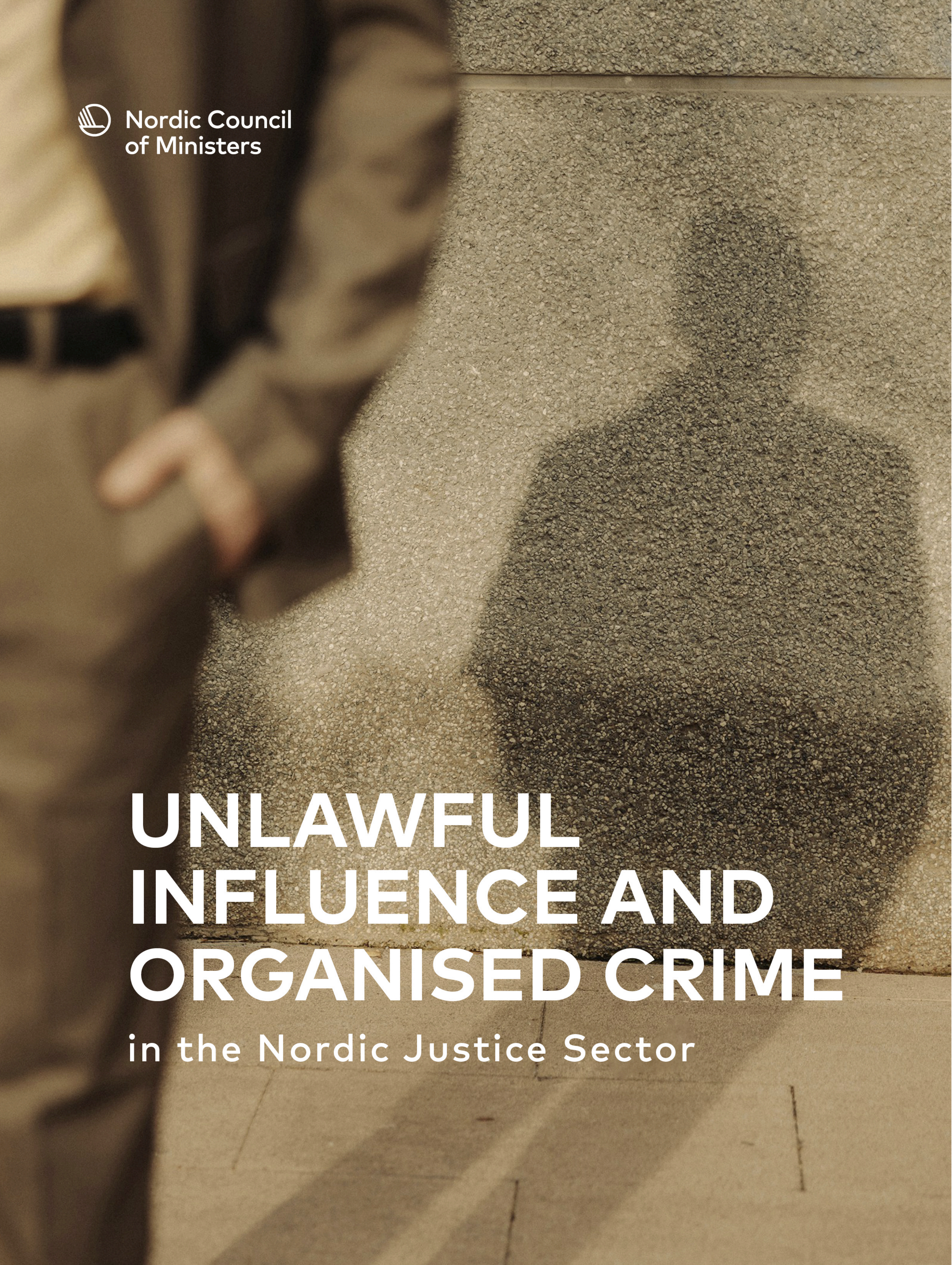

Nordic Council of Ministers

# UNLAWFUL INFLUENCE AND ORGANISED CRIME

## in the Nordic Justice Sector

# Contents

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# Foreword

There is little research-based information available in Finland and around the world on how criminals seek to unlawfully influence the authorities. Inappropriate attempts to exert influence include threats, violence, bribery, extortion and pressure on public officials themselves, their close relatives or their property.

Inappropriate influence on the authorities was brought up in the working group discussions on updating Finland's strategy to combat organised crime, so it was decided to investigate the matter and intervene if necessary. In the Finnish strategy and action plan for combating organised crime adopted by the government, measure 13 promoting its objectives is: “Inappropriate influence and prevention against the authorities will be investigated.” Any needs for change arising from this report will be assessed.

Funding for this study was received from the Nordic Council of Ministers and was motivated by a joint Nordic study on the topic. The project was coordinated by the Institute of Criminology and Legal Policy (KRIMO) with support from the Police University College in Finland. I would like to publicly thank them for the good work done to investigate this difficult problem.

Mika Junninen
Senior Advisor, Ministry of Justice, Finland
Chair of the steering group

# Summary


This report maps the existing knowledge about unlawful influence by organised crime in the justice sector in the Nordic countries, as well as the preventive measures implemented. The report is based on previous research and official reports on unlawful influence, supplemented by crime statistics and media coverage, as well as government proposals and official documents. The lack of systematic data and research on the topic (with Sweden as the exception) makes it difficult to determine how widespread the phenomenon is.

In Sweden, official reports and research have documented a variety of unlawful influence by organised crime within the justice sector. In the other Nordic countries, there are isolated examples of unlawful influence in the justice sector. Looking at offences against public officials, the reported level has increased somewhat in all Nordic countries except Sweden during the last decade. The issue of nonreporting is however estimated to be significant.

Unlawful influence and corruption are described to be increasingly important modes of operation for organised crime in Europe. Even if this development is not equally visible in all Nordic countries, it is likely present. As often highlighted, organised crime employs sophisticated and subtle methods that are difficult to detect.

Prevention measures implemented in the Nordic countries are both proactive and reactive. The proactive measures aim to increase resilience to unlawful influence, by raising awareness and strengthening operational practices in organisations. The reactive measures are also to a large degree concentrated in organisations, such as protocols for internal handling and support when unlawful influence has occurred. Formal responses, including reporting influence attempts to the police and the subsequent criminal process and punishment are also central reactive measures.

Better protection for public officials and harsher punishments for crimes targeting them have been implemented or discussed in several Nordic countries in recent years. This legislation increasingly identifies certain professional groups (police, prison and probation staff, customs officers, and rescue and ambulance personnel) as particularly important, while considering organised crime as an aggravating factor.

The Swedish focus on raising awareness and building organisational robustness to address the problem is a good example of prevention. Efforts to combat unlawful influence could further be strengthened by linking them more closely with anti-corruption initiatives. At the same time, prevention measures must be carefully considered to balance personal integrity with the public interest, so as not to undermine the openness and trust that are hallmarks of Nordic society.

Unlawful influence on authorities in the justice system poses a critical threat to the functioning of the rule of law and democracy, especially if such activities expand. In a time when organised crime is increasingly entrenched in societal structures, it is likely that questions of unlawful influence will become more pressing. A clear and articulated way of handling these is therefore important.

# 1. Introduction

In recent years there has been a shift in the nature of organised crime in the Nordic countries. Besides making large profits from drug trade, scams and other serious crimes, organised crime undermines the very foundations of society through illicit proceeds, corruption and violence. Furthermore, contemporary organised criminals can serve as proxies for hybrid influencing, ranging from sabotage of critical infrastructure to spreading disinformation (Europol, 2025; Muttilainen et al., 2025).

At the European level, is it reported that organised crime is increasingly destabilising society, with much of it occurring online and being driven by AI and other emerging technologies (Europol, 2025). European organised crime is increasingly utilising legal corporate structures to professionalise criminal activity, infiltrating the public sector and utilising public funds (Europol, 2025; GI-TOC, 2025).

Both Swedish and Norwegian authorities have in recent years framed organised crime as "system-threatening" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2025; Politiet, 2025), a label applied to actors from organised criminal groups, other criminal networks and violent extremist environments. What these actors have in common is that they possess intent and capability to harm or challenge the existing system, in particular the functioning of society, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights (Brå, 2025c; Gunnarson, 2023). System-threatening activity is referred to as "antagonistic threats" (e.g. Brå, 2025c), meaning "deliberately caused illegal and hostile threats" against processes, functions and structures in a society (Ekwall, 2009, p. 3).

The aforementioned changes in organised crime have aroused interest in how to secure society and public institutions from such interference. This report concentrates on one aspect within the changing landscape of organised crime, namely the unlawful influence it exerts on institutions in the justice sector.

The aim of this report is to map existing knowledge about unlawful influence by organised crime, such as threats, violence and corruption attempts, on the justice sector in the Nordic countries, as well as the preventive measures that have been implemented. The report has been produced in the project "Organised crime and undue influence: mapping Nordic knowledge", funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The project was coordinated by the Institute of Criminology and Legal Policy (KRIMO) at the University of Helsinki, in collaboration with the Finnish Police University College (POLAMK), which participated in the project planning, data analysis and reporting.[1] Moreover, Nordic researchers in the field have contributed

1. KRIMO has had overall responsibility for the project and the report (Emma Villman and Markus Kaakinen), while POLAMK, represented by Vesa Muttilainen and Pirjo Jukarainen, contributed to the project design, drafted Chapter 6, and reviewed the report. Villman held primary responsibility for data collection and reporting, and Muttilainen contributed in the reporting and commenting roles. Kaakinen acted in a supervisory and commenting capacity, and Jukarainen participated in a commenting role. Both organizations were involved in a previous project (see Muttilainen et al., 2025), and this report represents, in part, a continuation of that work.

valuably to the project by peer-reviewing the country-specific sections.[2] As part of the project, a Nordic online network seminar with researchers and ministry officials working in the field, as well as an open final webinar, were held to facilitate knowledge-sharing on the topic across the Nordic countries.

The data collection for this report has been explorative. We conducted exploratory free-word database searches and web searches and screened webpages of Nordic governments and justice authorities for information relevant to the topic. The systematic aspect of the approach has involved identifying information related to the police, the prison and probation service, and the courts in all countries. Nordic justice authorities and researchers have contributed by providing information and directing us to relevant research for this report. The data sources used are presented at the beginning of each chapter. As most of the material used in this report is in Nordic languages, all translations are the authors' own.

The first part of the report following this introduction outlines what is meant by *unlawful influence* (chapter 2), and the current state of knowledge concerning unlawful influence in the justice sector in the five Nordic countries (chapter 3–7). These chapters draw on previous research and reports on unlawful influence, supplemented by media coverage and statistics on reported offences. Systematic research specifically studying unlawful influence exists only for Sweden, while in the other countries understanding of the phenomenon relies on less precise indicators. As a result, the country-specific chapters vary in both content and length.

Unlawful influence has received relatively little research. In this report, some themes may therefore rely on information from only one or a few sources. Existing studies are primarily based on victim surveys, interviews with victims or secondary data sources such as court cases. These limitations mean that both current research and this report provide only a limited perspective of the overall phenomenon. Nonetheless, this report provides a solid foundation for further investigation.

Within the justice sector, unlawful influence on the police have received the greatest attention in research and reports across the Nordic countries. Along with the prison and probation services, these two authorities are examined separately for each country. By contrast, to date there has been relatively little focus on prosecutors and courts. These authorities are therefore included only where relevant information is available.

In the second part of the report (chapter 8) strategies adopted in the different Nordic countries to counter unlawful influence are reviewed. This part is based on analyses of selected government proposals and other official documents. Finally, the report ends with a presentation of the key findings and conclusions in chapter 9.

2. A warm thank you to Anna Horgby, Johanna Skinnari, Gunnar Thomassen, Kim Moeller, and Ólafur Örn Bragason for comments on parts of the manuscript.

# 2. Defining unlawful influence

## 2.1. What is unlawful influence?

Unlawful influence is a collective term for harassment, threats, violence, vandalism, improper offers, improper relationships, or attempts at corruption aimed at overriding democratically established rules (Brå, 2005, 2016b). The influence can be directed at a large array of actors, such as public administration, businesses, elected officials and journalists. In public administration, unlawful influence refers to actions carried out by an external actor with the aim of influencing a public official into not performing their duties or carrying them out incorrectly. The influence can also be directed at the family or other close associates of the public official. The influence can occur either through actions that are criminal or illegal (*unlawful influence*), or through actions that are merely improper (*undue influence*) (Brå, 2016b).

According to Brå (2025b, p. 11), for an act to be considered unlawful influence, it must be intended to pressure an employee into breaking rules, altering decisions or otherwise acting against the interests of the organisation. In this view, all threat and violence against public officials is serious, but does not necessarily constitute unlawful influence. The influence does, however, not need to be successful, that is, the official does not need to be influenced for it to qualify as unlawful influence.

Legally, however, the concept is approached somewhat differently. Unlawful influence is not a defined legal term in criminal law in the Nordic countries and must therefore be addressed through other criminal provisions, for example as offences against public officials. However, all forms of threats and violence against public officials are considered as attempts to influence the actions of an official (for Finland, see Finnish Government, 2025). In this context, the question of intent is not used as a determining factor.

Unlawful influence constitutes a continuum of acts that differ in their degree of seriousness. A particularly serious form of unlawful influence is influence through insiders, infiltrators or professional enablers. These individuals use their skills and expertise, facilities, vehicles or authority of their employer or client, to assist individuals in organised crime (Brå, 2024; Gunnarson, 2023). Infiltration attempts are often subtle and not even necessarily illegal, and these are rarely reported to the police and therefore seldom addressed within the justice system (Brå, 2025b). Often, these influencing actions are carried out within legal business structures, which makes them difficult to trace and prevent. Furthermore, as countries have different definitions of suspicious actions it is challenging to assess the risks (OECD, 2021).

