



## Reporting back in intervention activities

*A time study*



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**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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# Summary

The National Council's (Brå) evaluation of the previous Government's investment in increasing the number of police showed that a rather small percentage of resources went to strengthening emergency response activities, particularly to their work with initial investigation measures. The National Council's assessment was the time it takes to perform emergency response activities must be improved if person-based clearances are to increase. In that context, the National Council also discussed the possibility of creating more resources for this purpose by means of streamlining the work involved in administrative tasks following emergency callouts (Brå 2013:12, 2013:20 and 2014:17).

In light of the foregoing, the National Council has studied the amount of time which police in the field spend on filing reports. The result is discussed in this report.

## **The study involves 79 reports written by emergency response teams in Söderort**

The study is based on observations in the Söderort police commissioner district in Stockholm County. The subject of the study was how emergency response teams in the policing communities of Farsta, Globen and Skärholmen wrote police reports. A total of 162 hours of report writing were observed, broken down into 18 observation sessions from 13 October - 30 November in 2014.

A total of 79 cases were observed and coded during the period. Most of these (68) involved cases where an offence had been committed. The other 11 cases involved, among other things, five custodial cases under the Intoxicated Persons Detention Act. In addition, police in different functions in the Söderort force area were interviewed.

One cannot generalise about the results of this study such that they apply to the country as a whole, nor can one generalise as to what happens all the time in Söderort. For example, the police force area had trainees at work during the observation period, which probably affected the time devoted to report writing. The primary purpose of the study is to provide a basis for local comparisons and discussions regarding how different steps in the procedure of writing reports could be streamlined.

### **The six most common computer systems**

Report-writing at the police station takes place primarily using different IT systems. The six primary systems which are used are as follows:

#### ***RAR***

RAR is the case management system where the police register offence report information. The actual filed police report is registered in RAR, including personal data about suspects, victims, witnesses, information about offence classification, event, injuries, etc. The registration is based on both fixed headings for different information and so-called free text, where the offence and the surrounding facts are described.

#### ***DurTvå***

DurTvå is an IT tool for criminal investigation and coercive measures management.<sup>1</sup> If a police patrol has conducted an interrogation or used coercive measures, this must always be documented in DurTvå. Police patrols may also document observations and other information which is significant to the investigation in a so-called case report memorandum in DurTvå. The information which is documented in DurTvå is subsequently linked to a police report in RAR and thus a digital investigation file is created.

#### ***BIP***

BIP is a program which is used for filing on-site pictures taken by the police. The pertinent police report must be approved before the pictures can be entered into the system. The pictures can then be transferred directly from the camera to BIP.

#### ***Forms portal***

The Police's forms portal (Formulärportalen) contains nationally produced forms which are used for a variety of different information. The most common forms used refer to custody, refusing entry, removal and judicial assistance, forfeiture under the Traffic Offences Act, body searches and searches of automobiles in order to

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<sup>1</sup> Coercive measures which are registered in DurTvå include, for example, deprivation of liberty such as arrest or custody, as well as actions such as body searches, body examinations or seizure of property.

prevent offences, and driving under the influence of narcotics and narcotics offences.

### ***Storm***

Storm<sup>2</sup> is a management system for field activities which is used nationally by Swedish County emergency communication centres (*länskommunikationscentraler (LKC)*) in order to handle events which come in via, for example, the 112 emergency number. Police involved in emergency response activities do not use Storm, instead they use the accompanying application, *Webstorm*.

*Webstorm* gives the police the opportunity to obtain information regarding closed and ongoing cases in their own county. The application is used in connection with writing reports in order to obtain information regarding the times for different measures taken in a case, such as when the police patrol was on site, when a person was arrested, and so forth.

### ***Central Systems***

Central Systems (Centrala System) is a collective name for the Police's register and is used to obtain information regarding everything from automobiles to individuals. The register can be used to obtain information regarding, for example, the registration numbers of companies, organisations, and similar entities which are subject to, for example, vandalism or burglary. The register also includes population register information, income information, and vehicle information.

## **The average time for writing a report on a criminal case was one hour and six minutes**

On average, one hour and six minutes passed between the time when a police patrol came in to write a report on a criminal case until it was ready to leave again. However, the time varied. The case that took most time to report was a case of where two police officers took a person into custody under the Intoxicated Persons Detention Act. A large quantity of narcotics was found when the person taken into custody was searched. This resulted in the officers writing an offence report and a case report memorandum<sup>3</sup>, as well as documenting an arrest, a body search, custody under the Intoxicated Persons Detention Act, photographs, and 17 seizures. This case took three hours from start to finish.

In general, the length of time it took to write a report depended on how many measures needed to be documented and how many police worked with writing the report. On average, police patrols consisting of three officers went back out more quickly than police patrols

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<sup>2</sup> Storm stands for "System for Tasking and Operational Resource Management".

<sup>3</sup> The case report memorandum contains space for the police officers to describe their own experiences and feelings about an event, for example the police patrol's impression of the victim's state of mind or residence.

with two officers. If more officers were involved, the report writing was, however, more *efficient* only if all of them were active and none of them merely sat and waited.

