

REPORT 

PROJECT TARGET

A Deadly Cocktail: Firearm Violence and Trafficking in Sweden

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Colophon

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Introduction

Sweden has experienced a significant increase in the levels and callousness of shootings since the 2010s. Firearm-related violence has continued to grow, with firearms becoming preferred for homicides in the country. The nature of the violence and its perpetrators and victims have some unique characteristics in Europe, while the trend in firearm-related violence continues to hold strong. This trend is something that looks set to be a continuing source of insecurity in Swedish society for the foreseeable future. As a result, firearm-related violence has become a salient political issue.

Firearm-trafficking in Sweden is a multifaceted phenomenon that has provided a continuous source of firearms; this has helped to intensify and promote the occurrence of firearm-related violence in the country and beyond. This chapter will provide a brief overview of the Swedish regulatory framework for firearms before delving into illicit firearm-trafficking. The chapter will examine the nature and characteristics of the illicit supply of firearms and ammunition and its evolution.

The main body of this report examines gun violence in Sweden. A description of the scope and characteristics of firearm violence is offered before similarly exploring the evolution of firearm violence. Following that, a detailed overview of contemporary firearm violence examines:

- the spatio-temporal nature of gun violence;
- the particular criminal characteristics endemic within firearm violence;
- the demographic composition of perpetrators and suspects; and
- the contributing factors behind the rise in firearm violence.

The last analysis of gun violence in the chapter investigates the characteristics of the firearms used in gun violence. The final section of this chapter examines national policy and initiatives to deal with and control firearm violence and trafficking, and their shortcomings, along with the main challenges relating to data-collection and analysis pertaining to firearms.

Box 1: Reserach methodology

This study used a research methodology based on various methods. First, desk research was conducted through a literature review and an analysis of existing relevant open-source documents in English and Swedish from previously conducted studies, international reports, legislative documents and media documents. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet or 'Brå') has a wealth of information and analysis about firearm violence in Sweden. This open-source information was supplemented by an analysis of internal data helpfully provided by the competent authorities.

Secondly, the research team conducted in-depth interviews with experts from key authorities in Sweden involved in tackling firearm violence and trafficking. These included individuals from the Police Authority Department of National Operations (NOA) and Development Centre, and representatives from the National Forensic Centre (NFC) and Swedish Customs. In addition, given the significance of Denmark as a transit state for firearms being trafficked into Sweden, written communication was conducted with a representative of the Danish National Police.

1

Regulatory framework and legal firearm possession and market

The Swedish Police Authority is responsible for overseeing firearm legislation and issuing the corresponding permits and authorisations, such as a permit for the possession of a firearm. Swedish firearm regulation is codified in the Weapons Act (Vapenlagen 1996: 67) and the Weapons Ordinance (Vapenförordning 1996: 70).

In Sweden, an individual must be older than 18 years of age – with some exceptions – to be permitted to hold a licence for a weapon. A firearm licence covers one firearm only; additional firearms require further licences. In addition, the individual must be law-abiding and well behaved; the police may reject an application if the individual has a criminal record or is considered unsuitable for other reasons. An individual must also be able to certify their reason for possessing a firearm. Individuals may be granted a licence only if it is for a valid purpose.

The most common grounds for holding a weapon licence are for hunting and target-shooting. A permit for hunting requires the individual to have a hunting certificate, whereas for target-shooting an individual must have been an active member of an approved shooting club for at least six months prior to their application.^I Moreover, the club must conduct shooting activities using the type of weapon stated in the application. Finally, individuals are able to obtain a firearm licence as collectors of firearms,^{II} although a serious interest in collecting is required and in the case of memorial weapons, they must have significant sentimental value.¹ The possession of firearms for self-defence purposes is generally forbidden and/or denied in Sweden. A licence also requires owners to store their firearm(s) safely in accordance with regulations.

^I For handguns, an applicant must have passed a special shooting test organised by their shooting association. Handgun permits are limited to a duration of five years.

^{II} Collections should have a particular focus and be limited. A firearm licence is required for each individual weapon in a collection and they must not be used for shooting without special permission.

The levels of legal firearm ownership have decreased significantly in Sweden, from a high point of 781,521² in 1999 to currently around 580,000 people with a firearm licence – amounting to approximately 6% of the population. Accordingly, the number of firearms held has also declined from a reported 2,096,798³ in 2005 to 1,900,000⁴ in 2015.¹ Brå has also reported that firearm licence levels decreased by around 20% from the mid-1990s to 2010s.⁵ Nonetheless, at around 31.6 per 100 people, Sweden still has one of the highest rates of legal firearm ownership per capita in the world.⁶ The levels of legal firearm possession vary around the country. For example, in Arjeplog, Lapland, more than one in three people have a firearm licence; in contrast in Malmö, around one in 50 people have a licence. Given that hunting is the most common purpose for having a weapon licence (at about 80% of all gun licences), it is not surprising that some areas of the country witness a greater level of firearm ownership than others.⁷

Sweden's domestic market is, however, quite small, especially when considering the number of legal guns possessed. According to a 2014 European Commission report, some 220 arms dealers or brokers were operating in Sweden.⁸ Furthermore, there appears to be no significant active firearm production in Sweden.⁹ ^{II}

^I Aaron Karp's 2017 survey based on an expert estimate suggests a number of 1,955,478 legally held firearms. Karp, Aaron. (2018) 'Civilian Firearms Holdings, 2017: Estimating Global Civilian-Held Firearms Numbers. Geneva: Small Arms Survey, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

^{II} For an in-depth study of the firearm regulations in Sweden see the Project DIVERT Sweden case study.

2

Illicit firearm trafficking



The illicit firearm scene in Sweden is very active and well supplied, and the number of illegal firearms in circulation is said to be increasing.^{I 10} Automatic firearms are seen as the currency of power within the various criminal milieus, and many in these networks are well armed. Moreover, for those within or connected to criminal networks, firearms are very easily accessed. Table 1 gives a breakdown of the various firearms seized by the police from 2010 to June 2020. The predominant firearms seized are handguns, whereas the most common military-type weapons the NFC receives are submachine guns and Kalashnikov-type rifles. In addition, the 2020 UNODC Global Study on Firearms Trafficking noted that Sweden, among other things, stood out for the significant proportion of submachine guns among seized firearms^{II}. A breakdown of the types seized in 2016 and 2017 from the UNODC report is shown in Table 2.

The table shows that, over the time period, the most common firearm type seized by the police are handguns, including converted handguns, comprising between 62–75% of firearms seized by the police per year up to 2019. The number of handguns in circulation has clearly risen over the period from the low of 266 seized in 2010 to a peak of 816 in 2018. Although data on firearms seized are not a direct translation into numbers in the illicit sphere, they enable a strong inference to be made as to the dynamics of illicit firearms. The number of military weapons, such as machine guns and submachine guns, in circulation has also risen significantly, although these are still less commonly seized than rifles and shotguns. However, it should be highlighted

^I The strong supply of firearms in Sweden contrasts markedly with neighbouring Denmark, where the Danish NaNCI assesses that illicit firearms pose only a limited threat to Danish society while the supply of illicit firearms has decreased in recent years. Danish intelligence from criminal environments indicates shortages and, simultaneously, a significant rise in prices for illicit firearms on the criminal market. Moreover, police have noticed an increased reuse of firearms, even after serious cases, whereas previously they would have been discarded after use. The decrease in supply has come from increased legislative measures, EU Firearms Directives and increased law-enforcement efforts. (From written communication with a Danish National Police representative.)

^{II} The UNODC reported that Northern European countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden), Croatia and the Netherlands stood out in terms of the proportions of machine or submachine guns. However, in each of the mentioned countries the proportion of machine guns or submachine guns (separately) did not exceed 16% of the total arms seized in that country over 2016-17. UNODC, (2020). Global Study on Firearms Trafficking, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.IV.1, pp.28

that rifles and shotguns have a legal basis for ownership and are commonly owned, and for this reason seizures are less likely to be the result of violent criminal activity.

Table 1: Firearms seized by the police, 2010–2020

Type	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*
Handguns	266	498	563	472	539	544	629	556	816	680	338
Rifles	50	87	107	85	110	90	92	76	113	99	53
Shotguns	58	76	109	89	130	122	158	106	111	110	37
Military weapons	16	40	40	50	78	81	69	71	102	62	46
Other	8	5	5	15	4	2	9	3	18	11	9
Total	398	706	819	711	861	839	957	812	1,180	962	453

Source: Police/NFC data from SVT – Polisens vapenbeslag har minskat – trots Rimfrost (28 August 2020)

*Up to June 2020

Table 2: Seizures of weapons by type in 2016 and 2017

Year	Machine gun	Pistol	Revolver	Rifle	Shotgun	Sub-machine gun	Other	Total
2016	39	430	106	92	158	30	102	957
2017	42	401	77	76	106	29	81	812

Source: UNODC Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020

2.1 Scope of illegal firearm possession

Figure 1 below shows the number of violations of the Weapons Law from 2010 to 2019 and gives an insight into the scope and trend of the possession of illegal weapons.¹ The total number of violations has increased nearly every year: there has been an increase of more than 50% from 4,844 in 2010 to 7,427 in 2019. Among the largest increases in

¹ See appendix for chart data.

violations for illegal possession are handguns: these have almost tripled from 909 in 2010 to 2,494 in 2019. This mirrors the data seen above regarding firearms seized. Other weapons, which include military-style firearms, among other weapons, have similarly increased from 814 to 2,199. By way of contrast, the levels of firearm violation involving hunting weapons have remained largely consistent, due largely to the lack of demand for hunting weapons within the criminal milieu.

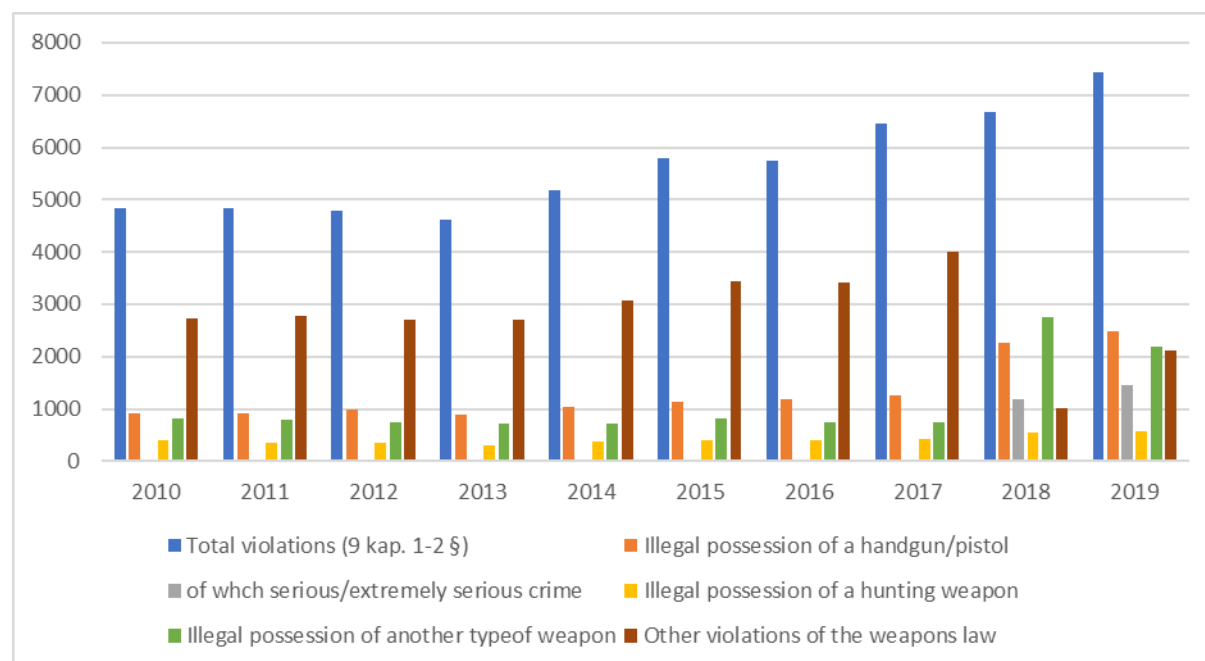
Among Sweden's criminals, particular weapons, such as Glock pistols, have gained a cult status – they are both sought after and provide the owner with a level of status.¹¹ Brå research based on interviews with police officers suggests that old firearms from Eastern Bloc countries are readily available. Criminals, however, are reported to be tired of such older weapons – for example, old Kalashnikov weapons that have been buried for a number of years and have become temperamental from rust. Instead, criminals desire weapons from Western Europe and the United States.¹²

At the beginning of 2018, Sweden adopted regulations that set out serious or extremely serious weapons violations. These regulations cover incidents in which firearms pose a heightened risk to public safety, with rulings contextually based on:

- the location of possession;
- the relative danger of the weapon;
- the number of weapons; and
- the danger of possession, such as the influence of drugs or alcohol.

As the graph shows, a large proportion of handgun violations in 2019 were incidents of serious or extremely serious violations; for the other types of firearm the proportion of serious cases was less significant. This is the result of criminals favouring handguns which has the effect of meeting the criteria for serious violations.

Figure 1: Violations of the Weapons Law



Source: Statistics Database of reported crimes – Brå

The price of illicit firearms remains largely opaque. It is known that the prices for illicit firearms in Sweden are generally high due to the significant demand for firearms, despite the strong supply.

Sweden has experienced increasing levels of converted firearms in recent years, with converted firearms being described as one of the greatest firearm-trafficking and supply problems.¹³ Several reports comment on the increasing commonality of converted weapons. The 2020 UNODC report emphasises that Sweden reported a comparatively high number of converted firearms (from starter pistols), and of all the countries which supplied statistics, Sweden was second only to the United Kingdom in the proportion of converted weapons reported. Converted handguns are reported to cost between US\$870–1,750 (€736–1,480), whereas an original pistol may cost around US\$1,170–2,340 (€990–1,980).¹⁴

In addition to the recent proliferation of higher-grade illegal firearms, Sweden has also experienced, perhaps uniquely, growth in the use and supply of explosives such as hand grenades, bangers/firecrackers and improvised devices, often using Thermos flasks. Previously, Malmö had been the epicentre of the use of explosives in Sweden; however, this phenomenon has now percolated throughout the rest of the country, with Malmö having experienced a decline in their use. The vast majority of hand grenades found in Malmö are old and originate from the former Yugoslavia; the most common is the M75.¹⁵ One report from 2015 cites a police commissioner stating that hand grenades are cheaper to buy in Sweden on the black market than ice cream, with street prices of SEK20 or €1–2 each.¹⁶

Since the mid-2010s, the demand for illegal firearms in Sweden has grown to unprecedented levels. With the demand for firearms continuing from inside Sweden, the supply of illegal firearms has largely come through illicit firearm-trafficking. The demand has come from actors linked to local organised criminal groups (OCGs) geographically located in areas which the Swedish Police describe as 'vulnerable areas',¹ with firearm violence often linked to drug-trafficking, among other motivators, as is discussed below.¹⁷

2.2 Characteristics of firearm trafficking

The trafficking of live-firing firearms into Sweden, generally using ant-type trafficking methods, is one of the most common and well-known firearm-trafficking phenomena in the country. This method sees low quantities of firearms being smuggled at a time in transportation, most commonly in the flow of cars or buses into Sweden, for example, Eurolines and Flixbus buses.¹⁸ Occasionally, though, they are trafficked in the flow of heavy traffic where firearms are illegally smuggled alongside legal imports. The quantities involved are low – usually between one and three firearms – whereas exposures of 10–15 firearms would be considered high and the frequency of smuggling is high, ultimately providing a steady stream of illegal firearms.¹⁹ As mentioned, the supply of trafficked firearms is considered to be good; moreover, a 2017 assessment highlighted the view that weapon-trafficking was considered to be 'low risk' for criminals because of the relatively low penalties.²⁰