The latest handbook on unlawful influence by Brå (2025b, pp. 33–36), highlights that certain professional roles and tasks are particularly vulnerable to infiltration. These include:

- Employees making decisions affecting people's life situations
- Employees working in areas where criminal networks or extremist groups are active
- Employees in supportive and therapeutic roles where regular, long-term contact is central to the work
- Employees that have access to sensitive information of interest to criminal networks
- Employees working alone, particularly in situations involving single case management, solo inspections or working alone in e.g. youth centres without colleagues nearby
- Employees in smaller organisations, as the risk of friendship-based corruption or other questionable relationships may be higher due to shorter geographic and social distances between officials and residents/users
- Employees with limited experience, dissatisfaction with the work and private or social vulnerability

Unlawful influence has effects on the individual, organisational and societal level. At the individual level, unlawful influence contributes to unsafe work environments, with those exposed to threats and harassment experiencing, for example, stress and anxiety (Brå, 2025c; Riksrevisionen, 2022). The effect is particularly pronounced when the influencing actor possesses a high capacity for violence (Brå, 2016b, 2025c). At an organisational level, the consequences include the risk of employees refraining from making decisions or carrying out tasks due to fear of negative repercussions, incorrect decisions, and difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff in occupations particularly exposed to influence (Brå, 2016b; 2025c; see also Gunnarson, 2023). At societal level, the trust and functioning of public institutions, and in the end democracy, is at stake if they can be unlawfully influenced.

## 2.2. Unlawful influence from organised crime

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the threat of unlawful influence from organised crime in the Nordic countries. The evolution of organised criminal networks together with technological advancements, particularly those that make it easier to contact authorities and individual employees, have contributed to increased attention to this issue (SOU 2024: 1). At least in Sweden, there have been indications that organised crime is engaging in unlawful influence to an increasing extent (Polismyndigheten, 2023).

A defining feature of the unlawful influence by organised crime is its capacity for violence, its *intimidation capital*. This means that such groups can employ subtle methods that do not involve explicit threats or direct violence, making attempts at influence more difficult to detect and address (Brå, 2025c; NOU 2020:4). It has moreover been shown that compared to other actors attempting to influence public officials, individuals involved in organised crime have a more strategic approach (Brå, 2016b).

Influencing public officials is one form of *criminal governance* exercised by criminal groups, alongside generating fear in the community, coercing legitimate businesses, controlling markets and engaging in community activities. However, international research has shown that only a share of gangs manage to evolve from fear-inducing groups into more complex organisations engaged in criminal governance (Campana et al., 2025). Criminal groups further have varying degrees of willingness and ability to influence administration and politics. Some seek to keep low profile to avoid confrontation with state authorities while others display a clearer ambition and capability to engage with administration and politics. Their strategies can range from open confrontation to consensus and cooperation (Gunnarson, 2023, p. 10).

Gunnarsson (2023, pp. 39–44) argues, in the case of Sweden, that the local level of government is more vulnerable to influence than the national level. In Sweden, as in the other Nordic countries, there is a distribution of extensive welfare resources at the local level, alongside numerous institutional reforms implemented in recent decades and weak municipal auditing and transparency.

## 2.3. What differs unlawful influence from corruption?

Unlawful influence and corruption are closely related and partially overlapping concepts; corruption can be understood as a specific form of unlawful influence (Brå, 2017). Corruption is often defined as "the abuse of entrusted power for personal gain" (Transparency International, 2026). However, in research, a broader understanding of the phenomena is often employed. This includes "noble cause corruption" in which the focus is on acts "committed in the name of good ends" (Crank & Caldero, 2000, p. 2, see also Kleinig, 1996). Thus, the motivation behind corruption is not always personal gain.

This broader understanding of corruption aligns well with the concept of unlawful influence. For example activities like protection of illegal activities or "fixing" by manipulating the criminal justice system (Roebuck & Barker, 1974) might be defined as corruption as well as unlawful influence. While the study of unlawful influence often has focused on the person being influenced/victimised, corruption research typically concentrates on individuals who knowingly (or unknowingly) engage in improper actions.

The level of corruption in the Nordic countries has generally been described as modest. According to Transparency International's population surveys (2021), very few people in the Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland) report having had to pay bribes (<1%), a rate much lower than in other European countries. Also the use of personal connections to receive a service is somewhat lower than in other European countries (Transparency International, 2021). In Finland, structural corruption in its various forms have perceived to be the most common form of corruption, and this is most likely the case also in other Nordic countries (see Ollus & Muttilainen, 2021). Since much of the literature on corruption is relevant for understanding unlawful influence, appropriate parts of it have been included in this report. For instance, police corruption is currently receiving increasing research attention in the Nordics (Thomassen & Strype, 2024), and is relevant to this report.

## 2.4. Unlawful influence in the justice sector

This report focuses on unlawful influence in the justice sector, meaning the part of public administration that involves the exercise of legal authority, namely the police, the prosecution authority, the courts and the prison and probation services. Control authorities such as the border and coast guard, customs and the tax agency are also affected by unlawful influence. However, these institutions fall outside the scope of this report, primarily due to the limited availability of information and research on them, as well as this project's limited resources.

Swedish studies have found that especially the police authority, prison and probation service, customs, and prosecution authority are exposed to unlawful influence by organised crime (Brå, 2016b). These agencies are directly involved in disrupting organised crime, and individuals or networks trying to protect their operations therefore target them strategically.

At the same time, it is arguably easier for actors within the justice sector than other public authorities to link an act of influence to organised crime, as they have access to information on criminal records and affiliations with criminal groups (Brå, 2016b). Yet it can still often be hard to distinguish persons involved in organised crime.

Threats against witnesses in court cases have been highlighted as a concern in several Nordic countries (Justitsministeriet, 2017b, 2023; SOU 2023:67). This report primarily focuses on unlawful influence targeting public institutions and officials, and witnesses receive less attention. Nevertheless, their role remains central to understanding unlawful influence within the justice sector.

Drawing empirical boundaries between unlawful, undue, unethical and inappropriate influence is difficult. Table 1 provides examples of what undue and unlawful influence can look like. All these examples are serious, but not all are necessarily illegal. In this report, when inappropriate influence targets public officials in the justice sector, it is regarded as unlawful influence. Thus, we primarily refer to unlawful influence, even when the act itself is not necessarily criminalised.

**Table 1.** Examples of inappropriate influence by target and type

| Type of influence by organised crime | Target: The justice sector (e.g., prison officer) | Target: Other actors (e.g., journalist) |
|---|---|---|
| Undue or unethical influence | Subtle pressure, e.g. by implying to offer a prison officer protection in exchange for not reporting a witnessed narcotics violation | Subtle pressure, e.g., implying to a journalist that the gang knows where they live |
| Unlawful influence | Threatening a prison officer with death if they report a witnessed narcotics violation | Attempting to influence a journalist by threatening to take their life if they do not stop current reporting |

Studying unlawful influence within the judicial authorities is important as they are cornerstones of the legal system and the state's use of power, and it must be ensured that they operate independently and impartially. Maintaining public trust in justice institutions is essential in a democracy. Next, the report examines the characteristics of unlawful influence across the five Nordic countries.

# 3. Unlawful influence in the Swedish justice sector

This chapter is based on several research studies on unlawful influence, including victim surveys, interview studies and a research overview, as well as a study on workplace-related violence in Sweden. Additionally, two audit reports from the Swedish National Audit Office have been used. Reports from government agencies, including the police, the prison and probation service, the courts administration, the parliamentary ombudsman and the joint cooperation of agencies against organised crime, were also incorporated. Furthermore, a Swedish government official report, the National Security Strategy and the national strategy against organised crime were utilised, along with statistics on reported offences against public officials. Finally, some media coverage, particularly on more recent phenomena not yet examined in research, was included.

## 3.1. Unlawful influence in Sweden

The Swedish Crime Prevention Council (Brå) has been pioneering in the research concerning unlawful influence. It started with a survey on unlawful influence directed public servants in 2005, where the concept of *unlawful influence* (otillåten påverkan) was coined (Brå, 2005). This survey found that 12% of the officials in the survey (including officials from coastguard, customs, tax administration, police, court and the enforcement agency, N=4,500) had been exposed to unlawful influence in the form of serious harassment, threats or violence in the last 1.5 years. Organised criminal groups were reported to be responsible for one quarter of the incidents of unlawful influence (Brå, 2005). In a similar but much larger study (N=45,500) conducted in 2015 (Brå, 2016b), the level of unlawful influence seemed to have increased, but more importantly there were big differences in which authorities and public officials were subject to this. People involved in organised crime seemed to be primarily interested in influencing officials at the customs, police authority, prosecution authority and prison and probation service. Besides these two studies, Brå studied unlawful influence on municipal employees and governance (Brå, 2025c), elected representatives (Brå, 2023), police employees (Brå, 2020), the sports sector (Brå, 2018), the Swedish Migration Agency (Brå, 2016a), companies (Brå, 2012) public procurement (Brå, 2009a), and crime victims and witnesses (Brå, 2008). Relatedly, Brå researched cultures of silence (Brå, 2019), threats and violence (Brå, 2015), corruption in the Swedish public sector (Brå, 2014) and the police's encounter with organised crime (Brå, 2009b).

The latest study from Brå (2025c) concludes that organised criminal groups are interested in influencing municipal employees, such as social services. There are special vulnerabilities on the municipal level, such as proximity between the influencer and victims, that increase the risk of both victimisation and successful influence (see also Gunnarson, 2023). Likewise, the Swedish enforcement authority, migration agency, social insurance agency and tax agency have been mentioned as important targets for unlawful influence by organised crime. It has been pointed out that as efforts to combat organised crime in Sweden today include an increasing range of authorities, it is likely to provoke further violence, threats and harassment directed at staff in these institutions (SOU 2024: 1).

### Characteristics of unlawful influence by organised crime

Altogether, the studies from Brå paint a picture of unlawful influence by organised crime that is more strategic compared to other types of influence, and often comes in subtle forms that are not criminal offences, or that are hard to prove (Brå, 2009b, 2016b, 2025c). Some traits however stand out as typical for unlawful influence by organised crime: threatening behaviour, threats based on criminal connections, and by outnumbering single victims (Brå, 2016b, 2025c). Four distinctive features of unlawful influence by organised crime are recognised (Brå, 2016b, pp. 122–124):

1. **Legal awareness and targeting:**
   The individuals exerting influence often have strong legal knowledge, enabling them to act in ways that are difficult to prosecute. They also tend to have detailed information about the official they are trying to influence. This influence may be subtle, testing whether a public servant is open to invitations – potentially recruiting them as an insider.
2. **Subtle intimidation:**
   The influence may involve subtle signals intended to show the official that they are being watched or monitored.
3. **Disruption ("making a scene"):**
   Tactics may include creating disturbances with the goal of interfering with official duties, such as causing disorder during court proceedings.
4. **Personal targeting:**
   The public servant may be held personally accountable for decisions or actions, with attempts made to influence them by attacking their private life.

Primarily very concrete incidents, such as direct threats or acts of violence, ideally witnessed by other public officials, result in convictions for threats or violence against public servants (Brå, 2016b). Actors who use more subtle forms of threats and harassment are rarely investigated. As shown in several studies, these more subtle forms of influence are just as commonly used by organised criminal groups (Brå, 2005, 2009a; Gunnarson, 2023; Riksrevisionen, 2022).

## How unlawful influence occurs

In Sweden, unlawful influence is regarded as a national security issue. The latest National Security Strategy notes that infiltration, corruption, and threats or unlawful influence are growing and serious threats to the integrity of public institutions and the business sector (Skr. 2023/24:163). Criminal networks' attempts to build parallel societal structures and to challenge the state's monopoly on power and the use of force in certain parts of the country are considered a threat to national security.

Several Swedish government agencies are cooperating in a joint initiative against organised crime (the OB initiative) and publish a biannual situation report on organised crime in Sweden. In the latest report (Polismyndigheten, 2025b), unlawful influence is understood as part of the criminal infrastructure that enables organised crime and affects democratic decision-making. As serious examples of unlawful influence, the report mentions cases where insiders within law enforcement authorities have shared information with criminal actors, as well as indications that unlawful influence occurs through connections between criminal actors and individuals working in public authorities – although the report does not specify which authorities. An older situation report assessed that more advanced forms of unlawful influence are likely to become more common, as well as threats and assaults perpetrated by minors (Polismyndigheten, 2023).

A survey by the Swedish National Audit Office across a range of public authorities found that in 13% of the reported incidents involving harassment, threats or violence, the perpetrators were linked to organised crime (Riksrevisionen, 2022). Influence associated with organised crime was typically more systematic and calculated in nature, and often more serious and difficult to manage. According to the survey, the police authority and the Swedish National Board of Institutional Care were the public institutions most frequently exposed to harassment, threats and violence, while the enforcement authority, the social insurance agency, and the inspection activities of the national food agency were the main targets of more systematic influence connected to organised crime.

## Reported offence against public officials

Interestingly, and somewhat contrary to what the abovementioned surveys and reports on unlawful influence suggest, there has not been any clear increase in reported offences against public officials in Sweden over the past decade, with the exception of reported threats (see Figure 1). Violence against public officials (including police and public order officers) has decreased over the past decade, from about 4,600 to 3,600 incidents per year, while threats against public officials have increased from approximately 5,500 to 6,500 annually. These figures include all reported offences and are not limited to organised crime. This trend concerns both the number of reported and convicted cases of threats and violence against public officials (Brå, 2025a, 2025d), as well as the work environment authority's statistics on reported workplace accidents caused by threats and violence (Riksrevisionen, 2022). It is noteworthy that there has not been any increase in violence, given the large focus on the topic in Sweden. What this statistic of reported cases confirms, however, is that threats are much more prevalent than violent acts, which previous surveys have suggested, and that these have increased more than violent acts during the last decade.

