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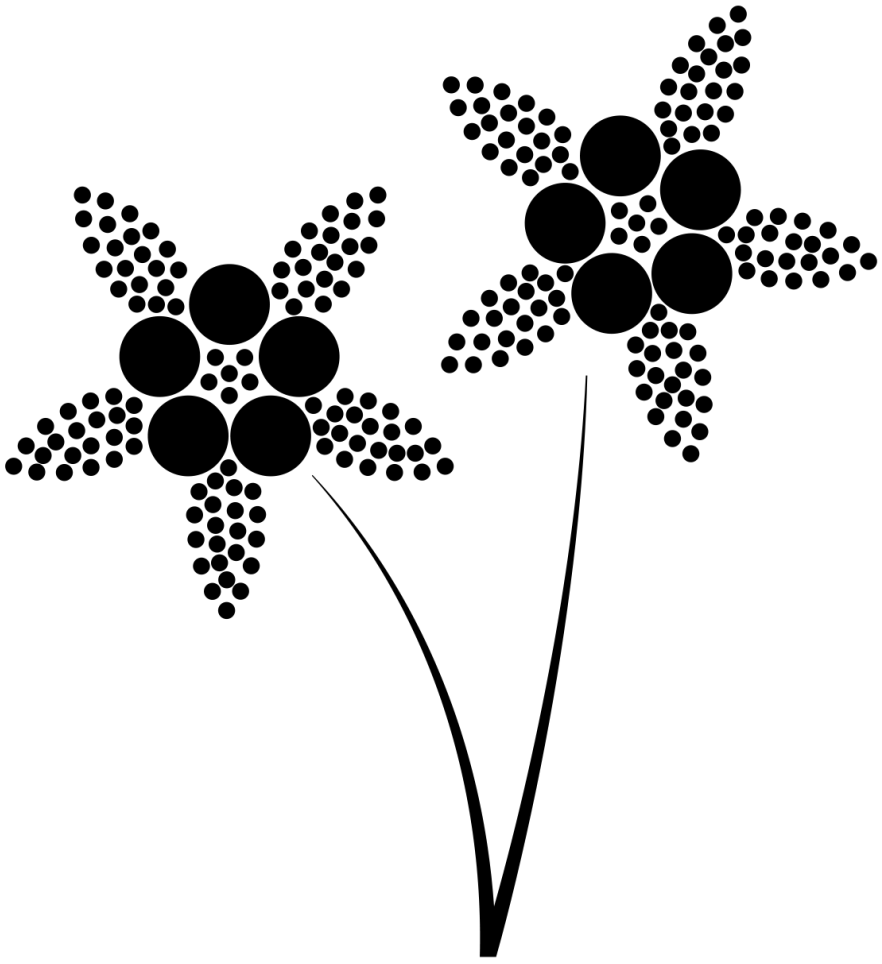
Recognising Women in the Exit Process

A Gender-Responsive DDR Analysis of Municipal Reintegration Support for Women Leaving Criminal Gangs in Sweden



Bachelor Thesis

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Abstract

Leaving a criminal gang requires more than just simply ending the criminal involvement. It involves rebuilding an entirely new life outside the criminal environment, which may include cutting the contact with previous social circles, relocating to another part of the country, and dealing with mental health challenges. For women, this process may involve handling experiences and needs that differ from those of men, yet little is known about how these are addressed within the Swedish social service exit processes. This study therefore explores how six municipal exit-support practitioners in Sweden describe and understand the reintegration of women leaving criminal gangs. To examine this, the study includes six in-depth, semi-structured interviews with professionals working with municipal exit-support across Sweden. The interviews were thematically analyzed, while Gender-Responsive DDR was used as the analytical framework, to examine the findings from a gender-perspective. The findings suggest that the professionals describe support in several areas of reintegration. However, the interviews also highlight challenges in identifying women as potential exit clients, as well as differences in how gender-specific needs are recognized and addressed.

Keywords

Gender-Responsive DDR, GR-DDR, Reintegration, Exit-support, Social Services, Sweden, Criminal Gangs, Women

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1. Introduction

Organized criminal networks have become one of the most pressing security and structural challenges in Sweden in recent years. According to the Swedish Police Authority's 2025 situational report, approximately 17 500 individuals are identified as active members of criminal networks in Sweden, with an additional 50 000 individuals assessed as having connections to such networks. These figures not only illustrate the scale of organized criminal activity in Sweden but also demonstrate its significant presence within Swedish society (Polisen, 2025a).

In the Swedish context, criminal networks or criminal gangs generally refer to groups of individuals engaged in organized criminal activities for financial gain, influence, or territorial control. Such activities may include smuggling, drug trafficking, tax crimes and other forms of criminal activities. Moreover, members of these networks usually occupy different roles and levels of involvement, contributing to the operation of the networks in different ways. Furthermore, violence, and threats of violence are frequently used to maintain control, resolve conflicts, protect interests or use as an act of revenge against rival networks (Polisen, 2025b; Bris.se, 2024).

Furthermore, organized criminal networks in Sweden have long been perceived as predominantly male-dominated, both in public discourse and in academic research. Research demonstrates that women occupy a variety of different roles that have over the years started extending beyond more passive or supportive roles (Arnell, Stephenson and Vogel, n.d.). According to The Swedish Prosecution Authority (2024), the involvement of women in criminal gangs have increased in recent years, with indications that their roles have become more strategic and active. For instance, it has become more common for women to carry out more violent crimes and transport narcotics. Moreover, their residences have also reportedly been used for the storage of weapons and drugs. Furthermore, women without prior criminal records are sometimes perceived as less likely to be suspected by police, which may influence the roles they are assigned within these networks (Åklagarmyndigheten, 2024).

While women and girls may become involved in criminal networks, disengagement from these environments raises questions about how they are supported in reintegrating back into society. Given that research shows that women possess different roles and experiences than men within criminal gangs, there is a need to examine whether reintegration processes adequately address their specific needs. Moreover, while existing gang desistance research provides valuable insights into disengagement and reintegration, much of this literature has historically focused more on male experiences. Consequently, there remains a limited understanding of how reintegration processes in Sweden respond to women's specific needs and challenges.

To further understand these issues, this study uses selected dimensions of Gender-Responsive DDR (GR-DDR) as an analytical lens to examine how municipal exit-support practitioners describe women's reintegration needs, challenges and access to support.

1.1 Relevance & Objective

From a peace and development perspective, reintegration is an important process for promoting social inclusion, reducing violence, and strengthening long-term societal resilience. While reintegration and especially, gender-responsive DDR has traditionally been examined in relation to former combatants in post-conflict settings, similar challenges arise when individuals disengage from gang criminality. Understanding how women leaving criminal gangs are supported in rebuilding their lives is therefore relevant not only for individual well-being, but also for broader questions concerning security, social cohesion, and sustainable development in society.

The objective of this study is therefore to examine how municipal exit-support practitioners in Sweden describe and understand the reintegration of women leaving criminal gangs, including needs, challenges and barriers identified in the process. The study uses selected dimensions of GR-DDR as an analytical tool to better understand these findings from a gender perspective. By doing so, the study

aims to highlight aspects of women's reintegration that may otherwise receive less attention. The professionals' descriptions can also indicate how prepared the municipal exit-support units are to receive women. Additionally, the findings may also contribute to future research and provide insights relevant to the development of more gender-responsive exit-support practices and policies.

1.2 Research Questions

- How do municipal exit-support practitioners describe and understand reintegration support for women leaving criminal gangs in Sweden?
- What challenges, needs, and barriers are identified in the reintegration process for women?
- How can selected Gender-Responsive DDR dimensions contribute to understanding municipal exit-support for women leaving criminal gangs, and what are the limitations of this perspective?

1.3 Disposition

The thesis consists of eight chapters. Following the introduction, chapter two reviews previous research on women's involvement in criminal gangs, their experiences and roles within these environments, and existing knowledge on reintegration in Sweden. The third chapter introduces the analytical framework, introducing gender-responsive DDR. Moreover, chapter four outlines the methodology, including the research design, data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations. The fifth chapter provides a background on how Swedish exit work is organised in Sweden. Chapter six presents the empirical findings, and chapter seven analyses them through the lens of gender-responsive DDR. Additionally, the final chapter concludes the study and suggests areas for future research.

2 Literature Review

Research on criminal gangs has increased considerably over the past decades. However, while previous research has examined disengagement and reintegration

from criminal environments, it has largely focused on male experiences. As we see an increase of women engaging in criminal gangs in Sweden, there is a need to evaluate the reintegration processes from a more gender-sensitive perspective and adapt the programs to this change. Moreover, gender-responsive DDR emphasize the need for a more tailored support that is addressing women's specific vulnerabilities and pathways out of violence.

Despite the growing amount of research on women in criminal gangs, limited research has examined whether reintegration practices in Sweden adequately address women's specific needs and experiences. Furthermore, no identified studies have applied a gender-responsive DDR perspective to the Swedish context of gang disengagement and reintegration. Therefore, the following review examines existing research on women's involvement in gangs, gender-specific experiences in criminal gangs, and reintegration within Sweden to identify gaps within the literature.

2.1 DDR in Gang Related Contexts

Although research on the application of DDR in gang-related contexts remains limited, Haiti represents a significant case. Schuberth (2017) describes it as the only case in which the United Nations stabilization mission attempted to implement a traditional DDR program specifically targeting gang members and in a non-conflict setting. However, the DDR process had to be later adapted. Difficulties related to the reintegration were also brought to light in the Haitian context. For example, although participants received vocational training and support for income-generating activities, many continued to face barriers to a sustainable reintegration due to unemployment, stigma, ongoing insecurities and limited opportunities to disengage from their gang-affiliated social networks. Furthermore, psychosocial needs and broader structural conditions, including poverty and social exclusion, were insufficiently addressed. These findings demonstrate that reintegration is a multidimensional process requiring adequate economic, psychosocial and social support, while also being tailored to the specific context in which it is implemented. This is particularly relevant when

examining women leaving criminal gangs, whose reintegration needs may be further shaped by gender-specific experiences.

2.2 Drivers of Women's Gang Involvement

Understanding the factors that influence women's involvement in criminal networks is important for understanding both their pathways into criminal environments and their reintegration needs. Existing research demonstrates that women's involvement in gangs is often shaped by a combination of individual, social, and structural factors. These patterns are evident across both international and Swedish research.

An international systematic review identifying several push and pull factors associated with women's involvement in criminal gangs identifies victimisation as an important push factor. This includes experiences of mental, sexual and physical abuse. Furthermore, within the peer and family context, an unstable family environment and family conflicts were all found to increase the likelihood of girls becoming involved in gang-related activities. Additionally, low school commitment or weak attachment to school also led to a higher risk of females to be involved in gangs (Sutherland et al., 2024). Similar patterns can be seen in the Swedish context. A report from KSAN (The Women's Organisations' Committee on Alcohol and Drug Issues) highlights socio-economic disadvantages, growing up in vulnerable areas, or having experienced violence at home. Additional factors brought up are having a relative or partner involved in a criminal gang. KSAN highlights that romantic relationships are particularly common as a pathway into criminal environments for women, compared to the men (Heine and Ljuslin, 2025).

