RESEARCH

Evaluation of the Swedish Police Authority's 10,000-employee expansion

Final report

Report 2026:7

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) is a government agency that works to reduce crime and increase safety in society. We do this by providing factual information and disseminating knowledge about crime, law enforcement and crime prevention work - primarily for the Government, agencies within the criminal justice system and organisations engaged in crime prevention.

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Final report

English summary of report 2026:7

Summary

Between 2017 and 2024, the appropriations to the Swedish Police Authority nearly doubled, from SEK 22 billion to just under SEK 41 billion. In addition to increasing the agency's workforce by 10,000 employees, the key objectives of the initiative were to prioritise core operations, strengthen local police presence, and improve operational results.

Since 2021, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) has been tasked by the Government with evaluating the initiative (Ju2021/02238). Together with the three previous interim reports, this constitutes the final reporting of the assignment. The overarching aim of the report is to provide a comprehensive analysis and assessment of how the police have utilised the increased resources and how operational performance has developed during the period.

The study draws on the Swedish Police Authority's personnel statistics, operational statistics and case data, as well as official government statistics. The international comparisons presented are primarily based on data from Eurostat. Brå has also conducted supplementary interviews with senior officers and officials at the Swedish Police Authority.

The target of 10,000 more police employees has been met

The Swedish Police Authority has met its target of growing by 10,000 employees. In 2024, the police had 11,426 more employees than it did at the start of 2016. Overall, the workforce has grown by 40 per cent, and the number of full-time equivalents has increased by 49 per cent.

Growth distributed across the country

In percentage terms, growth has been greater in the national departments than in the police regions. In terms of staff roles, the percentage growth is the same for core operations and support functions. However, in absolute terms, most of the growth has taken place in the regions, where most employees work and most core operations are carried out. Police regions with more rural areas have grown at the same rate as other regions. Within the regions, the percentage growth is lower at the local and police district level than at the regional level.

Greater growth among civilian staff

The Swedish Police Authority has struggled to increase its number of police officers, and most of the agency's growth is made up of civilian employees. In total, the civilian staff increased by 7,484 employees between 2015 and 2024, corresponding to a 90 per

cent increase. The number of police officers increased by 3,942, corresponding to an increase of 20 per cent.

The area of the organisation that saw the most growth is investigations, which grew by 56 per cent. Crime prevention and intervention activities – which, unlike investigations, require more trained police officers – grew by only 19 per cent. In local police districts with so-called vulnerable areas (Swedish: utsatt område), the growth in police officers and employees working in crime prevention and intervention is slightly higher, suggesting that vulnerable areas have been prioritised.

In the Stockholm Police Region, the number of police officers has increased by just under 3 per cent, and the number of employees working in crime prevention and intervention has increased by 9 per cent. This is the lowest growth in the country, and the number of police officers per inhabitant in Stockholm has decreased over time. Since local police districts with vulnerable areas have been prioritised, the region's other local police districts have seen even lower growth. Temporary staff transfers to the region during the period have also largely been concentrated in local police districts with vulnerable areas.

Sweden's police density has increased

Although growth in the number of police officers has been significantly lower than that of civilian staff, Sweden's police density increased during the period, from 202 to 225 police officers per 100,000 inhabitants. Sweden now has by far the highest number of police officers per capita in the Nordic region. From a European perspective, however, Sweden still has a relatively low police density, although direct comparisons are complicated by the fact that different police forces and law enforcement agencies are organised in different ways.

The Swedish Police Authority's operating conditions

While the Swedish Police Authority has grown, the number of reported crimes has remained relatively stable at around 1,500,000 per year. This means that the number of reported crimes per employee fell from 53 to 38 between 2015 and 2024. The operational pressure on police patrols, measured by incoming calls and dispatched incidents, has also decreased during the period.

At the same time, the police have been under significant pressure from serious crime linked to criminal networks. The number of shootings and bombings has remained high for much of the period, requiring substantial efforts from many parts of the police service.

New crime-fighting tools

A number of legal and technological developments in recent years have created new possibilities for police work. Examples include changes to the Firearms Act, expanded powers to carry out house searches, a number of legal changes regarding covert and preventive coercive measures and data interception, as well as the ability to issue exclusion orders and establish “stop-and-search zones” (also known as security zones). Technological developments include expanded and improved CCTV surveillance, the use of drones, various information management tools and a number of mobile applications designed to facilitate the work of patrol officers.