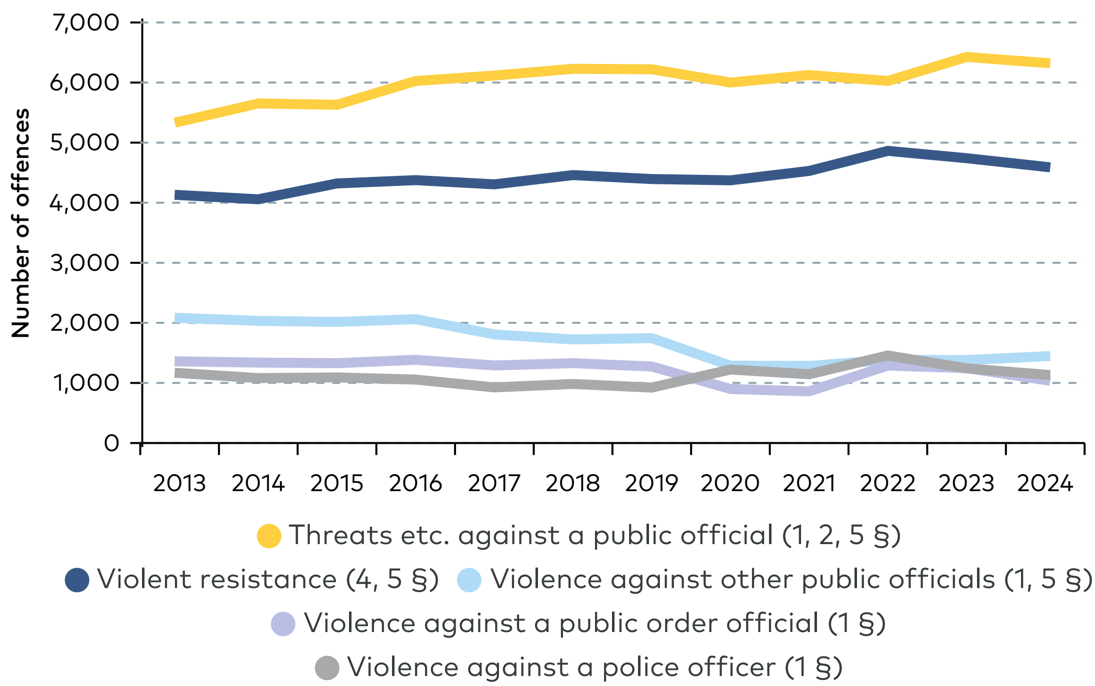


**Figure 1.** Reported offences against public authorities in Sweden, 2013–2024
Source: Brå (2025a).

A possible reason for the perceived rise in harassment, threats and violence is the increased awareness of such incidents. Incidents which previously would not have been regarded as threats or harassment are now seen as such (Riksrevisionen, 2022; Wikman & Rickfors, 2017). The statistics show that this is not reflected in reporting to the police, which suggests that a lot of events are not considered illegal acts or left unreported. Moreover, only a small proportion of reported cases results in prosecution: out of a total of 9,958 reported cases of violence and threats against public officials, only 1,313 resulted in prosecution in 2024 (Brå, 2025a, 2025d).

## Unreported unlawful influence

Leaving unlawful influence unreported appears to be common in Sweden. A study by the police authority estimated that 62% of those subjected to unlawful influence had not reported the incident (Projekt Medarbetarskydd, referenced in SOU 2024: 1, p. 78). The mentioned reasons for not reporting are many (Brå, 2025c, pp. 75–78; Riksrevisionen, 2022, p. 60):

- the legislation is insufficient or unclear, uncertainty about whether certain types of actions are criminal or not
- the actions are considered as part of the job
- not wanting to break the trust or relationship with the client with whom they must continue to work
- reporting is not considered to lead to any result, it may even worsen the situation
- preliminary investigations are often discontinued – particularly in cases involving threats and harassment committed online
- not wanting, or daring, to appear in court as private individuals in a trial
- the resulting penalties are considered too lenient to deter serious criminals
- not feeling enough support from the authority they work for

In some authorities, however, such as the Swedish Enforcement Authority, most cases of violence, threats and harassment are in fact reported (Riksrevisionen, 2022).

An example of the impact that criminalisation can have on reporting levels is the crime of insulting a public official in Sweden, introduced in 2025. During its first three months in effect, the law was actively applied, with 710 reported offences (SVT Nyheter, 2025). This contrasts with the period before the law, when insults against public officials were not covered by specific legislation, and the number of individuals prosecuted for insults decreased from 147 in 2011 to 40 in 2021[3] (Riksrevisionen, 2022). The new law has sparked public debate, with discussions concerning its necessity and what public officials are expected to tolerate. So far, its application has shown that more severe insults (such as "I wish your children dead") have resulted in convictions, whereas insults perceived as less serious (such as calling police officers "whores") have been dismissed (SVT Nyheter, 2025).

## Insiders

Research and government agency reports have identified the use of insiders as a distinct and serious form of unlawful influence exerted by organised crime (Brå, 2014, 2024; Polismyndigheten, 2025b). Beyond Brå's 2024 report, there is currently

3. Total figures, not limited to public officials, although the majority of cases involved the police.

little additional research specifically addressing the use of insiders. According to this report, criminal networks use insiders or enablers, within public and private organisations to facilitate criminal activities, avoid detection, reduce or avoid criminal penalties or other sanctions, and launder proceeds of crime through legal sectors.

Brå (2024) notes that the justice system is particularly exposed to insiders, primarily regarding exchange of information between insiders and criminal networks. Besides the justice system, insiders have been identified within several other government agencies, municipalities, the banking and finance sector, real estate agencies, company formation services, accounting and bookkeeping firms, legal services, the security and surveillance industry, and the transport sector. The use of insiders often appears to be a strategic response to increased control and investigative efforts by authorities and municipalities, and a way for criminal networks to expand and diversify their illegal activities.

According to Brå's study (2024), insiders were often individuals that the person recruiting already knew; family members, relatives, childhood friends or someone who held positions or jobs within legal society that could be useful. The criminal networks' use of intimidation and coercive power makes it difficult for individuals to refuse once they have been drawn in as insiders. Moreover, the study showed that employers often find it challenging to detect and investigate insider activity.

## 3.2. The police

Police officers are the occupational group most frequently subjected to violence, threats and unlawful influence. According to a study conducted in 2016, a total of 40% of police employees reported being subjected to one or more attempts at influence during the past 18 months (Brå, 2020). The factor that most affected the risk of exposure was the person's professional role, especially for those working as frontline police officers. According to the study, influence clearly had an impact on the behaviour of police employees. It was common for those affected to change their behaviour in their private lives as a result of the influence, but also to change or leave their job. Most report having no larger consequences due to the attempted influence, but there are still employees that face consequences, such as hesitating before taking action or avoiding work tasks.

In 2019, the police internally audited their management of risks related to unlawful influence (Internrevisionen, 2019). The report identifies a normalisation process, in which employees are forced to tolerate and accept subtle threats in the workplace. This normalisation primarily concerns undue influence and is described as a constant wear-and-tear in daily work. The report refers to a survey conducted by the police authority in 2018 (as a part of Projekt Medarbetarskydd), which showed that one in four police employees had been subjected to attempts at influence during the past year. Among frontline police officers, the figure was as high as seven in ten. The report further indicated that new officers appear to be more exposed than experienced ones, as they are "tested" by criminals.

The Swedish police regularly monitor the prevalence of unlawful influence through their internal survey on employee safety. This survey also shows that the most vulnerable group is frontline personnel, with 60% of frontline police officers reporting that they have been subjected to unlawful or undue influence (Polisen, 2024). According to the survey conducted in 2024 were organised criminal networks responsible for 63% of the attempts of unlawful influence. Looking at the number of reported offences of violence against police officers, the numbers fluctuated somewhat over the past decade, but without any drastic increase (see Figure 1).

Cases of insider activity or corruption within the Swedish police have also been reported in recent years. Most of these cases have come to light through media; reports of police officers loyal to criminal relatives, illegal arms deals, leaks of sensitive information to criminal networks, and inappropriate sexual relationships (Erlandsson & Örstadius, 2024b; Erlandsson & Sadikovic, 2025; Örstadius & Erlandsson, 2025). Confidential information is leaked to organised crime, and in many cases the police cannot determine the source (Erlandsson & Örstadius, 2024a). According to an investigation by *Dagens Nyheter* (Erlandsson & Örstadius, 2024b), of 514 reports of suspected leaks since 2018, at least 30 police employees have been identified as security risks and either forced to resign or have resigned voluntarily. In 14 cases, there was strong evidence, including court judgements in several instances, showing that police employees have disclosed classified information to organised criminals. Two patterns emerged from the investigation: female police employees entering sexual relationships with criminals, and police employees with foreign backgrounds being pressured by criminal family-based networks.

## 3.3. The prison and probation service

Unlawful influence is considered a significant security threat to the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, as an increasing number of clients have ties to organised crime (Kriminalvården, 2025). Since 2022, employees within the prison and probation service have begun reporting attempts at unlawful influence. Notably, probation officers have this far been overrepresented in the reported serious cases of attempted undue influence.

In recent years, the prison and probation service has hired a large number of new staff, which is seen to heighten the risks of unlawful influence and infiltration. To address these concerns, the agency has strengthened its procedures around security vetting, interviews, and training connected to the hiring process (Kriminalvården, 2025).

Internal reporting of threats, violence and unlawful influence against employees within the Swedish Prison and Probation Service have increased in recent years. For example incidents of violence against prison staff have risen significantly, from 197 cases in 2020 to 617 in 2024 (Kriminalvården, 2023, 2025). However, the proportion of these incidents related to organised crime has not been disclosed. The annual reports of the prison and probation service, however, link this trend to the growing number of clients connected to organised criminal groups.

As the issue of undue and unlawful influence has gained prominence within the prison and probation system, it has brought along challenges. The Swedish Parliamentary Ombudsman (JO) has expressed concern that even legitimate expressions of dissatisfaction by prisoners are at times being reported as unlawful influence. The ombudsman emphasises the importance of accurate, well-founded reports and the need for clear criteria in determining what constitutes undue or unlawful influence (Justitieombudsmannen, 2025).

## 3.4. Courts and prosecutors

An assessment of the security situation in the Swedish courts, based on compiled incident reports, shows that in 2023 there was one reported case of violence against staff, 85 reports of threats, and 27 reports of harassment (Domstolsverket, 2024). No information is available on the extent to which these incidents are connected to organised crime. The overall assessment is that the level of exposure is not considered particularly high, nor drastically increasing. However, the societal climate has become harsher, and this affects the courts to such an extent that security measures must be adjusted accordingly.

There have been cases in Sweden where defence lawyers leaked information to major criminal networks in Stockholm (SVT Nyheter, 2022). This has resulted in a government inquiry commissioned to examine measures aimed at reinforcing the integrity of the justice system and enhancing the legal profession's resistance to criminal infiltration (Strömmer et al., 2024)

Operational prosecutors at the Swedish Prosecution Authority and the Swedish Economic Crime Authority received an online survey during one working week (Brå, 2019). The same survey was sent over the course of four weeks in 2018. The percentage who reported suspected attempts to influence varied somewhat over the four weeks but was between 7% and 9%. In total during the four weeks, 18% or 120 public prosecutors, stated that they perceived attempts to influence. The most common influencer was the suspected perpetrator (64% of the public prosecutors stated this alternative), but it could also be a relative of the person suspected of the offence, someone entirely different or an unknown person.

### Threats against victims and witnesses

According to Sweden's national strategy to address organised crime, there is a pervasive culture of silence surrounding criminal networks (Skr. 2023/24:67). Fear of threats and violence from these groups makes people too afraid to testify or even speak to law enforcement (Brå, 2019, 2025c). This culture of silence has spread beyond the networks, obstructing criminal investigations.

According to a study on unlawful influence on victims and witnesses (Brå, 2008), organised criminals typically seek to protect their business operations. This study found that victims were most commonly affected, while it was uncommon for witnesses to be targeted. When directed at outsiders, organised crime primarily used implicit threats and signals. The influence within networks, which was more common, was far less subtle, with direct threats and violence being the most frequent forms of unlawful influence. A more recent study on cultures of silence (Brå, 2019) reported similar findings. However, in the newer survey of prosecutors regarding suspected attempts to influence victims or witnesses, the prosecutors more frequently stated that such offences were committed as part of organised crime.

The Swedish Police Authority has a Victim and Personal Security Unit (Bops) that assesses the risk of individuals being exposed to threats and violence and implements protective measures when needed (Riksrevisionen, 2024). The focus areas are domestic violence, organised crime, and work-related threats (primarily targeting police officers, prosecutors and judges). The unit is reported to increasingly handle cases related to organised crime and extortion, but as there is no systematic monitoring of the cases handled, it is unclear how widespread this trend is.

## 3.5. Summary

Compared to other Nordic countries, unlawful influence is a well-researched topic in Sweden. A research tradition spanning over two decades has examined unlawful influence across a wide range of sectors. Drawing primarily on victim surveys and interviews, this research provides less insight into the prevalence of unlawful influence but offers substantial knowledge about its characteristics. These studies have contributed valuable process-oriented insights into how, when and where unlawful influence occurs, as well as its consequences for both victims and organisations. Reports produced by government agencies further complement this picture. Any conclusions concerning the developments in unlawful influence in Sweden are hard to draw based on the publicly available material. One indication is, however, that unlawful influence now seems to affect a broader range of agencies and organisations than it did a decade ago.

# 4. Unlawful influence in the Danish justice sector

This chapter is based on research reports and academic articles on staff well-being among police personnel, prison staff, prosecutors and in relation to the gang Loyal to Familia. Moreover, reports from government agencies, including the Danish National Special Crime Unit, the Anti-Money Laundering Secretariat, the prison and probation service, and the Ministry of Justice, are included, along with statistics on reported offences against public officials. Finally, media coverage is used to provide a broader picture of the situation in Denmark.

## 4.1. Unlawful influence in Denmark

In 2024, the TV documentary "Den sorte svane" put unlawful influence by organised crime on the agenda in Denmark. The documentary depicts alliances between organised crime and respected and powerful persons (TV 2, 2025). The second season of the show, in 2025, depicted how the authorities themselves may be involved in problematic practices. The Danish Independent Police Complaints Authority initiated an investigation into possible criminal conduct by the police in relation to a number of the incidents depicted in the TV programme (Politiklage-myndigheden, 2025a). The documentary also caused public debate and resulted in a law change that obliged lawyers to provide necessary information to financial institutions about clients who have funds in pooled client accounts (Justits-ministeriet, 2024). Politically, the primary focus became the economic aspects of unlawful influence. This has repeatedly been prioritised in Denmark's approach to unlawful influence, as will be seen in the analysis of strategies (see chapter 8).