Collectively, these two studies demonstrate that women's involvement in criminal gangs is rarely explained by a single factor. Rather, it reflects the interaction of individual experiences, relationships, and socioeconomic circumstances. Similar patterns have also been identified in conflict settings such as in Guatemala and Colombia, where women's involvement in armed groups has been linked to

socioeconomic challenges, experiences of violence or through family and relationships (Weber, 2021). Although the contexts differ significantly from the Swedish one, this suggests that some of the factors shaping women's involvement overlap. Moreover, recognising these factors is important for understanding women's involvement in criminal gangs and for developing reintegration interventions that address the factors contributing to gang involvement.

2.3 Gender-Specific Roles & Experiences

The roles and experiences of women in criminal gangs highlight the need for gender-sensitive reintegration. Existing research demonstrates that women occupy a variety of roles within criminal networks, acting both as active participants in criminal activities and as victims. This pattern is evident across both international and Swedish research. Overall, the literature suggests that women's experiences differ visibly from those typically described in the predominantly male-focused gang literature.

International research illustrates this. For example, a report from The British Home office (Disley and Liddle, 2016) highlights the roles of women. The report describes how women's roles could vary between transporting weapons, storing drugs, and facilitating violent attacks against rival members. Additionally, the report further mentions how women are usually less likely to be suspected to be carrying anything illegal and in turn, being searched, which makes it strategically valuable to have them possess certain roles (Disley and Liddle, 2016). Similar patterns are found in the Swedish context. A report from The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) reports that women commonly participate in the distribution and storage of narcotics and weapons. However, the report further highlights that women are also involved in crimes such as robbery, money laundering, and other violent crimes (Tollin, Dufort and Hurve, 2025). These patterns are further reflected in a recent Swedish study by Khalil and Tsotoglou (2025), which analyses podcast interviews with women formerly involved in criminal networks. The study similarly identifies that women engage in a variety of different roles such as transporting and selling narcotics, planning and logistics,

committing violent crimes or pursuing economic crimes such as money laundering or burglary. Additionally, the authors further highlight the complexity of women's involvement by showing how they may be both active perpetrators and victims within the criminal networks. Furthermore, this demonstrates that women’s involvement in criminal gangs is multifaceted, with women occupying a wide range of roles within criminal networks.

While women occupy a variety of roles within these criminal networks, the literature also demonstrates that they are exposed to gender-specific violence and exploitation. A longitudinal study of young women in residential care shows that gang exposure is strongly associated with both violence and sexual exploitation victimisation, leading to trauma-related outcomes. Sexual violence is further identified as the most significant factor explaining symptoms such as post-traumatic stress, identity disturbance and behavioural problems. It demonstrates how girls in gang environments are frequently exposed to gender-based violence (Ducharme et al., 2024).

These findings are further supported by the report by The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ). The report examines how misogynistic norms, sexual violence, and gendered power structures within criminal gangs contribute to a high level of sexual victimisation, particularly against women in these environments. Through interviews and encrypted chats, the report describes how purchasing sex, exploitation, and degrading attitudes towards women appear normalized within these criminal settings. Women are frequently objectified and discussed in ways that reflect deeply misogynistic norms. Furthermore, the report demonstrate how sexual violence is used as a tool of control and domination within criminal networks. Additionally, the report mentions how it has been identified in the material, that men in criminal networks have attempted to pressure women into withdrawing rape accusations though threats, manipulation, and social pressure (Tollin, Dufort and Hurve, 2025). Continuously, this report emphasises that misogynistic norms and sexual violence are normalized within criminal gangs, exposing the women to gender-specific forms of control, exploitation, and abuse. These findings further highlight the complexity of

women's involvement in criminal networks, reflecting both active participation in criminal activities and experiences of victimisation. The studies also stress the importance of adopting a gender-sensitive approach to reintegration practices.

2.4 Research on Sweden's Reintegration and Support Interventions

Sweden has developed a welfare-based model of reintegration to support individuals leaving criminal networks. However, research examining reintegration processes in the Swedish context remains limited, particularly regarding women. The existing literature suggests that women are often overlooked in both research and practice, indicating that current reintegration interventions do not always adequately address women's specific experiences and needs.

Recent peer-reviewed research demonstrates that Swedish exit programmes face increasing challenges in responding to the complex needs of individuals leaving criminal networks. Based on interviews with practitioners in both Swedish and Danish exit programmes, Hedlund et al. (2026) identify challenges related to trauma, social isolation, following the relocation, difficulties establishing new social networks, protection and the need for long-term, individually adapted support to facilitate successful reintegration. Similarly, Forslund Petrelius and Leiman Eriksson (2025) also found that there are reintegration challenges for individuals leaving criminal gangs. This includes difficulties in finding new social networks when relocated, but also that trust, patience and continuity between practitioner and individuals leaving criminal networks plays an important role for successful reintegration.

Additionally, a Swedish student thesis by Sveijer and Kölqvist (2024) adds a gender lens to the reintegration system. They argue that women in Swedish exit processes are frequently overlooked in both research and practice. Using an analytical lens from intersectionality and street level bureaucracy, the authors demonstrate that existing exit programmes are largely designed around men's experiences, resulting in women receiving support that does not adequately reflect their specific needs, or they get excluded. Furthermore, the study argues that

women are often treated primarily as victims rather than active agents which may influence both the support they receive and their access to the reintegration interventions. Additionally, the authors further emphasize the limited knowledge available regarding women's reintegration in the Swedish context and the lack of evidence-based guidance for designing interventions tailored for women.

Collectively, the existing literature identifies shortcomings within Swedish reintegration practices, including the need for long-term support, social reintegration, and insufficient recognition of women's specific experiences and needs. Professionals are central here, as they identify, assess and organise support, and their understanding of women may influence whether women are recognised as exit clients and what support they receive. This study also differs from previous research in two ways. Firstly, unlike Hedlund et al. (2026), it focuses on women, and unlike Sveijer and Kölqvist (2024), it examines how municipal exit-support professionals describe reintegration support for women, and which needs, challenges and barriers they identify. Secondly, it is the first identified study to apply GR-DDR dimensions to Swedish exit-support, directing attention to the entire reintegration process, from identification and assessment to psychosocial, economic and social support.

3 Theoretical Framework: Gender-Responsive DDR

This chapter presents *Gender-Responsive Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (GR-DDR),* as the analytical framework used in this study, with a particular focus on reintegration. GR-DDR is a policy and practice framework rather than an explanatory theory. Additionally, selected dimensions of GR-DDR are used as an analytical lens to understand the findings, rather than to assess whether Swedish exit-support meet international standards.

Although GR-DDR was developed primarily for conflict/post-conflict settings, some of its principles are still relevant to the Swedish context, particularly its

focus concerning women's needs, access to support, and social, economic and psychosocial reintegration, which provides useful perspectives for examining municipal exit-support. However, differences between these contexts mean that GR-DDR cannot be directly transferred as a programme to the Swedish context. Unlike DDR programmes in conflict/post-conflict settings, reintegration support in Sweden is provided through the social service and cooperation with other public authorities and service providers. Therefore, the GR-DDR dimensions must be understood in relation to these organisational differences.

3.1 The Evolution of DDR

DDR has evolved considerably over the past decades from an initial focus on security and disarmament towards a broader focus on long-term reintegration. While first-generation DDR primarily focused on disarming and dissolving armed groups, second-generation DDR placed greater emphasis on sustainable reintegration, community participation and local ownership. Additionally, third-generation DDR further developed more flexible and individualised approaches and developed the framework beyond traditional conflict/post-conflict settings. This more recent development towards a more flexible approach, long-term integration and individual needs is particularly relevant for this study (Rodríguez-Castellón, 2024; United Nations, 2010).

3.2 Gender-Responsive DDR

Gender-responsive DDR is not a generation of DDR, but a policy and practice perspective that recognises how women's roles, experiences and needs have often been overlooked in DDR processes. Historically DDR programmes have primarily focused on male combatants, which has contributed to women being excluded from support (Palik and Salama, 2024).

The main idea of GR-DDR is that gender perspectives should be integrated throughout the entire process. This includes recognizing that women may have held support roles within armed groups, without possessing any weapons, and should therefore not be excluded from the DDR programme based on weapon

possession. Moreover, women may also self-demobilize, leaving the armed group outside of the formal DDR process, which can make them difficult to identify and reach, meaning other methods of reaching them must be explored (United Nations, 2023, p. 20-21).

GR-DDR also emphasises long-term reintegration, including social, economic, political and psychosocial dimensions. The economic reintegration involves equal access to employment, education, and other occupational opportunities, while recognising gender inequalities and barriers faced by women, such as childcare responsibilities. The economic reintegration is also described as playing a key-role in reintegrating ex-combatants. Moreover, psychosocial reintegration instead includes support for trauma, mental health difficulties and specifically experiences of sexual violence, with interventions adapted to the individual needs of the person. It also highlights the importance of having female staff available for women who have experienced sexual violence, as well as the role of women's organisations that can provide support (Palik and Salama, 2024; United Nations, 2023, p. 25-30).

Furthermore, the framework highlights the importance of gender-sensitive competence among all relevant actors, coordination between actors, and women as actors of change. Additionally, it is mentioned that gender experts should be available to ensure women's needs are met adequately throughout the entire process (Palik and Salama, 2024; United Nations, 2023, p. 29-30).

However, not all GR-DDR principles are equally as relevant to the Swedish context. For example, political reintegration, particularly the transformation of armed groups into political actors and individual participation in governance, is not examined in this study (United Nations, 2023, p. 30). Similarly, specific recommendations concerning DDR programme budgets are not used in the analysis.

Furthermore, table 1 presents the selected GR-DDR dimensions used to guide the analysis. More particularly, identification and eligibility, risk assessment, and needs assessment are treated as related but separate processes in the analysis. The

analysis focuses on how these dimensions help understand the findings from the interviews, rather than assessing whether Swedish municipal exit-programmes meet GR-DDR standards. Moreover, since the study is based on interviews with municipal professionals, some dimensions can be examined through their descriptions, while others may not be sufficiently covered by the material.