The Balkans have traditionally been one of the main sources of illegal firearms trafficked into Sweden. Following the conflicts in that region, many of the firearms trafficked into Sweden have come from there, and more specifically the Western Balkans. Interestingly, Sweden experiences a large number of weapons used in shootings that have originated in the Balkans, whereas, in contrast, in neighbouring Denmark, the weapons used in shootings are seldom sourced from the Balkans. This difference is especially marked when considering that a large proportion of Balkan guns travel through Denmark, only to cross the Öresund Bridge into Sweden. Dr Lina Grip suggests that this disjuncture may be the result of the large diaspora from the various Balkan states in Sweden and their connections which enable the trafficking of firearms from this area into Sweden.²¹ Danish sources tend to confirm this: they indicate that traffickers operating through Denmark into Sweden tend to be of Balkan nationality.²² Many of the arms circulating within Sweden's criminal milieu have been trafficked from the Balkans facilitated by Balkan criminals living in Sweden, while sellers in Bosnia and Serbia are known to be keen to move their firearms on.^{23 24} This is supported by the UNODC 2020 report, which notes that Sweden is a relative outlier in receiving firearms from the Balkans as trafficked firearms from the area moving outside of the sub-region are otherwise limited and tend to be restricted to

¹ 'Vulnerable area' is a term used by Swedish Police to describe locations with a low socio-economic status where local criminals have an impact on the community.

neighbouring countries.²⁵ For example, a Serbian group trafficked ten automatic rifles, 59 pistols and 105 hand grenades by car through Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, transiting Austria, Hungary and Germany en route to Sweden.²⁶

In addition, it has been identified that along with firearms being smuggled from the Balkans, explosives are also smuggled, often from the same supplier. For example, reports indicate that when purchasing an automatic weapon from Serbia, hand grenades are included free of charge as sellers are eager to move rusting hand grenades that have been in storage for decades. In one incident, police stopped a shipment of automatic weapons containing 100 hand grenades.^{27 28}

As mentioned, the Öresund Bridge connecting Malmö with Copenhagen is the most common land route for firearm-trafficking through which significant numbers of firearms transit. With an open border between Sweden and Denmark and without the personnel and the motivation to check every vehicle crossing, the Öresund Bridge will probably continue to be the main artery for the flow of trafficked arms and other goods into Sweden, along with any trafficking movements in the reverse direction.ⁱ Danish sources nonetheless emphasise that seizures in Denmark of firearms bound for Sweden are uncommon, with quantities ranging from single firearms up to bulk seizures of five or more. These seizures often comprise short firearms, but Kalashnikov-type weapons and notably hand grenades are also seized; these are rarely used in the Danish environment. Traffickers often travel from Germany through Denmark to Sweden via the motorway using the bridge, or otherwise they travel by ferry to Helsingborg, although the ferry from Frederikshavn to Göteborg has also been used. In 2012, three-quarters of firearms seized in Sweden were uncovered on the Öresund Bridge or at the Malmö docks. Lina Grip also adds that due to the location of and local demand in Malmö, the city has been used as a firearm depot for trafficked firearms.^{29 30}

Other countries from which firearms are smuggled to Sweden from include Germany, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Czechia. An arms dealer in Norway had for many years been popular among Swedes wanting to purchase gas guns for conversion, despite the higher purchase prices. However, since Norwegian legislation has required gas guns to be registered, this problem has stopped.^{ii 31} A *Svenska Dagbladet* investigation followed a police investigation into a Scorpion vz 61 used in a shooting in 2015. They reported the existence of a firearm-trafficking group based in Skåne, known as the Skåne Network. The group travelled regularly to Slovakia to buy deactivated firearms over the counter before travelling back to Germany and taking a ferry from Puttgarden to Rödby in Denmark and then crossing back to Sweden over the Öresund Bridge. The group would then reactivate the firearms in a workshop in Vellinge, having the live-firing weapons

ⁱ 'Investigations and source intelligence have shown that a number of firearms used in the Danish gang environment, mostly short firearms, have been acquired from criminals in Sweden.' This is also apparent in hits from the IBIS database, where ballistic matches are occasionally found between firearms used in shootings in Sweden and later gang shootings in Denmark. Written communication with a Danish National Police representative.

ⁱⁱ The arms shop in Norway, 'Game On', which was selling gas guns, was previously popular among Swedes almost certainly looking to convert the weapons. However, pressure from the Swedish authorities has resulted in Norway changing its firearm legislation to require gas guns to be registered. Operation End Game saw a number of house searches aimed at those who had purchased gas guns from the shop.

on the streets after only a few weeks. The group conducted the same activity several times without being noticed by the authorities, buying a mixture of deactivated Scorpion submachine guns, military pistols and automatic rifles. The group of three^I managed to smuggle 236 weapons into Sweden before being caught,^{II} in one instance, having 174 weapons in their vehicle. As at the publication date, the police had yet to find 160 of the firearms that had been smuggled and reactivated, but it is known that some of these weapons ended up on different sides of gang conflicts.^{III} ³²

A second common *modus operandi* of firearm-trafficking operates through mail and courier flows. These weapons may often be sent in individual parts to reduce the chances of detection, although it is common for one to three firearms to be found in a package. Blank-firing guns in particular have been associated with the mail flow as they are purchased and sent from gun shops in Europe where registration is not required. It has been reported that the illegal movement of firearms through the mail is commonly linked to Eastern European arms dealers.³³ One of the reports covered by *Svenska Dagbladet*'s 'Weapons review' highlights the case of a 44-year-old man who purchased and shipped gas pistols from Bulgaria to Sweden, where he converted them before selling the now live-firing weapons. The individual was discovered after Europol's Operation Bosphorus.

The smuggler is known to have paid SEK44,000 for 98 pistols and received some SEK220,000 for the converted weapons. Police believe the individual was not acting alone but have not been able to build on his network. These weapons have been connected to 17 criminal cases, mainly in Stockholm, and were often equipped with silencers.³⁴ In another instance in 2019, police targeted and stopped two workshops converting firearms, one of which contained 30 firearms.³⁵

The newspaper, *Svenska Dagbladet*, conducted an in-depth investigation into weapon-trafficking at the end of 2019. In addition to international trafficking routes, they also highlighted the internal diversion of firearms at a Swedish hunting/shooting store. The dealer had purchased more than 300 weapons from other dealers using his arms dealer licence before reselling most of them on the black market, including 72 Glocks. He had not filled out his arms registry for the previous years, purchasing firearms with cash because other arms dealers did not trust his credit. At the time of the publication of the *Svenska Dagbladet* article, 289 firearms were still missing.³⁶

About half of the weapon seizures by Swedish Customs have been in connection with house searches during a criminal investigation, whereas the remaining cases of seizure

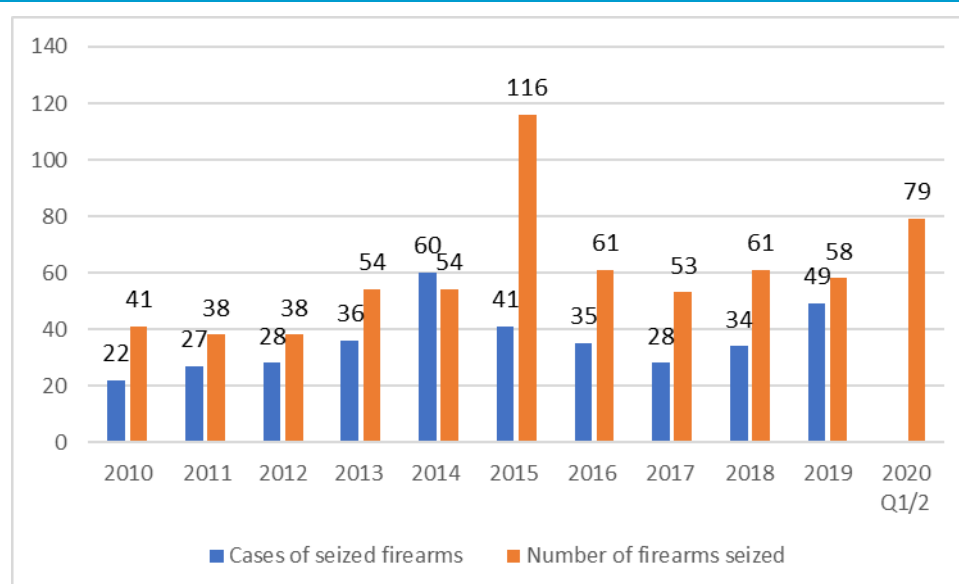
^I The group consisted of three men aged 33, 34 and 36. The 33-year-old is described as an entrepreneur from Skåne who was very interested in weapons and had a gun licence; he received four years and four months in prison for aggravated smuggling and extremely serious gun crime. The 34-year-old was a known drug-related criminal with connections to Malmö's largest criminal networks; he received six years in prison for aggravated smuggling and extremely serious gun crime. The 36-year-old was an unemployed salesman with previous convictions for drug and theft offences; he received two years in prison for aiding and abetting a particularly serious gun crime.

^{II} The store's sales list indicates that they bought 108 Scorpions, 100 Bell Pistols and about 20 other firearms of mixed makes.

^{III} The weapons found were discovered in 40 different locations in Scandinavia, from Copenhagen to Kramfors, while there were also ten in Malmö, 17 in Gothenburg and seven in Stockholm.

have occurred largely in the mail and in passenger flow.³⁷ Figure 2 shows the number of cases of firearms seized and the absolute number of firearms seized annually by Swedish Customs, according to their annual reports. The graph shows that there has been a general trend of slightly increasing seizures, in both cases and absolute numbers, from 2010 until 2020. The number of firearms seized in relation to the number of seizure cases is suggestive evidence of ant trafficking. From the years with complete data, 2010–2019, 574 firearms were seized and 360 cases of firearm seizures, with a firearms per case seizure rate of around 1.6. Moreover, if 2015 is discounted from the data with its anomalously high level of firearms seized, the rate of firearms seized per seizure case is about 1.4. These numbers are in line with the understanding of the small-quantity, high-frequency characteristics of firearm-trafficking.

Figure 2: Swedish Customs annual firearms seized: cases and absolute seizures



Source: Tullverkets årsredovisning, 2010–2019

The supply of ammunition among criminals in Sweden is known to be good, although the exact methods by which it is obtained is unknown. According to interviews, ammunition is very easily obtained at the same time as firearms are acquired.³⁸ Moreover, the trend of high and increasing levels of ammunition expenditure during shootings, as will be covered below, indicates that the supply of ammunition is not a problem for perpetrators. In addition, reloaded ammunition is very rare in Sweden, suggesting that the supply of manufactured ammunition is strong. The sale of ammunition is not registered in Sweden and therefore enables the potential for domestic diversion, a gap in state control that may be exploited.³⁹ For example, in August 2020, 52,000 rounds of ammunition were stolen from a truck stopped in Skåne, an occurrence capable of fuelling yet further firearm violence.⁴⁰

2.3 Trends in firearm trafficking

The traditional view has been that substantial numbers of firearms trafficked into Sweden have come from the Balkans. For example, a 2013 report from the Swedish police noted that most firearms used in gun violence were illegal and came from the Balkans.⁴¹ This was especially the case from the mid-2010s, when there was an influx of high-grade firearms from the Balkans, which made for easy access to firearms and significantly changed the dynamics of the illicit firearms scene.⁴² To be sure, this route of trafficking is no less relevant: Swedish Customs anticipate the trafficking of live-firing firearms from the Balkans to continue. However, police intelligence and Swedish Customs' experience suggests the picture has increasingly become more multifaceted in recent years as different routes and methods of trafficking have opened up.

During the period 2000–2010, common weapons trafficked and used by criminals in Sweden in connection with robberies and murders were semi-automatic pistols, which often came from Eastern Europe. Although various types were smuggled, Glocks and Smith and Wesson handguns carried a higher status among criminals and were more sought after. Automatic firearms were previously uncommon in Sweden. Moreover, reports of automatic weapons being used, which were often connected to high-profile cases, often turned out to be replica firearms or airsoft guns. This has perhaps been the area with the greatest disjuncture, because since the mid-2010s automatic firearms and shootings connected to automatic firearms have become common.⁴³

An interview with a representative of the National Forensic Laboratory highlighted a previous trend from 2010 to 2015 of 'puzzle Glocks'. These firearms often consisted of Glock frames matched with Lone Wolf barrels and naked slides, the parts being sourced locally. In the case of the previously mentioned Skåne network, they had purchased enough Glock parts to cover the maintenance demands for all Glock pistols in service in the Swedish military, coast guard and customs for five years.^{44 45}

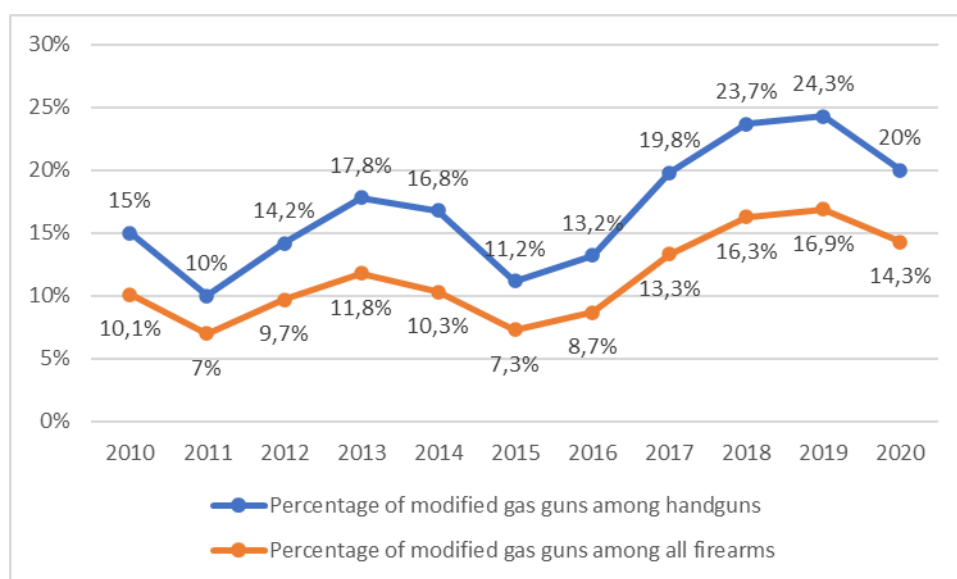
The mid-2010s saw the reactivation of deactivated firearms from Slovakia become popular in Sweden, a trend which reflected the picture seen across the rest of Europe. These firearms included Kalashnikov-type firearms and Scorpion machine pistols, which were used in shootings in Sweden. Swedish Customs found that these firearms were commonly received through the postal service, with at least half of the recipients being convicted criminals. Slovakian deactivated firearms have become less significant in Sweden following European action to tackle the problem.⁴⁶ The issue of flobert conversions¹ has been raised in Europe as a possible new stream for diversion. In Sweden, though, there are only a trickle of known flobert live-firing conversion cases, but their numbers are increasing slightly. In addition, there are known cases of Turkish blank-firers being converted into floberts before being fully converted.⁴⁷ These firearms make use of the same trafficking patterns, but they are nonetheless marginal compared to the overall firearm-trafficking picture.

¹ Floberts are low-calibre pistols that can be easily converted to fire live ammunition.

Converted gas or starter firearms have also become increasingly common in Sweden over the past two to three years according to Swedish Customs, although they have been an ongoing source of diversion for some time.⁴⁸ These firearms are frequently Turkish-origin blank-firers and have often been purchased in Eastern European countries where differences in firearm legislation are exploited; they can be purchased without registration and easily shipped to Sweden.