In late 2024, a proposal was put forward in the Danish Parliament to initiate reports similar to those published in Sweden: "Möjliggörare för kriminella nätverk" (Brå, 2024) and "Lägesbild över aktiva gängkriminella i Sverige" (Polismyndigheten, 2024). Although there was consensus in the parliament that a report on insiders in Denmark would be valuable, the proposal was rejected (Folketinget, 2025). No such investigation has been published to date.

The criminal activity of organised networks, including gangs, is described by the Danish National Special Crime Unit as harmful to society and a serious threat to the Danish state (NSK, 2025). According to the annual report from the National Special Crime Unit, organised criminals are increasingly making use of criminal services provided by individuals outside the traditional criminal environment. Monitoring of traditional gang- and biker-related crime, narcotics, weapons and explosives and economic crime remains the focus of prevention efforts. An exception is economic crime, where attention has shifted to professional advisers who assist organised criminals in laundering illicit proceeds.

A recent investigation by the Anti-Money Laundering Secretariat (Hvidvask-sekretariatet, 2025), found that 15% of commercial, approved social residential facilities for children and adults have received at least five reports of potential money laundering and other economic crime in the past four years. These 46 facilities received over 2.7 billion DKK, more than 20% of the sector's total funding from 2021–2024. Some networks linked to these facilities have ties to organised crime, such as invoice fraud schemes. The number of reports is unusually high compared to other sectors, placing these facilities among the 15 most reported out of nearly 600.

Since January 2025, Denmark's prisons and other authorities are obliged to report to the Anti-Money Laundering Secretariat (Hvidvasksekretariatet, 2025). Efforts are underway to share information about financial flows to and from prisoners to combat economic crime.

Looking at the statistics, there have been no alarming changes in offences against public authorities in Denmark since 2017, although there were significant increases prior to 2017 (Danmarks statistik, 2025). When looking specifically at 2024, there were 2,607 victims of violence against public officials, while 3,006 were victims of threats of violence against public officials (Figure 2). In the years following 2020, reported threats and incidents of violence against public officials have increased. A noteworthy observation is that women and men in Denmark are equally likely to be victims of violence and threats in public service.

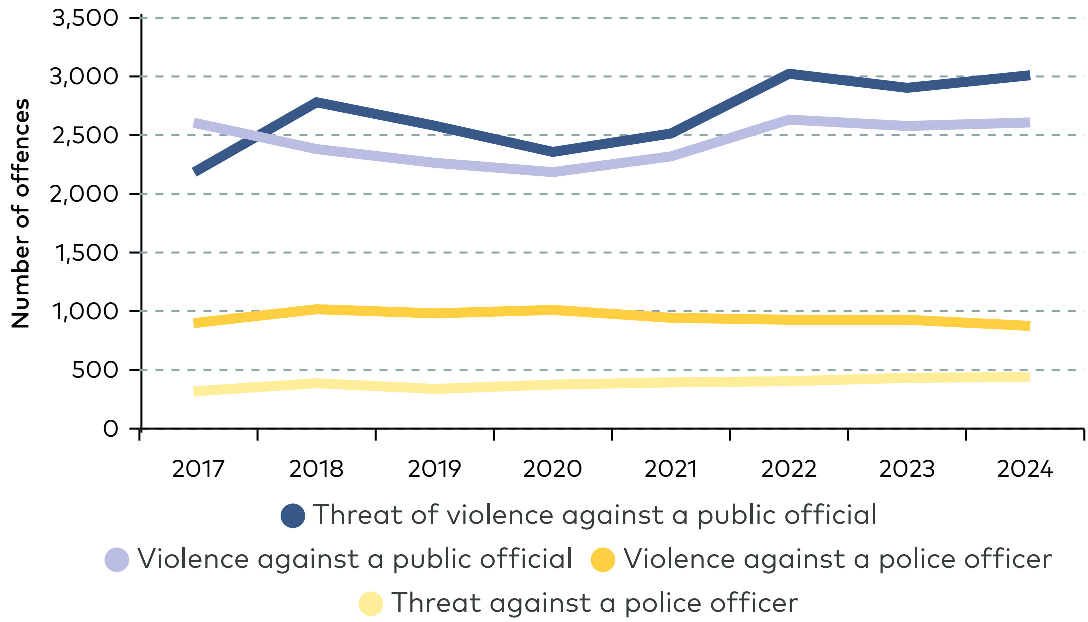


**Figure 2.** Victims of reported crimes against public officials in Denmark, 2017–2024. Source: Statistics Denmark (2025).

There is no information regarding to what degree organised crime is behind these numbers. Research about unlawful influence by organised crime in the justice sector is therefore mostly in the form or personal experience, such as reports of an increasingly harsh environment in prisons due to gangs, or accounts of prison officers being approached by gang members outside of working hours (Larsen, Pejtersen, Bom, et al., 2020). Little is known about the frequency. A report on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among police officers and prison staff mention a "widespread perception that work in the police and the correctional service has changed in character in recent years" and officials that are "increasingly exposed to unpleasant and violent incidents, face a general rise in work pressure, and have less time and fewer resources for collegial support and processing these events" (report authors' translation; Larsen, Pejtersen, Berger, et al., 2020, p. 24).

## 4.2. The police

There is no openly available statistic concerning unlawful influence from organised crime within the police. Well-being surveys in the Danish Police and Prosecution Service in 2020, showed that about 25% had been subjected to harassment, threats or violence from a citizen or external partner in their work time, and 5% outside of work time during the last year (Larsen, Pejtersen, Bom, et al., 2020, p. 180). Charges of violence and threats against police officers in 2024 totalled 877 reported incidents of violence and 441 cases of threats (Figure 2). The share of police officers among all public officials facing violence and threats is notably lower than in the other Nordic countries. Already 10 years ago was it noted that the most frequent victims are social and healthcare assistants, nurses and doctors, while the police are less often affected (Jørgensen, 2014; Møllerhøj et al., 2016). The number of reported cases of threat and violence against police officers has been rather stable since 2017 (see Figure 2).

In recent years, Denmark has seen isolated instances of insider misconduct and corruption within the police force. In addition to the problems depicted in "Den sorte svane", there have been cases of sharing confidential information from the police's internal systems (Brix & Jørgensen, 2025), as well as providing false information about police operations in official reports and to colleagues (Politiklagemyndigheden, 2025b). However, these instances have only been reported individually and are not yet portrayed as part of any systematic pattern (forthcoming research, see Hestehave, 2025).

In a service review of legislative changes concerning gang crime, the Danish National Police assesses threats against witnesses as a continuous problem in gang-related criminal cases (Justitsministeriet, 2022). According to the police, threats against witnesses and a general fear of reprisals for testifying against gang members lead witnesses to refrain from reporting crimes and providing comprehensive statements to the police. Witnesses also tend to alter their statements during trials. The National Police assess that the increased penalties in this area probably do not increase witnesses' willingness to testify, as a harsher sentence in itself does not provide witnesses with individual security against potential reprisals.

## 4.3. The prison and probation service

In 2018, a report was published examining violence and threats against employees in the Danish prison and probation service (Clausen & Bien, 2018). In the follow-up period covered by the report (2012–2017), approximately 10% of incidents of violence or threats against employees involved prisoners affiliated with a biker gang or street gang. Moreover, it was stated that those affiliated with a biker gang or street gang were slightly overrepresented in the statistics on violence and threats throughout the period.

An article based on court documents banning the gang Loyal to Familia (Møller, 2022) noted persistent violence and threats against prison staff and inmates since 2013. In response, prisons introduced special measures, including focus units for high-risk inmates, registration of suspected gang affiliations, and enhanced security protocols, such as a minimum of two staff members for interactions with Loyal to Familia prisoners, the use of stab-proof vests, and restrictions on inmate possessions. Because staff have been targeted outside of prisons, the security response included safety advice for staff off duty. The court cases describe Loyal to Familia–affiliated prisoners as more violent and demanding than biker gangs and suggest that related incidents may have been underreported.

Looking at general numbers of violence and threats against employees in the prison and probation system, 35% report having been subjected to threats at work and 11.5% subjected to violence at work in a well-being survey in 2018 (ref. in Larsen, Pejtersen, Bom, et al., 2020, p. 181). According to newer data from the prison and probation service in Denmark, 285 episodes where employees were subject to threats at work, and 134 episodes where employees were subject to violence at work occurred in 2024 (Kriminalforsorgen, 2025). There have not been any increases in these numbers in the last few years, rather an overall decrease since 2017.

## 4.3. Courts and prosecutors

Unlawful influence within Danish courts appears to have been addressed only sparsely. However, recent concern has been raised at the union level about the increasing harassment of court employees (HK Danmarks domstole, 2025). Due to the growing sense of insecurity, it has been proposed that employees' names no longer appear in court correspondence and decisions. Organised crime was not mentioned as a primary reason, but rather harassment on social media.

Occupational mental health among Danish prosecutors has been examined (Vang, Hansen, et al., 2025; Vang, Hovman, et al., 2025). Although not specifically related to organised crime, Vang, Hansen, et al. (2025) estimated the occurrence of threats from clients or their relatives, exposure to violence and abusive behaviour from professional counterparts. The findings indicated that burnout was the most prominent concern among Danish prosecutors, while rates of secondary traumatisation and PTSD were generally low. Key correlates of burnout symptoms included quantitative demands, abusive behaviour from professional counterparts and the emotional impact of cases.

## 4.4. Summary

Overall, the extent of unlawful influence by organised crime in Denmark remains largely unknown. No publicly available indicators assessing such influence within the Danish justice system could be found. The reports from the police and the prison and probation service that address violence and threats against employees do not suggest an alarming situation or growing trends linked to organised crime. However, more up-to-date information is needed.

# 5. Unlawful influence in the Norwegian justice sector

This chapter draws on research reports concerning economic crime, police corruption, threats to judicial independence and staff well-being in the correctional system in Norway. It incorporates annual reports from the courts administration and correctional system, and an evaluation report on police corruption. In addition, two Norwegian government official reports and statistics on reported offences against public officials are used.

## 5.1. Unlawful influence by organised crime

In 2019, National Criminal Investigation Service (Kripos) made a situation report of gang crime in Norway (NOU 2020:4). The overview states that the Norwegian police do not experience that their service execution or movement is restricted by organised crime, but that threats against police officials by criminal gangs do occur:

> *the police occasionally experience being obstructed and subjected to direct threats during gang-related operations. Such incidents occur more frequently when the police are outnumbered. The situations sometimes appear to be coordinated and planned but can also arise spontaneously. Threatening behaviour towards the police is documented and shared via social media, which in turn serves to unite and inspire the gangs.* (NOU 2020:4, p.127, report authors' translation)

The overview further notes, based on the general experience of the police, that criminal youth groups are more likely to harass public officials than more experienced gang members (NOU 2020:4). The more experienced actors often have a less visible role. Among established gang members, the use of violence is not always necessary, as they may have built up sufficient intimidation capital, allowing them to achieve their objectives without having to use physical force. This intimidation capital can be used for extortion, influencing legal actors and other forms of threat-based crime. In Norway, police employees are considered the primary targets of unlawful influence by criminal networks, while prison staff are affected to a slightly lesser extent.

## Identity shielding

Identity shielding of employees in the justice sector have been debated in recent years in Norway. In 2024 a Norwegian official report (NOU) on access to identity shielding for police and correctional service employees was published (NOU 2024:5). The NOU suggested limited and targeted access to identity shielding for employees in the police and correctional services, where compelling reasons justify it. This shows the intricacy of unlawful influence, as the risk of it can be used both to argue for and against identity shielding. Identity shielding would on one hand be motivated by employee safety. On the other hand, transparency of public authority actions and considerations for individual legal protection suggest that access to identity shielding should be limited. The NOU specifically raised the risk of unlawful influence and conflicts of interest as an argument against shielding.

## Unlawful influence through corruption

In recent years, the Norwegian government has focused on corruption in its efforts to combat organised crime (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2024). As part of this work, a survey was conducted in 2025 to map the extent of economic crime affecting businesses and municipalities (SØA, 2025). The report shows that fewer than 0.5% of businesses (i.e., all Norwegian entities engaged in economic activity) have been exposed to corruption, whereas the figure for municipalities is almost 2%. When looking specifically at the public administration and defence sector businesses, almost 12% report having suffered some form of economic loss. The report does not address the role or impact of organised crime, nor the public justice sector.

## Offences against public officials

Reported cases of violence and threats against public officials have increased over the past 20 years in Norway. As shown in Figure 3, over the last decade there has been a rise in threats, while cases of obstruction or harassment against public officials have decreased. The level of violence has increased moderately since 2020. The statistics do not indicate the extent to which organised crime has been involved in these offences.

