

Transferring focused deterrence to the Nordic context

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Legal compatibility and the limits of GVI in Denmark and Sweden¹

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Abstract

This article examines the introduction of Group Violence Intervention (GVI), a focused deterrence strategy for reducing serious group-related violence, to two Nordic contexts: Malmö, Sweden, and Copenhagen, Denmark. While GVI is supported by a growing evidence base, most studies derive from the United States, leaving questions about its generalisability to other legal and institutional settings. Drawing on a qualitative comparative analysis of implementation experiences, the article explores how legal and organisational conditions shaped the activation of GVI's core components. We ask: what happens when GVI is transferred to two closely related Nordic contexts with different legal and institutional conditions, and what can this tell us about the broader approach to gang violence in the two countries?

The findings show that most core components could be implemented in Malmö, where information sharing, multi-agency collaboration, call-ins, custom notifications, coordinated enforcement, and support could be activated within the existing legal framework. In Copenhagen, stricter constraints on data protection and intelligence sharing prevented call-ins, limited collaboration, and excluded civil society involvement. As a result, GVI was transformed from a collective, group-based intervention into a more individualised, police-led model centred on custom notifications.

The article argues that GVI is not a "plug-and-play" model. Its integration depends on legal compatibility and institutional arrangements that allow its core mechanisms to function. The study contributes to research on focused deterrence, policy transfer, and evidence-based crime prevention by showing that "what works" is inseparable from

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“what is rendered possible” by broader approaches to gang violence in a given context.

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Denna artikel undersöker överföringen av Group Violence Intervention (GVI), en strategi baserad på fokuserad avskräckning för att minska grovt grupprelaterat våld, till två nordiska kontexter: Malmö i Sverige och Köpenhamn i Danmark. Även om GVI har ett växande empiriskt stöd kommer den huvudsakliga kunskapen från USA, vilket gör överförbarheten till andra rättsliga och institutionella sammanhang osäker. Genom en kvalitativ komparativ analys av implementeringserfarenheter undersöker artikeln hur rättsliga och organisatoriska förutsättningar påverkade möjligheten att aktivera GVI:s kärnkomponenter. Vi frågar vad som händer när GVI överförs till två närbesläktade nordiska kontexter med olika rättsliga och institutionella förutsättningar, och vad detta kan säga oss om de två ländernas mer övergripande sätt att hantera gängvåld.

Resultaten visar att GVI kunde implementeras relativt fullständigt i Malmö, där informationsdelning, myndighetssamverkan, call-ins, custom notifications, samordnade sanktioner och stöd kunde genomföras inom befintliga rättsliga ramar. I Köpenhamn begränsade striktare regler kring dataskydd och underrättelseinformation möjligheten att genomföra call-ins, samverka brett och involvera civilsamhället. GVI omvandlades därmed från en kollektiv, gruppbaserad strategi till en mer individualiserad och polisledd modell centrerad kring custom notifications.

Artikeln visar att GVI inte är en “plug-and-play”-modell. Överföringen är beroende av rättslig kompatibilitet och institutionella arrangemang som gör det möjligt för strategins kärnmekanismer att fungera. Studien bidrar till forskningen om fokuserad avskräckning, policyöverföring och evidensbaserad brottsprevention genom att visa att frågan om “vad som fungerar” inte kan skiljas från frågan om “vad som är möjligt” i en specifik kontext.

Key words

GVI; Denmark; Sweden; Gang violence; Focused deterrence

Introduction

This article examines experiences of working with the American-based violence-reduction strategy “Group Violence Intervention” (GVI) in Denmark and Sweden. GVI is based on the principle of *focused deterrence*, designed to address gang violence (Braga & Kennedy, 2021). We ask, what happens when GVI is transferred to two closely related Nordic contexts with different

legal and institutional conditions, and what can this tell us about the broader approach to gang violence in the two countries?