Recent Swedish Customs annual reports have highlighted the growing levels of converted gas and starter weapons in addition to reactivated weapons, which have become increasingly common in shootings.⁴⁹ In 2010, the National Forensics Centre examined 40 converted firearms which comprised 15% of all handguns and 10% of the total firearms examined. By 2018, 153 converted weapons were examined, accounting for 22.6% of handguns and 15.7% of all firearms examined.⁵⁰ There was a slight increase from 2018 to 2019, when the share of converted guns for both handguns and firearms peaked before dropping off in 2020 (as of data up to 23 October). Figure 3 shows the percentages of converted handguns among all handguns and all firearms.

Figure 3: Converted handguns as a percentage of seized handguns and all firearms



Source: Data provided by the National Forensics Laboratory

Interviews highlight that there has been a shift in the characteristics of converted weapons from smaller guns, such as the Ekol Tuna, towards larger models, such as the Ekol 99 Special or the Zoraki 917. These come as conversions that increasingly favour larger calibres, from 6.35 mm to 7.65 mm to 9 mm Browning or Makarov. There has been a clear increase in converted firearms firing 7.35 mm ammunition and a slower increase in converted firearms firing 9 mm variants. Moreover, certain converted firearm models may be sold to unknowing criminals as genuine Glocks due to their copycat appearance. Finally, it has been reported that an easy source of ammunition for

converted firearms comes from modified blank cartridges which have a ball bearing added to the cartridge. Registered arms dealers are able to sell blank-firing cartridges unregulated; they can be sold to anyone and are frequently sold over the internet.^{1 51 52}

It could be argued that Swedish legislation has helped to incentivise the development of a domestic market for the conversion of firearms. Previously, such weapons would be converted before being trafficked into Sweden, as most converted firearms trafficked into other European countries still are; however, the conversion now occurs mainly after being smuggled into the country. This development may well have occurred because Swedish legislation provides for harsher penalties for those caught smuggling a live-firing weapon in comparison to an as yet unconverted firearm.

There are also no legislative measures in Sweden that cover how readily convertible a firearm is or the intention behind converting such a firearm. This is also against the backdrop, as highlighted in interviews, that the prevalence of converted firearms among criminals is well known and that there are no realistic possible explanations for the trafficking in, for example, gas guns, other than to convert them into live-firing weapons. Swedish law interprets gas guns as not live-firing and therefore not dangerous, despite the ease and high likelihood of their conversion if not seized and the lethal consequences that follow.

This is highlighted by the case of three young men who received comparatively short sentences after smuggling 31 unconverted firearms into Sweden from Hamburg. They were held in custody for three days before being released for a court date two years later, where they received sentences for minor felonies. Attempts from within the Swedish authorities have been made to change the legislation to equate convertible firearms with live-firing firearms. But these have failed to gain traction, allowing the problem to continue in perpetuity.^{53 54 55} This is compounded by the fact that converting this particular type of firearm is relatively easy. It is apparent that a number of people in Sweden have gained the skills and knowledge to conduct this conversion, something that will undoubtedly persist and proliferate. Under these circumstances, it is likely that there are a number of illegal gunsmiths in Sweden who, unless apprehended, will provide a continuous supply of firearms both inside Sweden and potentially to markets beyond its borders.

Objectively, firearm-trafficking generally has also faced little deterrence in Sweden. Swedish Customs, who operate under the Smuggling Act and not the Firearms Act, have clearly been hampered by the leniency afforded to firearm-traffickers under the legislation they have to enforce. Because the penalties for blank-firers are so low, it has been difficult, against competing demands, to justify investigations and house searches, which are a way of dealing with the firearm supply and the distribution network. Penalties for live-firing weapons being trafficked are also considered to be comparatively low. Likewise, this has undermined Customs' operations aimed at

¹ Recent changes in Turkish legislation have revised the technical requirements for the manufacture of blank-firers to make them harder to convert.

exposing and prosecuting firearm-traffickers. Swedish Customs was not aware of the discrepancy between lower penalties for arms smuggling compared to illegal firearm possession; but after two years of attempting to remedy this, legislation eventually came into force in December 2020 that equates the smuggling of firearms to illegal possession and therefore introduces the possibility of two-year minimum sentences for firearm-smuggling. Two-year penalties trigger the possibility of using a larger investigative ‘toolbox’ such as wiretaps to conduct investigations.⁵⁶ But whereas the sentences for firearm-trafficking have been increased, they remain comparatively low, with most sentences expected to involve around two years’ imprisonment. This sentence may be reduced further by youth discounts and early parole release.¹

There is, to an extent, a debate over the current state of the supply of and demand for firearms in Sweden. A number of incidents in 2019 saw firearms reused in shootings instead of the usual practice of disposing of a used firearm. One police officer stated in a report that this may be because it takes too long to replace the firearm. This, in combination with the increase in converted firearms, it has been suggested, leads to the conclusion of a decrease in the supply of firearms.⁵⁷ According to the Swedish Customs’ 2019 annual report, as police and customs seize more firearms, the demand for firearms increases to replace and replenish firearm supplies.⁵⁸ A 2017 report from the Swedish Police’s National Intelligence Centre, however, has noted that firearm reuse has increased compared to previous years, the supply of illegal firearms remains good and criminals continue to use firearms to an increasing extent.⁵⁹ However, it has been suggested that the greater reuse of firearms is not the result of diminishing supply but because criminals do not fear being apprehended as the rate of success in prosecuting firearm offences is low.⁶⁰ Interviews with experts in Sweden have also reiterated the point that the supply of firearms remains strong and, moreover, weaknesses have been noted in the control of the domestic firearm market which could enable domestic diversion; yet the fact that this has not occurred suggests the continuing strength of trafficked firearms.⁶¹

Experts interviewed also highlighted the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic was viewed as a potential circuit breaker for firearm-trafficking, given its impact on international travel. However, the pandemic does not appear to have had any such impact on the supply of firearms or ammunition, although there has been an increase in the number of seizures of firearms by Swedish Customs – the first half of 2020 saw 79 firearms seized. This represents a substantial increase over the 20 firearms seized during the same period in 2019 and is greater than the overall level of seizures in 2019 at 58.⁶² This was the result of previous operations unrelated to the pandemic. Instead, it is said that the trafficking in firearms (and firearm violence) has continued largely unabated.

¹ Sentences may also be lower due to the provision of youth discounts in sentencing. In Sweden, youth offenders are treated differently under criminal law. The youth discount applies at a greater rate for those between the ages of 15 and 17, but also applies to those aged 18–20, the discount decreasing the closer to 21 years of age the individual is. According to the current procedure, those aged 15 will receive one-fifth of the penalty time, those aged 18 will receive half of the sentence, and a 20-year-old will receive three-quarters of the sentence. In addition, no one below the age of 21 can receive more than a 14-year sentence.

Moreover, according to Swedish law, any person who is sentenced to a minimum of 30 days’ imprisonment must be released on parole after two-thirds of their sentence has been served, unless there are special reasons against releasing the person on parole.

3

Gun violence



3.1 Scope and nature of gun violence

Lethal and non-lethal firearm-related violence has increased drastically over recent years in Sweden. The country has one of the highest rates of shootings in Europe: Sweden's firearm-homicide rate is significantly higher in comparison to European averages. A comparison of firearm-related homicides from 2005–2010 to 2011–2016 shows that, at 52%, Sweden also had the second highest global increase in incidents. Sweden is also a clear outlier in comparison to its Scandinavian neighbours.^{1 63 64 65}

While historically the country has seen consistently low and stable levels of shootings, this was reversed during the 2010s, when firearms-related violence became a significant national and political issue. It should be noted that Sweden's level of non-firearm-related homicides remains very low.

Table 3 provides an overview of the homicides in Sweden from 2011 to 2019, including those committed with firearms along with the gender of the victims. It can clearly be seen that Sweden has experienced a significant growth in the levels of firearm-related homicides. At the same time, the level of non-firearm homicides has remained mainly constant over the past decade, fluctuating between 50 and 70 per annum, with recent years showing a slight decrease. In contrast, firearm homicides have, in the main, consistently increased year-on-year from a low of 17 cases in 2011 and 2012. Cases have risen significantly to the current peak at 45 cases in 2019, a near tripling of the cases during this period. This divergence between non-firearm homicides and firearm homicides is marked clearly by the growing proportion of firearm homicides in recorded homicide data across all crime types, similarly reaching a peak of 41% in 2019,

¹ According to the Nordic Homicide Report (covering 2007–2016), Sweden's divergence from its neighbours is greater still when compared to developments since the 1990s. The firearm homicide rate has decreased in Norway by 67%, in Denmark by 46% and in Finland by 81%. On the other hand, Sweden has seen an increase of 43%. Furthermore, Norway, Denmark and Finland have all seen decreases in the proportion of homicides committed with firearms, whereas Sweden has seen an increase.

up from 21% in 2011. In addition, the proportion of firearm-related homicides from 1990 to 2011 was approximately 20%,⁶⁶ illustrating the recent divergence of firearm homicide over more historical trends.

Moreover, the table illustrates a clear pattern in the victims of firearm homicide, with the number of male victims having more than doubled from 16 to 40, males comprising the vast proportion of victims. The number of female victims has fluctuated around the low single figures, although 2019 registered a slightly higher than average number of female victims.

Table 3: Homicides in Sweden, 2011–2019, including those with firearms

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Murder or manslaughter	81	68	87	87	112	106	113	108	111
With firearms	17	17	25	28	33	30	40	43	45
Female victims	1	3	4	3	2	2	1	1	5
Male victims	16	14	21	25	31	28	39	42	40
Without firearms	64	51	62	59	79	76	73	65	66
Percentage with firearm	21%	25%	29%	32%	29%	28%	35%	40%	41%

Source: Statistics Database of reported crimes – Brå

Despite the rising number of firearm homicides, Sweden has seen a decrease since the 1990s in the number of firearm homicides linked to intimate partner and child homicides, homicides by individuals with a psychosis, homicide suicides and alcohol-related suicides.⁶⁷

Table 4 shows the number of attempted homicides in Sweden, including those carried out using a firearm. Similarly to cases of murder and manslaughter, the total number of attempted murder and manslaughter cases has increased during the 2010–2019 period. This increase can be attributed largely to the increase in firearm-related attempts. When firearm incidents are discounted from the overall total, the average attempts annually fluctuate around 600 cases per year. Similarly, the increase in attempted firearm homicides has largely been driven by attempts against males, with the number of male victims increasing by more than 100 in 2019 compared to 2010 and having steadily increased annually. Attempted homicides against females overall, and

with firearms, has largely remained stable, fluctuating around similar levels. The years 2017 and 2018 present slightly higher numbers before dropping to a low of 12 in 2019, notably contrasting with the peak of five firearm homicides recorded in the same year. In the same year, two women were killed with firearms in the same week – a very rare occurrence in Sweden. It has been speculated that these deaths were either collateral murders, the intended target being close to the victim. Another theory posits that a previous code of conduct – one of the few in existence – of not targeting women and children has collapsed as part of the greater ruthlessness of firearm-related violence.⁶⁸

Table 4: Attempted homicides, 2010–2019, including with firearms

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Attempted murder or manslaughter	792	842	798	728	792	838	879	909	868	983
Against males	590	641	615	559	636	658	697	723	697	785
with a firearm	162	187	189	177	185	204	221	248	246	274
Against females	202	201	183	169	156	180	182	186	171	44
with a firearm	33	42	28	32	25	27	27	40	44	12
Total firearm attempts	195	229	217	209	210	231	248	288	290	286

Source: Statistics Database of reported crimes – Brå

It should also be noted that historically the most common *modus operandi* for homicides and attempted homicides in Sweden, though now about equal to firearms, has been the use of knives or sharp objects. Whereas knives have been more common, firearms have been much more lethal.⁶⁹ See Table 5 below for an overview of homicide *modus operandi* from 1990 to 2016. As mentioned above and highlighted in Table 3 for recent years, the longer-term trend has seen a shift from domestic homicides often using knives, to public settings which use firearms, as will be discussed.⁷⁰

Interviews highlighted that there has been a slight increase among OCGs in knife violence and carrying knives for self-protection over recent years, possibly because of more stringent sanctions for illegal firearms possession. Some may carry a screwdriver instead of a knife as screwdrivers are not covered by legislation.⁷¹

Table 5: Homicide modus operandi, 1990–2016

	1990–1996 (n = 719)	1997–2003 (n = 659)	2004–2010 (n = 607)	2011–2016 (n = 469)
Stabbing	42%	39%	45%	45%
Blunt force trauma	23%	16%	14%	13%
Firearm	17%	22%	19%	30%
Asphyxiation	12%	11%	9%	8%
Other	6%	12%	13%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Junuzovic, M. (2018) Firearm deaths in Sweden: Epidemiology with emphasis on accidental deaths and prevention (Doctoral dissertation, Umeå universitet), 14

An article in *SVT Nyheter* highlights the fact that the Trauma Centre at Karolinska Hospital has calculated that the cost of treating gunshot wounds in 2020 (up to publication date) was SEK10,106,306 or about €1,000,000 (38 patients). This translates into an average cost of SEK266,000 or €26,000 per person and an estimated SEK100 million plus over the previous ten years. In addition, the number of patients that have been treated for gunshot wounds in Stockholm County has increased nearly fourfold from 16 in 2009 to 61 in 2018 and more than threefold 54 in 2019.^{1 72}

In addition, hand grenades and explosives more broadly have become an increasingly popular instrument for perpetrating violence in Sweden, a trend that appears uniquely in Sweden when compared to European nations. According to Sturup et al's study on repeat hand-grenade attacks and shootings, there were 77 hand-grenade attacks overall in Sweden from 2011 to 2016, resulting in one fatality and nine injuries. It is noted that most hand grenades are used in attacks on property and not on people. Nonetheless, there is a casualty rate of 0.4 per hand-grenade detonation, equivalent to one of the worst periods in Mexican grenade violence.⁷³

While a full exploration of the scope and nature of explosives is outside the parameters of this study, and indeed warrants a further study in itself, the development of the phenomenon of explosives in Sweden occurred concurrently with the increase in shootings. Sweden is unique in its experience of the use of explosives in public places for a country not at war or in a post-conflict setting. It is not clear what has caused the initiation and resulting increases in the use of explosives in Sweden, although the

¹ It costs approximately SEK250,000 to treat each patient. As at 21 September 2020, Karolinska Hospital had treated 38 patients for gunshot wounds.

increased and easy availability is one likely factor. The use of explosives has become something of a norm, with OCGs intimidating each other with further uses of explosives – bombs and explosives often being used in ways not intended to produce a fatal outcome but with the aim of intimidation. An explosive may also be used for the purposes of extortion, along with other criminal intentions, or may otherwise be used in retaliation for minor slights, relationship problems such as a problem with an ex-partner, or perceived insults. For example, a group given the name the ‘Thermos League’ because of their practice of building explosives in Thermos flasks would leave the explosives at the doors of people they were attempting to extort money from.^{1 74} In another instance, a nightclub was bombed because the perpetrator had previously been denied entry.⁷⁵ Swedish police have concluded that, in general, if an individual wants to kill, they will use a firearm, and if they want to threaten or intimidate, they will use an explosive, although there is a degree of overlap.⁷⁶

3.2 Evolution of gun violence

The increase in firearm-related violence has been driven by local OCGs. Street gangs are reported to have flourished in Sweden since the late-1990s and 2000s. However, their threshold for and tendency towards violence, especially firearm-related and explosives-related violence, which are the favoured *modi operandi*, increased markedly only in the mid-2010s. Arguably, firearm-related and explosives-related violence is now the biggest threat to contemporary Swedish security.⁷⁷ Interviews indicate that the shift largely occurred around 2014/2015, with an increase in shootings and the use of explosives since then, such cases usually developing together.⁷⁸

