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# Crime prevention work in Sweden

Current status and development needs 2023

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Current situation and need for development 2023

English Summary

# Summary and overall assessment

Since 2017, Brå has been commissioned by the Swedish government to produce an annual report on crime prevention work in Sweden. This report is part of a series of annual reports that aims to provide a broad picture of how crime prevention work has been conducted and developed locally, regionally and nationally in relation to the objectives described in Sweden's national crime prevention programme *Combating Crime Together – A National Crime Prevention Programme (Tillsammans mot brott – ett nationellt brottsförebyggande program*, government communication 2016/17:126). The report, like the crime prevention programme, focuses on actors who use different types of measures to prevent crime and criminality at various levels. The report is based primarily on data from surveys, interviews and document studies conducted by Brå, although it also describes matters identified through Brå's national monitoring, networking and other ongoing work.

This year's report focuses in particular on the work of crime prevention actors in relation to forthcoming legislation (SOU 2021:49 and government bill 2022/23:43) and the most pressing development needs in preparation for this new legislation. This year's report also specifically highlights how local and regional actors incorporate gender equality and age perspectives in their crime prevention work.

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

- Local crime prevention work
- Regional crime prevention work
- National crime prevention work
- Brå's development work
- Conclusions and closing discussion

# Local crime prevention work

Municipalities and local police districts are key actors in local crime prevention work. Accordingly, since 2017, municipal civil servants and local police officers have both been asked to complete an annual Brå survey on local crime prevention work. The survey results provide the basis for Brå's work on this report. In addition to surveys, the data collected for this year's report includes interviews and document studies.

## Local crime prevention work needs to become more knowledge-based

The forthcoming legislation on municipal responsibility for crime prevention work requires not only that such work be conducted, but also that it be conducted using a knowledge-based approach. A central conclusion from this year's survey is that local crime prevention work is actively conducted in most municipalities and local police districts such that crime prevention measures are implemented. Respondents from almost all local police districts and eighty-six percent of municipalities report that they have implemented measures. However, as in previous years, the measures are far too seldom knowledge-based. Brå's document studies, which include a review of the action plans of more than half of the municipalities reporting that they have such a plan, show that almost every other plan lacks clear links between the proposed measures and identified crime problems. That is, the plans do not state which types of crime the measures are intended to address.

The percentage of municipalities and local police districts working with the different steps of the knowledge-based work process – needs analysis, root cause analysis, action plans and follow-ups – has plateaued at too low a level. Considered over a longer time period, the percentage of people working with these sub-processes is roughly the same as in 2017. Even where local actors work with needs analysis, root cause analysis, action plans and follow-ups, important aspects, such as an analysis of the consequences and causes of crime or clear links between measures and problems, are often lacking.

To ensure the most effective use of the resources invested by local actors in implementing measures, a knowledge-based approach must be developed so that said measures are more accurate and less universal, as is currently the case.

A related observation is that the support offered by Brå and the county administrative boards is an important factor for the implementation and quality of knowledge-based work. For example, there are strong correlations between having partaken of Brå's methodological support for needs analysis and root cause analysis and conducting needs analysis and root cause analysis to a greater extent and of higher quality. Accordingly, Brå considers the development of methodological support for action plans to be one of its priority tasks moving forward.

## Improved conditions show good potential for developing local work

This year's report identifies a strong correlation between the conditions of personnel and whether knowledge-based crime prevention work is conducted or not and, when it is, the resultant quality. This correlation is seen in all aspects of knowledge-based work. For example, it is more common for needs analyses to include a description of the consequences of crime and for the action plan to be based on an analysis of the root causes of crime in municipalities where the concerned civil servant has received crime prevention training. However, parallel to this, both this year's and previous reports show that many municipalities lack civil servants with such training. In many cases, the concerned civil servants also have too little of their time allocated to the task. Over the past five years, only just over a third of the municipalities have reported that they have allocated at least fifty percent of one full-time position to coordinating crime prevention work. Similarly, during the same time period, about half of the concerned municipal civil servants lacked relevant training.