Over the past few decades, violent crimes such as shootings and explosions linked to gangs have increased across the Nordic countries, especially in Sweden.² While Swedish homicide rates have declined since 2000, lethal violence specifically linked to gangs have increased, particularly gun violence emerging around 2010 and onwards. This development marked a notable departure from earlier patterns of violence in Sweden (Sturup et al., 2017; Brottsförebyggande rådet, 2024) and makes Sweden the only country in Europe with an increase in deadly violence over the last 20 years (Hradilova Selin, 2024).

In Copenhagen, the “Great Nordic Biker War” between Hells Angels MC and Bandidos MC unfolded in 1994-1997, and the aftershocks of the war continued into the 2000s. Danish police link the war to ten murders, which is unprecedented in a Danish context (Klement, 2016, 2019). In the 2000s, the two traditional motorcycle gangs that had until then controlled the illegal drug market began to encounter resistance from newer loosely structured street gangs comprised primarily of young ethnic minorities. A new intense conflict unfolded in 2008-10 between Hells Angels’ new militant chapter, AK81, and street gangs, such as Black Cobra. This conflict led to at least seven murders. During the 2010s, various local gangs rooted in specific neighbourhoods in Copenhagen, began dominating the illegal drug market. From 2015 onward, many of these gangs have been involved in conflicts with shifting alliances and outbreaks of new groupings.

Between 2017 and 2021, a larger conflict unfolded between Loyal to Familia and various other gangs, leading to a surge in gang related shootings. This conflict, which is still partially active, resulted in four murders so far (Møller, 2017).

Around the same time, in Malmö, just 16 kilometres away across the Öresund Bridge, there was a peak in gun violence in 2016, with 65 reported gang-related shootings, and the Swedish police and city council agreed to try something new. Since then, the increase in gang conflicts in both countries has prompted changes to both the Swedish and Danish criminal justice systems. Both Sweden and Denmark have launched a series of anti-gang policies and strategies to tackle the violence. Denmark has introduced four gang packages (2009, 2014, 2017, 2023), combining harsher penalties with extended law enforcement powers, improved supervision, gang exit programs, tighter control of illegal weapons and criminal economies, and a stronger focus on cross-border crime and criminal careers (Johansen et al., 2026).

2 In this article, we use a broad definition of the term “gangs”, which includes different formations of criminal networks, such as motorcycle gangs, street gangs, organized criminal networks and loosely structured criminal groups.

In Sweden, a 34-point anti-gang program, introduced in 2019, strengthened crime prevention and sanctions. The 2024 strategy against organized crime focuses on disrupting criminal career paths, reducing access to weapons and explosives, combating the illegal economy, and preventing undue influence from criminal networks. The 2024 strategy builds on a 2009 inter-agency cooperation model, which targets illegal networks through intelligence-led operational measures (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2025).

In Malmö, the local police, the municipality (including social services and other municipal activities), and the Probation Service joined forces to plan the implementation of GVI in 2017. The strategy had previously been implemented with promising results in several U.S. cities to address gun violence (Braga et al., 2026). The strategy was up and running by 2018 and has been a part of the local strategic work to tackle gun violence since then. Violence has dropped since its apex in 2016 and some of the decrease can be credited to GVI (Ivert & Mellgren, 2025).

In Copenhagen, the police and the municipality (a municipal crime prevention unit) joined forces to implement GVI in 2021, inspired by the positive Swedish experiences with the strategy. The strategy was tested between 2021 and 2024 in Copenhagen. By the end of the project period, the police decided not to pursue an implementation of the model into the police's day-to-day practice (Johansen and Fynbo, 2025).

The implementation of GVI aligns well with the overall punitive turn in the anti-gang policy development across the Nordic countries. This involves shifting responsibility from social services to the police and from social prevention to more punitive/deterrent policies over the last decades (Ugelvik & Dullum, 2012). However, a closer look at the way that GVI was adapted to local and legal frameworks in the two countries shows a distinction between policy and practice: while the strategy has been based on punitive/deterrence logics at the level of policy, it was adapted to already existing approaches within crime prevention, including dialogue-based relational work and civil society engagement, at the level of everyday practice.