A 2015 Brå report of a study on lethal violence in Sweden between 1990 and 2014 highlights the fact that there was a general reduction in lethal violence in the 1990s and 2000s, whereas firearm-related lethal violence held stable at about 20 victims per year until the early 2010s. These numbers reveal that there was, nonetheless, what has been described as a clear structural change in firearm homicides during the period. Sweden has experienced a decrease in firearm-related violence that occurs outside of a criminal context, such as domestic violence, in violence that occurs outside of major metropolitan areas and in firearm violence with hunting weapons. The number of homicides that occur with a legal weapon decreased by almost half during the same period. This has been driven partly by the decrease in legal firearm ownership and the reduced rate of alcohol-related homicides and domestic homicides, in which contexts legal firearms are often used.⁷⁹ The rate of domestic homicide cases or male-perpetrated lethal firearm violence against a current or former partner has decreased drastically.⁸⁰ According to Brå, about 5% of all firearm homicides between 2014 and 2017 were related to domestic cases.⁸¹ Moreover, legal weapons such as hunting rifles and shotguns are very rare within the criminal milieu – the weapons sought after and

¹ During a raid on the group, a cache of 30 firearms was also uncovered.

in demand by such criminals, and often used in lethal firearms violence, are not available legally in Sweden.⁸²

Simultaneously, the country has experienced an increase in both absolute and relative terms of lethal firearm-related violence within the criminal milieu and in major cities, namely, Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg. Recent reports indicate that firearm violence has proliferated to an increasing extent outside the main cities. The study suggested that one reason behind the structural change was the variations in licit and illicit firearms. As mentioned previously, the Balkan conflicts and the collapse of the Soviet Union provided new paths for criminals to obtain illegal weapons while successive Swedish firearms regulation has become stricter, reducing the availability and accessibility of legal firearms.⁸³

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, men were most commonly the victims of homicide violence, comprising around 66% of victims during the period. As cases of violence and homicide within the OCGs have increased, including firearm-related violence, the proportion of male homicide victims has increased to three-quarters of all homicide victims and such homicides account for 94% of homicide perpetrators. In the criminal community, men account for 97% of homicide victims.⁸⁴

Interestingly, despite the increase in firearms and firearm-related violence, which indicate an increase in the capacity and will for firearm violence, the incidents of armed robbery have remained stable throughout the 2010s. Table 5 below details the various forms of robbery. The number of robberies using a firearm have generally fluctuated around the mid-800s to the mid-1,000s, while years which saw a decrease in the total number of robberies also saw a decrease in robberies using firearms. From 2015 to 2019 there was, however, a marked drop-off in bank robberies committed with a firearm, with the incident rate dropping to around half compared to 2010–2014. The one area in which firearm robberies have increased is in incidents that occur outdoors, which have increased significantly between 2017 and 2019. This mirrors the growing trend of firearm-related violence occurring outdoors or in public areas in Sweden, as is discussed next. Many of these outside robberies occur between young criminals, who are often targeting each other as part of inward-facing crime. In such cases, there have been instances of individuals being forced to transfer money at gunpoint through the Swedish Swish money transfer app.⁸⁵

Table 6: Robberies and armed robberies, 2010–2019

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total robbery cases	9,219	9,719	9,213	8,361	8,364	8,461	8,562	8,649	8,646	9,035
Using firearms	1,068	1,019	865	862	867	996	983	1,095	980	931
Bank robbery with a firearm	18	33	16	16	18	8	8	5	6	9
Robbery outdoors with a firearm	339	389	324	282	324	344	331	418	479	517

Source: Statistics Database of reported crimes – Brå

3.3 Characteristics of contemporary firearm related violence

Despite the changes in firearms-related violence in the 1990s and 2000s, the characteristics and nature of contemporary firearm violence from the mid-2010s onwards are qualitatively different, whereas Tables 3 and 4 have shown the quantitative divergence. The wave of criminal violence and firearm-related violence in particular since the mid-2010s is callous in character, with not only greater levels of violence, but also what appears to be a greater appetite and desire for violence, with scant regard for the lives and safety of others. The violence is dominated by street gangs who are often loosely organised and connected with a local geographical area, with no rules of the road and often rapidly changing loyalties or sides in conflicts. Conflicts themselves often occur over control of the local drug trade; however, shootings can occur and new conflicts can begin over often trivial incidents, such as perceived slights or a look in the wrong direction. The participants are increasingly young men, teenagers and children. This section provides an overview of the characteristics and dynamics before providing some illustrative cases.

3.3.1 Spatio temporal characteristics

The spatial characteristics of firearm-related violence are, first, that it is largely concentrated in the three main cities of Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg. During the period 2011–2016, 68% of firearm homicides in Sweden occurred in these three metropolitan areas. Firearm homicides over this period accounted for more than 50% of all homicides in Malmö and Gothenburg and 40% in Stockholm.⁸⁶ Between the three cities, 2019 saw a combined total of 32 firearm homicides or 71% of the total of 45 firearm homicides in the country. Stockholm experienced an increase of seven cases of lethal firearm violence whereas the south (Malmö) and west (Gothenburg) saw a decrease of six and two respectively, when compared to 2018.⁸⁷ The highest combined total between the three cities was in 2017, when they comprised 85% of all firearm homicides. However, as

noted, in recent years a slight increase in the number of firearm homicides occurring outside of the main metropolitan areas have been recorded.⁸⁸ Violence has permeated urban areas such as Helsingborg, Uppsala, Linköping and Västerås, including more affluent areas.⁸⁹ It should be noted that the firearm violence in Malmö has been decreasing following police efforts to tackle violence and street gangs, as is covered in a section below.

In comparative annual data from January to the end of September 2020 – the latest comparable data available – Stockholm County matched its worst yearly rate for shooting deaths and injuries, as shown in Table 5. There were 93 shootings up to September in 2020, six higher than the previous comparative peak of 87 in 2017, while there were two additional killings and ten more injured. Police declared a special event, ‘Portia’, in the summer of 2020 to break the cycle of violence with conflicts escalating: resources were channelled into the district of Rinkeby, long associated with firearm-related violence, as discussed in Box 2 below. The conflict, which began in July 2020, was between the extremely well-armed Husby’s Hyenas (HH), a group who have built a strong network and have a high capacity for violence, and Rinkeby’s Filterless Guys (FLG), a new group who have also been called Shottaz Younger, a splinter group from the now largely defunct Shottaz (see Boxes 3 and 4). FLG has grown rapidly in strength from drug-trafficking, while police intelligence indicates that they have given children money and weapons to conduct violent crimes and to gather information on rivals. At the time of the publication of the article, the conflict had resulted in four young men being shot dead in two months, including an FLG leader being shot dead in August in a park full of mothers and prams.^{90 91 I 92}

Table 7: Annual shootings in Stockholm county to the end of September 2020

Time period	Shootings	Killed	Injured
Start of 2020 to the end of September	93	15	38
Start of 2019 to the end of September	63	14	32
Start of 2018 to the end of September	69	7	30
Start of 2017 to the end of September	87	12	28
Start of 2016 to the end of September	62	5	21

Source: SVT (5 October 2020) ‘Skjutningar i Stockholms län 2020’

¹ In 2018, some 50 gangs were operating in Stockholm with around 1,500 members. It has been reported that new gangs, sometimes formed along ethnic lines, such as the Nigerian Ax group, have established themselves and challenged other groups. Meanwhile, the recruitment or socialisation of individuals into the groups through family and other social networks, such as at places of worship, makes it difficult for the police to gather intelligence.

In the cities and in general, firearm violence is heavily linked to areas that the Swedish Police describe as ‘vulnerable areas’, typified by high levels of unemployment, social benefits, lower school results and the presence of OGCs. They have a high degree of socio-economic vulnerability compared to other parts of Sweden. These areas are also more likely to be associated with a high proportion of people with immigrant backgrounds as residents.⁹³ Many have pointed out that this represents a failure of integration practices. A Swedish Deputy National Police Chief stated that such areas lack integration, leading to associated problems in housing, labour markets, schools and the broad social situation.⁹⁴ Sturup et al 2017 note that it is not clear which specific characteristics make vulnerable areas more prone to firearm violence, but they add that they often have similar physical characteristics. This means they were mostly built in the 1960s and 1970s and, apart from small centres, are almost exclusively residential, while they were not designed internally for vehicle use, which hinders police work.⁹⁵ According to the previously mentioned 2015 Brå figures, shootings were five times more likely to happen in these vulnerable areas. More recent reports indicate that shootings in vulnerable areas are now eight times more likely to occur when compared to the rest of the country.⁹⁶ Between 2010 and 2015, the area of Järva (Rinkeby/Tensta/Husby) in Stockholm experienced 15% of all shootings in Stockholm despite comprising only 2% of the population.⁹⁷ Swedish police have identified 60 vulnerable areas around the country where unemployment is high, incomes are low and local OGCs and their drug trade have been entrenched.⁹⁸

Local gangs can have a significant influence or impact on their local communities. In August 2020, in residential areas of Gothenburg, OGCs urged citizens not to leave their houses and to stay indoors. At this time, masked and armed men with protective gear and communications equipment from the Ali Khan criminal network set up temporary roadblocks and controlled entrances to the area they were operating in. This followed a shooting at a petrol station which ignited a conflict between two rival dominant gangs, the Ali Khan network and the Backa network, with other criminal networks linked to the main participants. Although Gothenburg had been largely calm before the shooting, the conflict affected much of the city. The shooting by two men at a group of other men near a petrol station was followed by a revenge killing and a subsequent shooting in retaliation to that. While the gang roadblocks retreated in the face of the police presence, their will and capacity to act showed a significant degree of power.^{99 100}

As mentioned previously, shootings in Sweden are notable for being perpetrated in public areas. Firearm homicides often take place in public settings such as streets, parks and squares. A study from 2006–2017 shows that 46% of homicides that take place in public places involve the use of a firearm, whereas only 15% of homicides in a private home involve the use of a firearm.¹⁰¹ A police analysis of shootings in Stockholm from 2013 to 2018 highlights the fact that during 2015–2017 more than 70% of shootings occurred in a public place; moreover, this proportion of public shootings has remained largely consistent as shootings have increased. The same report emphasises that both lethal and non-lethal firearm violence are said to occur commonly in environments that the victim is familiar with or visits often, or when the victim is in the location to meet the perpetrators. Moreover, shootings generally occur at close

proximity, usually at around a couple of metres, with the perpetrators aiming for the head, because it is common for individuals to wear protective vests.¹⁰² Firearm violence can, therefore, be said to be mostly premeditated, with perpetrators planning hits, although incidents do occur following arguments or disagreements. It is rarer for shooting scenarios to consist of an exchange of fire or other violence between the perpetrator and the victim.¹⁰³

According to the Stockholm police report, shootings generally occur when it is dark – regardless of the time of year. This has also been confirmed by individuals who have been active participants in crime, as the dark helps to aid their activities. Furthermore, it is noted that milder winters provide an increased risk factor for shootings as they provide the combination of increased hours of darkness while discounting the impact of cold weather on shootings – which is often a dampener, especially in the case of shootings occurring outdoors. It should be noted, however, that the report highlighted the fact that the statistical correlation behind the data is slightly weak.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, a Brå study from 2005–2017 on homicide in the criminal milieu supports these findings, noting a shift to increasing night/dark shootings over the time period. In addition, interviews highlighted the trend that shootings occur mainly between 21:00 and 03:00, although there is a regional disparity. It is also common for shootings to occur between 18:00 and 21:00, notably when there is an increased risk to third parties who are more likely to be present at this time.¹⁰⁵

Shootings also commonly target property and residential housing; they are often linked to cases of criminal coercion, such as blackmail or intimidation. According to the Stockholm 2013–2018 police report, these incidents occur in 15–20% of cases.¹⁰⁶

The extent to which Swedish gun violence is conducted in public areas, often with a callous disregard for any innocent third parties, increases the risk and danger to the general public from stray bullets or projectiles. This occurs especially when automatic weapons are used and a significant quantity of ammunition is fired. An article from 2018 highlights the fact that, since 2010, ten innocent third parties have been killed by stray bullets or explosives.¹⁰⁷ There have been more cases since its publication. This was sadly the case in August 2020, when a 12-year-old girl, who had left her house to walk her dog, was shot dead during a drive-by shooting at a petrol station in South Stockholm. The gunman had reportedly been aiming at two rival gang members nearby.¹⁰⁸

3.3.2 Criminal characteristics

Firearm violence is commonly associated with control over local drug-dealing activities and trading by local groups habitually engaged in the narcotics trade, running small operations in their local area.¹⁰⁹ ¹¹⁰ An article indicates that 2019 saw a 60% increase in bomb blasts, a *modus operandi* that dovetails with firearm violence and is driven by a surge in drug-linked gang conflict.¹¹¹ Firearm-related violence is closely connected to the drug trade as drugs account for a large proportion of OCGs' income.¹¹²

As mentioned above, it is also common for conflicts within the criminal milieu to be sparked by trivial incidents unrelated to criminal motives but driven by what are often taken as personal slights and affronts. Street gangs comprise individuals who may often instigate individually driven conflict over perceived injustices or offences. The status and prestige of OCGs and individuals mandate retaliation aimed at maintaining them, which inevitably draws more people into a conflict.¹ According to police officers, many criminal individuals have a low tolerance of perceived slights, are easily offended¹¹³ and are inclined to resort to violence.

The pursuit of status within the criminal milieu and within the broader local area is one driving factor behind the increased levels of firearm violence, where such violence is the currency. This is because individuals see gun violence as a self-investment in their future, providing them with a reputation and respect.¹¹⁴ Moreover, emergent OCGs seeking status, prestige and fear-based power are more likely to be inclined to establish themselves through acts of violence.¹¹⁵

Local OCGs are considered to account for a large amount of the criminal violence and shootings that occur in Sweden, especially in the case of violence in public areas. Across the criminal milieu, but particularly for these loosely organised local groups, there is a low threshold for violence and a high-level of readiness for it, with criminals increasingly making use of firearms.¹¹⁶ According to a 2014 report by the police intelligence section, these local criminal groups are often formed through economic or social motives,¹¹⁷ they often lack a clear or permanent structure and they may have fluid loyalties depending on the action being taken. The *Aftonbladet* article on Stockholm's gang members highlights the mobility in gang memberships, with some individuals being linked to two different gangs.¹¹⁷ These groups are temporally and structurally fluid in nature, although increasingly territorially bound, while recruitment into them is rapid and flexible. Owing to the nature of these groups, there is increased room for the arbitrary and impulsive use of violence. Police officers have described a new unhesitant attitude towards the use of violence. The police have suggested this may be one reason why local violent conflicts occur so frequently among local-level criminal networks.^{118 119 120}

A recent *Aftonbladet* report highlights the case of a 28-year-old gang member who had been engaged in a gang conflict with a rival South Stockholm gang for five years. In 2014 the individual was the intended target of a shooting; although he survived, the driver of the car was killed while another person was injured. The police suspect the conflict has been the cause of several murders and attempted murders. These include a murder at Vårby Gård's school in 2017, a double attempted murder in Rågsved in 2019 and the killing of a 22-year-old student teacher who resembled the intended target, the 28-year-old man.

¹ This is also the case with family-based OCGs, where a family forms at least the nucleus of the organisation. The reputation of the group, especially when connected to a family name, also requires groups to resort to violence in order to uphold its reputation.

¹¹ Groups may be formed around common social experiences, such as common environments, family and friends (Grip & Anthony 2017: 130).

Box 2: The rise of the Husby Hyenas

While new OCGs are formed occasionally in Stockholm, often made up of teenagers, most tend not to have much impact or influence on the drug scene. The Husby Hyenas, however, have managed to emerge as a powerful actor in Stockholm's criminal milieu, with a reported high capacity for violence.

The group developed from 2017, originally functioning as support for more powerful criminals, running drugs, weapons and committing theft and shoplifting, largely comprising young teenagers. From the beginning they had clear intentions to stamp their mark on the criminal scene and build a career in crime, surviving a police attempt to disrupt the group and their activities in 2017.