Accordingly, moving forward, Brå considers one of the most important development areas for the

municipalities to be ensuring that they allocate sufficient time for crime prevention work and provide their personnel with appropriate training. By improving the working conditions of the personnel this provides great opportunities for municipalities that need to start using a knowledge-based approach in their crime prevention work, as well as municipalities that need to develop the quality of the work. Hopefully, the forthcoming legislation will encourage local decision-makers to improve the working conditions of municipal civil servants, which could boost the development of local crime prevention work.

Brå also finds that, as in previous years, while the organisational conditions for this work are relatively good, collaborative efforts could be broadened. The vast majority of municipalities have an organisation in the shape of a crime prevention council as well as collaborative agreements and they actively assume responsibility for coordinating their local work. However, many municipalities have the potential to develop this collaboration by involving additional external actors in their work. The local police districts, which collaborate with more actors than the average municipality, are well positioned to support the municipalities by inspiring and facilitating contacts with relevant actors appropriate to local conditions. As an example, collaboration with the Swedish Enforcement Authority, the Swedish Tax Agency and the Swedish Security Service is well established among local police districts but rare among municipalities. Municipalities in and close to smaller towns, urban areas and rural areas also tend to collaborate with more actors than the average municipality. Such municipalities are, for instance, more likely to collaborate with regions and other municipalities.

Thus, collaborating with a broader range of external actors in local crime prevention work is an important aspect for many municipalities to develop. Broader collaboration enables municipalities to include multiple perspectives in their efforts to analyse crime, identify root causes and determine

relevant and feasible measures. It is also important that municipalities and local police districts develop their knowledge-based approaches to encompass even more perspectives in other ways. This is particularly true when it comes to gathering input from different groups in society to understand their views on crime problems and the associated consequences. Today, few local actors incorporate age and gender equality perspectives in their analysis work. Including such perspectives improves the effectiveness of the measures that are implemented.

## Support needs of municipalities and local police districts remain high

Lastly, Brå can conclude that the support needs of local actors remain very high. Even though many municipalities that do not currently meet the requirements of the proposed legislation are actively striving to do so, this is not something they can achieve on their own. This is made particularly apparent by all municipalities in the survey stating that they need support before the forthcoming legislation enters into force. While the type of support needed varies between municipalities, the need for knowledge and resources is undoubtedly the greatest. For example, many municipalities state that they would like more specialised training initiatives aimed at, say, different types of municipalities or different municipal departments. As of 2023, Brå has been allocated greater resources to support local actors and, as a consequence, is now more able to offer the municipalities the support they need. However, there is a general need for national and regional actors to examine whether the support they offer matches current needs. Based on our findings, there is also reason for the Swedish Police Authority in particular to review how the support offered to local police districts is implemented as this very type of internal support is the support that most local police officers feel is lacking.

# Regional crime prevention work

The regional coordinators at the county administrative boards and the police regions are important sources of support in local crime prevention work. Of particular importance is the support the county administrative boards are offering the municipalities in preparation for and in connection with the forthcoming legislation entering into force. Even though almost all county administrative board coordinators state that they are prepared to provide the municipalities with support regarding the forthcoming legislation, some of the findings of this year's report indicate a degree of uncertainty among coordinators in how to interpret the legislation. Accordingly, in 2023 it will be important for Brå to work together with the county administrative boards to reduce this uncertainty.

Although there is some uncertainty concerning the forthcoming legislation, Brå's overall assessment is that regional support is well established. The regional coordinators have extensive experience and training in crime prevention work and many municipalities turn to the county administrative boards for support. However, one challenge for crime prevention coordinators at the county administrative boards and the police regions is that they have broad responsibility encompassing several different areas. Moreover, the time county administrative board coordinators are able to allocate to crime prevention matters has decreased and working conditions also differ between counties. Accordingly, before the legislation enters into force, Brå's assessment is that the conditions for regional coordinators to provide support in specific areas need to be improved so that the support offered to local actors can be tailored to their needs.