The present study

Against this background, the article examines how GVI was transferred to and adapted in two Nordic contexts: Malmö, Sweden, and Copenhagen, Denmark. Rather than evaluating whether GVI "works", the article focuses on the conditions under which the strategy can operate as intended. The comparison is structured around three central dimensions of GVI: legal and institutional frameworks, target group identification, and the delivery of core components, including communication, enforcement, support, and collaboration.

This comparative analysis contributes to the literature about the global applicability of focused deterrence strategies, shedding light on how criminological ideas are imported, adapted, or resisted across different cultural and legal contexts (Jones & Newburn, 2002).

Policy-transfer research distinguishes between different degrees and forms of transfer, including direct copying of a programme, emulation (adaption to different contexts), hybridisation (a combination of different models), and inspiration (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000). More recent work on policy mobilities has questioned the assumption that policies travel as fully formed packages, emphasising instead that they are often transformed as they move between settings (Peck & Theodore, 2010; Peck, 2011). Graham and Robertson (2022), examining the transfer of a focused-deterrence violence reduction programme from the United States to Scotland, similarly, demonstrate that violence-reduction strategies may be reshaped by the legal, organisational and social conditions of the receiving context. From this perspective, the transfer of GVI to Malmö and Copenhagen can be examined not only in terms of implementation fidelity, but also in terms of how the intervention itself was reproduced and transformed through transfer.

This raises a broader question concerning policy transfer in evidence-based crime prevention. Interventions described as evidence-based are often transferred on the assumption that their core mechanisms can be reproduced across settings. Yet crime problems, institutional capacities, legal mandates, and relationships between state and non-state actors vary considerably between contexts. Transfer therefore involves more than reproducing programme components; it involves translating an intervention into an existing institutional and sociocultural system. From this perspective, adaptation is not necessarily an implementation failure. It may instead reveal which mechanisms depend on particular contextual conditions and where the limits of standardised programme transfer lie.

The GVI strategy is based on a problem-oriented approach to local conditions and aims for an agile and flexible adjustment to various contextual factors. However, as we will show, institutional and legal frameworks may, altogether, pose an impasse to the implementation of the strategy's core elements. The analysis is guided by two questions:

1. What legal and institutional conditions shape the implementation of GVI in Sweden and Denmark, and how do these conditions affect the activation of its core components?
2. What do these differences suggest about the transferability of GVI, and under what conditions can the strategy operate in its intended form?

1. Method and analytical approach

This study adopts a small-N qualitative comparative case design informed by Ragin's (1987) conception of comparative social research. In Ragin's comparative logic, cases are approached as configurations of conditions rather than as isolated observations, and systematic comparison is used to examine how

similarities and differences between cases help explain variation in the phenomenon under study, in this case the implementation of GVI. The purpose is therefore not statistical generalisation or estimation of causal effects, but to identify how contextual conditions enable, constrain, or transform a particular process.

The study is limited to two cases: Malmö (Sweden) and Copenhagen (Denmark). These two cases constitute analytically useful cases because they combine important similarities with theoretically relevant differences. Both are large Nordic cities that experienced serious group-related violence, operate within broadly comparable welfare-state and policing traditions, and attempted to introduce the same American-developed focused deterrence framework, i.e. GVI. At the same time, they differ in legal rules governing information sharing, multi-agency collaboration, and aspects of gang-related crime-control policy. These differences make it possible to examine how the same intervention framework is translated under different institutional conditions. The comparison therefore treats legal and organisational context not merely as background characteristics, but as primary conditions shaping implementation outcomes.

