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# Crime prevention in Sweden

Current status and development needs 2022

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Current situation and need for development 2022

English Summary

# Summary

Since 2017, Brå has had a long-term commission to produce an annual report on crime prevention work in Sweden. The purpose of this series of reports is to provide a broad picture of how crime prevention work has developed locally, regionally and nationally in recent years in relation to the objectives described in Sweden's national crime prevention programme, Combating Crime Together (*Tillsammans mot brott*, government communication 2016/2017). Just like the crime prevention programme, the reports are focused on efforts that are primarily intended to prevent crimes and criminality. These can include, for example, social measures for people at risk of turning or returning to crime, or situational measures to make crime less profitable or riskier.

This year's report has an emphasis on the work of organisations involved in crime prevention in relation to the proposed legislation presented in the government inquiry Municipalities Against Crime (*Kommuner mot brott*, SOU 2021:49). If the municipalities are to fulfil the intentions of the law, many organisations within the field, and at all levels of society, will most likely need to develop their crime prevention work.

To better describe crime prevention work in Sweden, the report is divided into five chapters:

- Crime prevention work – National initiatives.
- Brå's development work in 2021.
- Regional crime prevention work.
- Local crime prevention work.
- Final conclusions and discussion.

The first chapter describes the overarching national initiatives pursued in 2021. This section is based on

Brå's systematic national monitoring. The second chapter describes Brå's efforts in 2021 to develop crime prevention work nationally, regionally and locally. The third and fourth chapters deal with regional and local crime prevention work, respectively. These chapters are based primarily on the results of Brå's regional and local surveys, but also the final reports submitted by organisations receiving financial support from Brå to conduct evaluations as well as Brå's broad network of crime prevention organisations within its methodological support and knowledge sharing initiatives. In the fifth and final chapter, Brå offers its assessment of the challenges and opportunities faced by crime prevention work in Sweden in 2022.

## National initiatives

In 2021, several national initiatives to bolster crime prevention work were continued and intensified, including in the areas of gang-related crime, men's violence against women and financial crime against the welfare state.

Measures implemented within the initiatives were primarily aimed at strengthening preventive work targeting children and youths at risk of adopting a criminal lifestyle. Many general initiatives to strengthen society's control and oversight were also conducted.

Among the most far-reaching national initiatives was the proposed legislation on municipal responsibility for crime prevention work. Several other national initiatives also highlight the importance of the municipalities in crime prevention work, such as with regard to exit programmes, preventing improper benefit payments and Sweden's new Social Services Act.

Initiatives need to target the challenges currently faced by society. At the same time, this can limit the development of local crime prevention work if initiatives against certain crime problems dominate the national crime prevention agenda and thereby the support offered to the municipalities.

A national focus on specific crime problems can lead to the neglect of local prevention work against other crimes. It can also mean that certain types of municipalities seldom receive any support in their work. To develop and strengthen knowledge-based crime prevention work throughout Sweden, national initiatives to secure the objectives of the Combating Crime Together programme are also needed.

## Brå's development work in 2021

Based on previous reports on crime prevention work in Sweden, in 2021 Brå focused its development efforts on a knowledge-based approach, in particular with regard to situational analyses, including through publications, webinars and training courses. In addition, the agency has also strengthened and refined efforts to counter gang-related violent crime, prevention work targeting youths who commit or are at risk of committing crimes, and the prevention of financial crime. In the second half of the year and on behalf of the Swedish government, in a programme named Cease Fire (*Sluta skjut*) Brå initiated practical support based on the Group Violence Intervention (GVI) strategy for certain municipalities (government decision 2021/09/23).

Within crime prevention work, Brå is striving to ensure that support from the national level is increasingly concrete and practical. Moreover, by means of, for example, network meetings, lectures and practical method support, Brå and the concerned authorities have helped to spread knowledge to raise awareness, both locally and regionally, about matters such as recidivism prevention work, preventive measures against financial crime and the prevention of problems related to youths with motor vehicles. As the regional support structures have progressed from the establishment phase to the implementation phase, the support provided by Brå has evolved, and now the agency is increasingly seeking forms of cooperation and coordination with the county administrative boards and police regions that support local crime prevention work.

Brå's 2017 extended government commission to strengthen and develop crime prevention work in Sweden at national, regional and local level came about following the agency's 2015 feedback on the need for strengthened support for crime prevention work. Brå's assessment thus far is that the increased support from the agency, together with the work of the county administrative boards, has developed knowledge-based approaches at the local level, within needs analysis in particular.

In December 2021, Brå was commissioned to report back in 2022 on how this support can be developed to meet the local needs arising from the proposed legislation on municipal responsibility for crime prevention work. This is presented in more detail in the report stemming from that commission.

However, it is clear that the municipalities will need considerably more support if they are to fulfil the intentions of the law. Brå needs to meet both a general need for skills development, by means of training and other knowledge sharing, and more specific needs for varied support tailored to the differing circumstances of the municipalities. Brå also needs to work together with the other concerned authorities to develop the opportunities to provide practical support.