According to an *Aftonbladet* report, the group became influential by being sympathetic to 'those deprived of their liberty linked to various networks'. They also made it clear that they had significant firearms and proceeds from crime, which they openly displayed. The group is said to consist of between 15 and 20 teenagers and men, aged between 17 and 30. It is likely, though, that the group may be larger, because the affiliation of some of the additional members is unknown and they are not yet established members. Two of their members are well-known rappers, one of whom is one of Sweden's most well-known popular artists, who is suspected of serious weapon crimes.

The group has two leaders, aged 20 and 21, both of whom have long criminal records. The 21-year-old was the group front leader in 2017 and has continued to hold this position. The 20-year-old has been involved with drugs from an early age and has since 2015 been suspected of 34 crimes and convicted of nine.

The group is largely funded by drug sales, mostly marijuana and hashish. They have sought to expand their control over the drug market and, as a result, their goals have led them into conflict with other gangs. Throughout the summer of 2020 they clashed with Shottaz Younger, as described above. A reported theory suggests that the Husby Hyenas were behind every Shottaz murder in the summer of 2020 and a major reason for the wave of murders during the summer, although preliminary investigations have not been able to lead to any Husby Hyenas members being prosecuted.¹²¹

The boundaries of various types of OCG in Sweden are loose, with a high degree of crossover and interplay due to the fluid state of Sweden's criminal networks. Nonetheless, it is worth exploring another form of criminal group with a similar tendency towards violence.

Family- or clan-based OCGs have received considerable attention in Sweden of late. According to a newspaper interview with a Deputy National Police Chief, family-based networks operate around the goal of organising and systematising crime for power and wealth, while these groups have a high proclivity for violence, including firearm

violence. They may operationally resemble the same loose structures as street gangs; however, they have the differentiating factor of being organised around a family nucleus. About 40 family-based OCGs are reported to exist in Sweden. Areas with a strong presence of family gangs include Stockholm, Södertälje, Malmö, Landskrona, Jönköping and Gothenburg.¹²²

Outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) also enjoy a degree of the same fluidity and boundary-crossing as the other groups, although internally they are more structured and perhaps slightly more rare, especially given their international status and networks. OMGs, which were once a priority focus, especially during the biker wars, have dropped in priority since the level of shooting and violence across Sweden driven by the previously mentioned groups has increased. While OMG levels of violence are generally below those of other criminal groups, they are known to have been involved in violence, including the use of firearms and explosives. Moreover, in 2019, a Swedish National Police Officer when testifying about a hideout containing an extensive weapons and explosives arsenal, stated that Bandidos MC was increasing in power in Stockholm. In line with this, the group is said to have expanded its membership and has a large capacity for violence. OMGs have a presence in the main three cities as well as in Norrköping and Linköping.¹²³

It is also the case that these criminal groups and the individuals within them, keen to cement their reputation and gain status and power, often seek and obtain firearms for the purposes of acquiring or maintaining their status and prestige. These factors have become a central part and symbol of criminal life. Therefore firearms are not seen as being solely for the purpose of self-defence or the perpetration of violence, although it is often seen as a requirement to have a firearm. As noted in the previous section, particular weapons – especially rarer weapons such as Glockes, Lugers and Smith and Wesson handguns – carry significant symbolic value and have become cult symbols.¹²⁴ Nonetheless, once a firearm is obtained by such groups or individuals, in combination with the nature of local street gangs and the tendency towards violence, it does not take much for the weapon to become a tool of homicide.

Victims and perpetrators of violence involving firearms in Stockholm and Sweden generally often have criminal records with multiple entries of charges and/or suspicions. The perpetrators are also likely to have been previously suspected or convicted of weapon-related offences involving either firearms or knives.^{125 126} A recent report by *Aftonbladet* in association with a secret survey by the police highlights the fact that there are about 676 individuals¹ connected to 30 gangs in Stockholm. Of these, nine out of ten have a criminal record, with many serious crimes to their name.¹²⁷ Criminal conflicts can result in multiple incidents of shootings and retaliation. Network analysis conducted by Brå shows that towards the end of their 2005–2017 study, it was more likely for suspects to be linked together through different cases, reappearing as either a perpetrator or a victim. Ultimately, a cluster of 30 cases was identified through

¹ Thirty-six minors are members of Stockholm's gangs, the youngest of whom is 13.

the reappearance of the suspects and persons involved.¹²⁸ Overall, the duration of a criminal conflict depends on the outcome of violence: some conflicts may start and finish quickly, while some notoriously vicious conflicts have lasted for years.

3.3.3 Demographic characteristics

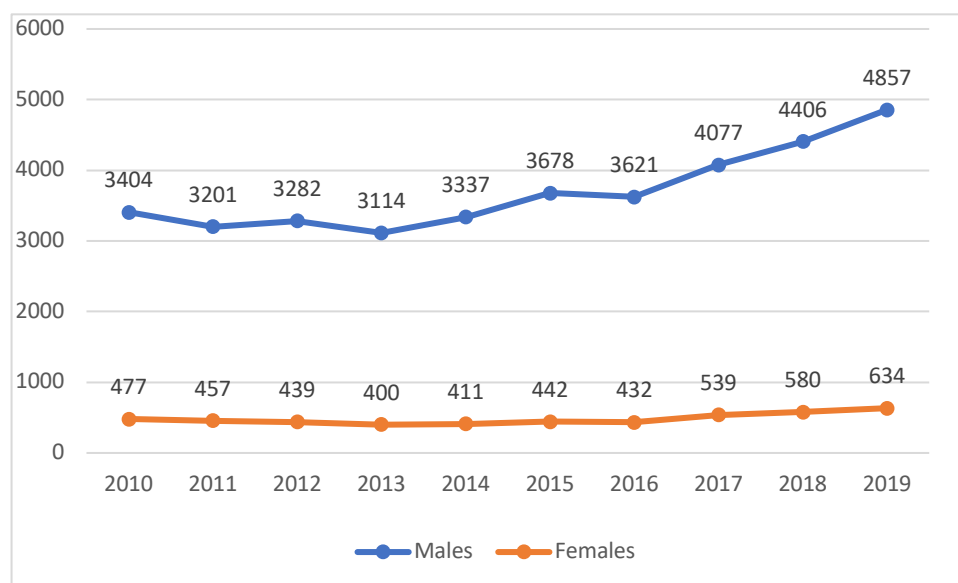
As previously mentioned, many of those suspected of firearm violence are reported to have an immigrant background, though some have been born and brought up in Sweden. Henrik Tham, a professor at the University of Stockholm, writes that there is a significant degree of segregation in Sweden, with those from immigrant backgrounds becoming trapped in poverty, while those who become involved in crime become socialised into it as their futures look bleak otherwise.¹²⁹ *The Economist* highlights the fact that most (75%) gang members are first- or second-generation immigrants, although most have not immigrated recently. From the 1990s, Sweden accepted refugees and asylum-seekers from Iraq, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. Although efforts were made to provide housing and language courses for them, many failed to enter the labour market successfully, many of those becoming stuck due to their lack of social mobility.¹ OCGs offer a means to income and status which are otherwise frustrated or denied.¹³⁰

As has already been discussed, men are both the main perpetrators and victims of firearm crime. During the past two decades, an increasing degree of both lethal and non-lethal firearm violence among men has occurred.¹³¹ Given that men are the predominant participants within the criminal milieu which has been the main battleground for gun violence, this is not surprising. Sturup et al's 2011–2015 study of firearms in Sweden showed that during that period there was a 2% annual increase in males shot to death and a 4% annual increase in males hospitalised as a result of a firearm injury.¹³² The Stockholm study on firearm violence from January 2013 to April 2018 draws attention to the fact that more than 66% of men shot and injured during this period were known to be involved in local street crime or organised crime.¹³³ Overall in Sweden, from 2011 to 2019, the proportion of male victims of lethal firearm violence has fluctuated between 82% and 98%.¹³⁴

Figure 4 shows the gender distribution of suspected gun criminals and shows clearly that the increase in gun crime – and with it firearm-related violence – has been driven by males. The increase began during the mid-2010s before rising precipitously during the past few years. Notably, while the number of females suspected of gun crime is largely minor in comparison, the trend over recent years also shows an increase in female gun-crime suspects. Whereas perpetrators of firearm violence and victims are predominantly male, they are also characteristically young.

¹ At the time of publication, 16% of people in Sweden who had been born abroad were unemployed, one of the highest rates in the OECD countries.

Figure 4: Gender distribution of gun crime suspects, 2010–2019



Source: Brå

The young ages of those participants and perpetrators may be a factor contributing to the higher levels of shootings and violence being experienced in Sweden. One article highlights the criminological research which indicates that tendencies towards violence and ruthlessness are strongest at a young age; there is also a higher tolerance of risk and more impulsive behaviour in youths. The most violent ages in criminal circles are 16–24, which an analyst and criminologist in the police suggested may lead to greater chances of collateral killings, such as those of innocent citizens or of the friends and families of intended targets.¹³⁵ Police describe young people as the greatest at-risk group for joining OCGs. According to Brå, violence is increasingly exclusive to males in the 18–24 age bracket. There has been a shift towards younger perpetrators and victims. For example, in September 2020, a 16-year-old shot and killed another boy of the same age at a small centre in a residential area in Eskilstuna where there were reported to be many people around. The suspect was known to social services and is believed to have been acting as a ‘runner’ for older gang members.¹³⁶ Historically, perpetrators were more likely to be older and either working or unemployed and receiving state benefits. Instead, contemporary perpetrators and victims are more likely to be living at home with their parents while unemployed or still studying.¹³⁷ Victims of homicide within the criminal milieu are different from victims of homicide outside of the criminal environment as they are generally younger.

Sturup et al found in their research of the period 1996–2015 that males over the age of 15 faced a significantly increased risk of both lethal and non-lethal firearm victimisation. The male age group of 15–29 faces an increase in their risk of being the victim of a lethal shooting from 0.3 to 1.5 per 100,000 and from 0.8 to 3.7 per 100,000 of being a non-lethal victim. The study also found similar drastic trends among perpetrators: the same male age group experienced an increase of 1.0 to 7.0 per 100,000 in lethal gun perpetration and from 3.0 to 12.0 as a non-lethal firearm perpetrator.

Sweden can claim the unfortunate statistic of having the highest rate of gun violence between 15- and 29-year-olds in Europe, about 30+ on average. The study finds that increasing gun violence in Sweden is being driven by young males, generally those from 'vulnerable areas', while these areas are also commonly over-represented in forms of extremism and social unrest.^{I 138 139}

Sweden's problem of young males being involved in firearm-related violence and criminality is seen in the recruitment efforts of criminal groups. Individuals are generally socialised into groups instead of being explicitly recruited.¹⁴⁰ Large numbers of young men are eager for the opportunity to join a criminal group and prove themselves. In a 2020 article, Mats Löfving, head of the National Operations Department, stated there were some 5,000 young men in Sweden identified as being part of OCGs. These individuals, often from vulnerable areas, are generally those who have dropped out of school or who otherwise have not achieved the required grades necessary to continue with their studies. Many young males fall into this group and see crime as their only prospect. Gangs may recruit boys as young as 12 to be couriers for drugs and firearms, especially as younger people receive discounted penalties if caught. Yet these boys and young men also seek the opportunity show themselves as useful, to gain status and become part of the group's core. They are often willing and prepared to shoot and murder to lay claim to a more prominent position in the group, even accepting the risk that they might receive time in jail as a worthy investment because the group will welcome them back once they are released.^{141 142}

It should be noted that it is also known for individuals to be coerced into membership of and involvement in local OCGs. Many groups engage in extortion and seek to enforce the payment of debts, although these debts are also often fabricated as a way of forcing the individual to become involved to 'pay off' these imagined debts.¹⁴³

Swedish police are concerned that, because firearm-related perpetrators of violence and suspects are characteristically young, with a large proportion being of school age, violence and shooting may proliferate into school shootings. While fortunately this has not been the case in Sweden (with no cases of school shootings having occurred yet), the Swedish authorities have nevertheless prevented some incidents occurring.¹⁴⁴

An offender characteristics study of 23 perpetrators convicted of murder and/or manslaughter by Khoshnood and Väfors in 2017 highlighted the common characteristics of perpetrators who were young, mainly had a primary education, did not work,^{II} had been previously convicted of violent offences and had used a firearm in their criminal cases, which were often gang-related.¹⁴⁵

^I Half of those who have travelled from Sweden to join overseas extremist groups have come from vulnerable areas.

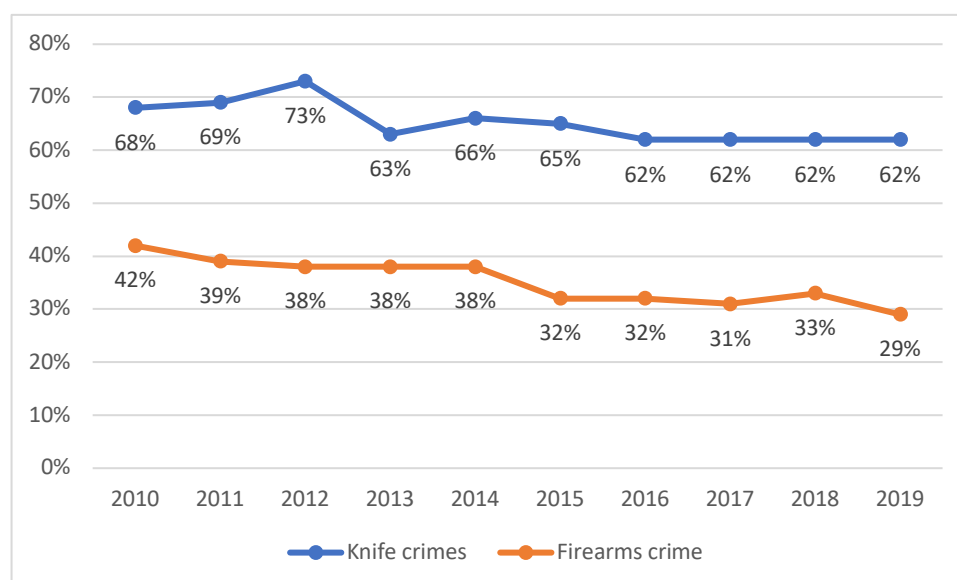
^{II} They were either a student, unemployed and/or supported by social welfare.

3.3.4 Falling firearms clearance rate

One phenomenon associated with the firearm violence in Sweden, which has further deteriorated with the increase in shootings, has been the corresponding decrease in the clearance rate of firearm-related crimes: there has been a decline since the 1990s. Understandably, police have often struggled to obtain information from migrant neighbourhoods.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, a culture of witness intimidation, either directly or indirectly, surrounds firearm cases and often prevents the police from being able to pursue these cases. According to the police, there have been several incidents in which witnesses have seen attempted shootings against individuals without calling the police to report them. On the other hand, victims of shootings or attempted shootings, often criminals themselves, do not want to engage with police.¹⁴⁷ As a result, Sweden's firearm homicide clearance rate has declined drastically: the late 1990s saw a firearm-homicide clearance rate of 95%, but this decreased to about 50% by the early 2010s.¹⁴⁸

The decrease in firearm homicide clearances has also been complicated by the environments lethal shootings often occur in, namely, outdoors and without physical contact between the perpetrator and victim, making the collection of evidence difficult.¹⁴⁹ Figure 4 shows the annual clearance rate of firearms and knife crimes. The level of clearances for firearm-related crime had fallen from the already low level of 42% in 2010 to 29% in 2019. Sweden's homicide clearance rate has also fallen due to the difficulties related to firearms. In 2016, not a single firearm homicide case was solved in Stockholm.¹⁵⁰

Figure 5: Solved violations of the Knife Act and the Weapons Act, 2010–2019



Source: Brå

Lina Grip and Ian Anthony, of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, suggest that there has been a polarisation of violence in Sweden. The general trend in Sweden has been a decrease in the number of people who have been a victim of crime

and also a decrease in the number of people aged 15–20 suspected of crimes, as was also previously mentioned in the decrease of various other forms of gun violence. In contrast, in the metropolitan areas young men have experienced the opposite, with violence and gun violence becoming increasingly geographically and socio-economically, and partly ethnically and gender, exclusive.¹⁵¹

Box 3: The evolution of a gang conflict: Shottaz and Death

The conflict between Shottaz and Death Patrol, one of the deadliest gang conflicts in Sweden, originated in Rinkeby in 2014 with a group of armed youths committing petty crimes and slashing the tyres of police vehicles. In 2015, the group committed an armed robbery, stealing SEK2 million (around €200,000). However, the action created anger among the friends of one of the participants, a 19-year-old, called Izzy, after they were not invited to participate. Feeling betrayed and having missed out on the financial rewards, they tricked Izzy into attending a fake forest party where he was shot and later died in hospital. The following day retaliation occurred when a 16-year-old, already with a strong criminal reputation, was shot dead in a petrol station in Bromma.

