

## **NSfK seminar on initiatives to prevent and combat gangs and gang-related crime in the Nordic countries**

Initiatives to prevent and combat gangs and gang-related crime in the Nordic countries was the theme for the contact seminar arranged by Danish NSfK Council member Anne-Julie Boesen Pedersen in January 2022.

Definition of *gangs*: An organized group engaged in serious criminal activities (i.e. *gangs* also include outlaw motorcycle clubs such as Hells Angels, Bandidos, Satudarah, etc.).

20 Nordic researchers, policy makers, and representatives from the police, the prison and probation service, and various gang preventive interventions attended the seminar. Given the COVID-19 situation in Denmark, the seminar was held online.

Summary of the seminar:

### **Thursday the 13<sup>th</sup> of January from 12-4.30 p.m.: *Preventing gang membership***

Session: Gang preventive initiatives in the Nordic countries

Presentation by **Marie Wahlstrøm Kappel**, Special consultant at Danish Agency of international Recruitment and Integration, and **Anders Bo Christensen**, Special consultant at The Danish Centre for prevention of Extremism (DK).

The main focus of the presentation was a specific task force to prevent children and young people from joining gangs. The aim of the project: To strengthen the local preventive measures towards children and youth at risk of joining gangs. Core elements: Cross sectoral and coordinated intervention plus interdisciplinary holistic assessment of the whole family. The principles are: I) a single point of contact with the municipality, II) fewer professionals to meet the family, III) inter-agency organization of the work across different legislations (e.g., social or employment) to describe how these interdisciplinary cases are handled, including the cases of the parents, and IV) involve the family in the intervention.

Discussions in groups and a joined discussion.

Session: Exchange of information between the police and social authorities

Joined discussion of what kind of information is exchanged and how the exchange of information takes place. The participants largely agreed that information sharing is often crucial, but it is not always possible for authorities to exchange information on gang members without their consent.

Session: What are the challenges in preventing gang membership? Suggested solutions?

Presentation by **Glen Sjögren**, Police commissioner (superintendent), head of the Youth Section in the Malmö Police Area, coordinator in Group Violence Intervention (GVI: a collaboration between

the police, the prison service, the city of Malmö and Malmö residents in community organizations and associations, to reduce shootings and other serious violent crimes) in Malmö (SE).

Challenges and solutions pointed out in the presentation:

- Focus on primary school is important. Nearly all members of violent groups leave primary school with a result that does not qualify them to study afterwards, which makes them vulnerable for membership of violent groups. Self-recruitment due to lack of alternatives.
- Important to react fast and relocate persons in risk of joining violent groups/gangs

Challenges and solutions mentioned in discussions in groups and a joined discussion:

- Challenges:
  - financial debt
  - enemies from rival gangs
  - no education
  - getting work without education
  - presence of gang members in the neighborhood
  - stigma
  - the families are not aware of the nature of crime. Rethink how to create awareness.
  - the problem is multidisciplinary. The problem is 'owned' by the justice department/system, but the solution is in the social service, municipalities.
  - Responsibilities; When everyone is responsible, no one is responsible (authorities would like gang preventive efforts to be coordinated – but by whom?)
  - differences between municipalities
- Important to offer alternatives to the gangs (education, job, leisure activities, to be part of social networks/community/society etc.)
- long-term initiatives are necessary
- The number of incarcerated gang members counts. If there is too many gang members in prison, you can't spread them. They have negative effects on each other.

**Friday the 14<sup>th</sup> of January from 9.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.: *Release of gang members from prison***

Session: Rehabilitation initiatives towards gang members upon release

Presentation by **Martin Wishman**, project-manager of the EX/IN (Exit jail/Into society) initiative, localized in the district of Søndre Nordstrand in Oslo (NO).

The project is a collaborative project with focus on return to society after incarceration. The initiative starts 6 months before release from prison with relational work and focus on clarifying dept, situation when released etc. Time for release: making sure the social authorities are aware of the person's release (housing, work etc.), help with contact and coordination. Organisations like Red Cross (leisure activities) are also part of the collaboration.

Discussions in groups and a joined discussion.

Session: Cooperation between authorities and exchange of information

Presentation by **Kari-Anne Aasen Aasterud**, Work as a senior adviser in the Directorate for the Norwegian Correctional Service with security as main area of responsibility (NO).

The main focus in the presentation was the cooperation between the correctional service and the police/ Police Secret Service on different levels, including the cooperation between the correctional service and the police/ Police Secret Service in «Infoflyt», which is a specific system for exchange of information.

Discussions in groups and a joined discussion on which kind of cooperation that exists in terms of exchange of information and how the cooperation work.

Session: What are the challenges of releasing gang members? Suggested solutions?

Presentation by **Camila Salazar Atías**, criminologist and one of Sweden's foremost experts in the field of gang related activity. Working at Fryshuset. Founded the Center for Information (2010) on Destructive Sub-cultures (CIDES) whose mission is to counteract the development of gangs and focus on exit strategies. Presently, she is part of the leadership team at Fryshuset as their global head of social operations (SE).

Challenges pointed out in the presentation:

- to get a program/plan/structure for the time after release from the social authorities. The municipalities differ in terms of economy, interpretation of legislation etc.
- contact with many different parts of the social system
- slow reaction from the social authorities (if no alternative, quickly back in gangs)
- financial and other forms of dept
- returning to same neighborhood
- transition from super max prison to open society where the current situation is unknown to the released person (makes them paranoid)

Suggestions:

- Use virtual reality in prison for job preparation: qualifications and training ('meet' colleagues, hear the language in a firm, see the surroundings etc.)

Presentation by **Miika Mehmet** working in exit-project which is coordinated by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI). Aggredi (exit-project for organized crime members) assists NBI in their work by providing social guidance and psychosocial support to the clients (FI).

Challenges pointed out in the presentation:

- leaving network and family
- financial and other forms of dept

Discussions in groups and a joined discussion on challenges of releasing gang members and suggested solutions:

- build up a new identity of the person
- very hard to leave friends behind
- enemies in the neighborhood
- hard to free yourself from obligations to the gang
- living conditions (Social benefits are low and nothing in comparison to what the person is used to. The housing provided do not look attractive)
- drug use/addiction
- motivation is central (age is a factor: It's difficult to motivate the youngsters to leave the gang)
- use the time in prison: education, job training, etc., so they leave prison with better skills.
- use virtual reality in prison to introduce (former) gang members to different situations in "normal" life, so they are prepared and feel more comfortable with the situations when they meet them.
- strengthen the cooperation with companies.
- a cross-disciplinary approach / professionals with different qualifications is important
- acknowledge that relapse will happen (a lot of things are working against these individuals, the reasons for joining the gang is often still there, when they are trying to leave)