Dimension	Description	Analytical Indicators
Gender Mainstreaming	Integrating gender perspectives throughout reintegration	- Women's needs recognized? - Support adapted to identified needs?
Competence & Capacity	Capacity to provide gender-responsive support	- Staff trainings? - Gender experts? - Gender-specific knowledge?
Participation & Agency	Women's involvement and influence in reintegration	- Involved in decisions? - Agency recognized?
Psychosocial Support	Addressing trauma and psychosocial needs	- Trauma-informed support? - Female staff available?
Identification & Eligibility	Recognising and reaching women	- How are women identified? - Eligibility criteria?
Risk Assessment	Assessing threats and safety risks	- Gender-specific risks considered?
Needs Assessment	Identifying individual reintegration needs	- Individual and gender-specific needs assessed?
Social networks & Community	Supporting in social reintegration	- Support for new social networks?
Economic Support & Structural barriers	Addressing economic needs and structural barriers	- Housing, finances and employment? Barriers identified?
Cooperation Among Actors	Coordination between support providers	- Coordination and referrals?

Table 1: Selected GR-DDR Dimensions and their Analytical Indicators

Furthermore, these dimensions were originally developed for DDR programmes. In the Swedish context it differs and the same tasks are instead divided between different actors, being the social service, police, regional healthcare, and external service providers.

Moreover, each dimension is analysed in a different section of the analytical chapter, depending on which part of the reintegration they concern. Identification & eligibility, risk assessment and needs assessment are analysed under 7.1, competence and capacity in 7.2, psychosocial support in 7.3, economic support & structural barriers and social networks & community in 7.4, and participation &

agency, and cooperation among actors in 7.5. Gender mainstreaming is not analysed separately, since it concerns the entire process and is therefore addressed across all sections.

4 Methodology

4.1 Research Approach & Design

This study adopts a qualitative single-case study approach to examine how municipal exit-support practitioners describe and understand reintegration support for women leaving criminal gangs, including the needs, challenges and barriers they identify. The qualitative approach was considered suitable because it allowed for a more in-depth understanding of practitioners' perspectives and experiences, which cannot be identified in publicly available documents. Moreover, interviews were conducted with practitioners from six municipalities to gain different perspectives on how reintegration support is understood and described. Instead of examining each municipality as a separate case, the study examines women's reintegration within this specific context.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were used throughout the interviewing process. This was useful because the practices could differ between municipalities. It also leaves room for the interviewee to bring up things outside of the interview guide.

Moreover, the study followed an abductive approach, combining both inductive and deductive elements. Although Gender-Responsive DDR was selected as the analytical framework before the interviews, the initial themes were developed primarily from the interview material. The selected GR-DDR dimensions were then used to better understand the findings from a gender-perspective. The findings also helped determine which parts of GR-DDR were relevant and by moving between the findings and the framework, the study could better understand patterns and challenges identified in the interviews.

4.2 Data Collection Method

Starting with the recruitment process, participants were recruited through e-mail. To reach the social services, an email must be sent to the contact centre for each municipality, which redirects you to the right department. Within the contact e-mail it was briefly described what the study was about, questions whether they worked with reintegration/exit processes, and if they had someone who would have the time to participate in an interview.

The contact process was the most difficult part. However, a contact with previous experience from the social services gave advice on how to phrase the e-mail, as well as a contact list to all Swedish municipalities. The goal was to include as many municipalities as possible, to get a variety of perspectives. Municipalities were approached on five principles. The first one was that they were known to run an exit unit. The second one was that they appear in the Swedish Police Authority's situational report on vulnerable areas, since gang-related crime, and therefore exit work, is concentrated there. The third was that they had been mentioned in online news articles in connection to gang criminality. The fourth one was a close distance to a municipality in the second group. The fifth and final one was a large breadth. Municipalities were contacted across the country without knowledge beforehand of whether exit-support existed there, to avoid limiting the material to those already visible as working in this field.

The six interviewees possessed different roles, came from different sized municipalities and varied in experience. Interviews were carried out between April-May 2026. Table 2 gives an overview of the interviewees, while keeping them anonymous.

Participant	Municipality size	Role	Gender	Exit-Support Organization	Interview format	Duration
M1	Large	Teamleader	Female	Exit-support integrated in adult unit	Online: Teams	1:05:12
M2	Large	Social secretary	Female	Exit-support integrated in adult unit	Online: Teams	59:57
M3	Medium	Coordinator	Male	Exit-support integrated in adult unit	Online: Teams	1:03:37
M4	Small	Coordinator	Female	Exit-support integrated in adult unit	Online: Teams	42:45
M5	Large	Project leader	Female	Separate exit unit	Telephone	38:42
M6	Large	Social secretary	Female	Separate exit unit	Telephone	1:04:53

Table 2: Overview of the interviewed municipalities

Note: municipality size is categorized by population: Small (fewer than 50,000 inhabitants), Medium (50,000-100,000 inhabitants, and Large (more than 100,000 inhabitants)

Moreover, the six municipalities differed considerably in how much experience they had with female exit clients. M1 and M4 had not had any female exit-clients and M6 described having had “more or less none”. M5 had worked with a small number of women compared to a large majority of men. M2 had three ongoing cases of women at the time of the interview and had experience of quite a few women before that as well. M3 declined to state the number of female clients that they have had, explaining that with so few individuals they could become identifiable.

Furthermore, the primary sources are the conducted six interviews (one person per social service unit), and the data that the analysis is primarily based on. Secondary sources (official reports from Swedish authorities, international reports, and academic research), are primarily used to build the study and provide background material. Additionally, all interviews were conducted and transcribed in Swedish and the quotes from the interviews were translated into English, with the aim of remaining as close as possible to the participants original wording.

4.3 Data Analysis

The method used to analyse the material was thematic analysis, drawing on Braun and Clarke (2021). This was considered suitable for this study because it allowed recurring patterns, similarities and differences to be identified across the interviews.

The analysis began with transcribing and reading the material several times, to familiarize with the material. Relevant excerpts were then selected from each interview based on their connection to the aim of the study and the research questions. Each excerpt was assigned an initial code reflecting what the interviewee expressed, and the process was repeated for all six interviews.

Afterwards, the codes were reviewed and compared across interviews. Codes with similar meaning were given the same labels to identify patterns. The related codes were then grouped into themes, which were reviewed to determine if any further groupings had to be done. For example, the theme “Women” covered several issues and was therefore divided into more specific sub-themes.

After developing the themes and potential sub-themes, the chosen GR-DDR dimensions were applied to understand the findings from a gender-perspective. This allowed the analysis to move between the findings and the analytical framework. Moreover, this entire process also helped create a clear distinction between the findings and analysis compared to if GR-DDR had been applied from the beginning in the coding process.

To illustrate how the findings were examined in relation to the GR-DDR dimensions, the following examples are provided: Findings from the theme “Women” concerning the interviewees knowledge and preparedness to receive women were matched towards “Competence & Capacity”, while findings concerning violence and trauma were analysed under “Psychosocial Support”. In other words, this meant findings from the same theme could be used in different GR-DDR dimensions of the analysis.

To further illustrate the analytical process, table 3 provides a worked example showing how an interview excerpt was assigned an initial code, organised into a theme and sub-theme and interpreted using GR-DDR.

Steps	Example
(1) Interview excerpt	"Some service providers may have a therapist connected to their organisation […] and can sometimes match the support to the individual's needs […] if they cannot provide this support, you end up in the regular healthcare services […] which is probably the most common approach" (M2, 2026)
(2) Initial code	*Access to psychological support*
(3) Theme & Sub-theme	**Theme:** Support & Its limitations **Sub-theme:** Trauma & Healthcare Support
(4) GR-DDR Interpretation	GR-DDR highlights the importance of access to trauma informed psychosocial support. This suggests that access to support may depend on available resources, raising questions of whether women's specific needs are adequately addressed **(Psychosocial Support)**

Table 3: Example from the analytical process

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Prior to each interview, the participants received a consent form informing about the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, the right to withdraw and asked if they were okay with the interview being recorded or not. Moreover, the form explained how the data would be stored, used, and presented in the study. Two of the participants signed the form, and the rest gave verbal consent at the beginning of the interview.

Furthermore, given the sensitivity to the topic of criminal gangs and reintegration processes, confidentiality was considered particularly important for this study. Although the participants were interviewed in their professional roles rather than

as private individuals, identifying information has been removed or anonymized where necessary to reduce the risk of linking specific statements to individual participants or municipalities. The anonymization of municipalities has also been done on request of some participants.

The interviews were recorded only with the participants permission and stored securely, with no one else accessing the recordings. Access to recordings and transcripts was limited to the researcher only and audio recordings will be deleted after the completion of the study. Moreover, additional ethical consideration concerns the topic itself. Discussions relating to criminal gangs, individuals in this sphere and reintegration may involve sensitive information. Therefore, participants were not asked to share any confidential information or asked about specific cases. The focus of the interviews remained on organizational practices, support interventions, and professional experience rather than specific individuals. This was information clarified in the contact e-mail towards the actors at first as well.

Finally, as the study examines reintegration through the perspectives of the practitioners, it has been important to not misrepresent participants' views during the analysis. The findings presented are presented in a manner that seeks to accurately reflect the participants perspectives.

4.5 Limitations & Delimitations

4.5.1 Limitations

One of the major limitations for the research paper was the recruitment of participants for interviews. Although requests were sent out to more than 65 municipalities all over Sweden, only six interviews were ultimately conducted. Several municipalities, including the three largest either did not respond to the request, declined participation with no further explanation, or declined due to time restraints. Moreover, a total of 5 municipalities declined due to lack of experience or did not currently provide exit services. While this limited the number of possible participants, it also provides a relevant finding, as these municipalities

had little or no experience of providing reintegration support to women leaving criminal gangs. This further illustrates the limited presence of gender-responsive reintegration practices at the municipal level.

Furthermore, because of few responses, the study could only capture the perspectives of a limited number of municipalities and cannot be considered to represent all the different municipalities or reintegration strategies in Sweden. Moreover, as the largest municipalities may have more extensive experience of working with women leaving criminal networks, their absence may limit the comprehensiveness of the findings, and comparative possibilities.

Another limitation also concerns the recruitment of participants. In addition to contacting the social service, attempts were also made to contact private companies and NGOs involved in reintegration and exit-support for individuals leaving criminal gangs. In total, four private companies and two NGOs were contacted, however, no interviews were secured, due to lack of response. Consequently, the study primarily reflects the perspective of municipal actors and may not fully capture the experiences and practices of other key actors involved in the reintegration process.

Additionally, time constraints were also a limitation for the study. As qualitative interviews benefit from allowing participants having sufficient time to reflect on and elaborate upon their experiences and perspectives, variations in interview length may have influenced the depth of the collected data. Some participants had limited availability due to professional commitments, which occasionally restricted the opportunity for further elaborated answers and follow-up questions. Consequently, certain topics may not have been explored in the same depth across all interviews.

A further limitation is that only M2 and M5 described experience of female exit clients (see section 4.2). Much of the material on women therefore reflects perceptions rather than practice, which limits generalisation. However, this limited experience is a relevant finding, as it reflects how few women currently reach the municipal exit-support.