The comparison was conducted in four steps. First, Malmö and Copenhagen were identified as analytically relevant cases because they combine important similarities with theoretically relevant differences. Second, the implementation of each case was analysed separately. Third, the cases were systematically compared across three dimensions central to the operation of GVI: (1) legal and institutional frameworks, particularly rules governing information sharing and the use of sanctions; (2) target group identification; and (3) collaboration and the delivery of the intervention's core components, including communication strategies, enforcement actions, and support measures. Fourth, similarities and differences between the cases were identified and finally interpreted to examine how these contextual conditions enabled, constrained, or transformed the implementation of GVI's core mechanisms. Rather than evaluating implementation success, the comparison sought to explain how the same intervention developed differently under two institutionally similar, yet legally and organisationally distinct, Nordic contexts.

We do not present new empirical data, rather the analysis is based on a re-analysis of existing process evaluations and research reports on the implementation of GVI in the two contexts (Ivert, Mellgren & Nilsson, 2020; Ivert & Mellgren, 2025; Johansen & Fynbo, 2025).

2. Core components of GVI and previous research

Comprehensive systematic reviews and meta-analyses synthesizing decades of research indicate that focused deterrence strategies are generally associated with moderate reductions in violent crime and are often part of broader

responses to serious violence in the community. A systematic review and meta-analysis of psychosocial interventions targeting youth gang violence and gang involvement reported that interventions grounded in focused deterrence on average reduced gun violence by 26% (Mellgren et al., 2024). In a review of focused deterrence strategies, Braga et al. (2026) confirmed previously reported reductions in crime. The largest impacts were observed for interventions targeting gang-related violence, that is, GVI. The review also suggests that these strategies can strengthen relationships between communities and law enforcement. Although a robust evidence base now supports the continued application of focused deterrence-based strategies, the evidence base outside the United States remains limited. Only seven of the 50 studies included in Braga et al.'s (2026) review were conducted outside the USA. Therefore, the evidence base for GVI outside the U.S still needs to be expanded.

While local adaptations are common, implementations generally follow a set of core components next (Braga et al., 2026). The first step in GVI is a systematic analysis of the local violence problem to determine if the problem fits the intervention. Crime data, intelligence information, and practitioner knowledge are used to identify patterns of violence, conflicts between gangs, and the individuals most actively involved. Next is the establishment of interagency collaboration between the police and for example probation or social services.

Based on the problem analysis, authorities identify individuals who are affiliated with violent gangs. This step often involves intelligence analysis and the compilation of lists of individuals who are known to be active in gangs.

Direct and respectful communication, theoretically grounded in procedural justice (Tyler, 2006), with the target group is another defining feature of GVI. Individuals connected to violent networks are contacted through group call-ins or through individual custom notifications. During these meetings, representatives from authorities and community organizations deliver a clear message: violence must stop or further violence will have consequences for the entire group, and social support is available for those who wish to end their gang affiliation. Civil society actors, such as community leaders and faith-based organizations, are often involved in the strategy. Their participation strengthens the legitimacy of the message delivered to the target group and emphasizes that violence harms not only victims but also the wider community.

Participating authorities identify and coordinate the legal and administrative measures that can be activated if violence continues. These measures, often referred to as "levers", include enforcement of probation conditions, intensified/focused investigations, or other legal responses. If violence continues, authorities follow through on the consequences previously communicated to the target group.

Alongside enforcement, GVI includes offers of help and support for individuals who wish to exit crime. Support includes employment assistance, education, counselling, and substance abuse treatment.

3. GVI in Malmö and Copenhagen

In the following section we describe the operationalization of GVI in Malmö and Copenhagen respectively, focusing on legal frameworks and collaboration and delivery of core components.

3.1. *The case of Malmö, Sweden*

The implementation of GVI in Malmö has been evaluated both with focus on the implementation process and the impact (Ivert & Mellgren, 2025). The process evaluation shows that, with minor adjustments related to the Swedish context, the implementation of GVI in Malmö aligns well with the original (American) strategy.

Findings from the impact evaluation link GVI (under the name *Ceasefire Malmö*) with a reduction in shootings (Ivert & Mellgren, 2025).