The two murders split the group, although attempts were made at reconciliation. Izzy sympathisers formed the Shottaz group while the opposing members, named the 'Gang of Four' by police and Death Patrol by the media, went their own way. After that, the two rival groups engaged in a long and brutal conflict, with at least ten known murders being committed. In 2016, two brothers were killed in a café, one of whom had ties to Shottaz. Following the café murders, two incidents saw Death Patrol members shot. In the first case the perpetrator fired a full Kalashnikov magazine into a car, hitting the victim multiple times, although he survived. In the second incident, a man was shot ten times and later died of his injuries. In December 2017, a 20-year-old man linked to Death Patrol was shot dead in a parking garage, having receiving shots from various weapons. In 2018, a 17-year-old was jailed for executing a Shottaz member who was believed to have been involved in the garage murder. Police believe the perpetrator was previously involved with drugs for Death Patrol but wanted to show his loyalty to the group by attacking Shottaz. In 2019, Death Patrol conducted a callous double murder in Copenhagen against a Shottaz member and one other, with a third surviving, after setting up an ambush. The unsuspecting victims were waiting in a car for a false meeting Death Patrol had set up when the Death Patrol members, of which the youngest assailant was 17, ran up to the car with Kalashnikov weapons, shooting and murdering the occupants. The 22-year-old leader of Death Patrol was filmed reloading his rifle before firing another 14 shots into one of the victims lying on the floor after having already been shot.

Backgrounds: SVD identified 20 individuals from both sides of the conflict, although, as noted, sides can change quickly and trivial offences can see friends murdering friends. At the time of SVD's publication, the individuals had collectively been convicted of 330 crimes, which include drug crimes, serious firearm offences, robberies, beatings, aggravated rape and murders. Similarly, at the time of publication, the men were between the ages of 17 and 24, with 16 out of 20 having been born in Sweden. In addition,

most of the 20 individuals have received assistance from Swedish social services, with resources being exhausted and few to none of the individuals going under the radar.

Death Patrol was led by four males born between 1996 and 1997. They ran and controlled their local drug trade and used violence against rivals. The groups had numbers of young persons waiting for an opportunity to become involved, many of them used for low-level crime such as drug-couriering but with a desire to become violently active. As a result, the conflict was continued by younger members while elder members were behind bars. Since the double murder in Copenhagen, all four Death Patrol leaders have now either been sentenced or detained, with the three other members having been detained for various drug offences.

The Shottaz group no longer exists, their leadership having left Sweden following long prison sentences for serious crimes. A splinter group of younger members variously known as Shottaz Younger are now active and in conflict with a number of other OCGs.^{152 153 154}

3.3.5 Factors contributing to the increase in violence

Sweden has seen a qualitative and quantitative shift in firearm-related violence since the mid-2010s. What is less clear, however, is what the causes are that underlie the increasing resort to gun violence. A few hypotheses have been advanced in an attempt to understand the new firearm phenomenon. Some of the variables that are likely to have influenced the use of firearms include:

- an increase in the availability and access of firearms to local criminal actors, including automatic weapons;
- the looser composition of local OCGs and their greater inclination to violence;
- the development of the use of violence and the capacity to use violence as a marker of status and reputation; and finally
- the escalatory dynamics of gang warfare driving further shootings.

One theory for the increase in firearm-related violence has been the increased supply and easy availability of firearms, although, as many have noted, this does not in itself account for the sudden increase in gun violence.¹⁵⁵ There has, for example, been an increased level of illegal firearms in Sweden, most notably in the availability of and access to automatic firearms. Automatic firearms were not freely available or commonly used before 2012; however, in more recent years automatic firearms were used in almost 25% of cases.¹⁵⁶ Perhaps more importantly, interviews suggest that the ready availability of firearms online – that is, Turkish-origin blank-firing pistols – may be significant because it has reduced the need for criminal connections to acquire a firearm. Whereas previously to access a trafficked firearm, language, familial, cultural or other connections were necessary, the playing field has now been levelled.¹⁵⁷

It has also been suggested that there is now a greater concentration of criminals and violent gangs in smaller areas. The close proximity of numerous OCGs creates tension over competing claims of territory for criminal enterprises such as drug-dealing.¹⁵⁸ As a result, the use of violence to compel a territorial claim offers a solution, especially when the nature of contemporary criminal groups without clear avenues for conflict resolution, or the desire for it, is concerned. This explanation may indicate why, during the earlier years of increased gun violence, Malmö, which is considerably smaller than Gothenburg and Stockholm, experienced disproportionate levels of gun violence.¹⁵⁹ This dynamic is similarly seen in Stockholm's Järva area, which includes Rinkeby, Tensta and Husby; these contain a considerable number of violent and particularly violent groups. As mentioned earlier, shootings here are highly disproportionate when compared to the areas' population.

It has also been suggested, and has previously been commented on with regard to firearm-trafficking, that the low penalties and low levels of perpetrators being sentenced for firearm crimes meant there was no effective deterrent.¹⁶⁰ It was not until 2018 that legislation was introduced that increased the penalties for firearm possession and added clauses for serious and extremely serious offences with increased minimum and maximum sentences.¹ Moreover, interviews have highlighted that Swedish police authorities have lacked the knowledge pertaining to prosecutorial requirements to secure more substantial convictions, such as aggravating circumstances that can increase a case to a serious charge, while delays in obtaining firearm analysis also meant that some cases go to court without even being able to prove that a firearm is live-firing. Whereas extremely serious crimes have largely been underused as the courts have not wanted to set a benchmark for the number of firearms needed to satisfy the condition, attempts are now being made at remedying this.¹⁶¹ From 2009 to 2014, for example, only a quarter of firearms cases went to court.¹⁶² It has been found, for example, when prosecuting for attempted murder cases using a firearm, an illegal firearm charge is often not included in the prosecution despite the investigation having concluded that it is an illegal firearm. Therefore, if the attempted murder conviction fails, there is no conviction at all. In addition, there are not enough resources or there is insufficient knowledge to push back against firearm-trafficking and so the supply of trafficked firearms remains largely untouched.¹⁶³ Without any significant consequences for participation in firearm violence, OCGs have probably felt emboldened to continue and then increase their use of firearm violence.

Similarly, the concurrent development of shootings and the use of explosives may suggest that a spiral of conflict was created with greater levels of violence leading to a further deterioration of the threshold for violence and a greater acceptance and normalisation of firearm and explosive violence. Sturup et al's 2017 study on near-repeat shootings in Sweden during the period 2011–2015 showed that across the three cities of Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg incidents of secondary or retaliatory

¹ Penalties were increased to a minimum of one year and a maximum of three years for illegal possession, a minimum of two years and a maximum of four years for serious illegal possession, and a minimum of four and a maximum of six for extremely serious illegal possession. Forthcoming changes are likely to extend the penalties again.

shootings are likely to follow an initial shooting incident. There were reported differences in the strength of the near-repeat incidents: for example, Stockholm and Malmö registered a fourfold increase in the likelihood of a repeat shooting at 100 m proximity to the first shooting within two weeks, while Gothenburg was over-represented in incidents of near-repeat shootings at 100–200 m within the first two weeks. Ultimately, near-repeat analysis showed that there was a strong likelihood of a follow-up shooting in each of the cities, although it was less likely in Gothenburg.¹⁶⁴ The study indicates that there are escalatory dynamics to some extent at play in firearm violence in Sweden, with incidents of shootings being responded to by further shootings in retaliation.

3.4 The firearms used in gun violence

3.4.1 Types of firearm

As mentioned above, handguns and automatic weapons have become commonplace within the criminal milieu and, as a result, they have become the weapons of choice for gun violence in Sweden. The supply of pistols is known to be especially strong whereas Kalashnikov-type weapons are readily available on the black market.^{165 166} From the latter years of a Brå study up to 2017, automatic firearms were being used in 25% of criminal shootings.^{167 1} Interviews with the Police Authority reveal that over the past five to six years the most commonly seized firearms are interchangeably converted Ekols and Zorakis. These are followed by Glocks and Kalashnikov-type firearms interchangeably as the third and fourth most common type.¹⁶⁸

From 2015 to 2019, about 40% of the shootings that occurred in Stockholm were carried out with weapons that had been used in shootings previously. These weapons were largely reused exclusively in Stockholm; it was rare for such weapons to be reused elsewhere in Sweden. Police analysis shows that between 2015 and 2019 there were 563 shootings in Stockholm, of which there were 478 cases that were possible to analyse using ballistic analysis, with 449 cases actually having been analysed. Of the weapons that were analysed, 20% had been used in at least two shootings and therefore 40% of shootings had occurred with a firearm that had been used in another shooting during the time-period. The reused firearms were typically used in two shootings (62 cases out of 91 reuse cases), although 29 firearms were reused between three and five times. Moreover, of the 44 firearms connected to murder cases, five had been reused after the incident; this low level of reuse applies to both handguns and automatic weapons. About 33% of firearms used in murders had been used in shootings previously. Analysis showed that, at 25% of all cases, automatic firearms had a greater representation in murder cases compared to general shooting incidents, in which they were used in 13%

¹ In comparison, neighbouring Denmark rarely sees automatic weapons used in the criminal environment. Criminals prefer short weapons which can be concealed, while the penalties for automatic weapons are significantly more severe.

of cases. Conversely, rebuilt firearms are more likely to be used in non-lethal shootings and less likely to be used for murder. Over time, there was little change in the number of times firearms were reused in shootings. These numbers have remained largely consistent and independent of fluctuations in the average number of shootings. The report also described the 146 firearms that were seized in connection with the shootings (247 weapons connected to these shootings were not seized), detailed below in Tables 6, 7 and 8.¹⁶⁹

Table 8: Analysis of types of pistol used in shootings in Stockholm, 2015–2019

Semi-automatic pistols	Country of manufacture	Total	Of which were reused
Zastava	Yugoslavia	26	12
Glock	Austria	13	1
CZ	Czechia	7	2
Beretta	Italy	5	1
Tanfoglio	Italy	4	0
Other	–	32	9
Total		87	25

Source: Polisen. (2020) Illegal vapen användning i polisregion Stockholm

Semi-automatic pistols comprise 60% of all the seized weapons analysed in the report. Table 8 shows that Zastava pistols were the most commonly used at about 32%, although they accounted for 48% of reused firearms. Glocks accounted for 15% of the pistols but only 4% of reused weapons.

Table 9: Analysis of types of automatic weapon used in Stockholm, 2015–2019

Weapon	Total	Of which reused
Zastava M70 (automatic carbine)	19	3
Scorpio vz 61	6	2
AG Strojica ERO	1	1

AKS-47	1	0
CZ vz 58	1	0
Total	28	6

Source: Polisen. (2020) Illegal vapen användning i polisregion Stockholm

Of the types of automatic weapon analysed, the Zastava M70 was by far the most common firearm at 68%, and 50% of the cases of weapon reuse. The Scorpio vz 61 was the second most common firearm used and reused, although significantly less so than the Zastava M70.

Table 10: Analysis of other types of weapon used in Stockholm, 2015–2019

Other weapons	Total	Of which reused
Converted starter/gas weapons	11	6
Revolvers	7	2
Shotguns	8	0
Antique weapons	2	0
Starting and gas weapons	3	0
Total	31	8

Source: Polisen. (2020) Illegal vapen användning i polisregion Stockholm

Ultimately, these data show that a large number of the firearms seized in Stockholm in shooting cases at least originated from the Balkans, although they do not indicate to what extent they were trafficked directly from the region.

A different study of shootings in Stockholm between 2011 and 2018 found that the number of automatic rifles used had increased by 50% during the period. Moreover, the study found that the average number of cartridge cases found at crime scenes increased from six to 12 by the end of the study in 2018. Interviews with the National Forensic Centre have also revealed that, nationally, shootings are occurring more frequently, but are also increasingly likely to see most or all of the ammunition contained in the magazine fired.¹⁷⁰ Automatic weapons provide a far greater firing capacity, and they are apparently being used by perpetrators; they also correspond to understandings of the increased callousness with which firearms are being used. This is mirrored in a third

finding from the study: that the average number of wounds from a shooting increased from four gunshot wounds in 2011 to 11 in 2018.

3.4.2 Sources and supply chains of trafficked firearms used in gun violence

The vast majority of guns used in violent attacks are illegal, a significant proportion of them originating in the Balkans.¹⁷¹ A 2017 report on OCGs highlighted the fact that illegal firearms remain just as common, while they are also increasingly being reused.¹⁷² As described in the characteristics of firearm perpetrators, most participants in firearm violence are from the criminal milieu. Therefore, they are largely limited to using illegally accessed firearms, given their criminal convictions, associations and age that prohibit them from accessing legal firearms. Moreover, the types of legal firearm commonly available, and which are legally possible to own, are not desired among criminals. Illegal firearms, although they are quite highly priced, are in plentiful supply and easy to access.

As mentioned in the firearm-trafficking section, firearms are trafficked into Sweden from overseas into the hands of criminals. Swedish criminals are said to have ready access to older Eastern Bloc firearms, although they are not necessarily the weapons of choice.¹⁷³ Swedish OCGs are known to have collaborated with Danish criminal groups in trafficking firearms into Sweden. These collaborations are often based on cultural or ethnic similarities, family connections or geographic location.¹⁷⁴

A network analysis conducted in the previously mentioned Stockholm study of the period 2015–2019 found that firearms tend to stay within their respective criminal networks. This indicates that gangs often have their own arsenals available for when they are required. Furthermore, the analysis shows that during serious conflict firearms can and will be shared between allied networks. Firearms usually follow the lines of conflict, moving between socially and geographically linked groups.¹⁷⁵ A 2014 police overview of criminal networks similarly highlights the fact that groups build relationships with other organisations that have access to firearms,¹⁷⁶ indicating the networked characteristics of firearms in Sweden.