Finally, the study reports what the interviewees chose to describe. The absence of a theme in an interview cannot be read as an absence in practice. An interviewee might not have thought of something or been asked about it.

4.5.2 Delimitations

The first delimitation for the study is that it focuses on the perspective of only one of the involved key actors in the reintegration process. The study therefore does not capture the perspectives of other actors, such as the police, external service providers or regional healthcare.

Moreover, it does not include interviews with women who have personally left criminal networks. The reason for this is that the group is very hard to reach due to security and privacy concerns. Interviews with this group may also be harder as there could be a need to build trust, and a potential interview could pose a risk for re-traumatization which is why this approach has been considered more appropriate.

A second delimitation is the target group of the study. The study only focuses on women leaving criminal gangs and does not include men or children. The reason for this is that analysing all groups would have broadened the study considerably and risked leading to a shallower analysis. Furthermore, women may have different pathways into criminal gangs, gender-specific experiences etc. Given the limited research available on female reintegration, especially in Sweden, it enables the study to address an underexplored area of existing research.

Furthermore, the study is limited to the Swedish context, specifically the six municipalities. This delimitation also allows for a more in-depth analysis. Moreover, Sweden also provides a particularly relevant case for examining the reintegration of women leaving criminal gangs due to the increasing attention given to gangs and the growing recognition of women's involvement within these environments.

5 Background

Although exit-support is organised differently across different municipalities among Sweden, the work follows a broadly shared process and guidelines. Therefore, this chapter provides an overview of how support for individuals leaving criminal gangs is intended to be organised in Sweden. It outlines actors involved, eligibility criteria to be qualified as an exit client, assessment instruments used to identify needs and risks, and the general process from application to a completed program.

5.1 Defining Organised Crime

In Sweden, organised crime is defined using criteria from the European Union. At least six of the eleven criteria must be met for a group to be classified as involved in organised crime. Four of these criteria are mandatory, and those are: *(1) Collaboration between two or more persons, (3) Activity over a long or indefinite period, (5) Suspicion of serious criminal offences, and (11) The pursuit of profit and/or power.* These criteria's concern the criminal group, rather than an individual's eligibility for exit-support. However, they can serve as guidance for the social service and police. An individual's eligibility for exit-support is assessed separately by the social service and police (Socialstyrelsen, 2025; Polisen, 2025b).

5.2 The Exit Process

The process starts with a person getting in contact with the social service working with exit clients. There are different entry pathways to get in contact with the service, for example by contacting the social service through phone, arranging a meeting, or having been involved in other interventions within the social service before (Socialstyrelsen, 2025).

After the application, the initial assessment begins. The social service will then evaluate what the specific needs of the person are, and what type of interventions could be done. This does not mean that the person will be classified as an exit

client, but it is what the process aims to evaluate. When evaluating the needs of a person, there are certain assessment methods that are typically used within the social service. The methods commonly used are ASI, LS/CMI, Audit, and HCR-20[1]. In connection to the assessment, the cooperation with the police is initiated, since they are responsible for the threat- and risk assessment. In situations where the person has previously been in contact with the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, the social service may also access the risk and needs assessment (RBM) conducted by the Prison and Probation Service. This could contribute to the social services assessment (Socialstyrelsen, 2025).

Additionally, the client must agree to cooperation with the police, which involves allowing exchange of information between relevant actors that would be involved in different ways throughout the exit intervention. Furthermore, when it comes to the threat and risk assessment, if the client is considered to have a low threat level, it is less likely that there would be any relocation happening. However, if the assessment concludes that there is a high threat level, this leads to a relocation somewhere else in Sweden (Socialstyrelsen, 2025).

When relocation for the individual is relevant, the support-interventions are under the responsibility to be performed by the service provider that the social service purchases this specific service from. The social service provides the service provider with the needs and type of support that the client needs, and the provider should adapt interventions accordingly. Moreover, the police stay in the picture throughout the exit process, to oversee the risk and threat picture of a client and ensure that the client continues to match the criteria to be eligible for the exit program. Additionally, the social service also does follow-ups with both the service provider and client throughout the process to ensure that the program is working and to adapt the interventions accordingly if needs change. Finally, exit

[1] ASI (Addiction Severity Index) is a tool used to assess substance use problems and related support needs. LS/CMI (Level of Service/Case Management Inventory) and HCR-20 (Historical, Clinical and Risk Management-20) are both assessment tools used to evaluate and manage the risk of future violence of the client. AUDIT (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test), is used to identify any alcohol problems (Socialstyrelsen, 2025).

programs vary in length, but stretch from around six months up until two years (Socialstyrelsen, 2025).

5.3 Individual Needs and Women

The National board of Health and Welfare describes the importance of always focusing on the individual person's needs. Interventions should be adapted accordingly to this. Moreover, the authority acknowledges that women must be seen as both victims and offenders since their roles in these environments can be very complex, and support must be adapted accordingly. Moreover, to identify more of these women, professionals who meet women are advised to ask about possible links to criminal environments, since women often seek help for other problems, such as violence against themselves or their children (Socialstyrelsen, 2025).

6 Presentation of Findings

This chapter will present the findings from the six municipalities through five different themes, with both similarities and differences across municipalities. The first four themes describe general exit-support practices, including processes that women go through as well. Where possible, the findings indicate how the practices relate to women's reintegration and where gender-specific information is limited or unavailable. The fifth theme focuses specifically on gender-related findings, based on the practitioners' responses to questions about women and gender within exit-support.

6.1 Assessment

6.1.1 Access to Support

The process described by the municipalities followed the structure described in the background. This section therefore shows how the six municipalities described applying it, and where there are differences between their answers.

To begin, the eligibility to enter the exit program are described in similar terms across the municipalities: the person must belong to organized crime, and the

police is the one who mainly determines whether that condition is met, through a threat and risk assessment carried out alongside the social services. M6 described the eligibility criteria in more formal terms the following way:

"[...] It is a person who has chosen to leave organized crime and is in need of [...] support or protection in order to do so [...] being criminal is not the same as being an exit client [...] but then six of the criteria have to be fulfilled, so to speak. It must concern organised crime." (M6, 2026)

Additionally, M3 did not refer to the formal criteria, and instead described a local use of the term "exit client". The interviewee described that the term is used for people who are under threat, and at risk by staying in the municipality. Moreover, these descriptions concern general eligibility practices, while challenges specifically related to identifying women are presented in section 6.5.2.

6.1.2 Consent

To access the exit-support, clients must accept cooperation with the police and allow for the social service to obtain information, described by M1, M2, M3 and M5. Additionally, M1 described this as the first "filter" for the potential exit client. If the person does not want to cooperate or allow the police and social service to share information, the intervention cannot begin. However, other forms of support may still be accessible, but only the consent allows for the social service to investigate whether the person is an exit client and start an exit process. M3 and M4 also noted that some clients declined this consent. M4 also described that the requirement to cooperate with the police can sometimes be an obstacle. This, the interviewee says, makes a number of potential exit clients fall outside of the support that they might need.

6.1.3 The Instruments & Needs Assessment

The Instruments used in the assessment method varied among the interviewees. M1 described two formal methods, ASI and LS/CMI, M4 described ASI primarily for clients with addiction, adding that ASI could still be used with some additional questioning relating to criminality and threat. M5 named neither of these

instruments but described working with RBM and Check IRK[2] to assess the criminal risk factors for a person. Moreover, M2 and M3 named no instruments at all. Although, M2 described using no structured interviews. Instead, M2 described assessing the needs of a client over time with intensive contact, building trust and knowledge about the person. The assessment could change over time and be adapted accordingly to this. The interviewee described it in the following way:

"We have [...] no structured interviews as such. It's not like that, it's rather through [...] intensive contact to get to know the person, and then it usually emerges. And you never get everything out through an investigation alone, but slowly and surely you get to know them once they've been placed, and then you can direct the support while they're there" (M2, 2026)

Additionally, M4 described the client as an active participant throughout the assessment process, while M3 mentioned that the professional assessment can differ from what the client itself considers as necessary.

Moreover, the assessment alongside the threat and risk assessment together determines which form the support takes. M5 stated that this also depends on what the person wants. M3 described that there is an alternative for those who do not want to relocate, which is getting support through The Social Intervention Groups (SIG) within the social service.

These descriptions concern needs assessment for exit clients generally (no matter the gender). However, the interviewees differed in their views on whether the assessment instruments consider gender. M1 stated that the instruments had no gender focus, while M6 described that instruments could include additional questions on gender-based violence and honour-related violence. This is discussed further in section 6.5.5.

[2] RBM (Risk, Need and Responsivity), is a model used to prevent relapse into criminality. It focuses on assessing who needs support, what the risk factors that the support should focus on and how to adapt them based on the persons needs. (Kriminalvården, n.d).
Check IRK is an initial assesment tool used to identify criminal risk factors for a person (Örebro University, n.d.)

6.2 Support and Its Limitations

6.2.1 Delivery through External Service Providers

All six municipalities described purchasing a support package deal from external service providers, specializing in exit clients. Most often, this typically can include a flat elsewhere, a contact person, and a set of interventions adapted to the client, but it differs from provider to provider. M1 stated that the social services cannot run this type of service themselves, due to security reasons which is why an external one is necessary. Additionally, M5 described the external service providers as the municipality's extended arm.

6.2.2 The Content of the Support

The support described for exit clients generally varies depending on individual needs. However, certain elements recurred in the interviews. M1, M2, M4 and M6 all brought up changing criminal thoughts and behavioural patterns. This is described as something almost all clients need to go through.

Furthermore, everyday practical support is the second recurring theme. M1, M3 and M6 described clients needing support with everyday tasks such as laundry, budgeting, cooking, handling post, getting started with studies or dealing with authorities. M3 also added that the client can get accompanied to go to the bank or tax agency, perceiving that many clients have lower patience since being used to a fast-paced life and quick decisions. Additionally, M2 and M3 described that clients usually needed help with security awareness after relocation. This covered the use of social media or the phone, or adapting the appearance since certain attributes for a “gang criminal” could mark a client out.

6.2.3 Trauma and Healthcare Support

Trauma was raised by all interviewees. M1 described Seeking Safety as a method commonly used for clients awaiting trauma treatment, since PTSD symptoms could sometimes worsen during treatment itself.

Furthermore, the access to mental health support was described as a clear limitation for what the municipalities could arrange. M1 and M6 both described that this falls outside of the social services responsibilities, and that this responsibility belongs to the region. Additionally, M3 described always trying to find a suitable provider that can meet the psychological needs of a client. M6 also added that access to a psychologist at the service provider is not the responsibility of the social service, and it could not steer the decision on the choice of service provider. Moreover, M2 described the availability of a psychologist depending on the external service provider, but that it is not always possible to find, so the client must then go through regional healthcare.