3.1.1. *Legal framework: close collaboration and use of each authority's legal mandate*

Early in the implementation of GVI, legal experts from the collaborating authorities identified several challenges, primarily related to confidentiality, and particularly the sharing of intelligence information. Issues concerning confidentiality arose continuously throughout the project and required ongoing case-by-case assessments regarding what information could be shared, with whom, and under what conditions.

Over time, however, the collaborating authorities developed practical solutions that enabled the necessary exchange of information within the existing legal framework. One key example concerned the organisation of call-ins, where confidentiality was initially a major obstacle. This challenge was ultimately resolved when the authorities determined that individuals under probation could be lawfully required to attend call-ins as part of their sentence.

Overall, during the first years there was close collaboration between legal experts from the different authorities. Although collaboration within the framework of GVI was a new way of working, the different authorities were able to jointly resolve issues and identify opportunities within each other's regulatory frameworks.

3.1.2. *Target group identification*

GVI came with a new way of mapping violent crime, by shifting focus from individuals to groups and focusing on who drives the violence. In addition to analysing data in a new way, working with GVI also implied a new way of

gathering information, involving a broader range of informants from different sections of the police authority. This resulted in new gangs being identified and in a somewhat new picture of the criminality in the city.

The police identified almost 50 different gangs over the study period. However, these were not entirely unique groups but included groups that have arisen from previous groups splitting and merging. Most common were neighbourhood-based groups, followed by family-based groups, and combined family- and neighbourhood-based gangs. A few of the neighbourhood-based groups had relations with motorcycle groups. On average, the identified groups comprised about 15 members, mainly men but also a few women. During the study period almost 70 percent of the identified groups were associated with shootings in Malmö, either as suspects or targets.

3.1.3. *Collaboration and delivery of core components*

As stated in the introduction, collaboration is at the core of GVI. In Malmö there was a high level of involvement and support from the management of the respective collaborating authorities from the beginning. This, together with having the right person in the right place, and a collaboration structure where all parties have dedicated assignments created good conditions for collaboration within the GVI-framework of *Ceasefire Malmö*. Improved and developed collaboration between the police, social services and probation and parole was also one of the advantages of *Ceasefire Malmö*-and was fundamental to the implementation.

3.1.3.1. *Communication of anti-violence message*

Between 2018 and 2022 four call-ins were conducted in Malmö. Approximately ten individuals representing the most violent groups were present at each call-in. Participants were selected among group members currently under the supervision from probation and parole and were therefore summoned using the legal framework.

In addition to communicating the message through call-ins, *Ceasefire Malmö* also conducted custom notifications, where group members were approached individually by teams of police officers and social workers. During the study period, about 170 custom notifications addressing 30 different groups were carried out. The custom notifications were a good alternative to the call-ins as they were flexible and could be used swiftly in response to violent incidents, and because they enabled direct communication with group members who could not be summoned to call-ins as part of their probation. Overall, almost 70 percent of the violent gangs in Malmö were thus reached by the anti-violence message, either through a call-in or a custom notification.

3.1.3.2. *Enforcement action*

During periods of enforcement action, members of the group were subject to increased focus from the police and, when relevant, probation and parole authorities. When individuals were faced with sanctions, the police

or probation officer clarified that the reason that they were subjected to sanctions was that they conducted violence through their belonging to a criminal group.

Sanctions conducted by the police involved actions such as body searches, traffic controls, and direct interventions against drug sales. Sanctions also included heightened investigative activity and prioritising cases involving the targeted groups. Prison and probation put pressure on group members by expediting institutional processes after sentencing, swift responses for mismanaged contact, frequent check-ins and urine tests, travel restrictions, and quick imprisonment following guilty verdicts.

3.1.3.3. *Support and help*

Alongside the many sanctions, continuous support and help were offered by the social services. *Ceasefire Malmö* applied a “one way in” approach, which meant that group members could use the same contact details (that is, phone number) for several issues. Through the same “one way in,” social workers were ready to assist immediately with various problems. The ambition was to provide fast support to individual needs.