Akin to the way groups use younger members for drug-couriering to reduce risk and the exposure of older members while benefiting from reduced youth-offender penalties, OCGs also use younger members for firearms-couriering and storage. Weapons are often kept with younger and/or lesser-known members to hide them from the police and also for transporting them as they are less likely to be intercepted by police than older and more well-known members. Weapons being hidden are often kept in family members' or acquaintances' houses or storage areas.¹⁷⁷ For younger members, this is an opportunity to become more closely involved in a group's operations and to prove themselves. With their high proclivity to violence, these OCGs may need firearms to be readily accessible, especially if the group is in a conflict. For instance, criminals

may use an accompanying motorbiker holding a firearm to fire shots, while the motorbike offers the additional benefits of an enabling quick getaway and the removal of the firearm from the crime scene. Likewise, street gangs may also make use of parked vehicles with firearms hidden in them as tactical depots.¹⁷⁸

In contrast, OMGs are said commonly to have individuals who act as armourers for their whole organisation securing their supply of firearms – it is rare for the police to find firearms being carried by motorcycle gang members. Police officers believe that the OMGs may also make use of tactical firearm depots, perhaps near clubhouses or other strategic locations where they are easily accessible if required. Such depots may contain only as few as two–three firearms, though. It is also suggested that OMGs may use sub-groups as weapon-holders, especially those members without a criminal record.¹⁷⁹

A report based on interviews with police officers includes one statement from an officer who suggests that very few criminals will dispose of a firearm after a shooting, except after a murder. The corollary is that this may be because criminals do not have enough money to switch firearms repeatedly after use.¹⁸⁰ One way in which firearms may be disposed of without taking a financial hit involves selling a used firearm on to other criminals, on occasion even within different networks. Moreover, this makes it harder for police to tie a weapon to a crime when different sides and networks have used it.¹⁸¹

Cases

A Scorpion vz 61 submachine gun was used in a lethal shooting incident in a restaurant in Vårväderstorget in 2015. This resulted in two young men being killed and three receiving life-threatening injuries. The Scorpion, one of the weapons used by the shooters, was the firearm that police traced back to reveal the Skåne network's trafficking activity. This firearm had come from Slovakia before being reactivated. In another instance concerning the Skåne network's trafficked firearms, an 18-year-old boy was kidnapped in Nacka and forced to call his mother and ask for money to pay off a supposed debt. During the incident the boy was shot three times in the leg before being left badly injured.¹⁸²

In the case of the arms-trafficker caught during Operation Bosphorus, who had been converting firearms, these firearms had been connected to 17 criminal cases at the time of the article's publication. Of these, most cases were found in Stockholm and included weapons found with silencers or suppressors, while some were connected to known violent criminals.¹⁸³

4



National policy and initiatives to combat illicit firearm trafficking and gun violence

4.1 Legislative and policy efforts

The Swedish government has acted previously on recommendations from the Swedish Police Authority to develop more stringent firearm penalties. This resulted in the introduction in 2018 of serious and extremely serious firearm offences with increased penalties for illegal firearm possession. The Swedish government has also released a 34-point plan for countering gang and firearm-related crimes, including, among other measures, expanding the Police Authority by 10,000 personnel by 2024. The plan also includes measures for more firearm offences to be processed as serious or extremely serious crimes and to increase opportunities to conduct house searches related to gangs (so as to prevent revenge shootings).

From 1 December 2020, revisions to the Swedish Firearms Act have changed the qualifying criteria in order to expand the number of seized firearms that would qualify as a serious crime and therefore receive a higher penalty. For example, 'any pistol or revolver in 9 mm parabellum, or in a calibre of equal/higher energy level, will now qualify.' Given that in 2019, firearms in 9 mm parabellum accounted for more than 20% of all firearms seized, this new provision is expected to have a significant impact.¹⁸⁴ Regarding the powers of Swedish Customs, it includes enhanced coercive capacities and the ability to stop suspected consignments. Measures are also included which aim to increase penalties related to the intimidation of juries and the abuse of justice.¹⁸⁵

Swedish police officers, along with staff from forensics, have worked closely with foreign law enforcement, specialist companies and forensics counterparts to develop more efficient methods for investigations, specifically those related to firearm and ballistics investigations. This is especially relevant in relation to long waiting times for forensic ballistics reporting.¹⁸⁶ Interviewees suggested that the waiting time for the results of firearm analysis has been reducing. New measures for reporting firearm analysis have also been introduced, with initial reports being used to ensure there is a level of analysis available for investigations and more extensive reports being available

on request. Nonetheless, interviewees highlighted the fact that the process was still taking far too long, while logistical problems and a lack of resources hampered analysis and investigations.¹⁸⁷

Overall, it is apparent to the authors that there has been little disincentive to deter firearm-traffickers legislatively and marginal evidence of any proactive or systematic approach in policy towards tackling firearm-trafficking. For example, as the conversion market has continued to flourish, no commensurate policy has been put in place to counter converters, such as requiring the extensive DNA swabbing of all converted or suspected converted firearms to enable the investigation of firearm-converters. According to interviewees, commonly converted firearms such as Ekols and Zorakis ought to be swab-tested as a matter of course to expose firearm-converters in Sweden and hinder the progress of this growing market. However, without proactively tackling firearm-trafficking as a policy, the NFC cannot justify the extra resources required for such analysis, especially against a backlog of cases; this consequently compounds the missed investigative opportunities inherent in the current law-enforcement approach.¹⁸⁸ As mentioned in the firearm-trafficking section, there has been no legislative movement towards strengthening penalties against smuggling gas guns or readily convertible firearms. The penalties for trafficking in live-firing guns also remain comparatively low.

Furthermore, interviewees indicated that the few cases where investigations did successfully trace the firearm supply chain – such as the Skåne network trafficking case – were the result of a serendipitous combination of investigators and prosecutors who, on the basis of their own initiative, took proactive measures to investigate the supply chains behind a firearm incident. These investigations provide exemplar cases of how firearm-trafficking investigations should work and highlight the intelligence and impact to be gained from such activities; but these remain ad hoc instances of individual initiatives.

Interviewees also highlighted the lack of a national framework, policy and vision for dealing effectively with firearm-trafficking in order to ‘turn off the tap’ of illicit firearms. In one incident, the authorities had a list of 200 names connected to illicitly purchased firearms, but no attempt was made to follow up on the purchasers.¹⁸⁹ At the police level, the focus is on tackling violent criminals and gang-related crime but there is no similar emphasis on tackling the weapons and associated weapons supply that enables their behaviour.¹⁹⁰ This has often been the result of priority demands to investigate shooting and lethal shooting incidents that take precedence over the investigation of the firearms themselves. This approach has to be viewed against the backdrop of an apparent lack of resources. Based on the evidence, it is clear that Sweden currently lacks a systematic and encompassing national approach to countering the illicit firearm trade.¹

¹ Experts stress that the knowledge and experience for tackling firearm-trafficking already exist within the authorities, because the drug trade is treated as a priority and investigations into drug supply and distribution provide a strong basis for the way in which firearm investigations should be conducted.

4.2 Special events: -Operation Rimfrost

In an attempt to break the spiral of conflict, Swedish police have used 'special events' to increase the level of resources into areas where violence is increasing. During such operations, all the Swedish police regions work within the framework of a national special event. Decision-making processes are framed around the use of the available resources and particular regional situations.

Operation Rimfrost was a special event launched in 2019; it ended in June 2020. It began in Malmö and was then extended nationally following the murder of a 15-year-old in a pizzeria in Malmö. The operation had four goals:

- 1) reduce the number of murders and explosions in the gang environment;
- 2) reduce the number of people active in the gang environment by neutralising gang criminals;
- 3) increase the seizures of firearms and explosives; and
- 4) increase public safety.¹⁹¹

The operation enabled the deployment of additional personnel from investigators, civilian specialists and additional front-line police officers in Malmö/Police Region South. These personnel came from other police regions across Sweden. The aim was to bring about greater levels of arrests and stronger investigations into cases.¹⁹² In addition to supplementing routine operations such as investigations, reconnaissance and uniformed work, the additional human resources would allow for targeted measures focused on specific areas or targets. One such measure was Operation Hagelstorm, an operation within the Rimfrost framework. Operation Hagelstorm activity in Malmö occurred over three days during which a number of raids were conducted targeting criminal groups; they involved more than 100 police and customs officers with the goal of seizing firearms, explosives and drugs.¹ The actions were focused on areas in Malmö that intelligence considered to have the highest probability of resulting in arms seizures and arrests. Thirty-nine firearms were seized during the operation.^{193 194}

While special event Rimfrost did result in the seizures of firearms, explosives and drugs, it has been a controversial operation that has come in for a fair amount of criticism. First, the number of shooting incidents in Sweden has not been noticeably affected. Notably, although the operation focused on seizing as many firearms as possible, it did not have the goal of building on firearm seizures through investigations to target firearm-trafficking.¹⁹⁵ Stefan Holgersson, a Swedish police officer and author of a report on Rimfrost, suggests it was an operation governed more by the need to appear to be doing something rather than one specifically guided by a coherent

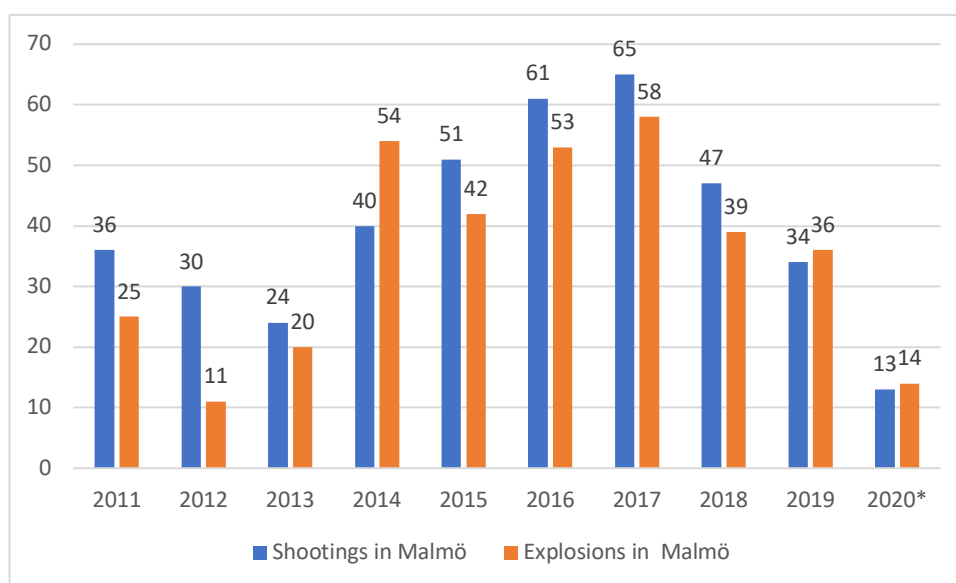
¹ It is reported that a goal of the raids was to inject panic into criminals, who would then make mistakes such as moving their firearms, which the police could then intercept.

strategy;¹ in the event, it was a collection of arrests and seizures that had little significant impact on gangs and violence. He went on to say that these results would be the usual outcome of routine police work. Holgersson also highlighted that the number of arrests and seizures in Malmö was linear before and after the beginning of Rimfrost. Moreover, providing additional resources in Malmö came at the cost of fewer resources in other parts of the country.¹⁹⁶

4.3 Sluta skjut programme in Malmö

As mentioned above, Malmö was one of the three metropolitan areas where shootings and the use of explosives had increased markedly, as is shown in Table 7. Between 2013 and 2014 a sharp increase was recorded in the number of shootings and cases involving explosions. This increase peaked in 2017 before the beginning of the current decrease in cases that have occurred concurrently with various police activities, including Sluta skjut or the ‘Stop Shooting’ pilot programme.

Figure 6: Shootings and explosions in Malmö



Source: Swedish Police data

The City of Malmö launched an initiative in February 2018 named ‘Stop Shooting’ with the objective of decreasing the level of firearm-related violence and dealing with OCGs. Although the pilot period has ended, the Malmö authorities are continuing the programme while the evaluation phase is being completed. The authorities are expected to continue the initiative after that. The programme was based on Group Violence

¹ For example, there was a list of 300 suspects to be arrested during an ‘action week’ when extra police resources were made available, yet there was a legal basis for coercive measures against only one of 300 individuals on the list.

Intervention (GVI), a method developed and used by US law enforcement in the 1990s in cities such as Chicago to tackle gang conflict. This approach involved applying pressure on whole groups associated with violence to make the use of violence or membership of a violent group untenable. It is a whole-city approach which combines the efforts of various authorities in the City of Malmö and committed citizens ultimately to make it more difficult for people to be involved in shootings and easier for them to access support in order to start a non-violent life.

The first six-months of the project were dedicated to a detailed mapping and analysis of the groups active in Malmö and their memberships, the lines of conflict, the dynamics of the violence and the alliances between groups. This (continuous) mapping provided the basis for police to pursue targeted and tailored pressure against groups and their members collectively. Whereas previously the police had targeted individuals, this would often result in temporary decreases in shootings, only to be undone once the individual was released from jail and conflict resumed. Instead, following GVI principles, whole groups could be targeted and punished instead. The mapping also included a review of violent incidents over the previous four years to establish the drivers of conflict. The drivers that the police found were not only conflict over the control of drugs, as expected, but also that over trivial incidents related to honour, jealousy, revenge and perceived violations.

The Malmö authorities conducted call-in meetings with representatives of the various groups, with one or two representatives from each group in attendance. These individuals were expected to relay the message to their groups. The individuals chosen to attend were those already under supervision by probation services and could therefore be compelled to attend. Four such meetings have taken place to date.¹ The meetings enable the city authorities to exchange information with the group representatives. During the meetings, various authorities give presentations, such as the police highlighting the consequences of violence and also informing the representatives that full pressure will be applied to the groups that use violence. In addition, social services have discussed and offered exit opportunities while medics have described the effects of being shot and the costs for other people who are deprioritised as a result of the shooting. A person from the community may, for example, describe the anguish of losing a son at a young age. The common theme throughout the call-ins is that society cares about the gang members, but they have to stop using violence, with emphasis placed on the 'moral voice of society'. It is made clear that the next violent act will result in the most violent groups being subjected to sustained intense pressure from the authorities and therefore deterring groups from using violence and being the first to resort to violence.

Moreover, after the call-ins there is an opportunity for group representatives to meet and speak to the representatives of the city authorities and community, who reaffirm the same messages of support and the need to end violence. These meetings have also

¹ None have taken place as at October 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

enabled trust to be built between Malmö's authorities and OCGs. The development of trust between the authorities and gang members has been an essential feature of the programme.

The authorities have also been conducting custom notification meetings at which individuals in groups are met with at home or in hospital following an incident and where similar messages from the call-ins are repeated. The representatives of the authorities usually comprise two police officers, one of whom knows the individual involved, and also social services personnel, who again offer the opportunity to leave the criminal life. These custom notification meetings are also by nature more personalised to the individual involved.

The programme therefore inverts the previous group dynamics of peer pressure, where the need to uphold individual and group honour and status leads to individuals feeling pressured into shooting, into a peer pressure that discourages acts of violence due to the collective pressure that will be applied to everyone in the group connected with the individual. In addition, it offers the individual a means of saving face by not using violence to avoid group punishment, ultimately encouraging resolution by non-violent means.