M4 further explained a complication with the access to healthcare: a client who has a protected identity, or who remains registered in the home municipality while living in another region, may face difficulties getting healthcare in the new region. M3 and M5 both described long waiting times even when the access was granted. M5 described it the following way:

"Much of the work with this target group [...] is about the right interventions arriving at the right time [...] and there we have the psychiatry as an enormous obstacle [...] in that we can sometimes see that a person might need medication for ADHD before they can even begin any occupation [...] and then we arrive at a place where there is a two-year waiting list to begin an assessment." (M5, 2026).

Furthermore, M1 described an attempt to establish cooperation with the psychiatric service across the regions where clients are placed, which had not yet led anywhere. Although these challenges were described for exit clients generally, they are also relevant to women, particularly given the experiences of violence and trauma discussed in section 6.5.4. However, the interviews did not mention specifically whether women experience these healthcare barriers differently.

6.2.4 Conditions & Follow-Ups

Access to exit-support is conditional. M3 described being drug-free as a requirement for getting protected placement, while M6 and M4 described that

clients had to accept a treatment and not reoffend for support to continue. Furthermore, all six interviewees described follow-ups throughout the relocation and placement but the frequency of this varied. M1 and M6 described follow-ups at least every 3 months, while M6 held the meetings in person. M4 described monthly reports from the provider, and M3 weekly contact at first and monthly later, as well as separate meetings with the client to ensure there are no concerns with the providers. M2 and M5 described weekly contact throughout, and M5 described meetings in person every six weeks with the client and service provider.

All six municipalities described the support to be running roughly one or two years, and M2 stated that the support cannot be ongoing forever. However, both M1 and M5 stated that there could in some cases be clients in need of support for the rest of their lives. Although, M5 mentioned that in those cases, the social service where the clients are relocated to, take over after the exit program is over, to continue supporting the person in different ways.

6.2.5 Limitations of the Municipality

Much of what happens during the placement lies outside the municipal control. M2 and M5 described that quality varies between the service providers, and M5 described working very closely with the client and provider and are therefore able to notice very quickly if something is not working. M4 described a more structural constraint. The relocated client remains registered in the home municipality, which keeps paying for financial assistance. The home municipality has no influence over housing or occupation where the client lives and cannot ask the receiving municipality to assist. Therefore, much of the responsibility to help the relocated client, falls on the service provider. M4 also described that the social service and service providers can sometimes have different views on how long the program should go on. M3 also raised the question of whether the providers, who are paid for this, have any incentive to bring a placement to an end.

6.3 Structural Barriers

6.3.1 Criminal Records, Housing and Education

Throughout the interviews, the municipalities were asked whether they experienced any challenges reintegrating exit clients. A recurring challenge was getting the clients into the labour market and all six interviewees mentioned the clients' criminal records as an obstacle. M6 described that many lack upper-secondary school qualifications, and employers nowadays check criminal records regardless of the post, making it harder for exit clients to get a job. M6 described this as a risk for clients to relapse into criminality. Additionally, M2 described that protected personal data makes access to employment support considerably more complicated and expressed a need for major initiatives to tackle this issue. Moreover, M3 and M6 both described studies as the easiest way to get clients started with some occupation, since everyone has the right to study in Sweden.

Additional structural barriers brought up by M4 and M6 were the housing situation, describing that clients are struggling to find a place to live, posing a risk for relapse into criminality. M3 brought up a separate aspect, describing that relapse often occurred among clients who remained locally (those who did not qualify for exit-support but still needed support to leave a criminal lifestyle). Clients who had been relocated were described as having done relatively well, and M3 connected the difference to how hard it is to stay away from the former criminal spheres.

6.3.2 Employment Support

The public employment service (The Swedish Public Employment Service) was frequently brought up in the interviews. Three out of six interviewees describe the agency as weakened or hard to work with (M2, M3, M5). M2 described the cooperation between the social service and public employment agency as not working efficiently. They were described as hard to reach. M3 described the agency as having undergone many cutbacks, with sometimes having little to

contribute with, when supporting the clients. M5 described what the changes have meant in real practice:

"The public employment agency has become difficult. Before, we had very good cooperation with them [...] The problem now is that large parts of the public employment service have been dismantled. Employment officers have been removed from the prisons. The start-up jobs scheme has been removed for those who, so to speak, only have criminality behind them, which you always used to get after having served a sentence." (M5, 2026).

M1 stated something different, that cooperation can be built with the local public employment agency, but not across the country, since clients are placed in many different regions. Additionally, one point that was brought up similarly by M1, M3, M4 and M6 was that the external service providers play an important role in arranging work placements or job coaching. M2 explained that the municipality relies on the service providers local knowledge and contacts, especially with the local public employment service. M5 described it similarly, and pointed towards the provider's local knowledge and contact, to get clients into some form of occupation.

These barriers were mainly described for exit clients generally. And while they may also affect women, the interviews provided limited information about if women experienced other challenges accessing employment support.

6.3.3 Cooperation Among Actors

Throughout the interviews, cooperation was described as working when a committed person holds the role but was considerably harder when that was not the case. M1 described the cooperation with the police as being dependent on the individual personnel.

"Right now it's working well [...] because it's one role, one person who has this role within the police [...] so it is very dependent on the individual [...] right now we have a very committed person [...] previously we've had people who perhaps had this more as a side assignment. Who weren't as committed or didn't have as

much time. Then it was much harder [...] to get anywhere. So, it really depends on who holds this role at the police" (M1, 2026).

M5 described the same dependence but also mentioned the prison and probation service. Additionally, M1 described an underlying tension between the police and social service, referring to the separate mandates. It was described that the social service prioritises helping the exit clients, while the police want to investigate a crime. M1 described having developed a type of understanding for each other's work, with both sides seeking to compromise with each other. Additionally, M3 described the same difference in priorities between the police and social service, leading to some tensions at times.

6.4 Establishing a Life Outside of Criminality

6.4.1 Defining a Successful Reintegration

The municipalities were asked about how they define whether a reintegration process for exit clients has been successful, which led to a variety of responses. All six interviewees described what a completed exit looks like. M1, M3, M4 and M5 described it in terms of having broken with the criminal thought patterns and lifestyle, being drug-free, having a place to live and some form of occupation. M4 added that the treatment program should have been completed. M5 described using IBIC (The Individual's Needs in Focus), which sets out life domains including contact with authorities, structure in everyday life, occupation and finances. Once those goals have been met, the exit process can be counted as completed. M6 described it similarly, following the care plan set up by the social service. When the care plan's goals are fulfilled, there is no reason to continue the intervention.

Furthermore, two municipalities described it as difficult to know when an exit process has been successful. M3 stated that cases who had looked successful sometimes took a turn much later, and asked what success is. M2 instead described having no list of criteria for this, and described it the following way:

"Some we have had to close early, and that may be because they have relapsed into substance use, relapsed into criminality. But when it has gone well, that is difficult to define. I don't think any of us has a list of criteria like that [...] thinking that I am going to be drug-free for the rest of my life and never commit a single offence, that might not be realistic for some of these people, and then you have to lower the bar. Not everyone will come out with a job, a flat and a large social circle, because they may not reach that either. So it's a little difficult to define what a good exit actually is." (M2, 2026).

6.4.2 Creating a New Identity

Building a new identity that is not criminal was described by four municipalities. M1 mentioned it usually starting from what the person is interested in. This could for instance be: The gym, going there sober and not being afraid of the others that are there. That itself, the interviewee described as a large step, but also described the importance of acquiring a new kind of identify.

"They also need to acquire a kind of new identity [...] maybe you shouldn't go out in grey tracksuit bottoms and a hoodie. You look criminal when you do that [...] that you need to [...] change your identity [...] become someone else [...] a new way of dressing perhaps [...] because you draw people's eyes to you [...] because you look exactly like someone who sells drugs. And also perhaps to find [...] a story about why you are here." (M1, 2026).

Moreover, M4 described "coming up with a new identity", when meeting new people. M3 followed this pattern as well, describing that clients often carry clear attributes such as expensive watches and jackets, and that even after leaving criminality a person may still dress like it. M6 described it as a question of how the client itself wants to be perceived when meeting others, as a part of the treatment.

6.4.3 Social Contexts and Occupation

M1 described that many clients come from a context in which they have had status and been looked up to by others. Instead, the client leaves the criminal life

and sometimes gets unemployed, and/or homeless. This is described as one of the concerns by the interviewee, that the boredom that comes with it, change of lifestyle and loneliness can lead to reoffending into criminality. M6 also described something similar, mentioning that the clients go from a close bond in the previous social spheres, to being alone.

Additionally, when it comes to a new social sphere, this was described as something worked on directly. M4 and M6 described prosocial activities and improving social skills as part of the intervention. M6 gave examples that improving social skills could include knowing how to hold a conversation in a workplace lunchroom, or how to handle encountering someone from the former environment. Moreover, M2 and M5 described occupation as the most practical way to get clients into a new social context.

These findings describe general challenges in establishing a life outside criminality. Additionally, the interviewees provided limited information about whether these challenges differ for female exit clients.

6.5 Women

This section presents both practitioners experience with female clients and their perceptions of women's involvement in gangs, the barriers they may face in accessing support, and how their reintegration needs could be addressed. It also explores why few women enter exit programmes, where they may seek support instead, and whether existing support may need to be adapted.

6.5.1 Women's Roles and Visibility

Throughout the interviews, three municipalities (M3, M5, M6), described women's roles within the gangs, as facilitators. M3 described that women can often rent cars, acting as bait to lure an enemy out, or fixing apartments for storing things or hiding people. M3 and M6 also described that women remain more invisible and harder to identify, especially for the police. Moreover, M5 explained it similarly, but also thought that men have historically been having the leading

roles, what women does remains invisible, which is why the judiciary has focused more on the men.

Furthermore, the degree of involvement was described in similar terms as well. M5 described that women are usually less involved compared to the men and have acted more as helpers. M6 elaborated on it and said that it can be easier to withdraw from the criminal sphere when you are not as deeply involved in it. M3 explained that as of their knowledge, they haven't seen any women in any leading positions locally and continued to explain their roles being more tied to transporting weapons. However, M3 also mentioned having learned through lectures that women are increasingly taking on larger roles within criminal gangs.

At the same time, the term "women as a facilitator" was also described as making the women's involvement sound smaller than it was. For example, M1 explained that this type of involvement should not be underestimated. By carrying/transporting a bag of weapons, you commit a weapons offence which could lead to ten years in prison. M3 also described that women can be a driving force in the violence, and M2 provided an example of a conversation with a female exit client:

"One of my women describes to me [...] During her criminality she is sitting in a car together with [...] Four other guys who all have links to gang criminality. When the police stop them, the one person they do not search in the car is her. But who is sitting with the drugs? She is [...] And they stand there saying "you need to leave these guys. Why are you hanging around with them? They are not good for you" [...] She is not a passive actor in this." (M2, 2026).

