

YOUTH CRIME MATTERS:

# Nordic Strategies for Evidence-Based Prevention



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**YOUTH CRIME MATTERS:**

# **Nordic Strategies for Evidence-Based Prevention**

Insights and collaboration from the 2024 Nordic Conference hosted by the Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services (SBU)

**SBU, SWEDISH AGENCY FOR HEALTH TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES,** is charged with undertaking independent assessments of interventions used in health, medical and dental services. SBU also evaluates interventions used by social services and services provided with the support of the Law regulating Support and Service to Persons with Certain Functional Disabilities (LSS).

# Background

The Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services (SBU) hosted a conference on evidence-based approaches to prevent crime among children and young adults. The conference was hosted on behalf of the Swedish government, as part of Sweden's presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2024.

**THE TOPIC** of the conference was challenges related to youth crime, and invitees were government ministry officials from the Nordic countries and decision-makers at national level working with development, assessment, and dissemination of knowledge-based interventions within social care. A total of 59 individuals attended the conference in Stockholm in person, while over 140 doing so through the video broadcast. The conference was moderated by Kristina Sinadinovic from the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare.

In parallel with the conference, ministers from the Nordic countries met to discuss challenges and opportunities for collaboration and knowledge exchange between the Nordic countries.

# Swedish ministers opening the conference

**THE CONFERENCE** was opened by Gunnar Strömmer, Minister for Justice in Sweden, and Camilla Waltersson Grönvall, Minister for Social Services in Sweden.

Gunnar Strömmer emphasised the importance of Nordic co-operation in addressing challenges that youth face, both as victims and perpetrators. Camilla Waltersson Grönvall highlighted the serious issue of young children being drawn into organised crime and emphasised on the importance of early preventive interventions.

## The importance of social intervention assessments

**DIRECTOR GENERAL** at SBU, Britta Björkholm, started the conference by presenting the importance of social intervention assessments (SIA) to ensure informed decision-making in social services.

This presentation highlighted the challenges in identifying relevant research, assessing the quality of the research, and addressing gaps in scientific evidence, particularly in a Nordic context. The presentation raised SBU's role in promoting evidence-based practices, supporting research, and contributing to better health and welfare.

# Presentations from the Nordic countries

The conference featured six presentations, exemplifying knowledge-based preventive approaches from different perspectives in the Nordic countries.

## Evidence-based interventions in the Nordic region

**IN THE NORDIC** region, 30 reports have been published whereby 51 unique interventions have been assessed as evidence based.

Project Manager Maral Jolstedt at SBU presented a scoping review of governmental guidelines (published by or for the Nordic countries), relating to evidence-based interventions for preventing juvenile delinquency within social care. SBU has not evaluated the quality or reliability of the identified Nordic reports and can therefore not provide guidance on effectiveness of a given intervention.

However, the Nordic reports show a large variety of possible preventive interventions and measures, which highlight the potential for knowledge exchange between the countries. The review also highlights potential areas for future research and cooperation, such as:

- Evidence-based interventions aimed to prevent recidivism for children who commit serious crime.
- Evidence-based interventions intended to be provided within institutional care.

**READ THE REPORT (IN ENGLISH):**

National reports of knowledge-based interventions for preventing juvenile delinquency within social care



## Cross-sectoral collaboration key to preventing gang-related crime

**CROSS-SECTORAL COLLABORATION** is a central component found in the effective interventions for young people affiliated to gang-related criminality.

Project manager Knut Sundell at SBU presented results from a systematic review and meta-analysis assessing psychosocial interventions aimed at preventing gang membership and gang-related crime among children and young people under the age of 30. The systematic review identified four types of interventions as potentially effective:

1. Skill training programs directed at children in middle schools (regardless of risk of joining gangs) in order to prevent gang membership.
2. Focused deterrence strategies in collaboration between law enforcement agencies and social care (among others) targeting gang-affiliated individuals in order to prevent gang-related violence.
3. Focused deterrence strategies in collaboration between police and social care (among others) targeting open drug markets in order to prevent drug crime.
4. Psychosocial interventions in collaboration between law enforcement agencies and social care (among others) for gang-affiliated individuals on probation in order to prevent recidivism.

**READ THE REPORT (IN SWEDISH):**

Psychosocial interventions preventing gang-related crime among children and young adults under the age of 30



## Education and school in crime prevention

**DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION** Malin Jondell Assbring and Sophie Casson Lindbäck from the Swedish National Agency for Education, presented a report summarising potential approaches for crime prevention in school and factors influencing a successful outcome relating to crime prevention in this setting. Key findings include:

- Consistent school attendance
- Fostering a sense of belonging
- Preventing harassment, discrimination, drug offenses, and threats
- Increased collaboration with social services, police and mental health service
- Adequate staffing

The presenters highlighted the crucial role of education in preventing juvenile delinquency, without possessing the formal responsibilities in crime prevention.