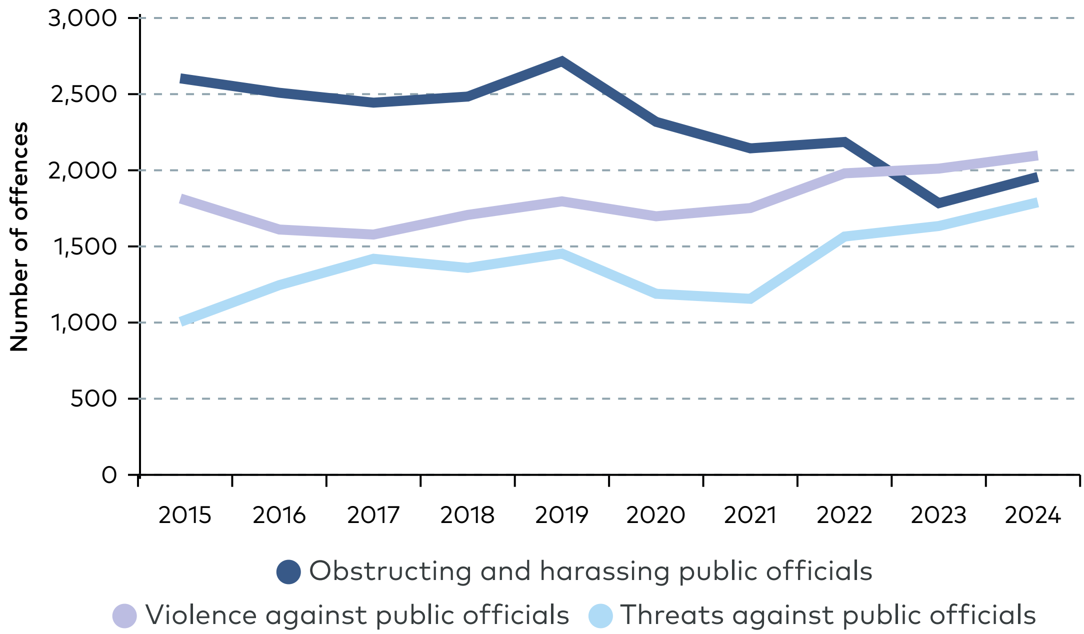


**Figure 3.** Reported offences against public officials in Norway, 2015–2024. Source: Statistics Norway (2025)

## 5.2. The police

Reported threats and violence against police employees have increased over the past decade in Norway, from 1,159 cases of violence in 2013 to 1,665 cases in 2022 (NOU 2024:5, pp. 121–122). Of the 1,980 reported cases of violence against public officials in 2022 (Figure 3), approximately 1,665 concerned a police employee,[4] indicating that most reported incidents of violence against public officials concern the police.

According to an employee survey from the Norwegian police in 2022, 18% of employees reported having been subjected to threats of violence, and 10% reported having been subjected to actual violence at work (Politiet, 2022, referenced in NOU 2024:5). To what degree these offences are committed by organised crime is not reported.

### Police corruption

In the Norwegian police, unlawful influence and corruption gained increased attention after the former police officer Eirik Jensen was sentenced to 21 years in prison for gross corruption and complicity in the import of narcotics. An evaluation

4. The numbers come from different sources and are therefore not directly comparable, but nevertheless provide an approximate estimate.

committee was appointed with the mandate of identifying key learning points for the police to prevent something similar from happening again. The evaluation committee identified 11 key lessons and recommendations concerning leadership, leadership accountability, informant handling and knowledge, learning, and research (Borgerud et al., 2021).

A recent report on police corruption in Norway (Thomassen & Strype, 2024) found that legally defined forms of corruption, such as bribery and improper advantages, were quite rare within the Norwegian police. However, applying a broader international definition they found that misuse of information, sexually motivated abuse of power, process corruption and theft or embezzlement were more common.

The report also looked at risk factors for corruption within the police and identified individual, situational and organisational factors. The most crucial individual factors for corruption were personal financial difficulties, substance abuse and private associations with criminals. At the situational level, factors such as autonomy, position, field of work, and methods of operation seemed to play a role (Thomassen & Strype, 2024). On the organisational level factors such as "risk acknowledgement" and a safe environment for whistleblowing influence the risk of corruption in the police.

Overall, police corruption seems to be relatively rare in Norway. In an employee survey in 2022, approximately 2% of those working in the police reported that during the past two years they had been exposed to or observed attempted corruption at work (Politiet, 2022, referenced in Thomassen & Strype, 2024, p. 24).

## 5.3. The prison and probation service

The Norwegian Correctional Service has reported an increase in violence and threats against employees. In the period from 2018 to 2022, the number of reported violent and threat-related offences against employees increased fourfold, rising from 110 to 487 reported cases (NOU 2024:5). Also in 2024, incidents of violence and threats increased, both between inmates and against staff (Kriminalomsorgsdirektoratet, 2025). The increase is believed to be linked to developments in the prison population, with more individuals suffering from mental illness and more inmates affiliated with criminal networks. In response, the correctional services have begun registering prisoners' group affiliations. This to ensure more information to prevent and reduce incidents of violence and threats in prisons.

A 2023 survey of psychological stress reactions among staff in the Norwegian correctional services reported that 70% had experienced one or more forms of threats, either directed at themselves or their families, at work or during their free time (Rambøll Management Consulting, 2023). In addition, 55% had been subjected to physical violence either at work or outside of work. Influence and stress caused by prisoners connected to organised crime was not specifically addressed in this survey.

## 5.4. Courts

Almost all Norwegian courts have recently adopted a national system for reporting deviations (Norges domstoler, 2024). In 2024, 60 deviations related to external threats were registered. These threats were made against judges, caseworkers and courts, as well as instances of vandalism and verbal or written harassment. The severity and nature of the threats vary considerably, and there is no information on the extent to which they can be linked to organised crime. Courts are however increasingly focusing on security and preparedness, not least regarding information security and vulnerability to influence.

Moreover, the Norwegian Courts Administration published a report titled *Judges under Stress* in 2025 (Bojarski, 2025). Although the report's empirical data comes mainly from European countries outside the Nordic region, its themes raise questions about threats, stress, and pressures from various actors, including risks of judicial corruption, which the Norwegian courts administration regards as relevant to Norway.

## 5.5. Summary

Overall, the picture of unlawful influence by organised crime in Norway remains largely unknown. No publicly available indicators assessing influence from organised crime could be found within the Norwegian justice system. The justice system institutions however appear to be placing increasing emphasis on systematically reporting incidents of violence, threats and harassment, with an awareness of the links to organised crime.

# 6. Unlawful influence in the Finnish justice sector

This chapter builds on research reports on organised crime in Finland, security in Finnish prisons and unlawful influence targeting prosecutors, judges and financial crime investigators. It incorporates findings and analyses from the Finnish Police Barometer Study and a quality report by the prison and probation service. It also draws on statistics on offences against public officials, as well as research on developments in these crimes.

## 6.1. Unlawful influence by organised crime

There are an estimated 90–100 identified organised criminal groups operating in Finland, with approximately 1,000 members (Jukarainen et al., 2023.). As in other countries, organised crime includes networks and groups without visible symbols, as well as professional facilitators and criminal service providers.

Organised criminals operating in Finland maintain strong links across Europe and beyond (GI-TOC, 2025). They actively seek vulnerabilities in legitimate business activities and physical and digital critical infrastructure. In addition to violence, they use more subtle forms of influence. In international comparison, organised crime is less prevalent in Finland and its resilience against it is particularly strong.

### Offences against public officials

In 2024, there were 2,290 reported cases of resistance (including violent resistance) against public officials in Finland. The number has increased in recent years, except in 2020, when COVID-19 restrictions were the likely cause of a decline (see Figure 4). Of the cases in 2024, 2 044 involved resistance against police personnel, indicating that most of such incidents are directed at police officers (see also Sutela & Rikander, 2020). There have been reports about increasing threats to broader spectra of public officials, such as employees at the Finnish Social Insurance Institution (Social- och hälsovårdsministeriet, 2025). The statistic does not indicate to what degree organised crime is involved in these offences. A review of court cases resulting in convictions of obstruction, resistance and insubordination against public officials between 2013 and 2023 revealed that references to organised crime were made in only a handful of verdicts (Villman & Kaakinen, manuscript).

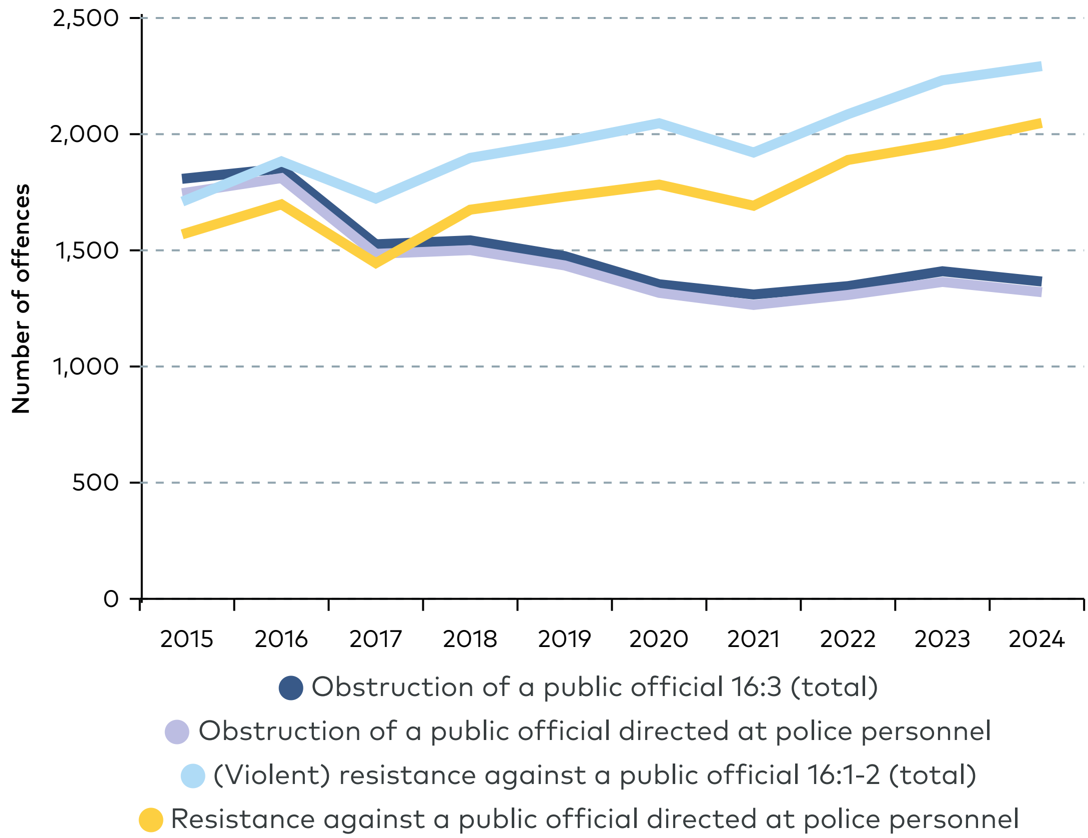


**Figure 4.** Reported offences against public officials in Finland, 2015–2024
Source: Statistics Finland (2025)

## 6.2. The police

The Finnish Police Barometer[5] surveys citizens' assessments on unethical influence related to the police, including both external influence on the organisation and corrupt practices within it. Approximately 32% of respondents in the latest survey considered it likely or very likely that attempts would be made from outside the police to disturb or influence its activities in an unethical manner. In these cases, the perpetrators may be citizens, companies or other entities. A total of 53% of respondents considered such influence unlikely and the rest of the respondents did not express an opinion. Organised crime was not specifically addressed in the survey.

5. The Police Barometer, conducted every two years in Finland, studies citizens' assessments of police activities and the state of internal security. The survey includes questions that examine citizens' views on the prevalence and forms of intimidation in criminal proceedings. These questions describe threats against witnesses and victims, unreported crime, and unethical influence. Due to changes in the data collection methods, the data for 2022 and 2024 cannot be directly compared with data from before 2022. For more information, see Vuorensyrjä et al. (2024, pp. 23–40).

A survey conducted among police financial crime investigators in 2024 included a question about perceived threats and undue influence (Kankaanranta et al., 2025).[6] The respondents were asked if attempts have been made to influence their work from outside the police. Of the respondents, 23% had experienced attempts at influence, the most common of which were verbal threats (oral or by email etc.) and "other inappropriate influence". There were only a few cases of threats of violence and no cases of violence or bribery. The report did not reveal any links to organised crime.

Corruption within the police is relevant in this context, as police officers may have unethical connections to criminal activity (see Thomassen & Strype, 2024). In a well-known Finnish police corruption case, a senior officer in the Helsinki drug squad, Jari Aarnio, played a key role and the case had strong links to serious crime. After the case came to light in 2013, the indicator for police corruption in the Police Barometer increased to a higher level from 2014 onwards (Vuorensyrjä et al., 2025).

A register study currently underway, examining corruption crimes reported to the police, has uncovered instances of police corruption (Muttilainen & Lundqvist, manuscript). Preliminary findings indicate that over 10% of the 741 cases investigated involve references to police personnel in connection with corruption. These cases include unauthorised viewing and leaking of information, handling personal, relatives' or colleagues' affairs while disqualified, misuse of official insignia and equipment during leisure time, suspicious secondary employment, inappropriate cooperation with criminal suspects, manipulation of investigations, and bribery. Unlawful connections with criminals seemed to be limited.

### Reporting levels for certain crimes

The proportion of unreported threats out of all threats can be considered an indicator referring to organised crime (Vuorensyrjä, 2025). According to the Police Barometer survey (Vuorensyrjä et al., 2025), crimes are most often not reported to the police because they are not considered serious. Other reasons include that the crimes are not believed to be solved, the police are not interested in them, they are reported to another authority, they are considered private matters, or there is fear of retaliation. Due to fear of retaliation, the respondents who were victims of armed threats were the most likely not to report crimes, followed by those who were victims of assault.

6. The target group of the survey was people working with investigating financial crimes or supporting such investigations within the police force. All in all 201 responses were received, a response rate of 47.4%.

## 6.3. Prison and probation service

An evaluation of security in Finnish prisons in 2021 states that as the number of prisoners who are active in or connected to organised crime has increased, so too have the threats to and pressure on both other prisoners and prison staff (Paasonen, 2021). In addition to physical and verbal intimidation, these prisoners have reportedly attempted to influence decision-making officials through the prison appeal processes. There have also been cases in which prisoners connected to organised crime have coerced other inmates into filing appeals and complaints on their behalf. Such activities have at times reportedly been overlooked by prisons, with no negative decisions enforced, due to fear of legal repercussions imposed by prisoners. The report therefore emphasises the importance of strengthening legal support for prisons, recommending access to lawyers familiar with the challenges of daily prison work who can provide informed legal opinions to support management decisions.

According to a survey among prison staff on the state of security in prisons (Paasonen, 2021), most of the respondents did state that violent and threatening incidents in prisons are internally reported, and that serious accidents and violent events are also reported to other authorities. However, qualitative responses in the study highlighted increasing harassment, threats and violence, as well as inadequate crisis support and follow-up after threatening situations in prisons.