3.2. *The case of Copenhagen, Denmark*

The testing of GVI in Copenhagen was run by a police intelligence unit, who collaborated with a gang taskforce, neighbourhood police units and the municipal exit support service. The Danish model, entitled *Forenet mod vold* [United against violence], was designed to target the most violent gangs in Copenhagen (Johansen & Fynbo, 2025). The project period was 2021-2024, and comprised processes of problem-orientation, strategizing, organizational preparation, pilot-testing, adjusting and re-testing of the strategy. In Copenhagen, however, GVI had to undergo several significant adjustments of the original model’s core elements, which we describe in the next section.

3.2.1. *Legal framework: GDPR and the national gang register database*

In Denmark, the national interpretation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) meant that information about individual citizens could not be shared across the Danish central register (CPR-register) and the register of gang affiliates. As part of the “Police intelligence support database,” the register of gang affiliations is controlled by the Danish Security and Intelligence Services (PET). This database has a special security classification and not even the police is cleared to access the database without a special vetting. Individual citizens are not allowed to know if they are part of the register, and data cannot be shared with any external parties, including the social services.

Together, GDPR and PET made the identification of individual GVI-recipients in Denmark almost impossible.

3.2.2. *Target group identification*

GVI recipients were identified by the police intelligence unit responsible for the Danish model, who were cleared to access the gang register. Recipients were prioritized according to these factors:

- If they were registered in the police intelligence support database (but not all were).
- If they had been involved in severe violent crimes carried out by a minimum of two persons (indicating group violence).
- If they were centrally positioned in a violent gang and/or had the authority to spread a message that would be recognized by, and have an impact on, the entire gang.

The list of GVI recipients was shared with local police officers and gang exit coordinators who carried out custom notifications. They could qualify the list based on their insights into the gang environment. Some local police officers added individual gang members who they had a longstanding and trust-based relationship with. The exit coordinators also added a few individuals whom they depicted as motivated for collaborating with the police. These parties were not informed about whether GVI recipients were listed on the national gang register.

The outcome of the selection process was a rather limited number of GVI recipients, comprising 10 individuals in a pilot phase, and 30 individuals in the second phase of testing the model. The target group represented the most violent motorcycle gangs and street gangs in Copenhagen.

3.2.3. *Collaboration and delivery of core components*

Because of the limitations posed by GDPR and PET, the Danish GVI-version could not include a collaboration between the police and civil organisations. The model was exclusively based on a partnership between the police intelligence unit, local police units, and the municipal exit programme.

3.2.3.1. *Communication*

The most significant implication of the limitations of the GDPR framework was that call-in meetings could not be held in collaboration with external partners or municipal organizations. Furthermore, a traditional call-in meeting in the US includes participation of several gangs in the same meeting, which means that people's gang affiliation is disclosed between the gangs. The sharing of such information between the police, external collaboration partners, and gang members was neither in accordance with the Danish law on GDPR or the rules on classified intelligence.

Furthermore, the national anti-gang policy from 2017 (Danish Government, 2017) abolished the use of parole for offenders sentenced by a gang provision, § 81a, in the Danish penal code. This means that the use of parole for gang members is not an option in Denmark, and that participation in call-ins during

parole therefore is not a possibility. Whereas the Swedish police had been able to grant gang members probation on the condition that they participate in call-in meetings, Danish recipients could not be obligated to participate in call-ins.

Overall, these challenges made the police decide to leave out call-ins from the Danish model and base the intervention on individual-oriented custom notifications.

This particular adjustment of the strategy resulted in an exclusion of a core component of GVI, namely, the element of civil society involvement and the moral appeal of community representatives. Instead, custom notifications were carried out by local police together with municipal exit coordinators.

The custom notifications resulted in a perceived positive outcome. One of the most important learning points from the Danish implementation of GVI was that successful violence reduction could be achieved through custom notifications. The police found that consent-based collaboration and dialogue with the GVI recipients added to their insight into the dynamics of violence in the gang environment. Information was gained from conversations with the GVI recipients, who had yearlong experiences in reading the gang "landscape" and predicting violence, especially retaliatory violence.

