

Review

Exit programmes for gang members and outlaw bikers – exit contracts under the national framework model ‘A Way out’ (second progress report)

Background and objectives:

- This report focuses on a survey of the exit programmes initiated by the police, local authorities and the Prison and Probation Service (*Kriminalforsorgen*) with members of adult gang-criminal groups and outlaw motorcycle clubs for a trial period in 2012 and for the full years 2013-2014.
- The background for the survey is the national framework model called ‘A way out’ launched by the government in 2011 and designed for the authorities’ coordination of initiatives to support and assist gang members and outlaw bikers in disengaging from their criminal environment.
- The Research Division (*Forskningskontoret*) of the Ministry of Justice has previously published a report on the circumstances of exit programme participants when their involvement in the gang environment was at its highest and when their exit programmes began. This report follows up on the previous report and looks further into the substance of the exit programmes and into the circumstances of the participants one year after the programme began.

Research design:

- The survey is based on information from the exit contracts concluded between the authorities and a total of 138 gang members and outlaw bikers during the survey period and on questionnaire responses from some of them.
- While the vast majority of the exit contracts have been received and included, only a small proportion of exit programme participants are included in the questionnaire survey. This is because, to be included, they must have completed a questionnaire both at the beginning of the programme and one year later.
- Based on the number of gang members and outlaw bikers registered in the survey period, approximately 5 per cent of them took part in an exit initiative under the framework model.

Findings:

- The analysis of exit contracts shows:
 - That, to be able to disengage from the gang environment, most exit programme participants at the institutions of the Prison and Probation Service need to relocate and to receive mentoring. Additionally, they often need schooling or to embark on training as well as consultations with a psychologist or similar support. Generally, the needs of exit programme participants match well with the initiatives launched in the exit programme according to the documentation.
 - That most exit programme participants living in freedom need help to overcome financial issues and to find a suitable home. Most of them also need consultations with a psychologist or similar support to find a job. Due to practical circumstances, it is not possible to elucidate what initiatives were launched during the exit programmes in freedom.
 - That gang members and the outlaw bikers participating in exit programmes generally need support and help with the same things. However, a larger proportion of gang members than outlaw bikers need schooling or training,

whereas a larger proportion of outlaw bikers than gang members need tattoo removals.

- The analysis of questionnaire responses shows:
 - That, one year after joining the exit programme, 30 of the 35 exit programme participants included in this sub-survey indicate that they have disengaged from the gang environment.
 - That family, in particular, was a crucial factor in enabling their disengagement, but most of them also emphasise that the exit initiative was essential.
 - That a good two thirds of all respondents indicate that the exit initiative has helped them stay away from crime, while approximately half of them indicate that they have received help finding a job, starting school or training and being able to feel protected and safe.
 - That the respondents' concerns about disengaging from the gang environment were reduced during the course of the exit programme, but that half of them are still concerned that other groups will treat them as active members, that the group with which they were previously or are still involved will retaliate and/or that they will have to commit crime to get by.
 - That the intervals at which respondents communicate with their exit programme liaison officer differ greatly, but that most of them are satisfied with their liaison officer.
 - That two thirds of the respondents are generally satisfied with the exit initiative. They make up 17 per cent of all exit programme participants, although the number may be higher as some of the exit programme participants that did not take part in the questionnaire survey must also be expected to be satisfied.
- The findings from the questionnaire survey are to be viewed in the light of the fact that the survey participants are *not* a representative segment of gang members and outlaw bikers in exit programmes. They are instead a favourably biased segment as relatively few of them had their exit programme discontinued by the authorities or decided themselves to quit.
- According to information provided by the police, relatively few exit programme participants return to a gang environment after their participation in an exit initiative. However, it cannot be concluded with certainty on the basis of this report that this is attributable to the exit initiative. Most gang members and outlaw bikers disengage from the environments within a few years without exit programmes, and it cannot be ruled out that the exit programme participants would have been able to do the same. On the other hand, there are indications that gang members and outlaw bikers in exit programmes form a particularly vulnerable and exposed group, to whom disengaging from the gang environment was probably very difficult, for which reason they may have needed extra support and help.