## The regional support should focus on cross-municipal collaboration and inclusion of multiple perspectives

The skills development initiatives provided by regional actors exhibit a distinctly positive correlation with a knowledge-based approach at local level. Municipalities that have partaken of the county administrative board's skills development initiatives

conduct, for example, needs analyses and root cause analyses to a significantly greater extent than municipalities that have not partaken of such support. They are also slightly more likely to adopt action plans and follow up implemented measures. Accordingly, the intention of several county administrative boards to continue offering skills development initiatives in 2023, with a focus on the legislation concerning municipal responsibility for crime prevention work, is constructive. However, the final conclusions of the government inquiry *Municipalities Against Crime (Kommuner mot brott)* include the assessment that the county administrative boards also need to strengthen their operational and tailored support, as also noted in several Brå reports. A few county administrative boards state that they have already initiated such efforts while several are planning to offer more practical and needs-based support in 2023.

In this context, Brå would also like to highlight the fact that several interviewed municipal civil servants would like to see more cross-municipal collaboration in the practical implementation. As for the county administrative board's support role, developing the aspect that involves supporting and initiating cross-municipal measures would offer the boards a prime opportunity to become an important facilitator. Brå can also conclude that it is important for the regional actors to strengthen their local-level support when it comes to incorporating gender equality and age perspectives in local efforts. For example, at present, children and youth are clearly the focus of regional support efforts, perhaps to the detriment of other age groups to some extent.

Within the field of regional support, Brå's overall assessment is that efforts to include multiple perspectives and promote cross-municipal collaboration should be prioritised over the coming years.

# National crime prevention work

In 2022, national initiatives to strengthen crime prevention work were continued and refined. Many authorities worked with crime prevention initiatives during the year, and two of the most important crime prevention authorities – the Swedish Police Authority and Swedish Customs – launched crime prevention strategies aimed at underlining that crime prevention work is to permeate their activities in all areas and at all levels. Over the past year, national efforts have also addressed certain crime problems more often than others. The authorities that responded to Brå’s survey return to an explicit focus on preventing organised crime and crime involving children and youth. Other overarching themes include several initiatives to prevent honour-based crime and work-related crime.

However, the focus and priorities of national efforts differ from their local equivalents. For example, national authorities are more likely to target organised crime and welfare crime, while local actors are more likely to target crime problems such as vandalism, disorderly conduct and drug-related crime. Although this could be considered to indicate that national priorities are not having a local impact, it could also be considered positive in that it might indicate that local actors are basing their efforts on local circumstances and prioritising their crime prevention work accordingly.

All authorities that responded to Brå’s survey are identified as important actors in the national crime prevention programme *Combating Crime Together* (*Tillsammans mot brott*, government communication 2016/17:126). At the same time, there are differences between authorities with and without overarching responsibility for crime prevention. That is, between authorities such as the Swedish Tax Agency, whose mandate states that they should prevent and combat financial crime and participate in efforts against serious organised crime, and authorities such as the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF), whose mandate includes no explicit responsibility for crime prevention.

The authorities with a general mandate to work with crime prevention matters conduct crime prevention initiatives and collaborate to a slightly greater extent. This finding suggests that an authority’s mandate affects whether it collaborates in its crime prevention work. While this is to be expected, several of these authorities have the potential to contribute more to the development of crime prevention work, not least in the light of the forthcoming legislation. Instead of striving for the programme to have a greater impact on the concerned authorities, Brå’s assessment is that it would be more effective if the next step in Sweden’s national crime prevention work was for more authorities to have mandates that include an explicit and general responsibility for crime prevention.



# Brå's development work in 2022

This year's survey shows that all municipalities feel that they need some kind of support from Brå before the forthcoming legislation enters into force. Brå is preparing for the increased need for support resulting from this legislation, such as by in October 2022 completing a government commission describing the need to increase the support offered to local actors as well as the type of support needed (Brå 2022b).

In 2022, Brå also began efforts to increase and develop that support. Brå has, for instance, refined and broadened its training course offering within crime prevention work as well as published several new methodological support tools with a focus on strengthening the knowledge-based approach. Moreover, Brå's development support for crime prevention work has included measures against gang-related violent crime, support for municipalities with socially disadvantaged areas and preventive work aimed at children and youth who commit or are at risk of committing crimes.