**READ THE REPORT (IN SWEDISH):**  
Skolans roll i det brottsförebyggande arbetet





## Community programs in marginalised neighborhoods

**CONSULTANT** Ulrik Lerbech Vinther from the Centre for Urban Regeneration and Community Development in Denmark presented experiences from 20 years of Danish work with community programs in marginalised neighborhoods ('boligsociale helhedsplaner'). The programs are cross-sectoral partnerships focusing on areas like crime prevention. They support disadvantaged children and youth with after-school jobs, mentorship, and guidance for education or employment transitions. Social integration efforts, like employment support for parents, are also included.

In Denmark, the programs operate through four-year partnerships involving non-profit housing organisations, municipalities, and local communities, with 50 active initiatives in marginalised neighborhoods nationwide.

The programs' preventive impact stems from their local approach, working with youth and other groups at the intersection of formal welfare and informal community support. They are flexible, context-sensitive, holistic, cross-sectoral, voluntary, and leverage existing local resources.

**READ THE REPORT (IN DANISH):**  
Center for Boligsocial Udvikling



## Complex interventions for individuals leaving organised crime

**HEAD OF DIVISION** Johanna Kumlin from the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare presented the efforts to strengthen the exit process for individuals leaving organised crime in Sweden.

In Sweden a model has been developed in which structured collaboration and knowledge sharing on national, regional, and local level is central. The presentation highlighted the difficulties of implementing evidence-based interventions for complex conditions, and the importance of building both short-term and long-term knowledge, gathering data, and promoting research. The presentation also encouraged sharing best practices through Nordic networks of web-based guides for methods and interventions.

**READ THE REPORT (IN SWEDISH):**

Arbeta med avhoppare – Ett stödmaterial till socialtjänsten



## Enhancing Nordic collaboration

**CHIEF RESEARCH ANALYST** Hans Skov Kloppenborg, from The Danish Center for Social Science Research (VIVE), presented a report focusing on the role of state actors in the development of social interventions in the Nordic countries, and the possibility for enhancing collaboration between| state actors in those countries.

The report presents networks as well as a trans-Nordic website as two potential platforms for knowledge sharing across the Nordic countries. Networks show promising potential, but require commitment, while a joint website faces skepticism partly due to differing assessment criteria used in different countries. More generally, countries have varying needs and resources, making it challenging to maintain and develop a shared platform. Therefore, knowledge sharing requires both time and strong commitment from all involved parties.

**READ THE REPORT (IN ENGLISH):**  
VIVE – The Danish Centre for Social Science Research






# Nordic panel-discussion on preventive strategies

The panel discussed several important aspects of preventative approaches in the Nordic context for example prioritising research to develop effective, tailored interventions. However, besides being effective, inventions must also be accessible to both the children and the professionals delivering them. Using diverse research methodologies can improve the understanding and their accessibility.

**THE DISCUSSION** also touched on the importance of social work and social care to address the root causes of youth behavior. Collaboration across sectors, such as social services, healthcare, education, and law enforcement, is key to supporting children and is essential for fostering a supportive environment.

The panelists argued that legislation can facilitate such collaboration without compromising confidentiality. However, for cross-sectoral work to a child-centered approach is emphasized, where children, youth, and their families are actively included in cross-sectoral efforts, provided that family involvement is not harmful to the child. Moving beyond assigning accountability to specific sectors for youth criminality, the panelists advocated for shared responsibility among all stakeholders to implement preventive measures.



Lastly, there was a call to empower staff working in these sectors, many of whom feel underfunded and inadequately trained. Providing them with the necessary resources and training is essential for building a workforce capable of making meaningful changes in the lives of vulnerable children.

**PANEL MEMBERS**

- Britt Østergaard Larsen, Senior researcher, The Danish Center for Social Science Research (VIVE), Denmark
- Thomas Hartvigsson, Researcher in applied ethics, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
- Rigmor Berg, Department Director, Norwegian Institute of Public Health, Norway
- Timo Harrikari, Professor of social work, University of Helsinki, Finland
- Eygló Harðardóttir, Office of the National Police Commissioner, Iceland

# Closing credits from the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare

**HEAD OF DEPARTMENT** Mattias Fredriksson, at the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, summarised the conference, emphasizing the importance of collaboration among Nordic countries in addressing youth crime prevention and relapse-related issues. He noted the value of discussing the similarities and differences in approaches and frameworks that shape interventions.

# Knowledge exchange and key connections, two of the valued outcomes of the conference

**THE CONFERENCE** in Stockholm provided an opportunity for sharing of knowledge and experiences among professionals working with evidence-based methods in the Nordic countries. One of the most significant outcomes was the formation of new collaborations among key individuals working on similar areas. Given the many similarities between the approaches within Nordic countries, the potential for exchanging experiences became more evident, particularly as different countries have made advancements in various areas of crime prevention.

There are several evidence-based interventions in use, but the ways these interventions are implemented, and the perspectives taken, vary across the Nordic countries. There is an opportunity to learn from each sector and adopt a more consistent approach to crime prevention. By exchanging insights from schools, civil society, social services, healthcare, and law enforcement, the Nordic countries can enhance their efforts and foster a more integrated and comprehensive approach to crime prevention.

For more information about the conference, recorded videos, and presentations, please visit the conference website.

**VISIT THE CONFERENCE WEBSITE (IN ENGLISH):**  
Youth crime matters: Knowledge based methods to prevent  
juvenile delinquency in the Nordic countries



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