M3 and M5 both also pointed to norms within the criminal gangs. M3 described that there is a strong macho ideal and characterised it as highly stereotypical gender roles within the gang sphere. Moreover, M6 raised norms concerning what is considered as feminine and masculine, including honour-related norms, and described the expectations placed on women as differing from those placed on the men.

6.5.2 Barriers for Reaching Women

All six municipalities were asked why so few women reach the exit service. M2 drew on experience working with female clients, explaining that women rarely identify themselves as criminals. It was mentioned that it doesn't match the norms of “what being feminine" is and highlighted that men often have an easier time identifying as criminals. M5 said the same thing and described that this is why it is harder to motivate women to get into this intervention and seek help.

M5 also mentioned that the police had a harder time identifying the women, that women often get sentenced to shorter sentences, and many times don't end up in prison, which in turn makes it harder for the social service. M5 also pointed to a further consequence of this:

“I think that could also become a problem, because sometimes it can be that even if they have committed criminal acts, the police may not have mapped them as network-involved [...] And when that is not there, they will not come to make the assessment that they are, for example, an exit client. And that can mean they have difficulty getting support from us”. (M5, 2026)

Moreover, M4 was uncertain on this point, but suggested that the threat picture may not be the same for women as for men, and therefore they do not end up in the exit-support as fast as the men do.

Outreach directed at women was largely absent. M2 stressed the difficulty of finding the women, making them realise that they are involved in the criminal sphere, knowing where to look for them, and where the responsibility lies to find them. M3 described it differently, describing that the unit had limited capacity to seek out more clients and M4 described that there has been no outreach or focus to identifying women, but acknowledged that there must be a change in that:

“We have not sought them out either [...] We have not focused on it, neither we nor the police or the probation service perhaps [...] I think that we have to open our eyes to them too.” (M4, 2026)

Moreover, responses largely consisted of suggestions. M1 argued that the precondition is to see women as potential exit clients and not only as victims of crime and pointed towards the need to change this image within the police. M1 also suggested approaching the prison and probation service to map out which women could be relevant and M4 suggested training staff to identify these women and ask relevant questions. Additionally, M4 and M3 mentioned services such as schools, child health and maternity clinics and women's shelters as possible places for identifying women. Furthermore, M5 was the only municipality that had implemented an outreach initiative, with a post directed specifically towards finding and identifying women in these environments, while also stating that no other targeted resources existed.

6.5.3 The Intimate Partner Violence Pathway (IPV)

A further explanation for the absence of women concerned services for intimate partner violence. Four municipalities suggested that women may leave criminal environments through a different route, being the service for intimate partner violence (M1, M3, M4, M6). However, most of the responses were suggestions. M3 marked this as only a theory and M4 brought it up as a possible explanation to why they haven't had any female clients so far. M4 also assumed that women have been assaulted or subjected to psychological violence in the relationship, ending up leaving through the IPV route instead. Moreover, M6 mentioned that the team at the unit had discussed that women are most likely ending up in other units.

Furthermore, M6 described the two forms of support as very similar. The IPV services relocate women who cannot remain where they are, place them in protected accommodation and help them start a "new life" elsewhere, which is also what the exit service does. Leaving organised crime could therefore happen because of leaving the relationship. However, M6 added that the need behind the two is often not the same.

Moreover, M1 had asked these questions to the colleagues at the IPV unit, who responded:

"We have surely had these girls, but they do not seek help because they need to leave criminality. They seek help because they are subjected to violence by their partner and want to leave that life, there may have been some form of criminality, that they have been involved in crime themselves. But that has not been the question - so you have only worked with the violence [...] but there is a risk that they have a criminal way of thinking that remains, if we do not see that too". (M1, 2026)

Furthermore, M5 also described the same connection. However, the interviewee explained that there was a planned collaboration with the IPV unit to identify women with criminal partners.

6.5.4 Perceived Differences in Needs

The municipalities perceived a number of differences in what type of support women may need, in most cases without having worked with female clients themselves. The differences were described mainly in relation to violence, relationships and trauma. Drawing a parallel with women in addiction services, M1 estimated the following:

"I would say that ninety percent have been subjected to violence in a close relationship, or some form of violence [...] or have had to use their body to pay for things, or been forced into prostitution in some way. Those questions [...] you really must not miss them." (M1, 2026)

Moreover, M1 mentioned that such questions towards the client can't be forced, but you must ask and it is normalized that women sometimes don't see these experiences as anything remarkable. M3 responded based on a "gut feeling" that a larger proportion of women have been subjected to sexual violence or force. Furthermore, M2 noted that this requires an external provider able to work with that kind of support, while stating that it was not work M2 had done and did not know exactly how it is carried out. Additionally, trauma was located differently. M5 perceived the women as less marked by shootings and explosions than by the

relationship they had been in, while M1 anticipated a greater need for trauma-focused work among women.

When it comes to relationships, four municipalities describe the relationship as the path into the criminal sphere for women (M1, M2, M5, M6). M5 described that in all cases they have had with female exit clients, the women entered the criminal sphere through a partner. Additionally, one municipality (M2), mentioned that often when they work with female clients, the women have to process the relationship and understand how a good partner should treat you, and what real love is. In contrast to this, M2 said that they usually have to work differently with the men, and train them on how to treat others, and how to behave in a relationship.

Moreover, two municipalities were even more specific in the experiences of working with female clients, and the differences between working with men and women. M2 emphasized that the experience was that women usually arrived at the exit program with more capacity than the men. Usually women had finished school, held a driver's license and/or had worked before, making it easier for them to later enter studies or get employment. M5 instead stated that it is equally hard for women and men to enter the labour market after the program, even if women sometimes have been less criminally "burdened". Additionally, M5 said that women usually had stronger motivation, and the work on social skills were not as needed for the women compared to male clients. However, M2 said that all clients must work on their criminal thinking, no matter the gender, and among women, the need is usually present but often more hidden.

6.5.5 Individualisation & Gender Competence

All six interviewees commonly referred to the assessment and support being "individualised" towards the client, and gender not being something crucial. M3 described this the following way:

"Exit clients are very much based on the individual's needs. There are always individual plans [...] you always live alone in a flat somewhere. You do not live

together with others [...] So without diminishing gender-specific questions, I think there are no obvious differences between male and female exit clients" (M3, 2026)

M3 mentioned the contrast that within the substance abuse services, which is integrated within the same unit as for exit clients, the clients live in collective housing and take part in group activities, with some units for men, some for women, and some being mixed. Exit clients in contrast, live alone. However, M3 raised one exception when it comes to where gender could play a difference. The interviewee highlighted that it could be of importance to match the client with the right contact person at the external provider:

"There can be different variables that make a man or a woman more or less suited to meet the person and build a relationship [...] otherwise there is nothing in our routines that makes a difference in that aspect" (M3, 2026)

When interviewees were asked about the unit's competence/preparedness to work with female clients, M2, M3, M5 and M6 all considered themselves well prepared. M2 and M5 both drew on experience of the team of previously having worked with women in vulnerable situations. M3 said that the colleagues in the unit had experience of working with women and men in addiction and with mental health problems. Additionally, M6 described the preparedness differently, referring to individual assessments:

"[...] As long as you do individual assessment, I think that is the most important thing. Because somewhere I think it should be gender-equal in, equal in how we meet people and their needs. And that, I think we are equipped for." (M6, 2026)

M2 stated a lack of knowledge in work with intimate partner violence, and didn't know exactly how to carry it out, except that the interviewee understood that this was something a woman with these experiences would need support with. Furthermore, M1 and M4 both described a clear lack of knowledge. M1 stated that no such training in gender specific knowledge had been provided and M4 stressed that there is a need for more knowledge in the social service, about

women's roles in organized crime. Finally, M6 described that there were possibilities for competence development in the unit, with some of it related to this area. However, M6 also stated that before working in this unit with exit clients, the interviewee had not had that competence either.

The instruments were described differently between municipalities. M1 stated that the assessment instruments used had no gender focus at all in them, while M6 stated that the instruments take both genders into account. M6 described that the standardised assessment template show questions about exposure to violence, sexual violence and honour-related violence.

Finally, the interviewees described guidelines, service providers and cooperation structures that had not been used or verified in practice. When asked whether any guidelines addressed differences between women and men, M2 stated that practice is based mainly on the unit's own experience, and that even though guidelines exist, no one in the team had read them closely. Moreover, M3 assumed that the external service providers can work with clients with experience of sexual violence. However, this was something that never had been asked of them. M1 described a structure for cooperation with the IPV unit. If such a case would arise, the units should cooperate. However, M1 also stated that no such case had come to the interviewee’s attention.

7 Analysis

This chapter aims to analyse the findings through the lens of gender-responsive DDR, primarily through the reintegration part. The analysis follows the research questions: how reintegration is understood and implemented for women at the municipal level, what challenges, needs and barriers are identified, and what the framework can and cannot account for in this context.

7.1 Identification, Eligibility & Assessment

Gender-responsive DDR locates a central problem at the point of access to a program. It requires that the eligibility to enter the program are gender inclusive

and not only for those who have carried a weapon. Moreover, it highlights that women may sometimes possess other support roles. Without this idea, they could easily be excluded. (United Nations, 2023). In the Swedish context this requirement is distributed across four related but separate steps. These include how a person is identified as involved in organised crime, whether the formal eligibility criteria are met, the threat and risk assessment done by the police, and the assessment of the individual's needs. Moreover, the findings suggest that gender may influence the first, third and fourth of these steps.

Beginning with the identification, M5 explained that women may not be identified by the police as being involved in criminal networks, which could prevent them from being assessed as potential exit clients. Moreover, M5 also suggested that women often receive shorter prison sentences or do not enter prison at all, potentially reducing the opportunity for social services to identify them through the prison and probation system. M3 and M6 also described women as less visible and harder to identify, especially for the police. Moreover, previous research from Sveijer and Kölqvist (2024), also show similar results. One woman previously involved in gang criminality described that she was not identified because she did not carry out the serious violence. A municipality from the same study described that neither the police nor the social service managed to identify women at times, because they sometimes are not seen as gang members.

Furthermore, another aspect of identification concerns self-demobilization. GR-DDR notes that women often leave armed groups outside of the formal processes due to reasons such as stigma or fear, and therefore other ways to reach women should be found and implemented (United nations, 2023). When asked why women sometimes do not reach the service, M1, M3, M4 and M6 all mentioned that there is a possibility that women end up at the IPV unit instead. M1 had previously discussed this with the IPV unit, and the answer had been that they most likely had met women from this sphere, but they had sought support for intimate partner violence instead. This could resemble the problem of self-mobilisation within GR-DDR. For example, women may leave an armed or criminal environment outside the formal exit process and therefore risk not

receiving reintegration support addressing their involvement in the criminal environment.

