was 29 per cent. The measure which has been reduced to the greatest extent is treatment time – the percentage has been reduced by half, from 16 per cent in 2007 to 8 per cent in 2016.

Why aren't more clients granted reintegration assistance?

The Prison and Probation Service has conducted a study regarding the reasons why inmates are released without a reintegration assistance measure (Prison and Probation Service 2015). The report notes that far and away the most common reason is that the client is deemed to present too high a level of risk. The next most common reason is that the client is not motivated to participate in a measure. In respect of some clients, the practical prerequisites are absent – for example activity, residence, commitments from social services, sufficient time – or another measure to prepare for release is deemed more appropriate.

Brå's study presents two additional impediments for clients receiving reintegration assistance: there is often insufficient knowledge regarding the various reintegration assistance alternatives, both among inmates and personnel, and the decision-making process can be complicated.

Client factors which can affect the access to reintegration assistance

An additional question on which Brå sheds light is that different groups have varying access to reintegration assistance. The factors which are studied are whether there are differences between different parts of the country, between men and women, and between individuals from different language backgrounds.

⁴ Both practical and legal factors limit the access to release measures for clients who have sentences shorter than six months. There is a statutory qualifying period for halfway houses and enhanced day release requiring the client to have served at least half of their sentence – however not shorter than three months – before they can be granted a release measure.

Access to reintegration assistance is worse for clients who do not have mastery of the Swedish language

Brå has gained access to statistics from Prison and Probation Service which indicate that client mastery of Swedish is significant in terms of their possibility to obtain reintegration assistance. The statistics show that a significantly lower percentage of clients with limited or non-existent Swedish language skills are provided with a reintegration assistance as compared with those clients with a mastery of Swedish⁵. The most common reintegration assistance for clients with limited Swedish language skills is day release (24 persons granted this measure in 2015). A few isolated individuals utilised other reintegration assistance.

A greater percentage of women inmates than men inmates were granted reintegration assistance

Only six to seven per cent of all inmates in prisons are women. The fact that women comprise a minority means that there is a risk that the reintegration assistance may be less varied for them when compared with that available to men and thus cover the needs of women to a lesser extent. However, in terms of percentage, it is not a lower percentage of women who obtain access to reintegration assistance but, instead, a lower percentage of men. Approximately 40 per cent of all women who were released in 2015 and had sentences longer than six months were granted reintegration assistance. Among men, the figure was approximately 30 per cent. On the other hand, there are no halfway houses for women.

Clients from large cities receive reintegration assistance more often

In order to study any possible differences in reintegration assistance work in various parts of the country, Brå has compared the access to reintegration assistance for clients who come from any of the three major metropolitan counties with clients from the rest of Sweden. Overall, clients who come from the large cities receive reintegration assistance to a greater extent than clients from the rest of the country. Clients from large cities are particularly overrepresented in respect of halfway houses. According to those individuals interviewed by Brå, this is probably because there are halfway houses only in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö, and thus it is more attractive for clients with ties to these cities. Day release and enhanced day release are also somewhat more common among clients from the major metropolitan counties. This is probably because it is generally easier to solve the logistical issues surrounding the reintegration assistance if the inmate lives in, or has ties to, a major city. On the other hand, treatment time is more common for those who come from the rest of Sweden.

⁵ However, the clients reflected in the material include both clients with a sentence shorter than six months and clients who will be deported after release or who have no ties to Sweden. Deportation or an absence of ties to Sweden are not an express impediment to reintegration assistance under the Prisons Act. The general guidelines of the Prison and Probation Authority (FARK Prison 2011:1, Chapter 11, section 25) state, however, that the deportation or lack of ties to Sweden must be taken into consideration in the risk assessment. The risk assessment is highly significant to the issue of granting or denying reintegration assistance.

Crime victim aspects are taken into consideration prior to a decision regarding reintegration assistance

The prison personnel and probation personnel interviewed by Brå are in agreement that crime victim aspects must be taken into consideration prior to any decision regarding reintegration assistance. In addition to requiring that any crime victims be informed that the client has been granted reintegration assistance, the measure must also be designed taking the victim into consideration.

The Prison and Probation Service's ongoing development work

Since the end of 2015, the Prison and Probation Service has had a specific instruction to reinforce and develop its reintegration assistance work (Ju2015/09899/KRIM). The definition of reintegration assistance in the Prison and Probation Service's instruction is broader than that in Brå's study. In addition to the special reintegration assistance measures, it includes risk reduction measures and measures preparatory to release. A final report on the Prison and Probation Service's instruction is due on 31 March 2018 and Brå has followed the progress of the work up to November 2017.

The areas where the Prison and Probation Service's work has shown the greatest progress when this report was written are the development of operational planning (known as Ny VSP) and of the risk and needs assessments (RBM-b⁶). The hope is that this work will lead to reinforcement of the reintegration assistance work because the planning, responsibility, and target groups are more structured and clearly defined.

⁶ RBM-b is the instrument used by the Prison and Probation Service to investigate the client's situation under the RBM principles (see What increases the chances of not relapsing into crime?)

Brå's assessment

Well-functioning reintegration assistance entails that the substance of the various forms of reintegration assistance correspond to the intended purpose and that the clients who need some form of reintegration assistance satisfy the prerequisites necessary to utilise it. In respect of the substance of the measures, Brå's assessment is that they prepare the clients, in various ways, for a return to the community. According to several of the studies, one of the measures – enhanced day release – also leads to a reduction of the percentage of recidivists. Although no significant effect has been observed for other measures, it is not unreasonable that these measures could be structured to have effect which prevents recidivism. However, this requires a concerted effort to match each individual client with a measure that meets their needs.

In respect of the number of clients who receive reintegration assistance, there is much to indicate that more individuals could be given access to reintegration assistance. Many of the previously identified impediments to increasing the number of persons who have access to reintegration assistance remain. These primarily involve overestimating the clients' risks, insufficient planning of measures, and insufficient interest among the clients.

The Prison and Probation Service's development work can lead to more individuals obtaining access to reintegration assistance and improvement of the effect of the measures. However, the Prison and Probation Service has carried out similar projects with no improvement. Accordingly, it is important to follow up on and evaluate the work.

In Brå's opinion, the Prison and Probation Service's reintegration assistance work is knowledge-based insofar that extensive follow-up statistics are maintained. However, Brå believes that additional follow-ups and analyses which would be valuable in terms of developing the scheme. This includes, for example, studies which would illuminate the following issues:

- What is causing the absence of effects from treatment periods?
- What would be the consequences if individuals at a higher risk level were granted reintegration assistance to greater extent?
- What are the possibilities for allowing a greater number of clients with limited or no Swedish language skills to participate in reintegration assistance?
- What are the consequences of the Ny VSP on reintegration assistance work?
- Notwithstanding substantial development work, Brå believes that there is a relatively large group of inmates who, for reasons related to time, will not come into question in respect of reintegration assistance. The Prison and Probation Service should be able to investigate whether these clients could, under controlled forms, be given access to computers, telephones, and the internet within the prison in order to prepare them for release.



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