The GVI recipients also pointed out that stabbing, in contrast to beatings, often triggered a spiralling form of violence that could lead to shootings. Therefore, custom notifications should be timely and intensified, when there was an incident of stabbing. Another learning point was that the experienced gang members themselves were clearly interested in reducing gang violence. They expressed concerns for their families, friends and gang affiliates, and many had been victims of violence themselves, now struggling with trauma and anxiety as a consequence hereof. Hence, they were willing to cooperate and found the aims and objectives of the GVI strategy meaningful, which indicated that preventive efforts rather than penal interventions aimed at this target group could have a potential successful outcome.

3.2.3.2. *Enforcement action*

The Danish police found that constructing new GVI-related sanctions was difficult because the sanctions were already being used. This placed local police officers in a dilemma since the deterrence messages could only be based on known levers, thereby minimizing the target groups' perception of GVI as a new initiative.

Like in Sweden, sanctions conducted by the police involved actions such as repeated stop and searches, zero tolerance policies, proactive traffic controls and interventions against drug sales, heightened investigative activity and prioritising cases involving individuals from particular groups.

During the second phase of testing, a special police operation was carried out with the aim of de-escalating a violent conflict between two rival gangs. In this operation, leading figures in one of the gangs received custom notifications to reduce retaliatory violence. In addition, all members of the gang were subjected to increased focus from the local police. The police emphasized that the GVI approach to violence reduction through custom notifications had been immensely useful in this case.

3.2.3.3. *Support and help*

The municipal exit coordinators provided support for GVI recipients who were motivated to leave their gang. However, it was not a criterion that GVI recipients enrolled in an exit program. On the contrary, the police wanted the GVI recipients to remain in their gangs in order to deliver messages and help control violence from within the gangs themselves. This challenged the collaboration between the police and the exit unit, because the exit coordinators' primary goal was to achieve gang desistance. Furthermore, exit coordinators were present only at a limited number of custom notifications, because they did not have the same level of flexibility as the local police. Despite these dilemmas, the exit unit decided that their participation in custom notifications was meaningful. The meetings provided an avenue for spreading information about exit support services within the gangs, and for countering negative assumptions about the exit program.

3.2.4. *Final remarks on the Danish case*

Because several core components were either left out or modulated significantly to fit the Danish context, the Copenhagen police decided not to pursue further implementation of GVI after the pilot test.

Despite the failure to fully implement GVI in Copenhagen, the custom notifications were considered an advancement of already-existing local policing practices. Furthermore, the project shed light on an important gap in Danish crime control measures, which was the lack of specialized preventive approaches to reduce severe violence among – and together with – the most hardcore group of gang members. This speaks against current political tendencies to merely prioritize penal approaches to gangs, while also highlighting the legal and policy obstacles that made a full-scale implementation of GVI impossible in Denmark.

4. Comparative analysis

Table 1 provides an overview of the similarities and differences between the two neighbouring countries' experiences with integrating GVI into their existing violence prevention.

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Table 1. Comparison of key conditions shaping the activation of GVI's core mechanisms in Sweden and Denmark