### **One-fourth of the time during a shift was spent writing reports on criminal cases**

In order to gain an overview of how much of a shift was spent on writing reports, the National Council asked the police commissioner district to document, over the course of one week, how many criminal case reports the police patrols wrote in a single shift.<sup>4</sup> The documentation showed that on average, the police patrols reported two (2.02) cases during a nine-hour shift. This means that on average, the police patrols devoted two hours and 13 minutes per shift to writing reports on criminal cases, corresponding to one-fourth of the shift. In addition, the police patrols also spent some time on documenting cases that were not criminal cases, for example custody under the Intoxicated Persons Detention Act. However, these cases were not observed within the parameters of this study in a scope sufficient to enable any conclusions to be drawn about expenditures of time.

### **The result is similar to Holgersson and Knutsson's result**

Researchers Stefan Holgersson and Johannes Knutsson conducted a similar measurement in a national observation study for the years 2006-2011 (*Vad gör egentligen polisen*, 2012 (What do the police actually do)). They concluded that police personnel spent 35 per cent of their working time on activities at a police station, of which 14 per cent was spent *registering information*. Their parameter "*registering information*" is broader than the parameter applied by the National Council. When the National Council adjusted its parameter for a comparison such that it was as similar to Holgersson and Knutsson's as possible, it came to light that the expenditure of time for registration in Söderort was almost exactly the same as that in Holgersson and Knutsson's study. In Söderort, approximately 13 per cent of the police officers' time during one shift was spent on such registration, while the percentage in the aforementioned Holgersson and Knutsson study was 14 per cent. However, the National Council's figure would be somewhat higher if it included the time spent on registering non-criminal cases. This indicates that the registration time may have increased. The results from a later time study conducted by Holgersson during 2013-2014 provide additional support for the view that the expenditure of time for writing reports has increased (Holgersson 2014).

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<sup>4</sup> The calculation includes only regular shifts (day, evening, night) and does not include any reinforcement shifts, since the latter were not the subject of the time study. The observation was carried out during the week of 23 February-1 March 2015.

## **Expenditure of time for the police patrol as a whole**

This study uses the term "resource time" for the time which the patrolling police involved spent on one step. If two officers on one patrol each wrote up their own interrogation, at 35 minutes and 23 minutes respectively, the resource time for the "writing up interrogation" step would be 58 minutes. If one of the police officers spent 35 minutes writing up an interrogation while the other waited, the resource time would be 35 minutes for the "writing up interrogation" step and 35 minutes for the "waiting time" step.

The step which, on average, took the most resource time was affected by both the length of time each step took for all involved individuals, and how often the step was encountered. Registering a report in RAR was always included in criminal cases, and took, on average, 20 per cent of the total resource time. Writing up an interrogation in DurTvå and handling goods and seized items also took, on average, 20 per cent of the resource time. However, these steps were not always included in the case – which meant that, taken as a whole, they were not as dominant as registration in RAR.

Part of the resource time referred to items which can be regarded as "idle time". Accordingly, in three out of four cases, someone in the group sat and waited while the other/others finished their report, and in 38 per cent of the cases, technical problems were encountered.

## **Different problems encountered in writing reports**

A number of problems regarding report writing, which increased the expenditure of time, were observed. The primary problems were as follows:

- System problems – the systems were not always coordinated and intuitive.
- Malfunctioning tools – primarily involved computers freezing and printers not being connected to the computer.
- Unclear and sometimes contradictory instructions – primarily regarding how to write free text in RAR.
- Skills – trainees were inexperienced and needed guidance.
- Shortcomings in routines for allocation of work when several members of the patrol participated in reporting back.
- Physical environment – it could be difficult to find peace and quiet and concentrate in the room where patrols wrote their reports.

## **The National Council's assessment**

There were essentially two items which emerge as *timesucks* in conjunction with reporting cases: the time it took to travel from a crime scene to the station in order to write a report on the event, and the extra time it took to write a report due to shortcomings in the IT systems.

In order to reduce the expenditure of time involved in returning to the station to write reports, the police launched the PUST mobile IT

system in 2011. There were high hopes that PUST would reduce the expenditure of time for writing reports. Due to various problems with the system, police in the field felt that PUST was actually more time-consuming, and the system was withdrawn in 2014.

The study which the National Council has now conducted confirms that there are shortcomings in the IT systems which are used to write reports. However, it also shows possibilities for improving the process of writing reports. The National Council wishes to highlight, above all, the following.

### **Improve the technical aids**

- It should be sufficient to enter the names and personal identification numbers of the individuals involved only once when writing a report.
- The system should provide better guidance regarding information to be entered at each step.

Currently, the police must fill in the name and personal identity number<sup>5</sup> of the individuals involved at each step of writing a report. It would save time if this information needed to be entered only once at the beginning of writing a report, and could thereafter be accessed when necessary by the police patrol reporting in the case.