Additionally, the interviewees mentioned other places where women could be found such as women shelters, schools, and maternity clinics. However, even if they showed an awareness of places to identify women, only one municipality had a set up outreach initiative to try identifying women. From a GR-DDR perspective, this suggests a gap between recognising the need to reach women and implementing a targeted outreach.

When it comes to eligibility, all six municipalities described the eligibility criteria similarly: The person must belong to organised crime, and the police decide if the criteria are met, with the help of a risk and threat assessment, alongside the social service. Additionally, the professionals accounts suggest that the challenges may not necessarily lie in the eligibility criteria themselves, but in whether women's involvement in organised crime is recognised by all actors. This could make it more difficult for some women to be identified as potential exit clients and gain access to support. In other words, gender-responsive DDR identifies a relevant problem of exclusion, while these findings suggest that exclusion may occur at an earlier stage than the formal eligibility assessment itself.

The third step is the threat and risk assessment carried out by the police, which determines both whether the person is considered to meet the criteria and whether a relocation takes place. M4 suggested that the threat picture might not be the same for women, leading to them not reaching the service as fast as men do. From a GR-DDR perspective, this indicates that gender may influence access throughout the risk assessment itself, even when criteria are formally neutral. However, this was raised by one interviewee as a possible explanation rather than as a pattern throughout all interviews, and the interviews do not show how the threat assessment is carried out in practice.

Finally, in the needs assessment, GR-DDR emphasises that gender should be considered, including women's experiences of sexual violence. The importance of recognising these experiences is also supported by research from The Swedish

National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) and raised by several interviewees (Tollin, Dufort and Hurve, 2025). However, only M1 and M6 discussed whether the instruments consider gender. M1 stated that the instruments had no gender focus and M6 described a template that included questions related to gender-specific experiences, such as sexual violence, or honour-based violence. Moreover, these descriptions suggest differences in how the interviewees understand the gender focus of their assessment instruments. However, the instruments themselves were not examined, and the interviews do not show how these questions are asked or whether the answers of potential exit clients lead to adapted support. From the lens of GR-DDR, including gender-related questions does not necessarily mean that women's specific needs are adequately identified and addressed.

7.2 Competence and Capacity

GR-DDR requires that there are gender competencies among those who work with women. Additionally, having a gender expert within the team is also considered as important. If this is not implemented, there is a risk that women's experiences and perspectives are not considered throughout the process. However, no municipality described anyone holding that role in the social service. Moreover, three municipalities considered themselves well prepared to receive women, arguing that previous experience of working with women in other settings such as from addiction and vulnerable situations. Additionally, a fourth municipality argued that the preparedness to meet and support female clients is because if everyone is assessed individually and met equally, the unit is equipped for this. However, from a GR-DDR approach, an individualised approach does not itself constitute gender-specific competence. Instead, GR-DDR emphasises knowledge in how gender shapes experiences, roles, needs, and barriers throughout disengagement. The municipalities descriptions suggest that the preparedness to receive female clients was understood in terms of having a broader professional experience with women, rather than specialised competence concerning women leaving criminal gangs.

Moreover, the findings also indicate that some gender-specific competence could depend on the individual professionals, rather than being institutionalized. For example, M1 stated that there had been no training in gender-specific knowledge provided and described that gender-specific knowledge depends on the individual worker's own interest in this question. Notably, both M1 and M4, which had no previous experience of female exit clients, were the municipalities that most clearly identified gaps in gender-specific knowledge.

Moreover, M6 mentions the obstacle that it is difficult to develop any knowledge and identify the needs of female clients, before having encountered them. As discussed in the previous section, women were described as difficult to identify and reach. Consequently, municipalities have limited opportunities to build new experiences of female exit clients when few women can reach the service. At the same time, GR-DDR puts a great emphasis that staff should possess gender-specific competence before receiving women.

Moreover, all six municipalities describe purchasing the service for implementing the support interventions, from an external service provider. From the framework's lens, this would mean that the criteria of gender-specific knowledge should then be put on that provider as well. When applied to the Swedish context, this suggests that gender competence may be required both at the social service and at the external service provider. Within the social service, to identify and assess the gender-specific needs, and within the external service provider to translate the assessment into appropriate interventions for the client. Moreover, M2 gave a very clear example of why it is important that the service providers carries this knowledge, stating that cases of IPV for women need “a service that can work with that kind of support” and also added “I have not worked with those questions, so I don't know exactly how it is done". These two examples suggest that there is a potential gap between identifying a need and ensuring that the service provider has the right competence to turn it into suitable interventions. Moreover, in this case it appears that gender-specific competence among service providers is rather assumed than something guaranteed within the more formal process.

7.3 Psychosocial Support

GR-DDR requires that women who have experienced sexual violence for example, should have access to specialised support. However, this also depends on these experiences first being identified in the assessment.

To begin, trauma was raised in all six interviews, and four of them described the relationship as the pathway into the criminal sphere. Moreover, M1 assumed that around 90% of women had experienced this from being in the criminal spheres, drawing the parallel to personal experience with women in the addiction services. M3 expressed that the "gut feeling" was that women are more prone to experience sexual violence within criminal spheres. Additionally, M1 mentioned that questions related to IPV could not be forced on the client but must be asked, because sometimes these experiences are so normalized for the woman that the woman herself might not see IPV as anything strange. From a GR-DDR point of view, the findings show that several municipalities recognise that women may have gender-specific experiences and psychosocial needs. However, recognising these needs is not the same as ensuring that they are identified and addressed in practice. This is important to note because much of the municipalities' knowledge came from experiences with women in other settings or assumptions, rather than from direct contact with female exit clients.

Furthermore, recognising these needs does not necessarily mean that specialised support is available for the client. Although municipalities discussed trauma as part of the support process, access to psychological support could depend both on the external service provider or the regional health care. In general, M1 and M6 described that mental health support generally falls under the responsibility of the region rather than the social service. Furthermore, M2 and M6 also described that psychological support cannot always be guaranteed through external providers and that availability did not determine the choice of provider. When such support was unavailable, clients instead had to access regional healthcare, where M3 and M5 described long waiting times. M4 also highlighted that protected identity can make it difficult to access healthcare in other regions when being relocated.

Moreover, M1 similarly described difficulties in coordinating psychiatric support across regions after relocation of clients.

From a GR-DDR perspective, the findings suggest there are challenges in accessing specialised mental health and trauma treatment, rather than psychosocial support in general. Such barriers may be particularly important for clients who need treatment related to sexual violence or IPV-related needs. However, interviewees did not describe if women are more affected by these barriers more than men. Additionally, access to specialised treatment can depend on the external service providers and the regional healthcare, which may limit the social services ability to ensure that these needs are addressed and met.

Furthermore, GR-DDR also highlight the importance of female staff available for women who have experiences sexual violence. However, only M3 mentioned this, noting that the contact person's gender could matter, but that no routine was established for this. This shows that gender of the staff was recognised as a possible consideration in M3 but provides limited insights into how this is addressed in practice, and across the other municipalities.

7.4 Economic and Social Reintegration

Within GR-DDR, economic reintegration plays a central part. It requires equal access to education and employment, while also recognising that women may face additional barriers, for example due to responsibility for children. The framework therefore emphasises that additional measures may be needed to ensure women's economic reintegration. However, childcare responsibilities were not specifically addressed in the interviews and can therefore not be assessed in this study. Moreover, social reintegration remains important as well and involves supporting individuals in establishing new social networks and contexts outside the former group.

To begin, municipalities described a broad range of individual support aimed at supporting the exit client establishing a life outside criminality. Employment, education and housing were central parts of this process, while work placement,

job coaching and prosocial activities were used to support economic reintegration. Occupation was also described as a central aspect to help the client enter new social spheres.

7.4.1 Economic Reintegration

Within the economic reintegration, a recurring challenge was access to the labour market, with all six municipalities describing criminal records as a major obstacle to employment. M6 described many exit clients lacking upper-secondary school qualifications and that employers increasingly request criminal records. The difficulty of finding employment could also increase the risk of returning to criminality, according to M6. M2 also highlighted that protected personal data could make access to employment support more difficult. Several municipalities also expressed difficulties in cooperating with the public employment service, increasing the importance of the external service providers arranging work placements and job coaching.

However, interviews did not show a clear pattern of if women faced greater barriers compared to the men. Moreover, the two municipalities with verified experience of female exit clients (M2, M5) were the only ones mentioning anything specific about economic reintegration for women. M2, for example, explained that women sometimes have better conditions for economic reintegration than men because they usually have finished school, had job experience and a driver's license. M5 on the other hand, described that the labour market is equally as difficult to enter for women as for men, even if women could sometimes have less extensive criminal records.

From a GR-DDR approach, the findings do not show a clear pattern of women facing greater barriers to economic reintegration than men. Instead, many of the barriers identified, such as criminal records, lack of education and difficulties accessing employment support affected exit clients more generally. In one case, women were described as having better conditions for entering employment or education. However, the limited experience of female exit clients makes it difficult to draw broader conclusions about gender differences. Moreover, the

findings therefore show stronger evidence of general economic reintegration support, than of specifically gender-specific evidence.

7.4.2 Social Reintegration

When it comes to social reintegration, the findings show a stronger connection to some gender-specific differences. For example, several municipalities described the importance of establishing a new identity and finding a new social context outside of criminality. The prosocial activities and occupation were described as useful to help clients build new social networks. However, loneliness and loss of previous relationships could make reintegration become more difficult and could be a risk for clients to relapse into criminality. Moreover, M5 described that female clients usually had a stronger motivation and required less support with social skills than the male clients. However, M2 described a different type of social need among female clients. Female clients sometimes needed support to process previous relationships and understand what healthy relationships are. In contrast, work with male clients was described to focus more on how to treat others and how to behave against your partner in a relationship.

These findings suggest that gender may shape the type of social reintegration support needed, meaning that women do not necessarily need more support than men. However, these gender-specific differences were only described by a couple municipalities, specifically those two with experience of female clients. Therefore, the limited interview material does not allow this study to systematically assess gender differences in social reintegration needs across the municipalities.

Overall, the interviews show that the professionals emphasize that economic and social reintegration are important parts of the exit-support but provide limited insights into how women's specific needs are addressed in practice, of these aspects.

7.5 Opportunities and Limitations of Gender-Responsive DDR

The analysis show both opportunities and limitations in applying Gender-Responsive DDR to the Swedish context. Although the framework was originally developed for conflict and post-conflict settings, it provides a useful lens for identifying how gender may influence access to support and the reintegration process. More particularly, the framework also helps highlight that a formally gender-neutral service does not necessarily result in equal access and support. For example, findings showed that women may be less visible to the police and social services, may enter criminal networks through romantic relationships, and may carry the experience of IPV that all could reflect their reintegration needs. GR-DDR therefore provides perspectives that help identify gender aspects of reintegration that could otherwise be overlooked. Moreover, gender mainstreaming, which emphasises integration of gender perspectives throughout the entire process, was not clearly described in the municipalities work. Although all six municipalities emphasised individualised assessment, gender-specific approaches did not appear to be systematically integrated within their practices.