Among the prison personnel surveyed, 48% reported experiencing offensive behaviour from a prisoner during the past two years, and about one in three had been threatened with violence (Paasonen, 2021). Eight percent of respondents had been subjected to some form of physical violence, and 22% reported being targets of harassment. The number of recorded incidents within institutions shows a much lower prevalence: in 2021, there were 85 documented cases of threats and violence against staff inside prisons, and 31 cases outside of work. As discussed earlier, many instances remain unreported.

In a quality report from the prison and probation service (Blomster et al., 2024), 35% of personnel considered that gang members can influence the functioning of the prison too much. These numbers decreased in 2022 from the levels in 2019 (46%), so the increase is not linear here, but rather a question of fluctuation.

## 6.4. Courts

A Finnish study in 2008 examined the experiences of Finnish prosecutors and judges with unlawful influence. Between 10% and 30% of the Finnish prosecutors and judges surveyed reported experiencing harassment, threats, violence, vandalism or corruption within the previous 18 months. Harassment and threats were the most reported types of unlawful influence, occurring primarily in the workplace and only rarely during leisure time. Incidents of violence directed at prosecutors and judges were rare. Only a small proportion of the unlawful influence was linked to individuals associated with organised crime; approximately 4% of harassment cases and 6% of threats. A notable finding of the study was that only 38% of the incidents of unlawful influence had been reported to a manager (Junninen & Aromaa, 2010).

The survey directed to prosecutors and judges in 2008 was simultaneously carried out in Finland and Sweden. Already in that comparative study was it noted that Swedish prosecutors experienced significantly more harassment and threats by organised crime more than their Finnish colleagues (Aromaa et al., 2016). No newer information on unlawful influence directed at prosecutors or judges in Finland is available.

Threats against witnesses and victims have been surveyed in the Police Barometer (Vuorensyrjä et al., 2025). Of the 22% of respondents that had been witnesses or plaintiffs (i.e. victims) in criminal proceedings, nearly 15% experienced threats or pressure. The perpetrator was the suspect, their lawyer or someone else. About 51% of those who had experienced threats or pressure had reported their most recent experience to the police.

Threats have also been examined in a master's thesis based on 1,314 criminal reports of threats made in court proceedings from 2004 to 2019 (Timonen, 2020). The targets of these acts are most often the plaintiffs (63%), followed by witnesses (30%) and, relatively rarely, suspects (7%). Threats before a statement may be intended to influence the behaviour of a party to the criminal proceeding, while threats after a statement are usually acts of retaliation.

Of the 1,314 cases analysed, gangs or the mafia were mentioned in 32 cases, of which 26 involved threats and six involved violence (Timonen, 2020). A total of 13, or approximately 1% of all studied cases, the threats were clearly linked to a recognised organised criminal group. However, it is possible that there are links to organised crime in cases other than those mentioned.

## 6.5. Summary

Although unlawful influence in Finland's justice sector has not been comprehensively investigated, information from various sources is available, although fragmented. These sources suggest that unlawful influence is a relatively limited problem, but appears to be increasing and requires attention to ensure an impartial and trustworthy justice system at all stages. Further research is needed, particularly regarding the police and courts.

# 7. Unlawful influence in the Icelandic justice sector

This chapter is based on a report on organised crime from the Icelandic National Commissioner of Police and a research report on violence against police officers, supplemented by statistics on reported offences against public officials. Additional data are drawn from media coverage.

## 7.1. Organised crime in Iceland

The number of organised criminal groups in Iceland has doubled over the past decade, and these groups have become increasingly embedded within Icelandic society, according to a recent report on organised crime (National Commissioner of the Police, 2025). Both the frequency and severity of organised crime have risen, accompanied by greater professionalism and capability among criminal networks. It is estimated that around 20 organised criminal groups operate in Iceland, each comprising between three and 20 individuals.

Regarding unlawful influence, the report from the National Commissioner of the Police (2025b) highlights economic crime and the role of professional facilitators in integrating organised criminal activity into legitimate financial structures. In Iceland, this trend has become visible through the use of "front persons", often vulnerable individuals who are registered as company owners or serve as intermediaries in transfers, foreign exchange transactions or fictitious accounts.

A recent case before the Reykjanes District Court illustrates this dynamic: a lawyer was convicted of laundering illicit proceeds for a co-defendant, with the court concluding that the lawyer's involvement was essential to the completion of the offences (National Commissioner of the Police, 2025). Although the case did not involve an organised criminal group, it demonstrates that professional services capable of facilitating money laundering do exist in Iceland and may play a significant role in supporting the operations of organised criminal networks.

## 7.2. Unlawful influence on public officials

Much of what is known about unlawful influence in Iceland is based on isolated cases that have become public in the media. It has been suggested that the growing presence of organised crime has contributed to increased violence and threats, particularly against police officers. Police officers reportedly perceive that threats made against them are increasingly intended to be carried out (Iceland Monitor, 2023). The Ministry of Justice is currently developing an action plan to address organised crime, and the government has announced plans to expand police powers to strengthen the fight against organised criminal activity (Adam, 2025).

Looking at reported offences in Iceland over the past two decades, there has been a clear increase in reported offences against public authorities. As in the other Nordic countries, violence against public officials primarily targets police officers (see Figure 5).

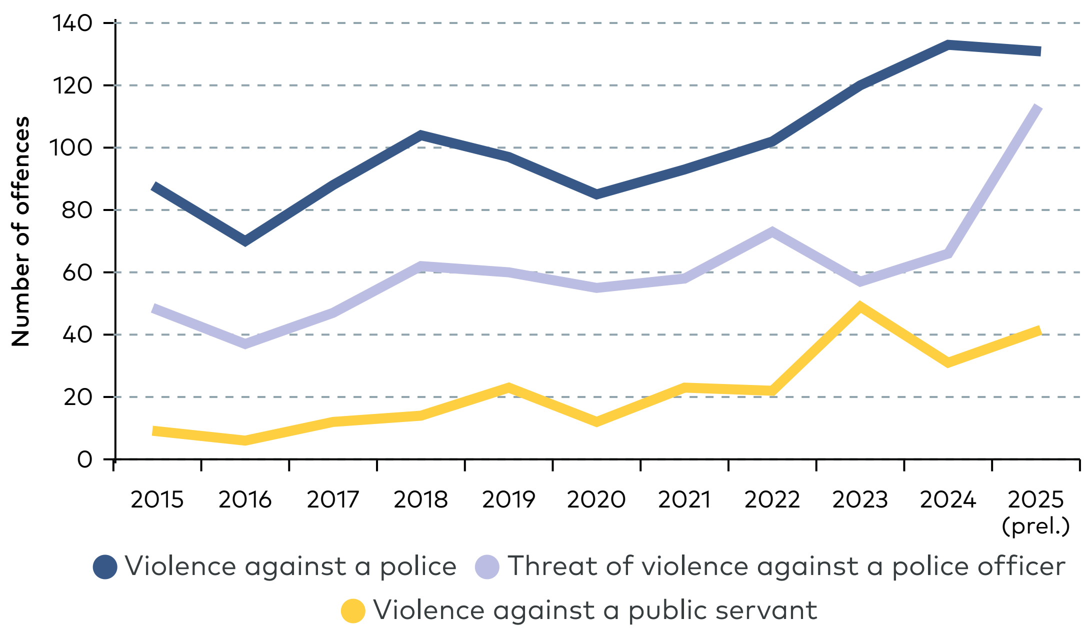


**Figure 5.** Reported offences against the police in Iceland, 2015–2025
Source: National Commissioner of the Police (2026)

## 7.3. The police

In the summer of 2025, the Icelandic Minister of Justice opened a review on how the law protects police officers and stated that action will be taken to ensure the safety of police officers, after an incident of violent threats against a police officer outside of working hours (Adam, 2025). In connection to previous cases involving violence against police officers, it has been mentioned that the police in Iceland are experiencing increasing violence and threats (Iceland Monitor, 2023). In recent years these concerns have been raised in connection to organised crime, however there is no statistic available concerning to what degree organised crime is behind this.

Organised crime has especially been connected to violence as a service, where groups can distance themselves from criminal acts and minimise the risk of investigation or prosecution. For instance, in 2023, a police officer's car was set on fire in exchange for payment for violent acts (National Commissioner of the Police, 2025).

When looking specifically at crimes directed at the police (Figure 5), one can see that there has been an increase in both violence and threat of violence against police officers. In 2025, according to the preliminary numbers, there were112 cases of threat of violence and 131 cases of violence against police officers (National Commissioner of the Police, 2026).

In a survey in 2007, 70% of police officers reported having been threatened or assaulted while on duty during the past five years (Bragason, 2007; Bragason et al., 2007). Around 40% of respondents considered the assaults against them to be serious or very serious, while 35% viewed them as not very serious or not serious at all. The survey does not recount to what degree the violence had connections to organised crime.

The 2007 survey remains the most systematic study of violence against police officers to date, although somewhat outdated given the more recent changes in organised crime in Iceland and increase in violence against police officers. However, the Office of the National Commissioner of Police is currently preparing a new survey among Icelandic officers, which will also address threats, harassment and violence.

Cases of corruption and insider activity have also been raised in Iceland. In a recent case revealed by the news programme Kveikur, three former and current police officers were found to have been spying on behalf of Iceland's richest man (Seljan & Theodórsson, 2025).

## 7.4. Summary

The unlawful influence of organised crime in Iceland remains largely unknown, with few sources describing the phenomenon. However, offences against public officials are on the rise, as is the influence of organised crime on Icelandic society.

# 8. Strategies to address unlawful influence

To gain an understanding of how unlawful influence is addressed and prevented in the Nordic countries, official documents such as strategies, reports, legislative proposals and handbooks have been analysed. A total of 17 publicly available documents from the past decade were included in the analysis (listed in Appendix). As no relevant strategic documents from Iceland were found, the country is only represented in the comparison of penalty scales in this chapter. The following presentation will examine strategic documents, changes in legislation and other prevention practices respectively, to provide an overview of the official responses to unlawful influence in the Nordic countries to date.

## 8.1. Strategic documents

### Sweden

In recent years, several Nordic countries have launched strategic programmes to combat organised crime, in which the issue of unlawful influence has been addressed. The Swedish national strategy *Resistance and Decisive Action* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2025) identifies as one of its five main goals to "build robustness against unlawful and undue influence" (p. 31). This includes safeguarding the integrity of public decision-making and preventing internal threats posed by insiders and infiltrators, through measures such as maintaining rigorous recruitment processes and strengthening internal security work within government agencies.

As a part of the Swedish national strategy, the government has decided on regulatory amendments granting the prison and probation service, the prosecution authority, the economic crime authority, and the courts extended powers to screen individuals against the criminal and suspicion registers (Justitiedepartementet, 2025b). In practical terms, these amendments mean that the prosecution authority, the economic crime authority and the courts are allowed to screen all individuals employed by these authorities, while the prison and probation service gains broader powers to screen individuals who are granted access to prisons and to check individuals who will work in halfway houses, care homes and under contract care. The Swedish government is also more generally investigating the need for and conditions of background checks in both the public and private sectors (Justitie-departementet, 2025a). The aim is through legislation to provide organisations with appropriate tools to prevent infiltration and unlawful influence.

## Denmark

In Denmark's most recent strategic programme against gang crime, Gang Package IV, organised crime is described as harmful to society ("samfundsundergravende kriminalitet og samfundsskadelig aktiviteter"). However, in this respect, the proposed responses focus primarily on economic strategies to combat organised crime (Justitsministeriet, 2023). Another important aspect in the Danish strategic programmes against gang crime concerning unlawful influence, have been the safeguarding of witnesses. In Gang Package III, in 2017, it was agreed upon that citizens who wish to report or testify against members of biker or gang groups, and who require it, should have the option to receive a personal attack alarm (Justitsministeriet, 2017a). The more recent gang package included attempts to enhance the safety of witnesses and victims in their interactions with the justice system (Justitsministeriet, 2023).

## Finland

Similarly to Sweden, the latest Finnish strategy and action plan to address organised crime highlights the risk of organised crime infiltrating the basic structures of society. Justice sector authorities, other public agencies and the business sector are specifically mentioned as potential targets of harassment, violence and other forms of influence. The strategy outlines three concrete measures to address this: investigating unlawful influence targeting public authorities and strengthening prevention; ensuring that organisations have response protocols for situations involving threats and extortion; and assessing the support needs of victims of organised crime (Junninen, 2025). The strategy was preceded by a research project examining Nordic models for combating organised crime (Muttilainen et al., 2025), which provided the groundwork for the strategy update.

## Norway

In a Norwegian white paper on child, youth and gang crime from 2021, the topic of intimidation-based crime (*trusselbasert kriminalitet*) is discussed. Particular concern is expressed about a culture of hostility to the police, fostered in gang environments, as well as the potential for established gang members to use violence to influence authorities in the justice sector. However, none of the strategic measures outlined in the report directly address such forms of unlawful influence (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2020).

In the 2025 state budget, the Norwegian government launched Gang Package 2 to strengthen efforts against organised crime, with a strong focus on combating economic crime and criminal masterminds. The goal was to enhance the fight against money laundering and corruption in a broad sense, as economic crime is often carried out by criminal networks. One objective was to carry out a project reviewing existing investigation materials to identify signs of corruption and other serious crimes linked to organised crime. In parallel, the aim was to conduct a project to map risks, particularly related to corruption, within specific industries and sectors of society, including the involvement of professional intermediaries and facilitators (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2024).

### Action plans against corruption

Beyond the efforts to address organised crime, several Nordic countries have implemented action plans to address corruption, which are relevant to the prevention of unlawful influence. In 2024, Sweden launched a joint action plan addressing both corruption and unlawful influence (Regeringskansliet, 2024), viewing the two phenomena as closely linked and requiring partly overlapping responses. This development is not reflected in the other Nordic countries or in international anti-corruption initiatives.

The Swedish action plan on corruption and unlawful influence includes measures to expand inter-agency cooperation and monitoring of anti-corruption efforts to encompass unlawful influence (Regeringskansliet, 2024). Additionally, it emphasises raising awareness about unlawful influence, strengthening control and security mechanisms within municipalities and government agencies, and enhancing protections for public employees and elected officials.