The National Council also believes that the system which is used when writing reports should be easy to use and intuitive since it must be used 24 hours a day, often under time pressure. It is important that the system functions as a tool which makes the work easier rather than more difficult. Since most new police officers begin their police careers in emergency response activities, the system should provide some guidance regarding the type of information which is requested at each step. In other words, instead of the police learning the system, the system should teach the police.

### **Make sure that the technology works**

- Make sure that computers and printers work properly.
- All cars should contain working cameras.

Malfunctioning technology, primarily computers and printers, is a common *timesuck* in writing reports. During the observations, it was not uncommon that computers "froze up" and that printers could not be used because they were not installed or, quite simply, did not work. These problems required the police patrols to interrupt their work to change computers or printers, or to figure out other ways to perform their work.

Police involved in emergency response activities often use a compact camera during preliminary investigatory work. During the ob-

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<sup>5</sup> The personal identity number is the Swedish national identification number that is issued by the Swedish Tax Agency.

servation, it could be seen that working cameras were not always available in the police cars. If this is rectified, the expenditure of time for picture management could be reduced. The problem that police officers sometimes feel compelled to use their private mobile telephone cameras for documentation – which is not permitted – would also disappear.

### **Improve technical support**

- Make sure that police patrols have good technical support when problems arise.

It is not always possible to avoid technical problems completely. Since the technical tools are essentially used 24 hours a day, it is no surprise that they wear out and need updating.

It is important that the police patrols know where to turn to report defects, and that these defects are rectified promptly. It is at least as important that the police patrols also take on the responsibility of reporting defects as soon as they occur. Although it might feel at the time that the police patrol does not have time to report a defect, doing so would have the long-term effect of fewer police patrols encountering the same problem.

### **Standardise free text content in a RAR report**

- Clear national guidelines for the wording of free text in RAR would be valuable.
- Create consistency for free text wording among those who review reports at the local level.

During the observation, it came to light that the free text content in a RAR report varies based not only on the nature of the case but also based on the preferences of the reviewer of the report. This became particularly clear when a reviewer ended their shift and was replaced by another reviewer while the report was still underway, or if the police patrols wrote reports in another area. Replacement of the reviewer could lead to a change in the directives for the wording of the text because the reviewers had different opinions about the necessary content for free text. In the National Council's opinion, there may be cause to formulate clear guidelines at the national level regarding the wording of free text in a RAR report and the type of information which it should contain.

### **Structure the work, even in smaller cases**

- Write down each step which is to be carried out.

- Exchange important information (such as personal identity numbers and times) with each other.
- Think about how the tasks can be divided so that the entire police patrol is finished at approximately the same time.

In major cases involving several police patrols, the police patrols often streamline the work by writing down the most important information and times on a whiteboard in the room where patrols filed their reports. This way, the police patrols which are writing a report on the same case avoid waiting for each other to communicate important information. In the National Council's opinion, the police patrols should, to the extent possible, structure their work in the same way in smaller cases in order to save time. If the police patrol begins the process of writing a report by quickly acquiring an overview of what needs to be done and by writing down information which is necessary in order to report the case (for example personal identity numbers and times), they need not interrupt each other while they write. This would probably also have a positive impact on the sound level in the room where patrols file their reports.

### **Make it possible to write reports in a quiet environment**

- Jointly produce rules for conduct in the room where patrols file their reports.
- Provide access to a "silent" room for writing reports where no conversation is permitted.
- Explore ways to reduce the volume in the room by using furnishings and materials that provide sound insulation.

A room that is large enough for several police patrols to use at the same time is advantageous. The fact that several groups can be there also fills a positive social function. However, it is important that it be possible for police patrols to write their reports in a quiet environment in order to avoid interruptions which can lead to delays in the process of reporting cases. This can take place in a number of ways, depending on local conditions. The bullet points above suggest several options.

### **Why is streamlining important?**

The amount of time which can be saved in administrative tasks at a police station is not enormous, particularly if care is taken to ensure high-quality documentation. It involves small simplifications and efficiency measures which save a couple of minutes here and a couple of minutes there. At the same time, one should be aware that in an organisation as large as the Swedish Police, even small time-saving measures can have tangible results. A 10 minute reduction in time spent by each police officer involved in emergency response activities would roughly correspond to the working hours for 100 police officers for one year.

Time spent on writing reports might be reduced even further in the future, if efficient technical aids are developed which makes it possible, to some extent, to document and look up information as early as when the police officer is out in the field. The Swedish Police IT strategy identifies increased access to mobile IT support as one of the areas of development for the agency (Swedish Police 2015). Woxblom and Holgersson (2006a, 2006b) have previously pointed out that there is potential for better use of waiting time out in the field by making it possible to complete certain types of documentation using mobile IT support.

Finally, the National Council wishes to point out that a more efficient process of writing reports would save more than just resources. It could also improve police officers' working environment. A number of earlier studies (Holgersson 2005, Brå 2013:20, Swedish Police 2013) point out that longer report-writing times create frustration and stress among police, which has a negative impact on work motivation and performance.

