

RESEARCH

Crime prevention work by police in vulnerable areas

Report 2026:8

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) works to reduce crime and improve levels of safety in society. We do this by providing factual information and disseminating knowledge on crime and crime prevention work. Our target audience is primarily the Government and agencies in the criminal justice system.

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Authors: Carolina Andersson and Kristin Franke Björkman

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Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, Box 1386, 111 93 Stockholm

Tel: +46(0)8-527 58 400, Email registrator@bra.se, www.bra.se

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English summary of Brå report 2026:8

Summary

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) has carried out a study of crime prevention work by police in vulnerable areas. The aim of the study is to increase knowledge and understanding of how crime prevention work is actually carried out by police. The study focuses on crime prevention work at local level and on the particular roles within local police districts which have explicit strategic or operational responsibility for crime prevention: municipality police officers, heads of local police districts, community police officers and response police officers.

The report is based primarily on interviews with police employees and field observations of the police crime prevention work in vulnerable areas¹. In 20 local police districts which include vulnerable areas, Brå has conducted structured, in-depth interviews, and four local police districts were selected for in-depth interviews and field observations. Findings from the 2025 Swedish Crime Survey (SCS) have been used to provide an overview of the factors which influence the conditions under which police carry out their work in vulnerable areas.

Factors affecting police crime prevention work

These vulnerable areas are characterised by low socio-economic status and significant influence from criminal networks. Criminal activity within these networks is dominated by drug trafficking and various forms of economic crime, which is used both to manage and to generate new proceeds of crime. One major problem is that children and youth are exposed to and drawn into the criminal networks that are present in their own neighbourhoods. A culture of silence also prevails in these areas, where residents are afraid or unwilling to report crimes, and in several areas the interviewees feel that certain types of crime are accepted or tolerated by locals. The results of the SCS also show that residents of vulnerable areas feel less safe when out late at night in their own residential area, compared with residents of other urban areas. Furthermore, confidence in the police and the criminal justice system as a whole is lower.

Police make efforts, but their work can be improved in several respects

Given the circumstances which characterise vulnerable areas, the police's work primarily focuses on combating criminality linked to criminal networks and the recruitment of children and youth into criminality.

¹ The Police Authority defines vulnerable areas as "geographically defined locations of low socio-economic status where criminals have a significant influence on the local community" (Police Authority 2025c).

To prevent and deter crime by criminal networks, police primarily patrol so-called ‘hot spots’² and conduct searches of persons and vehicles. Many police officers cited in the Brå report feel that the police’s expanded CCTV surveillance and the ability to issue preventive exclusion orders³ are effective tools in the fight against criminal individuals and groups, even though they do, to some extent, result in crime being displaced. Work by police to prevent the recruitment of children and youth includes initiatives aimed at youths who face an imminent risk of being recruited. This may involve, for example, submitting reports of concern to social services or participating in collaborative forums such as social intervention teams (SIG) and SSPF (including schools, social services, police and leisure time activities). Part of this work also includes building relationships with children and youth in these areas, for example by visiting schools, in order to facilitate their sharing of information with the police.

A strong police presence and confidence-enhancing efforts are crucial to countering a culture of silence and facilitating the police’s ability to gather information in vulnerable areas. Community police officers are specifically tasked with building relationships and confidence, which they do through activities such as foot patrols and visits to local businesses and religious communities, for example. The police also work with municipalities and landlords to identify locations which are particularly prone to crime or perceived as unsafe, so that the relevant stakeholders can implement appropriate measures in these areas.

Work in certain areas more advanced than others

The police have made significant progress in their work on situational crime prevention, which involves making locations less attractive for committing crimes through, among other things, close collaboration with other stakeholders and with the support from new legislation, such as preventive exclusion orders and increased CCTV surveillance. The vast majority of local police districts included in the study also have developed cooperation frameworks in place for tackling social prevention issues related to children and youth at risk of criminality.

However, the fight against covert criminality presents greater challenges. In many vulnerable areas, police officers describe financially motivated crime as widespread, but at local level the expertise and capacity to take preventive measures against the problem are often insufficient. Such crime also requires cooperation with other parts of the Police Authority and with other public authorities, and such cooperation is often deficient.

² Hot-spot policing involves police identifying specific locations where crime is concentrated and directing their resources to these locations (Weisburd and Eck 2004).

³ Act on Preventive Exclusion Orders (2024:7) (*Lag om preventiva vistelseförbud*).

The study clearly shows that not all aspects of crime prevention work are given equal priority; for example, efforts to build relationships and confidence are often sidelined when other tasks arise.

Long-term crime prevention work insufficiently prioritised

Community police officers are specifically tasked with long-term work to build relationships, prevent crime and promote safety, based on local issues. However, the study shows that community police officers are often moved from their core duties when needs arise in other areas of police work. This can include temporarily reassigning community police officers, for example to provide security at demonstrations and football matches, or to fill gaps in intervention policing. When community police officers are unable to carry out their crime prevention duties uninterrupted, there is a risk that public confidence in the police will decline, and the police will have a diminished understanding of what is going on in a given area. This could have particularly serious consequences for the police's ability to identify children and youth at risk of criminality. It may also become more difficult to attract and retain community police officers if they are unable to do their work as planned.

The Police Authority's new management system, LIO⁴, is based on shorter timeframes, which risks neglecting the long-term crime prevention perspective. This is particularly problematic in local police districts which include vulnerable areas, where the influence of criminal individuals and groups often means that operational work becomes shortsighted and reactive.