Based on the surveys of actors at local and regional level, Brå can conclude that many take advantage of Brå's support and find it beneficial. Unfortunately, the results also show that, compared to previous years, fewer actors at local level partake of this support. Given that the support appears to contribute to the development of local efforts, in 2023 it will be important for Brå to identify the cause of the drop and to better promote this support.

This especially concerns methodological support and training courses as the results of the local surveys show that municipalities and local police districts with civil servants and local police officers who partake of this support are more likely to adopt a knowledge-based approach. This is also the type of support most requested by local actors.

# Conclusions and closing discussion

Recent years have seen a marked increase in ambitions within Swedish crime prevention work. The national crime prevention programme *Combating Crime Together (Tillsammans mot brott*, government communication 2016/17:126) was presented in 2017 and has been followed by broader mandates within crime prevention for, among others, Brå and Sweden's county administrative boards. In 2022, additional steps were taken with the development of a crime prevention strategy within the Swedish Police Authority and commissions for Brå and other authorities to prepare for the forthcoming legislation on municipal responsibility for crime prevention work. It is hoped that the forthcoming legislation will encourage local decision-makers to improve the working conditions of municipal crime prevention officers.

Naturally, these heightened ambitions are coupled with the expectation to develop crime prevention work towards more active and widespread knowledge-based crime prevention work at local, regional and national level. This is a necessary development to reduce crime and increase people's sense of security, which are pressing goals for all of society. In the light of current developments in society, Brå's assessment is that there is an urgent need to move things forward in crime prevention work at all levels.

Accordingly, it is important to address the fact that, generally speaking, local crime prevention work has not moved towards a more knowledge-based approach since 2017 and that a relatively large share of municipalities have a great deal of work ahead of them to meet the requirements of the legislation entering into force this year. This needs to be achieved by, among other means, improving the working conditions of the municipal civil servants responsible for crime prevention matters. Brå's recommendation is that decision-makers in all municipalities review the working conditions of civil servants responsible for crime prevention matters and ensure that they are adequate for conducting qualitative work. Not only to meet the requirements of the forthcoming legislation, but also to mitigate the consequences of crime and the associated sense of insecurity.

In 2023, it will also be important for national and regional actors to offer municipalities more practical and tailored support to a greater extent. The county administrative boards should also develop the support they offer municipalities to better help promote cross-municipal collaboration within crime prevention. The support provided in 2023 should also include initiatives on how municipalities and local police districts can involve more actors and perspectives in their local efforts so as to increase their relevance. It is, for example, important to strengthen the collaboration between local actors and regions. The regions have responsibilities in areas such as public transport, health care and, in some cases, regional town and country planning, all of which are affected by and able to impact factors that contribute to crime and a sense of insecurity.

It is also important that the collaboration and exchange of support between municipalities and local police districts continue because knowledge-based work methods are significantly more well-established in local police districts, as seen in previous years. The Swedish Police Authority does, however, face one potential challenge here in that the newly established crime prevention strategy is being implemented parallel to the forthcoming legislation. This may impact the Swedish Police Authority's ability to allocate time to support the municipalities in their work.

Giving actors a clear mandate can be an effective means of promoting development in an area where it is both desirable and urgent. By legislating municipal responsibility for crime prevention work, the Swedish government hopes to promote the implementation and development of this work to a greater extent by giving the municipalities a clear mandate. Brå assesses that there is reason to examine whether clearer mandates within crime prevention also need to be established for more actors at national level, as many authorities have the potential to contribute more to the development of crime prevention work.

Just as Brå underlined in last year's report, development towards broader national involvement in crime prevention work also needs to be followed by greater national coordination. This is needed to ensure a common understanding of how crime prevention work is to be conducted.



The logo for Bra, consisting of the lowercase letters 'bra' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The letter 'a' has a small white circle above it, resembling a dot or a stylized 'o'.

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