## Regional crime prevention

The county administrative boards and police regions are important sources of support in local crime prevention work. The regional coordinators for crime prevention work stationed at the county administrative boards have settled into their roles in the organisation. The regional coordinators within the police authority comprise a newer function, but they are found in all regions. In some regions, coordinators have even been appointed at police district level. The county administrative board and the police often join forces in efforts to strengthen local crime prevention work. Several counties and regions have formalised their cooperation in agreements.

Brå's assessment is that support efforts from both the police and the county administrative boards are well established, and that this support helps to strengthen the use of a knowledge-based approach

in crime prevention work at the local level. In other words, regional support is essential to local efforts.

Support at regional level also provides a vital link between the national level and the local level. This is particularly apparent in the fact that many of the focus areas at national level are reflected in the work of the coordinators at regional level, especially within the county administrative boards.

Moving forwards, the active support that the county administrative boards and the police regions seem to be providing to local crime prevention officers also offers good opportunities for the regional coordinators to broaden their role to also include the transfer of valuable information from the local level to the national level.

In Brå's assessment, this is a key area to develop within regional efforts over the coming years, not least in the light of the proposed legislation emphasising the responsibility of the municipalities for crime prevention work.

## Local crime prevention

The proposed legislation on the responsibility of the municipalities for crime prevention proposes a clearer role for the municipalities in this area. They are to create the necessary organisational conditions for knowledge-based crime prevention work, and they are also expected to conduct certain steps of the knowledge-based process. The benefits of such a knowledge-based approach are that awareness of local crime problems motivates action, and that an understanding of local problems makes for more effective action.

A considerable percentage of the municipalities already have some of the organisational framework in place, such as strategic crime prevention councils, cooperation agreements and coordination functions. In previous reports, Brå has seen a positive trend in local knowledge-based crime prevention work, and this is a trend that continues.

One example is the percentage stating that they perform root cause analysis, which has risen from 41 per cent in 2018 to 56 per cent in 2021. Despite this positive development, it is estimated that so far only half of the municipalities are working system-

atically with all steps of the process, and there is a relatively large discrepancy between municipal coordinators and municipal police officers, respectively, in the percentage conducting needs analysis and root cause analysis. As an example, one quarter of the municipalities do not even complete the first step, which is to analyse local problems and needs. This poses the risk of the municipality's work being guided by how the police view the local situation. The municipalities' knowledge of the local situation, which is often broader than that of the police, is important for planning the most effective crime prevention work possible.

There are also indications that more concrete measures have been implemented in the municipalities. As described in previous reports on local crime prevention work, priority is often given to drug-related crime, vandalism, disorderly conduct and traffic offences. Common measures are training and/or information initiatives and visible police presence.

For local crime prevention officers in medium-sized municipalities, the prerequisites for well-functioning knowledge-based work have stagnated or even deteriorated over the past year, and in these municipalities cooperation agreements and local crime prevention councils are less common than in both larger cities and smaller municipalities. The medium-sized municipalities also work less with needs analysis and root cause analysis than the other municipalities.

In view of this, Brå's assessment is that there is a need for an additional focus on the medium-sized municipalities over the coming years to bolster their efforts and to reduce the risk of increased crime and insecurity, especially in the socially deprived areas of these municipalities.

## Final conclusions and discussion

While the proposed legislation on municipal responsibility for local crime prevention is central to raising ambitions within knowledge-based crime prevention work, it also presents a challenge for those municipalities lacking the prerequisites for employing a knowledge-based approach. They may need to establish new or reorganise existing areas within their operations. In previous reports, Brå has emphasised the need for the municipalities to be

ready to face future challenges, otherwise there is a risk of the development of socially deprived areas and the associated crime problems.

One important prerequisite if the municipalities are to employ a knowledge-based approach is access to support when needed. Brå welcomes the increasing attention afforded crime prevention work in national initiatives.

As increasingly more national organisations from different areas of expertise and with different perspectives get involved in supporting the development of crime prevention work, the need for consensus on what constitutes knowledge-based crime prevention increases.

In last year's report (2021), Brå's assessment was that although the national initiatives that are conducted are of relevance, there is a need for efforts with a clearer focus on the crimes addressed in the objectives of the Combating Crime Together programme. Accordingly, it is also necessary for Brå to be given greater opportunities to contribute to the coordination of the various national organisations, as otherwise this could affect the outcome of the municipal crime prevention work.

In conclusion, Brå welcomes the increasing attention given to crime prevention work at all levels – local, regional and national. However, Brå would like to warn that, in the wake of a stronger and broader focus on criminal justice policies, there may be a risk of the work becoming less knowledge-based if measures are chosen on the basis of an agenda centred on policies, organisation or resource efficiency rather than knowledge. Sweden's crime prevention work must be knowledge-based at all levels – local, regional and national.



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