Finland's anti-corruption strategy and action plan contains numerous references to both organised crime and unlawful influence (Mäntysalo, 2025). Regarding unlawful influence, the document states that investigations will be conducted into unlawful influence directed at authorities, as well as attempts at corruption and vulnerabilities related to official activities, as part of the strategy to combat organised crime. In addition, the document includes references to other themes related to unlawful influence, such as the protection of whistleblowers and the promotion of integrity among public officials and ministers.

## 8.2. Changes in legislation

Several official documents from the last decade that address unlawful influence are proposals for legislative changes. These government bills primarily concern how to protect public employees against violence, threats and harassment. Sweden has made legislative proposals on strengthened legal protection for emergency response activities and the execution of official duties (Prop 2015/16:113), police personnel (Prop 2019/20:186), and public employees (Prop 2024/25:141). In Finland, proposals on strengthening the legal protection for police and emergency operations have been put forward (Finnish Government, 2025). Denmark has suggested to strengthen the protection for all public officials against violence, threats and harassment by increasing the penalties by 50% (Justitsministeriet, 2025).

Sweden introduced legislation that gives the opportunity for witnesses to be heard anonymously during a preliminary investigation and in criminal cases in court. The purpose is to strengthen witness protection and to break the culture of silence within and around criminal gangs, thereby improving the ability to investigate and solve crimes (Prop. 2024/25:20). Similar provisions exist in Norway, Denmark and Finland, although they can be applied only in very limited circumstances and are therefore used very rarely (SOU 2023:67).

### Penalty levels for crimes against public officials

Penalties for offences against public officials have increased in Sweden in recent years, and changes have been proposed also in Finland and Denmark. To get an overview of the different sentence levels applied in the Nordic countries, we have compared the penalty levels for sentences against public officials (Table 2). Offences against public officials are the legal provisions typically applied when a justice sector official is subjected to unlawful influence in the form of threats and violence, although such cases also often involve additional offences depending on the circumstances. Comparing penalty levels is challenging, as there are many country-specific factors affecting sentencing. The comparison is therefore primarily indicative of general trends. Some conclusions can nonetheless be drawn from it.

Firstly, the range of applicable sentences is broader in Sweden than in the other Nordic countries. Sweden has more specific and detailed criminalisation of offences against public officials than the other Nordic countries. Yet, the penalty levels are not significantly higher, despite recent increases. For example, for aggravated violence against public officials, the maximum sentence in Sweden is 6 years, while in Denmark it is 8 years (with the possibility of doubling if it involves staff in prison and probation service), 6 years in Iceland (8 years if the victim is legally authorised to use force), and 6 years in Norway (with the possibility of 10 years if it involves firearm violence against the police). If the crime in Sweden concerns aggravated sabotage of emergency service activities (meaning police, rescue service and ambulance), 8 years or a life sentence can be implemented. Finland stands out with a lower maximum sentence of 4 years for aggravated violence against public officials. Finland aims to introduce new offences criminalising the obstruction or disruption of police and emergency service operations; however, this will not increase the maximum sentence (Finnish Government, 2025). In autumn 2025, Denmark signalled a tougher stance by announcing that it will double the penalties for violence, threats and harassment against public officials (Justitsministeriet, 2025). The Danish proposal also suggests that the provision regarding harassment should, more than at present, apply to activities on social media.

It appears that Sweden, with its broad range of penalties, has a lower threshold for recognising and punishing crimes against public officials. In particular, the newly introduced crime of insulting a public official clearly lowers the threshold for what is considered criminal. The motivation for the new crime was the development of an increasingly disrespectful and coarse tone between people, not least online. The insults to public officials are considered to be not only an attack on the individual, but also on the public service itself, as it makes it more difficult for individual public officials to carry out their duties (Prop 2024/25:141).

Secondly, the comparison of penalty levels shows that several countries have specified certain professional groups as having particularly important roles, and that offences against these groups should be punished more severely to protect them. This applies to the prison and probation service (Denmark), police (Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), customs (Iceland), and rescue and ambulance services (Sweden).

Thirdly, several countries have more or less explicitly mentioned organised crime as an aggravating circumstance in crimes against public officials within their penal codes. In Norway, an offence against a public official is considered aggravated if it is committed as part of the activities of an organised criminal group or is otherwise particularly harmful to society (chapter 19, section 155). Similarly, in Iceland, it is an aggravating factor if the crime was committed by a group; the initiators and leaders of the attack are to be given proportionally harsher punishments. In Sweden, "reference to a capacity for violence" ("anspelning på ett våldskapital") is mentioned as an aggravating circumstance in violence against public officials (chapter 17, section 1). The term capacity for violence, or intimidation capital, is indeed intended as a formulation that targets organised criminal networks and groups (chapter 12, art. 107). In Denmark, there is no specific mentioning of organised crime, but a general gang provision on doubling of penalties that can be applied. The gang provision can be enacted if the offence is motivated by, or is likely to incite, a conflict between groups, and knives or other bladed weapons, firearms, or explosives are used in that conflict (Straffeloven, Denmark, § 81 a).

**Table 2.** Penalty scales for offences against public officials in the different Nordic countries (see the legislation section in the list of references)

| DENMARK | |
|---|---|
| Offence | Penalty |
| Violence or threats of violence against public official (Ch. 14, § 119 (1)) | *Fine or imprisonment for at most 8 years.* When committed against an employee of the correctional services, the penalty may be increased to up to twice the standard sentence ( Ch.14, § 119 (5)).* |
| Obstruction of the duties of a public official (Ch. 14, § 119 (4)) | *Fine or imprisonment for at most 1 year and 6 months.* |
| Violation of the peace of a public official by contacting, stalking or otherwise harassing them (Ch. 14, § 119 a) | *Fine or imprisonment for at most 2 years.** |
| Assault of a public official with the use of an object (Ch. 14, § 119 b) | *Fine or imprisonment for at most 8 years. When committed against an employee of the correctional services, the penalty may be increased to up to twice the standard sentence (Ch. 14, § 119 b (2)).* |
| Assault of a public official through mockery, abusive language or other offensive remarks (Ch. 14, § 121) | *Fine or imprisonment for at most 1 year.* |

| FINLAND | |
|---|---|
| Offence | Penalty |
| Obstructing a public official (Ch. 16, § 3) | Fine |
| Resistance to a public official (Ch. 16, § 2) | *Fine or to imprisonment for at most six months* |
| Violent resistance to a public official (Ch.16, § 1) | *Imprisonment for at least four months and at most four years.* |
| Insubordination to the police, a border guard or a customs officer (Ch.16, § 4, 4a, 4b) | *Fine or to imprisonment for at most six months* |

* It has been proposed that the penalty be increased by 50%.

| ICELAND | |
|---|---|
| Offence | Penalty |
| Obstructing a public employee (Ch. XII, art.106) | *Fine or imprisonment up to 1 year. If directed at someone with the powers of a police officer or customs official, imprisonment of up to 2 years may be applied.* |
| Attacking, with violence or threats of violence, or obstructing a public employee (Ch. XII, art.106) | *Fine or imprisonment for up to 6 years. If directed at a public employee legally authorised to use physical force, imprisonment of up to 8 years may be applied.* |
| Where the offence described in Article 106 is committed by a group of persons, the initiators and leaders of the attack shall be given proportionally more severe punishments, (Ch. XII, art.107) | *Imprisonment up to 8 years* |

| NORWAY | |
|---|---|
| Offence | Penalty |
| Violence, threats, vandalism or other unlawful conduct against public officials (Ch. 19, § 155) | *Fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years* |
| Aggravated violence or threats against public officials (Ch. 19, § 156) | *Imprisonment for at most 6 years* |
| Minimum penalty for the use of firearms, etc., against the police (Ch. 19, § 155 b) | *Imprisonment for at least one year and at most 10 years* |
| Obstruction of a public official (Ch. 19, § 156) | *Fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months* |
| Protection of service weapon (Ch. 19, § 156 a) | *Imprisonment for at most 6 years* |
| Obstruction of justice (Ch. 19, § 157) | *Imprisonment for at most 6 years* |
| Aggravated obstruction of justice (Ch. 19, § 158) | *Imprisonment for at least one year* |

| SWEDEN | |
|---|---|
| Offence | Penalty |
| Insulting of public official (Ch. 17, § 3) | *Fine or imprisonment for at most six months (introduced as a new offence on 2 July 2025).* |
| Violent resistance against a public official (Ch. 17, § 4) | *Fine or imprisonment for at most six months.* |
| Abuse of a public official (Ch. 17, § 2§) | *Fine or imprisonment for at most two years.* |
| Gross abuse of a public official (Ch. 17, § 2) | *Imprisonment for at least six months and at most six years.* |
| Violence or threat against a public official (Ch. 17, § 1) | *Fine or imprisonment for at most three years.* |
| Gross violence or threat against a public official (Ch. 17, § 1) | *Imprisonment for at least one year and six months and at most eight years.* |
| Sabotage of emergency service activities (Ch. 13, § 5c) | *Imprisonment for at most four years.* |
| Gross sabotage of emergency service activities (Ch.13, § 5c) | *Imprisonment for a fixed term of at least two and at most 18 years, or for life.* |

## 8.3. Examples of prevention practices

Legal regulations aim to prevent the types of undesirable behaviour specified in the legislation. At the same time, the legislators recognise that recent efforts to broaden the legal framework have their limits: unlawful influence can only be prevented to a limited extent through legislation. Therefore, it is important to focus on other prevention practices, such as preventing violent situations through employers' risk management measures, training, and effective cooperation between authorities (Finnish Government, 2025; Government Offices of Sweden, 2025). The following sections present some of the most central official preventive measures that have been implemented in the Nordic countries.

## Handbooks on how to prevent and manage unlawful influence

Sweden has published a set of handbooks on how to prevent and manage unlawful influence. Brå has released several such handbooks over the years, with the most recent in 2025 (Brå, 2025b). These handbooks are based on data from Brå's surveys on unlawful influence and provide guidance and information for primarily public authorities and municipalities but can be applicable to all types of organisations.

The latest handbook contains concrete tools and strategies for preventing attempts at unlawful influence and focuses on general preventive measures, situational assessment, measures to reduce risk and good incident management. Table 3 summarizes the central strategies of the handbook.

Another of Brå's handbooks focuses on how to act against crime and risks connected to parallel societal structures (Brå, 2022). The handbook presents how unlawful influence can be integrated into different societal structures, with parallel systems of justice being most critical to the justice sector. Parallel justice refers to decisions that disregard established laws, for example, through unofficial so-called courts, appointed mediators or the imposition of fines within criminal environments. Preventive practices, according to the handbook, are long-term, knowledge-based and trust-building measures to strengthen the legitimacy of authorities. They include dialogue, police interventions, legal support and information on the rights and available support, especially for women and other marginalised groups.

**Table 3.** Strategies for preventing attempts at unlawful influence.
Source: Brå (2025b). Handbok för att förebygga otillåten påverkan.

| Strategies for preventing attempts at unlawful influence |
|---|
| **General preventive measures**<br><br>• Leadership commitment to the issue.<br>• Promote an open and safe organisational culture.<br>• Increase knowledge among managers and employees and involve different parts of the organisation. |
| **Situation assessment**<br><br>An understanding of the scope of the problem and the risks specific to the organisation, based on information from various sources (incident documentation, employee surveys and dialogues, information from the police and other cooperation partners) as well as risk analyses and internal controls. |
| **Risk-reduction measures**<br><br>• **Rotation and the four-eyes principle:** Rotate cases between different case officers, or have several case officers handle the same case, and ensure staffing levels that increase safety. Working alone can heighten vulnerability to both threats and violence, as well as the risk of being recruited as an enabler.<br>• **Conversations and supervision** to identify risks, vulnerabilities, and exposure.<br>• **Communicate routines both internally and externally:** Clear guidelines reduce the risk of employees being manipulated or recruited as enablers for criminal networks.<br>• **Review access to information:** Many employees have access to significantly more information than is necessary (Brå 2024). Access to sensitive information increases the risk that an employee, either voluntarily or involuntarily, could become an enabler for criminal actors. Unlimited access to the organization's premises also constitutes a security risk.<br>• **Strengthen the recruitment process** through reference checks, background checks, and security vetting of positions. |
| **Incident management**<br><br>Good incident management enables the collection of valuable information about incidents, which is essential for creating a situational assessment and further developing preventive measures:<br>• Incident reporting, as well as the possibility to report signs of potential enablers.<br>• Police reports.<br>• Whistleblower functions.<br>• Support for employees who have been subjected to threats or incidents. |

## Other prevention practices

A project on unlawful influence, "Motverka hotet från insidan" ("Countering the Threat from Within"), has been carried out in Sweden in recent years among the government agencies cooperating to address organised crime (Polismyndigheten, 2025a). The project had three main objectives: (1) to raise awareness, (2) to harmonise working methods, and (3) to propose legislative amendments concerning unlawful influence, insiders and infiltration. The joint project has resulted in information initiatives, the establishment of a new HR network, and increased cooperation aimed at preventing and addressing this threat to the authorities. Several agencies have submitted requests for legislative amendments to enable better background checks – which have been acknowledged by the government. New regulations are expected to provide better opportunities to carry out checks in order to prevent and detect risks related to insiders and infiltration.

Sweden has also institutionalised reporting of risk analyses on unlawful influence within government activities. The 72 government agencies covered by the Regulation on Internal Governance and Control are required to, in their risk analysis, identify the most significant risks in the agency's operations, such as corruption, unlawful influence, fraud and other irregularities. In these risk reports, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, the Swedish Enforcement Authority and the National Board of Institutional Care have identified unlawful influence in the form of harassment, threats and violence as a significant risk (Riksrevisionen, 2022).

In Denmark, victim protection has been a key focus. A service review of the first three gang packages notes that measures such as questioning witnesses via telecommunications and denying access to court hearings have been implemented (Justitsministeriet, 2022). Additionally, 60 personal alarm devices were purchased for distribution to citizens who wish to report or testify against gang or biker group members. Experience with these alarms varies: some districts have issued only a few gang-related cases, while others up to 20. The Danish National Police conclude that the availability of alarms has not clearly increased witnesses' willingness to speak to the police, although several districts report that alarms can provide reassurance and strengthen the relationship between victims or witnesses and authorities.