Greater scope for crime prevention and intervention

The increased staffing levels and reduced pressure from incident-driven operations have freed up time for police patrols and shortened response times. At the same time, the police are spending more time on each call-out. This increased time spent may partly reflect lower productivity per employee, but it may also be due to patrols carrying out investigative measures, documentation, and reporting in connection with interventions to a greater extent than before.

Increased local presence

The reduced pressure on patrols is also evident in the police’s local presence. The number of searches of persons and vehicles, the number of public order offences, and the number of cases involving so-called detection-dependent offences increased during the period, indicating that more police officers are present in the local community to carry out activities and detect crime.

Many crime prevention activities are focused on preventing and deterring more immediate criminal acts, particularly serious violence. Among other things, the number of weapons offences increased during the period, meaning that the police are finding and seizing more weapons. The police have also thwarted a greater number of attempted bombings.

With increased resources, it is important that prevention efforts do not stop at immediate and short-term measures. To ensure that the increased police presence also contributes in the long-term, more sustained measures are required, focusing both on addressing causes of crime and on enhancing feelings of safety and security. In this context, Brå sees a need for the police to strengthen its capacity to analyse and monitor crime prevention activities.

Long-term crime prevention work is particularly important in vulnerable areas. The number of vulnerable areas did not decrease during the follow-up period, but the police report improved conditions within these areas, and the Swedish Crime Survey indicates that perceived safety has increased. However, other studies and reviews show that there is a risk of the long-term perspective being deprioritised even in vulnerable areas, and that staff with a particular focus on long-term local crime prevention work are often drawn into other operational tasks (Brå 2026a).

Significant growth in border police operations

The border police also have a crime prevention role. In line with government policy, the border police have grown significantly, increasing by 50 per cent during the period. The police also report that they have prevented a large number of thefts by applying the Aliens Act in their crime prevention work against international theft gangs. The number of reported thefts has fallen in recent years, and part of this decrease can likely be linked to the police's increased focus on combating international criminal networks.

Increased staffing has not led to higher clearance rates

Investigative operations have become faster. Since 2018, the average time from case opening to closure has decreased from 39 to 28 days. This reduced case handling time is beneficial for the parties involved in several respects and should have improved the prospects of clearing more cases. However, during the period, both the proportion and the absolute number of crimes solved decreased or remained unchanged in several crime categories.

The clearance rate for volume crimes has decreased

Volume crimes, that is offences for which the preliminary investigation is usually led by the police, account for the largest share of offences. The clearance rate for volume crimes fell from 13 per cent to 11 per cent between 2016 and 2024. Given the substantial increase in staffing during the period, the number of cleared volume crime cases per member of investigative staff fell from 15 to 8 per year.

Volume crimes include both enforcement-driven offences and victim-based crimes, with or without interaction. Enforcement-driven crimes have the best prospects for clearance and the highest clearance rates. However, the proportion of cleared enforcement-driven crimes fell from 52 per cent to 39 percent between 2016 and 2024. This decline is largely explained by the police intervening more actively against drug-related crime. At the same time, however, there was also a drop in the clearance rate for other enforcement-driven crimes, such as traffic offences and shoplifting, which cannot be explained in the same way by changes in police practices.

For volume crimes involving a victim but with no interaction between victim and perpetrator, such as fraud, theft and vandalism, the clearance rate declined from 2.7 per cent to 1.8 per cent during the period. These crimes are generally difficult to investigate, and high clearance rates are not a realistic expectation. However, given the significant increase in resources, the police should have been in a position to at least prevent a decline in clearance rates, and preferably to raise them somewhat.

For victim-based crimes with interaction, such as violent offences and sexual offences, a relatively large proportion of such offences do not fall under volume crimes. The clearance rate for the category as a whole fluctuates around 10 per cent and neither increased nor decreased during the period. However, the absolute number of solved crimes rose from just over 32,000 in 2016 to just over 38,000 in 2024.

A clear emphasis on serious violent offences

The number of cleared offences has increased relatively sharply for a selection of serious violent offences typically linked to criminal networks. In 2024, the police cleared 35 completed firearm homicides, compared with 15 in 2016. During the same period, the number of cleared attempted homicides increased from 245 to 463. Between 2018 and 2024, the number of cleared bombings increased from 9 to 162, and the number of cleared aggravated weapons offences rose from 347 to 701. With the exception of weapons offences, these are crimes for which investigations are generally complex and resource-intensive.