Moreover, another useful aspect of GR-DDR is its emphasis on women's agency and participation. The framework highlights that women should not only be understood as victims but also have a say in their own reintegration. The findings showed that practitioners recognised women's different roles within criminal networks, challenging the view of women as only victims. However, this does not necessarily mean that women are involved in decisions about their own reintegration.

Moreover, M4 described the importance of client participation, while M3 highlighted that the client and professional may have different views of what support is needed sometimes. However, these findings concern exit clients overall, and do not show how female clients participate in decisions about their support. Therefore, GR-DDR provides a useful perspective for examining participation, but without interviews with women themselves, this study cannot fully assess their experiences of their participation in the reintegration process.

Additionally, coordination between different actors is important in the Swedish context, which is also emphasized within GR-DDR. The interviews showed that the municipalities depend on cooperation with the police, external service providers, and regional healthcare. For example, the police play an important role in identifying potential exit clients, assess different threats, while access to specialised mental health support may depend on external providers and regional healthcare. From a GR-DDR perspective, this shows how different actors are involved in addressing the reintegration needs of a client. However, when responsibilities are divided between several actors, the difficulties in cooperation or access to services may affect the support available to clients. This is also relevant for women, whose needs may require support from several different services.

Furthermore, one limitation with the framework is that since it's mainly developed for conflict and post-conflict settings, it is not 100% suitable in the Swedish context. The Swedish system is more institutionalized, divided between the social service, police, prison and probation service, regional health, and external service providers. Moreover, the findings from this study also show that through GR-DDR, certain patterns do not appear as clearly here. Examples of this is that GR-DDR says that women usually experience more barriers in economic reintegration due to social norms, stigma or childcare responsibilities. This was not identified through these findings and in the Swedish context. However, important to note is that the absence of data does not mean it does not exist, just not in these findings.

Additionally, another limitation concerns the political reintegration, which is another dimension of GR-DDR. Political reintegration within DDR concerns participation in political and governance structures, which does not directly correspond with the Swedish context regarding reintegration.

Overall, GR-DDR provides a useful analytical perspective for understanding the findings, particularly in relation to women's access to support, gender-specific needs and different aspects of reintegration. However, this does not mean that

DDR programmes developed for conflict/post-conflict settings can be directly applied to Swedish municipal exit-support. Additionally, the chosen dimensions of GR-DDR instead helped interpret the findings from the interviews, while also recognising the institutional differences between conflict/post-conflict settings and the municipal exit-support examined in this study.

8 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how municipal exit-support practitioners in Sweden describe and understand reintegration of women leaving criminal gangs, and to analyse this through the lens of Gender-Responsive DDR. It was also based on semi-structured interviews with professionals working in municipalities' exit units within the social service in Sweden.

The findings show that the six interviewed municipalities exit-support provides an individualised and a long-term process, including economic, social and psychosocial support. However, the gender-neutral eligibility criteria may not always result in equal access. Women were described as less visible to the police and more likely to be met by the IPV unit, while only one municipality had implemented outreach aimed at identifying women. At the same time, the findings indicate that reintegration can be limited by structural barriers such as employment issues, housing or access to other services, which are sometimes outside of the municipalities control.

Furthermore, the findings also suggest that gender may influence reintegration needs, particularly in relation to romantic relationships, violence and trauma. However, this does not necessarily mean that women require more support than men in all situations, but rather the right type of support to meet their needs. Additionally, while individualised support was strongly emphasised among all six municipalities, the gender-specific approaches brought up were not systematically established across all municipalities. This indicates that an individualised approach does not automatically address gender-specific needs. The findings also

suggest a need for gender-specific training, as such knowledge largely depended on the individual professional.

Moreover, the findings also point to several areas for future research. For example, future research could explore the perspectives of other key actors. The police is one example, given their important role in identifying potential exit clients and being part of the assessment process. This is particularly relevant for women, since the findings suggest that they may be more difficult to identify within criminal networks. Moreover, other areas for research could be interviewing the external service provider, which could give the perspective of how the needs assessment is turned into practice. While these areas require further research, the findings of this study provide initial insights into how gender may influence access to reintegration support and how women's reintegration needs are understood by the municipal professionals interviewed.

Finally, rather than providing a model that can be directly transferred to Swedish exit processes, the value of Gender-Responsive DDR lies in its ability to question whether formally gender-neutral reintegration processes recognize and respond to the different ways women may enter, experience and leave criminal environments. A more gender-responsive approach could therefore contribute not only to adapting support to women's needs, but also to ensure that women are recognised as individuals in need of exit programs and reintegration in the first place. These insights could also be relevant to other countries with welfare-based exit programs, and show that GR-DDR can offer useful perspectives even in non-conflict settings.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guide (Swedish)

Intervjumall

Övergripande Verksamhet

- Kan du beskriva din roll och hur många ni är som arbetar med avhopparverksamheten?
- Hur många avhopp har ni haft ungefär? (män respektive kvinnor)
- Finns det riktlinjer eller strategier som styr ert arbete?

Process & Insatser

- Kan du beskriva hur processen ser ut från första kontakt till vidare stöd?
- Hur bedömer ni vilka insatser en person behöver, och tar ni hänsyn till faktorer som kön eller andra individuella omständigheter?

Behov & Könsskillnader

- Vilka behov ser ni generellt hos personer som lämnar gängkriminalitet?
- Skiljer sig behoven mellan män och kvinnor?
- Vilka roller tror ni kvinnor haft i dessa miljöer, och hur har det påverkat deras behov och det stöd ni erbjuder?

Resurser & Kompetens

- Vilken kompetens finns inom verksamheten för att möta kvinnors behov?
- Upplever ni att ni har tillräcklig kompetens och resurser?
- Finns det särskilda resurser eller satsningar för att möta kvinnors behov i verksamheten?
- Har ni identifierat några hinder i kompetensen när ni arbetat med kvinnor?
- Finns det behov av ytterligare kunskap eller resurser för att kunna arbeta med kvinnor?

Ekonomiskt och Socialt Stöd

- Vilket typ av stöd erbjuder ni för att hjälpa personer vidare till arbete, utbildning och egen försörjning?
- Upplever ni att det finns särskilda hinder för kvinnor i detta avseende?

- Arbetar ni på något sätt för att stötta avhoppare i sin sociala återintegrering?
- Vilka reaktioner möter avhoppare från samhället i praktiken, och upplever ni attt det skiljer det sig för kvinnor?

Psykosocialt Stöd

- Hur går ni tillväga för att bedöma behov av psykosocialt stöd?
- Har ni tillgång till specialiserat stöd? exempelvis för trauma eller våldsutsatthet?
- Har ni observerat några skillnader i psykosocialt stöd mellan män och kvinnor?

Samverkan

- Vilka aktörer samarbetar ni med?
- Är det några aktörer som är särskilt viktiga för att nå eller stödja kvinnor? Varför?
- Finns det situationer där bristande samverkan har påverkat stödet till kvinnor?

Hinder

- Ser ni några hinder för att kvinnor ska få tillgång till stöd?
- Vad kan göra att de inte kan eller vill ta del av stödet?
- Ser ni att kvinnor söker stöd i samma utsträckning som män, eller finns det skillnader?
- Arbetar ni på något sätt med att komma i kontakt med kvinnorna, eller är det upp till dom att ta kontakt med er?

Utvärdering & Avslutning

- Hur följer ni upp resultaten av ert arbete? Och hur avgör ni om en återintegrering har varit framgångsrik?
- Anser du att det finns något som skulle behöva förbättras i stödet till kvinnor och avhoppare generellt?

Appendix 2: Consent Form (Swedish)

Samtyckesformulär: Deltagande i Studie

Studietitel (preliminär): Återintegrering av kvinnor som lämnar gängkriminella miljöer i Sverige

Ansvarig student:

Sara Eriksson

se223ra@student.se

Handledare:

Susanne Alldén, Universitetslektor i Freds- och utvecklingsstudier

susanne.allden@lnu.se

Syfte:

Syftet med den här studien är att undersöka hur olika aktörer i Sverige arbetar med att stötta kvinnor som lämnar gängkriminella miljöer i deras återintegrering i samhället. Studien syftar även till att analysera hur arbetet bedrivs i praktiken, vilka utmaningar som uppstår samt vilka stödinsatser som används.

Frivilligt deltagande:

Deltagandet i studien är helt frivilligt. Du kan när som helst välja att avbryta ditt deltagande, välja att inte svara på frågor, samt avbryta när som helst under intervjun, utan att uppge någon anledning. Du har också rätten att begära att ditt material tas bort från studien, fram tills att uppsatsen har blivit inlämnad.

Process:

- Intervjun förväntas ta cirka 45 minuter och genomförs digitalt.
- Intervjufrågan a skickas även ut i samband med samtyckes formuläret
- Med ditt medgivande kommer intervjun att spelas in för att säkerställa att datainsamlingen blir korrekt.

Konfidentialitet:

- Ditt namn och andra identifierande uppgifter kommer inte att framgå i uppsatsen.
- Eventuella citat som används kommer att anonymiseras så att du inte kan identifieras.

- Fokuset i studien ligger på aktörers arbete snarare än enskilda individer. I vissa fall kan organisationen eller verksamhetsområdena komma att beskrivas på en övergripande nivå.
- Det insamlade materialet senare kommer endast vara tillgängligt för studenten, och vid behov, handledaren inom ramen för studien.
- Studien kan komma att publiceras på DIVA (Digitala Vetenskapliga Arkivet) och vara offentligt tillgänglig. Inga personuppgifter som kan identifiera deltagare kommer att publiceras.

Hantering av data:
Det insamlade materialet används endast för denna studie. Materialet lagras på ett säkert sätt och raderas när uppsatsen har godkänts. Behandlingen av personuppgifter sker i enlighet med gällande dataskyddslagstiftning (GDPR).

Inspelning av intervju:
Intervjun kommer att spelas in (med ditt godkännande), för att underlätta för transkribering och analys. Inspelningen används enbart inom ramen för denna studien och hanteras konfidentiellt. Inspelningen kommer inte att delas med utomstående och raderas efter att uppsatsen har godkänts.

Vänligen markera ett av följande alternativ:

- ○ Jag samtycker till att intervjun spelas in
- ○ Jag samtycker inte till att intervjun spelas in

Tillgång till uppsatsen:

- ○ Jag önskar ta del av den färdiga uppsatsen

Samtycke:

- ○ Jag har läst och förstått ovanstående information i samtyckesformuläret.

Deltagare:	**Ansvarig Student:**
Namn:_____	Namn:_____
Datum:_____	Datum:_____

Signatur:_____ Signatur:_____