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# Inadequate interventions when children are suspected of serious crimes

## Summary

The Swedish National Audit Office (“the Swedish NAO”) has examined whether the overall interventions of the state to stop serious crime among children are effective. Children are increasingly committing serious crimes and can be linked to criminal networks. This affects not only the children themselves, but also society as a whole. It is important that such children receive the support they need to change their behaviour. The audit has covered the Swedish Police Authority, the Swedish Prosecution Authority, the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, the National Board of Institutional Care and the Government. Municipal social welfare committees and social services also play a major role in the work.

The Swedish NAO concludes that overall efforts are not fully effective. The exchange of information between the actors varies in quality, content and frequency. This applies, for example, to key tools such as police reports of concern to social services, and the social welfare committees’ statements of opinion to the judicial system. Ultimately, the shortcomings risk leading to children not receiving the care and support they need, and to them continuing their criminal behaviour. It is therefore important that all parts of the system work and that seemingly slight shortcomings are remedied.

The Swedish NAO also notes that the majority of children in our study populations who have received social and legal interventions re-emerge as crime suspects and also do not succeed in their schooling. Furthermore, there is a risk of a lack of equivalence across the country. This applies to the interventions that social services can offer, the content of different interventions and imposed sentences in practice, and whether the suspected offences are cleared up.

One reason for the variations is that joint efforts have largely been built bottom up and at the local level. This has led to disparities in the system in different municipalities, and forms of collaboration that are essentially the same having different designations in different municipalities. In some municipalities there is no formalised collaboration.

In order for the work to be more effective, conducted more smoothly across municipal boundaries and with greater equivalence across the country, clearer national governance is needed in the form of, for example, national training, common guidelines, national follow-up and oversight, a better transfer of knowledge and experience and a uniform conceptual structure to enable dialogue and effective exchange of information between the actors involved. The Swedish NAO considers that the various forms of national support that exist today are not fully adapted to more serious crime committed by children. Problems with children committing serious crimes cannot be tackled solely within one area and with one toolbox; rather, to be effective, all the tools must interact in the practical implementation. The support provided at the national level therefore needs to proceed on the basis of a broader, cross-sectoral perspective in order to help ensure that each child obtains the most appropriate intervention.

The Swedish NAO also notes that the state needs to take greater responsibility for ensuring that all parts of the system work and that the actors within it have the conditions that they need in place. It is a matter of ensuring that legislation and sentencing are apt for dealing with both serious crime and other offences among children, that social and legal interventions interact, and that quality-assured social interventions are available.

## Recommendations

The Swedish NAO makes the following recommendations:

### To the Government:

- Instruct the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Swedish Police Authority, the Swedish Prosecution Authority, the National Board of Institutional Care and the Swedish Prison and Probation Service to develop, in cooperation, common cross-sectoral remote training on the actors' different roles, responsibilities and needs, and how they interact in the effort to stop serious crime among children. Such training needs to be readily available to all

employees concerned – not least newly appointed staff – and supplement other written knowledge-enhancing materials.

- Instruct the National Board of Health and Welfare to create, in collaboration with the Swedish Prosecution Authority, better conditions for the social welfare committees to prepare statements of opinion. This could be a matter of developing and disseminating guidelines for the work in which all the relevant agencies' needs and roles associated with statements of opinion are clarified.
- Instruct the Swedish Police Authority to reinforce, in close cooperation with the National Board of Health and Welfare, the police's reports of concern. This may include, for example, working with the National Board of Health and Welfare on developing remote training on reports of concern that all relevant police employees can easily attend on a continuous basis. Such training should focus on the purpose of reports of concern, how they are used and the information they need to contain.
- Instruct the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Swedish Police Authority and the Swedish Prosecution Authority to produce and disseminate materials clarifying the added value – for each agency's operations – of investigations pursuant to section 31 of the Young Offenders (Special Provisions) Act. The material can be disseminated through, for example, training courses for social services, the police and prosecutors.
- Investigate the possibilities for national coordination of out-of-home placements for children to ensure an overall assessment based on the threat scenario, risks and care needs in such placements.

### **To the Swedish Police Authority, the National Board of Health and Welfare and the National Board of Institutional Care**

- Ensure that the local councils for children and youths in organised crime (the "BOB councils") become a robust structure that reduces dependence on individuals and needs for local solutions. This can be particularly important in small or more resource-poor municipalities so that they avoid having to devise their own solutions but can benefit from existing knowledge.
- Ensure that the local councils for children and youths in organised crime work with experience feedback loops, and also with common situation reports and threat analyses to improve planning and proactivity.