Clearance rates also increased for firearm homicides and bombings, rising from 20 to 28 per cent for firearm homicides and from 10 to 20 per cent for bombings. However, the clearance rate for aggravated weapons offences fell from 30 to 17 per cent, and the clearance rate for attempted homicides remained largely unchanged at around 30 per cent.

Improved working methods are more important than continued staff growth

The prioritisation of serious violent crimes is reflected in the allocation of personnel resources within investigative operations to units dealing with serious offences. However, senior police interviewees emphasise that it is, above all, new tools and working methods that have been the most important factors behind the positive development in the clearance of serious offences. Similarly, Brå's previous interim report on investigative operations showed that organisation, leadership, experience and working methods were at least as important to results as staffing levels (Brå 2024a).

Rapid and substantial organisational growth seldom leads to improved results commensurate with the scale of that growth. It is difficult to utilise resources effectively during rapid growth, and a great deal of effort is often spent managing expansion rather than developing core operations (Alvinius et al. 2018). This final report shows that it has been a challenge for the Swedish Police Authority to manage and utilise its growing resources effectively.

Brå's assessment

In summary, Brå concludes that the Swedish Police Authority has in several ways managed to respond to the increased pressure from criminal networks in recent years, and has improved its ability to combat serious violent crime. The local police presence has also increased, and over time people have come to feel safer in their neighbourhoods. At the same time, the Swedish Police Authority has not ensured continuity in its relationship-building and long-term local crime prevention work, nor in the quality and effectiveness of investigations into volume crime. Given the substantial increase in resources over an extended period, the agency should have improved results in these areas as well.

Volume crime accounts for the vast majority of reported offences, and the harm suffered by those affected can be serious. The category does not consist only of bicycle thefts, shoplifting and minor drug offences, but also fraud, burglary and violent offences. The police's handling of volume crime has long been neglected, and the Swedish National Audit Office has noted that public safety, security and confidence in the justice system are at risk if the police keep failing to address the problem (Swedish National Audit Office 2023a). With the doubled appropriation, there should have been scope for the police to devote greater resources to volume crime. Going forward, personnel resources, strategic initiatives, and development work must also extend to these areas of police operations.

Focus on needs and results

For the Swedish Police Authority to be make effective use of its resources, the pace of growth should be slowed and the governance of the organisation should be based on operational needs, desired outcomes, and expected effects rather than on staff growth. The police need time to absorb their steadily growing personnel resources, use them effectively, and continue developing its methods and working practices. The goal of bringing Sweden's police-per-capita level in line with the EU average risks becoming counterproductive, partly because the benchmark is based on conditions in other countries rather than Sweden's own needs and circumstances, and partly because it directs attention towards staffing levels rather than results. A focus on police density, and thus on increasing the number of officers, also risks undermining the recruitment

of technically and analytically skilled civilian staff – personnel who have proven crucial to several aspects of the positive developments that have taken place.

Brå recommends

- To give the Swedish Police Authority the stability and conditions needed to make effective use of its resources, the pace of funding increases needs to be slowed down.
- The Government's and the Swedish Police Authority's management of staffing growth needs to be based on operational needs and expected outcomes rather than the number of employees or police officers. This requires an analysis of both current needs and what level of growth can be absorbed.
- To prioritise better and streamline its operations, the Swedish Police Authority needs to improve its ability to analyse and follow up on its own work. Good results and important lessons should be disseminated within the organisation.
- In future development work, the Swedish Police Authority needs to take responsibility for its entire remit. Among other things, the agency should build on the working methods and approaches that have been successful in combating serious organised crime and draw lessons from this in order to develop other areas of law enforcement as well. This applies, for example, to coordinated investigations and increased information sharing.
- In its crime prevention work, the Swedish Police Authority needs to strengthen its long-term perspective through concrete objectives and clear steering. Objectives and expected outcomes of various measures must also be communicated to those carrying out the work. Otherwise, there is a risk that long-term work will be deprioritised, or that governance and follow-up will create an environment in which activities are merely ticked off in pursuit of targets rather than focused on long-term benefits.
- The Swedish Police Authority should review how resources and personnel are distributed between regions and ensure sufficient staffing levels in Stockholm and in vulnerable areas. The temporary staff transfers that have often been needed in recent years indicate shortcomings and inefficiencies in the underlying distribution of personnel.