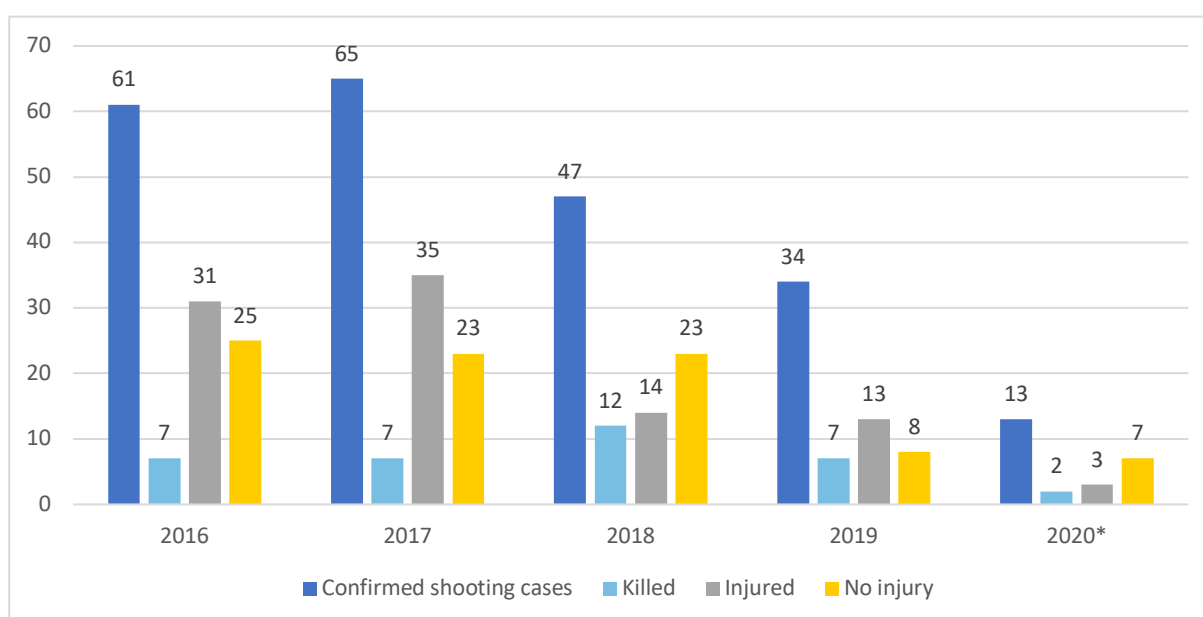
The coercive high-pressure tactics used by the Malmö authorities are designed to make membership of a violent group, connection to a violent individual, and ultimately the use of violence, untenable. All the city authorities collaborate to ensure that pressure is being tailored and targeted at the right groups. The police will use higher levels of controls, interceptions, arrests and any other available tools. For example, one article reveals how a 30-year-old gang member's bulletproof car was stopped so frequently by police that he reported it to the Swedish Parliamentary Ombudsman.¹⁹⁷ Concurrently with police activity, agencies such as the tax authorities can place individuals under greater scrutiny, prison probation and parole criteria can be made more stringent, and debt-collection can be targeted. These sanctions occur as part of routine work, with weekly shooting and intelligence reviews highlighting who to focus on and if there are any investigations linked to the individuals that can be leveraged and prioritised for maximum pressure.¹

The result has been that OCGs have found it difficult to operate and continue their use of violence. For example, an interview highlighted the case of two brothers in Malmö known for their use of explosives but who have found it nearly impossible to recruit anyone into their group because the pressure applied to them and their associates is known to be too intense. A number of individuals are also known to have accepted the help offered them to leave criminal life and start afresh. A significant factor behind criminal individuals taking the opportunity to leave has been the fear of losing their lives due to the brazen and unpredictable nature of violence.¹⁹⁸

¹ It should be noted that this programme is designed to target specifically the occurrence of violence, including firearm-related violence, and not to reduce firearm-trafficking. It is evident that attempts to deal with firearm-trafficking are few and far between.

The efforts to counteract firearm violence in Malmö have been noticeably successful, as shown in Figure 6. Since the initiation of the programme in 2018 the levels of shootings have decreased significantly year on year.¹ Although the evaluation of the pilot programme is ongoing and other programmes and activities were active concurrently, it is clear from the interviews and the continuation of the project after its pilot period that it has been a significant contributor. The previous high number of 65 shootings in 2017 that left seven dead and 35 injured has fallen to 13 confirmed shootings with two killed and three injured as at 30 September 2020. According to a report of August 2020, ten serious criminals had been convinced to relocate within Sweden and start new lives.^{199 200 201}

Figure 7: Shooting incidents in Malmö



Source: Swedish Police data

¹ In addition to shootings, the number of explosives has also decreased significantly over recent years. See Table 5.

5



Challenges for data collection on firearm trafficking and gun violence

The Swedish authorities keep good data records about the levels of shootings and the use of explosives in Sweden, with shooting incidents having to be verified. The National Council on Crime Prevention produces detailed and thorough analyses of the characteristics and trends relating to gun violence and the actors involved in firearm violence. Other authorities, such as the Stockholm Police, have similarly produced detailed analyses of firearm violence. The Swedish authorities also conduct thorough mapping and analysis of those involved in gangs and violence, including the lines of conflict and alliances. This enables a strong understanding of the use of firearm violence.

According to interviewees, a consistent problem with the collection and analysis of data pertaining to illicit firearm-trafficking and gun violence has been the lack of any organised and systematic approach at a national level focused on firearms. There is also little cooperation between the various authorities and a distinct lack of a national firearm-focused policy. There is also no joint information-sharing system between authorities: as a result, firearms data are spread across different databases and held in different formats without any methodological approach towards collecting, collating and analysing the data. The result is variable information that results in discrepancies.

For example, quarterly reports are produced in the NFC analysing recent patterns and these reports are passed up the chain of command in the NFC and to the Police Authority; however, organisationally there is very little feedback or demand for such analysis and no process for such information to be subsumed in a broader level analysis.

On the other hand, Swedish Customs are reported to have little understanding of what the police are seeing and doing regarding firearms and therefore cannot prepare for what to expect or what to be looking for. There is also a lack of structured communication and coordination between Customs and the NFC – instead, information is exchanged on an ad hoc basis, driven at the individual and not at the organisational level. The lack of a specific mandate to engage in such analysis and cooperation, compounded by resource restraints, has restricted the capacity to act – for example, by

the NFC – beyond individual-driven ad hoc initiatives.^{202 203} Instead, within the Swedish authorities, knowledge and expertise are siloed, disjointed and uncoordinated and attempts at bridging the gaps are often built on individual initiative and a personal commitment to doing the right thing.

One interviewee highlighted the need for geodata or metadata for seized firearms, cartridges or accompanying objects to be available throughout the whole process to allow for a better overall analysis of the situation.

Various interviewees highlighted the need for better record-keeping in firearm-dealers' registries. These are currently paper-based and inadequate for monitoring the flow of firearms between dealers. The only opportunity police have to gain insight into the movement of firearms between dealers is during annual inspections of their firearm registry; otherwise the police are notified only when a firearm enters private ownership. This offers an opportunity for diversion, which has previously been exploited. This problem should be resolved when dealers are moved onto an electronic registry system, which is currently in the pipeline; however, no one was able to provide details of the new registry system. In addition, the sale of ammunition and silencers or suppressors is also not required to be registered, although permits are required, which also creates the opportunity for diversion.^{204 205}

A common theme among interviewees was the need for a National Firearms Focal Point (FFP), a National Gun Crime Intelligence Centre or a variant such a facility. Such a facility could act as the hub for firearm intelligence analysis, drawing in firearm-relevant data from the various authorities and agencies working with firearms to enable analysis and an understanding of the illicit firearm scene and violence that is not currently conducted. Such a function would make possible the collation of firearm data that is otherwise disjointed. In addition, this function ought to be mandated with the vision, resources and expertise to conduct and coordinate thorough analyses of trends and patterns of firearm-trafficking and use across Sweden. Without a competent firearm body collecting, developing and disseminating information and intelligence in combination with best practices across all authorities, there is, and will probably continue to be, a lack of knowledge about firearms. This situation will serve to undermine investigations, prosecutions and attempts to deal with firearm-trafficking proactively. Moreover, such a facility and function should include the various firearm-facing authorities such as the Police and Customs, but also prosecutors. It should also have the capacity to conduct or coordinate investigations into firearms and firearm-trafficking nationally and internationally. The placement in a National FFP/National Gun Crime Intelligence Centre of prosecutors who can provide prosecutorial advice was highlighted as a possible way to bridge the gap between prosecutorial demands for firearm convictions and police investigations which have hampered prosecutions.

Ultimately, a national firearm-focused function would provide the emphasis, mandate and resources needed to tackle the problem of firearms themselves. Currently, Sweden lacks such a national function. Firearm violence is the product of both the dynamics of violence and the supply of firearms. The current Swedish approach largely ignores that latter driver, which is something a national firearms function could remedy.^{206 207 208}

6

Conclusions

Throughout the 2010s and particularly towards the end of the decade, Sweden experienced a qualitative and quantitative shift in gun violence. The levels of gun violence have risen drastically, while the acts of gun violence, driven by an increasingly callous criminal milieu, have become more brutal and unpredictable. Firearm violence and the use of explosives have grown to become the biggest security threat in Sweden.

One of the most significant factors behind the increased levels of gun violence has been a greater supply of firearms through trafficking. The trafficking in firearms in Sweden has become increasingly multifaceted, while the firearms that trafficking supplies have shifted towards higher-capacity weaponry such as automatic firearms and explosives in addition to a strong and steady stream of handguns. These weapons provide the perfect tools for initiating and proliferating criminal conflict.

The supply of trafficked firearms includes those smuggled from the Balkans; they form the mainstay of the illicit supply over the longer term. This supply chain is probably the result of the unique familial, cultural, lingual and social connections between criminals in Sweden. These criminals have both a great demand for firearms and explosive and the sources of them in the Balkans. These firearms have generally been smuggled through ant trafficking, which is a modus operandi that provides for the long-term continuous supply of firearms unless concerted action is taken to disrupt the supply and distribution networks.

The supply of illicit firearms diversified during the mid-2010s in Sweden. This opened new pathways for obtaining firearms and levelled the playing field by removing the need for criminal connections and the social connections mentioned previously. The purchasing of firearms online not only enabled anyone with access to the internet to tap into an illicit route to firearms but in effect reduced the time taken to obtain a firearm to the postage and delivery time. This simultaneous opening and flattening of the supply chain significantly reduced the threshold for obtaining firearms and, with it, reduced the threshold for gun violence.

These firearms are often converted or reactivated weapons, sourced from European arms dealers who exploit differences in legislation, before being modified in Sweden. Converted firearms pose one of the greatest challenges to combating the supply of illicit firearms. Unlike the patterns seen in many other European countries, blank-firers are trafficked to Sweden, where there is a capable and growing illicit firearm-conversion industry, before being converted. Converted firearms have become increasingly common, but because no significant attempts have been made at the legislative or operational level to clamp down on the supply, the problem looks set to continue unabated. Moreover, with the proliferation of conversion knowledge and expertise, Swedish converted firearms could pose a continuing and future challenge to regional security.

Firearm violence in Sweden has faced a structural change over the past couple of decades. Gun violence has shifted away from violence between perpetrators and victims who have close relationships, such as intimate partner violence, which had generally occurred in private property with a greater share of legal firearms. The quantitative share of such violence has reduced substantially in both absolute and relative terms. Instead, there has been a drastic shift towards, and an increase in, gun violence within the criminal milieu, where violence generally occurs in public settings and involves the use of illegal firearms.

Contemporary firearm violence within the criminal milieu has become increasingly callous and unpredictable. While conflicts between groups occur over control of the drug trade, the threshold for violence has largely collapsed, along with any notions of rules of the road, as gun violence and spiralling conflicts also occur over trivial matters. These OCGs and individuals often have little inhibition to resort to gun violence and display a blatant disregard for the danger this poses to third parties. As a result, Sweden has seen substantial and near-annual increases in firearm homicides and attempted homicides with firearms.

The ready supply of firearms, together with a substantial increase in the number of automatic weapons available, has certainly enabled and led to greater levels of gun violence. The combination of easy access to dangerous weapons among individuals and groups with a low threshold for violence has been a deadly cocktail. Moreover, there has been something of a miniature arms race between OCGs, who seek higher-capacity firearms and explosives in order to outgun their rivals. In the process, gun violence has become an established norm within the criminal milieu: resorting to violence is not only accepted but expected among groups and individuals who are concerned about their status and prestige. And the possession and use of firearms are necessary to maintain their position. Against this backdrop, criminals often have a constant fear of being shot and suspect others of planning to shoot them, which results in pre-emptive shootings and a constant lowering of the threshold to violence.

As the scope and nature of firearm-trafficking and violence have changed and increased, counter-measures in Sweden have largely failed to keep pace. This is seen most starkly in the failure to control the supply of converted firearms. There is a severe lack of vision, policy and framework at the national level to target firearm-trafficking.

Swedish legislation has arguably incentivised the domestic conversion of firearms owing to the very low penalties in place for trafficking in unconverted blank-firers. While there have been attempts by some authorities to close the gap, these have failed to gain traction. This one example is perhaps indicative of Sweden's lacklustre approach to tackling arms trafficking. There have been and continue to be movements and initiatives from inside authorities, often based on individual initiative, to focus on and help bring the firearm supply problem under control. These initiatives have not been matched at the policy level or received sufficient support and, therefore, the major problem of illicit firearm-trafficking continues unabated. Overall, Swedish efforts to bring the illicit supply of firearms under control can be described as non-existent.

Swedish efforts have instead focused on reducing firearm violence by focusing on the gangs engaged in the violence. These measures can be described as producing a mixed bag of results. The recent national operation named Special Event Rimfrost had been proposed as a means of combatting and reducing gun violence while at the same time restoring security. The operation has, however, been controversial and does not appear to have had any significant impact on firearm violence.

A notable success has been Project 'Stop Shooting' or Sluta skjut in Malmö. The project, based on group violence intervention, has managed to create a deterrence of violence by making the lives of criminals in targeted groups untenable. The result has been a significant reduction in the levels of shootings, including firearm homicides, and the use of explosives since the start of the programme. And even though evaluations of the programme have not yet been completed, it is expected that the programme will continue.

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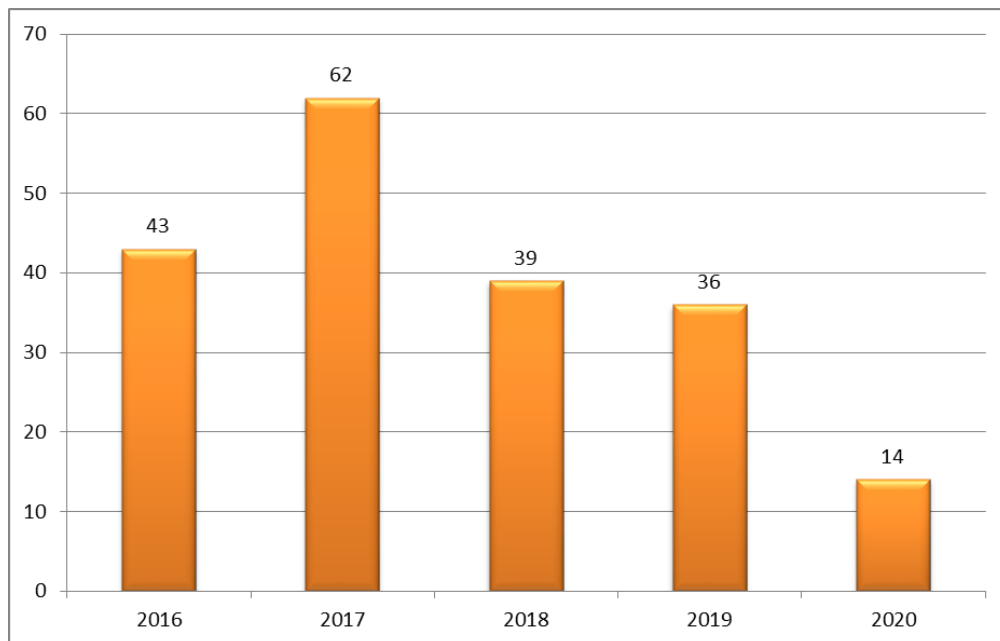
Annexure

Table 11: Illegal firearm possession cases, of which some are serious/extremely serious

Firearms law	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total violations (g kap. 1–2 §)	4,844	4,839	4,797	4,619	5,176	5,801	5,751	6,460	6,678	7,427
Illegal possession of a handgun/pistol	909	921	986	898	1,037	1,138	1,178	1,266	2,268	2,494
of which serious/ extremely serious crime								20	1,188	1,452
Illegal possession of a hunting weapon	391	351	361	301	364	411	406	435	555	573
of which serious/extremely serious crime								6	102	119
Illegal possession of another type of weapon	814	790	748	718	713	805	751	749	2,749	2,199
of which serious/extremely serious crime								3	283	337
Other violations of the weapons law	2,730	2,777	2,702	2,702	3,062	3,447	3,416	4,004	1,025	2,118

Source: Statistics Database of reported crimes – Brå

Figure 8: Annual levels of confirmed explosions in Malmö



Source: Data provided by Swedish Police

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