# 9. Summary and conclusion

This report has mapped the existing knowledge about unlawful influence by organised crime in the justice sector in the Nordic countries, as well as the preventive measures implemented. The report is based on previous research and official reports on unlawful influence, supplemented by media coverage, as well as relevant government proposals and official documents.

The general finding is that the presence of unlawful influence by organised crime in the Nordic justice sector appears uneven across countries, largely unknown and understudied. In Sweden, official reports have documented a variety of such influence in the justice sector, and research based on victim surveys has confirmed this picture. In the other Nordic countries, there are isolated examples of unlawful influence in the justice sector, but systematic empirical examinations of the phenomenon are lacking.

A limitation of this report is that the research available is scarce and captures only a partial perspective on the overall phenomenon. Similarly, official documentation cannot provide a comprehensive picture of how the phenomenon is understood or addressed. It is difficult to determine exactly how widespread the problem is, whether the influence is systematic and possible changes in its levels and forms.

Unlawful influence on justice authorities poses a critical threat to the rule of law and democracy, especially if such activities expand. Determining how often organised crime is behind unlawful influence remains a key challenge. The starting point of this report has been to study what we know about reported workplace violence and offences against public officials in the justice sector. Nevertheless, previous research has shown that studying unlawful influence reported to the criminal justice system captures only a small part of the phenomenon.

## Offences against public officials

Throughout the country-specific sections, this report has examined offences against public officials. Figure 6 shows a slight increase in reported violence and threats against public officials in all Nordic countries during the 2020s, although no dramatic changes have occurred. Country comparisons of the level of offending are difficult, as the terminology and scope of offences vary between jurisdictions. Therefore, trends rather than levels should be compared. The take-home message is that the reported level of offences against public officials has increased, though not dramatically, in most Nordic countries. Longer-term increases across the Nordic countries are identifiable since the 2000s, even if this trend has been less visible over the past decade.

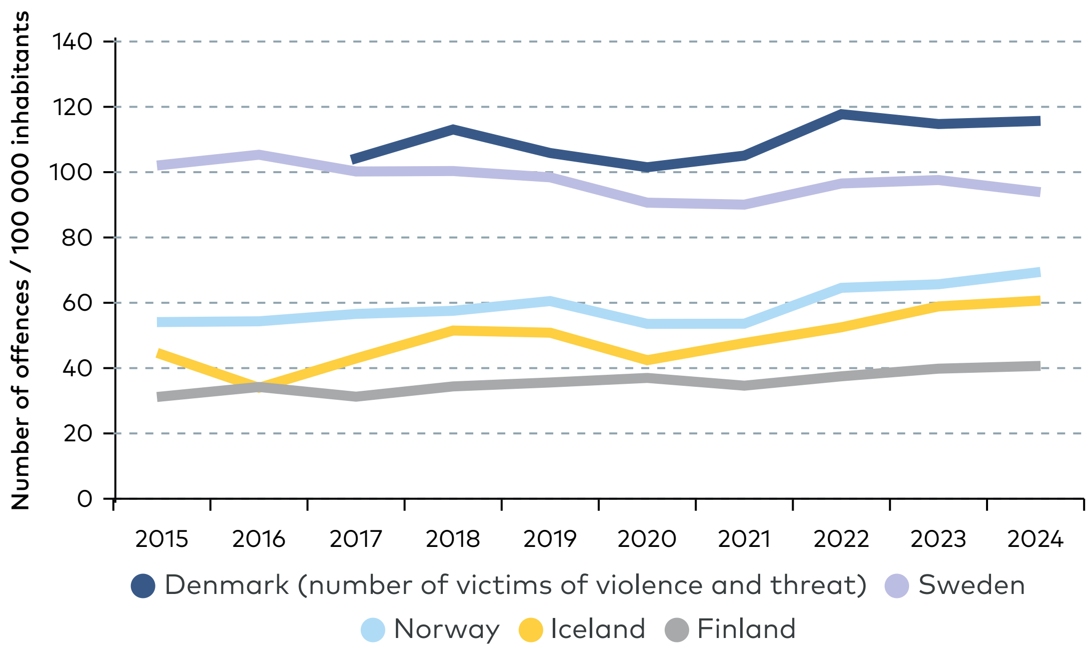


**Figure 6.** Reported offences of violence and threats against public officials in Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland, per 100, 000 inhabitants. Source: National statistics on population data and reported offences (including Brå for Sweden and the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police).

Figure 6 is somewhat surprising, especially regarding Sweden, considering the numerous reports of increasing violence and threats not least within the police and prison systems. There may be several reasons for this. Firstly, unlawful influence is not a legal definition. For it to result in a conviction, it must manifest and be considered as a criminalised act such as violence, threat or corruption. The idea of unlawful influence is however implemented in our current legislation. Using or threatening to use violence to compel a public official to take or not take an action in the course of their duties is punishable under current legislation on offences against public officials. Moreover, legislation on corruption can be used to punish improper or unlawful behaviours involving the abuse of power for personal or organisational gain, such as bribery, fraud, extortion and abuse of authority.

As a second reason to the decreasing Swedish numbers, unlawful influence is known to be characterised by a large number of hidden acts. Influence goes unreported if it remains unnoticed, is considered insignificant, is perceived by the influenced as shameful, or is deemed not worth reporting because it is not illegal. Unlawful influence is a phenomenon without a clear definition, which makes it difficult to assess its scope. Measurement is particularly complicated by the fact that intent is extremely difficult to prove.

Despite these factors, it remains essential for public trust that violence, threats and other forms of unlawful influence against staff are reported and properly investigated. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness so that incidents of unlawful influence are reported to a greater extent.

## Influence by organised crime

The sources from which we have been able to infer something about unlawful influence suggest that most of it appears to involve activities other than organised crime. Nevertheless, unlawful influence and corruption seem to be increasingly important modes of operation for organised crime (e.g., Europol, 2025).

Although it does not clearly emerge in this report, we know that organised crime is becoming increasingly entrenched in European societal structures. Even if this development is not equally visible in all Nordic countries, it cannot be avoided. And even if it is not openly recognised, it is likely present.

An important insight highlighted by the sources in this report is that, contrary to common perceptions, organised crime often uses soft, subtle forms of influence that are difficult for authorities to detect (Brå, 2016b, 2025c; NOU 2020:4; Riksrevisionen, 2022). Moreover, the influencing is characterised by legal awareness, disruption and personal targeting (Brå, 2016b; Paasonen, 2021). The goal often appears to be access to sensitive information. Therefore, preventive work requires equally sophisticated approaches.

While it is important to recognise the risks connected to organised crime and unlawful influence, it is also important to be aware that not only organised crime drives this development. Broader societal trends fuelled by social media contribute to a harsher public debate and increased polarisation, leaving public authorities more exposed.

## Preventive practices

When summarising existing knowledge on prevention practices in the Nordic countries, a pattern emerges of heavy reliance on penalties. In Sweden, for example, penalty levels for offences against public officials have been increased several times over the past decade. Similar increases are planned in other Nordic countries. Finland stands out for clearly shorter penalties in the comparison. In most Nordic countries, the legislation on offences against public officials increasingly identifies specific professional groups (police, prison and probation staff, customs officers, and rescue and ambulance personnel) as important and provides for harsher penalties for offences against them, while considering organised crime as an aggravating factor.

Sweden showcases a broader range of responses to unlawful influence than the other Nordic countries. In particular, the need to raise awareness of the problem and to build organisational robustness has been emphasised, for example in rigorous recruitment processes and strengthened internal security measures. This comprehensive focus on unlawful influence in Sweden has, in turn, inspired further legislation in the area. The issue of identity shielding within the police and the prison and probation services has sparked discussions about necessary measures and legislation in both Sweden and Norway. In this context, both research and official reports on these matters have concluded that it is difficult to determine how to balance personal integrity with the public interest (Brå, 2025c; NOU 2020:4; SOU 2023:67; SOU 2024: 1).

Figure 7 summarises what we have identified as the most important proactive measures, risks and reactive measures connected to unlawful influence. The proactive measures mainly focus on organisational practices, while general awareness of the problem is also crucial. The risks connected to unlawful influence range from a normalisation of undue and unlawful influence to the emergence of parallel justice systems.

The reactive measures include both internal handling within organisations and external actions such as reporting incidents to the police and the potential punishments that may follow. What the figure illustrates is that, although punishment is important, it represents only a very limited part of the overall response to unlawful influence (see also Muttilainen et al., 2025). A wide range of both proactive and reactive measures must be implemented alongside formal sanctions such as punishment.

| Prevetive measures | → | Risks | ← | Reactive measure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Raising awareness<br>• Operational culture and practices<br>• Training<br>• Recruitment processes<br>• Whistleblowing functions and reporting systems<br>• Risk assessment and guidelines | | • Normalization of threats and violence against public officials<br>• Undue and unlawful influence of public officials<br>• Corruption<br>• Enablers and insiders<br>• Parallel justice | | • Internal handling<br>• Advice and support<br>• Support for victims<br>• Reporting to the police<br>• Punishments |

**Figure 7.** Summary of risk management measures connected to unlawful influence in the justice sector

## Future research

One area that has received limited research attention is unlawful influence on prosecutors, courts, witnesses and control authorities such as the border and coast guard, customs and the tax agency. Although the focus on witness protection has resulted in some legal changes, research on this topic remains limited. In witness protection, crime that goes unreported to authorities is an important aspect of unlawful influence and organised crime worth further study. The decision not to report is often linked to serious criminality, and in such situations the fear of retaliation may be particularly pronounced. Moreover, we see the need for generally broadening the research perspective on what concerns unlawful influence, to include a wide range of methods and their flexible use. Therefore, the interconnections between different methods of influence are an increasingly important subject for study. For example, sexually motivated abuse of power has recently been raised as sexual corruption in Nordic police research (Lundgren & Wieslander, 2025; Thomassen & Strype, 2024), showing the diversity of corruption while emphasising the responsibility of those who abuse their positions of power.

This study is based on existing information from data sources that are in many ways fragmented. One potential topic for further research would be to develop indicators for collecting comparable data on unlawful influence across countries, and to analyse the scope, characteristics and changes of the phenomenon.

## Conclusion

This report has shown that unlawful influence from organised crime is perceived and reported to be an increasing problem within the justice sector in the Nordic countries. The lack of systematic data and research on the topic (with Sweden as the exception) makes it difficult to determine how widespread it is. Notably, reported levels of offences against public officials have not shown any dramatic increase in the Nordics, despite the significant focus on the phenomenon.

Altogether, the findings of this report suggest that an informed and sober approach is needed when assessing the risks and planning prevention of unlawful influence.

First of all, further research is needed, using victim surveys, interviews, administrative registers and other types of data. Secondly, other countries can take the example of the Swedish focus on raising awareness and building organisational robustness. Rigorous recruitment processes and strengthened internal security measures in organisations are good preventive actions that can be implemented at all organisational levels. In this context, efforts to combat unlawful influence could be strengthened by linking them more closely with anti-corruption initiatives. At the same time, prevention measures must be carefully considered to balance personal integrity with the public interest, so as not to undermine the openness and trust that are hallmarks of Nordic society. In a time characterised by polarisation and changing facets of organised crime, it is likely that questions of unlawful influence will become more pressing. It is therefore important to have a clear and articulated way of handling these cases.

Unlawful influence encompasses a wide range of methods, applied flexibly and targeting numerous public actors and organisations, and unlawful influence by organised crime is increasingly regarded as a national security concern. Effective prevention therefore requires strong coordination of measures between a wide array of responsible authorities. This does not necessarily mean that punishments are the only or correct solution, because the threshold for reporting is high and the perceived benefit of prosecuting crimes limited. Unlawful influence therefore needs to be prevented more than punished.

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# Appendix

Strategic documents analysed

| Country | Year | Name of the document | Type of document |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sweden | 2025 | Ett starkare skydd för offentliganställda mot våld, hot och trakasserier m.m. | Government proposal |
| Sweden | 2025 | Handbok att förebygga och hantera påverkansförsök | Handbook |
| Sweden | 2024 | Handlingsplan mot korruption och otillåten påverkan 2024–2027 | Strategic document |
| Sweden | 2024 | Motståndskraft och handlingskraft – en nationell strategi mot organiserad brottslighet (Resistance and decisive action – a national strategy against organised crime) | Strategic document |
| Sweden | 2024 | Anonyma vittnen | Government proposal |
| Sweden | 2022 | Agera mot brott och otrygghet med koppling till parallella samhällsstrukturer | Handbook |
| Sweden | 2020 | Ett förstärkt medarbetarskydd för polisanställda | Government proposal |
| Sweden | 2019 | Ett stärkt straffrättsligt skydd för blåljusverksamhet och myndighetsutövning | Government proposal |
| Sweden | 2017 | Att förebygga och hantera påverkansförsök | Handbook |
| Sweden | 2016 | Bättre straffrättsliga verktyg mot organiserad brottslighet | Government proposal |
| Denmark | 2025 | Aftale om strafreform og kriminalforsorgens økonomi 2026–2030 | Government proposal |
| Denmark | 2023 | Aftale om bandepakke IV – Trygge nabolag i hele Danmark | Government proposal |
| Denmark | 2017 | Aftale om Bandepakke III – Bander bag tremmer | Government proposal |
| Norway | 2024 | Statsbudsjettet 2025 (Gjengpakke II) | Government proposal |
| Norway | 2021 | Sammen mot barne-, ungdoms- og gjengkriminalitet | Strategic document |
| Finland | 2025 | Strategy and action plan to combat organised crime, 2025–2030 (Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätös järjestäytyneen rikollisuuden torjunnan strategiasta ja toimenpideohjelmasta vuosille 2025–2030) | Strategic document |
| Finland | 2025 | Government proposal to amend chapter 16 of the Criminal Code (blue-light sabotage) (Hallituksen esitys rikoslain 16 luvun muuttamisesta) | Government proposal |

# About this publication

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Emma Villman
Vesa Muttilainen
Markus Kaakinen

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The Nordic Council of Ministers
Nordens Hus
Ved Stranden 18
DK-1061 Copenhagen
pub@norden.org

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