Another indication that long-term crime prevention work is not prioritised is that patrol staff are spending an increasing amount of time on investigative measures in cases that are already open – that is, tasks not linked to an intervention. This may be an effective use of resources in some cases, but the possibility of lending out patrol staff for investigative measures also risks taking time away from planned crime prevention work.

Crime prevention efforts by response police officers could be improved

According to Brå's analysis, one advantage of the police's new management system is its clearer guidelines for crime prevention work carried out by response police officers. For example, the management system determines which priority locations, individuals and issues response police officers must focus on when not responding to calls. At the same time, factors such as workload, management and individual officers' interest in or

⁴ LIO stands for law enforcement management within the regular organisation (*ledning av brottsbekämpning i ordinarie organisation*) and can, in very simple terms, be described as a management structure designed to coordinate and focus the police's law enforcement work at all organisational levels. The management structure of LIO requires each organisational level to plan and monitor operations across three timeframes: long-term (one year), medium-term (up to eight weeks) and day-to-day management (Police Authority 2023a).

knowledge of crime prevention work clearly influence which measures are ultimately implemented. Therefore, Brå sees a need for clearer leadership within intervention policing, not least because many police officers are relatively new to the force. One proposal is to appoint police officers in each squad with specific responsibility for planning and coordinating crime prevention work.

Another way of strengthening the crime prevention capabilities of response police officers is to expand cooperation with community police officers, for example by carrying out joint postings and allowing community police officers to supervise response police in their crime prevention work. It is also important to incorporate community police officers' specific expertise related to community engagement and public interaction into intervention policing.

The Police Authority must monitor and make visible all aspects of its crime prevention work

The police officers in the study describe monitoring and evaluating crime prevention work as a challenge. Furthermore, who has been assigned responsibility for monitoring is unclear, and clear procedures regarding how monitoring must be carried out are often lacking. The most structured form in which police monitor crime prevention work is often in collaboration with other stakeholders, such as municipalities and landlords. Such work may include reviewing the implementation of commitments under partnership agreements, or assessing the outcomes of individual location-based measures. Long-term crime prevention work, which largely focuses on preventing children and youth from becoming involved in crime and on building relationships with the local community, is, however, perceived as more difficult to monitor in a meaningful way. According to Brå, the police must find ways to monitor and make visible such work as well, as it otherwise risks being deprioritised in favour of other work that produces measurable results more quickly. The Police Authority's new system support for planning and monitoring scheduled work, PGU⁵, could play a part in this by making visible the work that is actually done. At the same time, a clear framework is needed regarding documentation handling in PGU, and senior police management must actually request reports from monitoring activities.

Brå's assessment and recommendations

The police are just one of many stakeholders which must work to prevent crime and improve safety in vulnerable areas. The police often have limited scope for action, and many of the problems affecting these areas stem from socio-economic conditions which would require far-reaching structural changes to be improved. This concerns both the

⁵ PGU (*Planering, Genomförande, Uppföljning*; Planning, implementation, monitoring) is a system designed to support the monitoring of planned work, providing a record of crime prevention activities carried out in response to a specific problem.

physical environment – such as the design of buildings and the forms of housing tenure – and social circumstances, such as the conditions in which children and youths grow up.

At the same time, police play a key role in combating the impact of crime on local communities, and in order to bring about lasting change in vulnerable areas, it is vital that the police's crime prevention work takes a long-term view. Brå's report shows that the police carry out numerous crime prevention measures, but the findings also indicate challenges when it comes to a long-term, strategic perspective. This is reflected, among other things, in an inadequate ability to address more covert criminal structures, insufficient analysis of the underlying causes of criminality, and resources dedicated to crime prevention being diverted to other tasks. Brå therefore believes that the crime prevention work done by the police, both independently and in collaboration with other local stakeholders, must be more clearly rooted in a long-term strategy that aims at achieving sustainable change in vulnerable areas.

Recommendations

Based on the report's conclusions, Brå makes the following recommendations to the Police Authority:

- Use the phase model⁶ to ensure long-term strategic work in vulnerable areas and identify ways to incorporate this long-term perspective into the new LIO management system.
- Improve working conditions for community police officers by allowing them to carry out their duties without unnecessary interruption and by offering greater career and development opportunities.
- Ensure there are designated staff tasked with building relationships with children and youth, and that they are also enabled to work during school holidays.
- Develop cooperation between community police officers and response police, for example by allowing community police officers to supervise response officers' so-called 'BF patrol cars'⁷ and by carrying out more joint postings.

⁶ The phase model has been developed by Brå as a framework for embedding planned crime prevention measures and initiatives in vulnerable areas within a long-term strategy. The model is based on the premise that an area can be in one of three different phases, which determines how police can and should work to prevent and combat crime (Brå 2016b).

⁷ In addition to the minimum staff required for response police to respond to emergencies (calls), one or more additional patrols comprising response officers have crime prevention as a primary task. In many local police districts, these patrols are known as 'BF patrol cars'.

- Appoint response police officers with specific responsibility for crime prevention work, which could include, among other things, coordinating cooperation with community police offers.
- Ensure patrol staff are assigned the correct investigative tasks, so as to avoid spending undue time on such tasks which could otherwise be spent on crime prevention work. This can be done, for example, by appointing preliminary investigation leaders with specific responsibility for coordinating which investigative tasks are to be carried out by patrol staff.
- Clarify the structure that determines how all aspects of crime prevention work are to be documented and monitored, preferably using the new PGU system.