	Sweden	Denmark	Implications
Legal framework	Legal framework allowed information sharing between police, social services, and probation under certain conditions; enabled coordination.	Strict interpretation of GDPR and confidentiality rules; police intelligence data and information about gang membership cannot be shared with external actors.	Key structural difference: legal constraints in Denmark significantly limit the activation of core GVI components.
Scope and logic of target group identification	Broad identification of groups and individuals, including peripheral actors; flexible and evolving approach	Narrower, highly selective identification based on intelligence database; limited number of individuals.	Partly shaped by legal constraints (data access), partly by organisational adaptation.
Multi-agency collaboration	Established and institutionalised collaboration between police, social services, and probation; regular coordination.	Collaboration restricted to police and municipal exit services; no involvement of civil society or local actors.	Legal constraints shape collaboration structure and limit the scope of coordinated responses.
Communicative strategy	Combination of call-ins and custom notifications; both collective and individual communication possible.	Only individual custom notifications; no group-based communication.	Enables collective deterrence and moral voice (Sweden) vs. individualised deterrence (Denmark).
Coordinated enforcement	Coordinated enforcement across police and probation; clear link between group behaviour and sanctions.	Enforcement by police; limited coordination across agencies; no new or distinct GVI-specific levers.	Shaped both by legal constraints and existing penal policy frameworks; limits distinctiveness of GVI in Denmark.
Support	Structured support through social services; "one way in" approach; prioritised GVI clients.	Support through existing gang exit programmes; less integrated and not tailored to GVI model.	Weaker integration of support component limits balance between deterrence and assistance.
Civil society involvement	Limited but possible; attempts made to include community actors in call-ins.	None.	Legal constraints (information sharing) prevent community-based legitimacy component.
Overall implementation	Full GVI (collective, multi-agency, partly community-based).	Modified and individualized interventions directed and carried out mainly by police.	GVI transformed rather than partially implemented.

4.1. Legal framework

The legal framework directly affected the possibility to activate GVI's core mechanisms. In Malmö, the legal framework allowed for a degree of information exchange between the police, social services, and probation services, enabling coordinated action and joint decision-making. Although not without challenges, these conditions made it possible to activate call-ins and multi-agency responses.

In contrast, the Danish legal context imposed strict limitations on the sharing of personal data across registers. These restrictions prevented the disclosure of group affiliations and constrained collaboration between agencies significantly. Therefore, call-ins were impossible. In Denmark, legal constraints transformed GVI from a group-focused strategy to an individual-based intervention.

4.2. *Target group identification: similar logic, different scope*

Both Malmö and Copenhagen employed intelligence-led approaches to identify individuals involved in group-related violence. In both cases, police intelligence units played a central role in mapping networks and selecting relevant individuals. However, differences emerged in the scope and flexibility of this process.

In Malmö, the identification process evolved over time and included not only core group members but also individuals at the periphery of violent networks. This broad and dynamic approach was facilitated by the ability to integrate information from multiple sources and brought actors together in call-ins. In Copenhagen, by contrast, target group identification was narrowly defined and closely tied to the police intelligence database and the local police's embedded knowledge about individual gang members. While both cases relied on similar analytical logics, the Danish implementation was more constrained and dependent on local police knowledge.

4.3. *Collaboration and delivery of core components*

The most pronounced differences between the two cases can be found in the delivery of GVI's core components. In Malmö, all central mechanisms of the strategy were activated: direct communication (both call-ins and custom notifications); coordinated enforcement; and offers of social support. Call-ins function as the central integrative mechanism of GVI, where deterrence, legitimacy, and support are communicated simultaneously by the collaborating actors.

In Copenhagen, the absence of call-ins represented a fundamental deviation from the original GVI model. While the Danish use of custom notifications proved useful as a flexible and dialogue-based tool, they could not fully replicate the collective dimension of call-ins, particularly the involvement of community actors and the delivery of a unified moral message.

Similarly, collaboration structures differed between the countries. Malmö benefited from established interagency cooperation and the inclusion of civil society actors, at least in call-ins. In Copenhagen, collaboration was restricted to actors with the necessary high security clearance, excluding civil society. This not only reduced the scope of the intervention but also altered its character, shifting it away from a community-based approach toward a more individualized approach.

Differences were also evident in the balance between enforcement and support. While both countries applied enforcement tools, Malmö combined these with a support system, including a “one way in” model for contact with social services. In Denmark, support mechanisms existed but were not central to the intervention. This limited the integration of support as a systematic component of the strategy.

To summarize, the two implementations had different strengths and limitations. In Malmö, the broader mapping of groups made it possible to identify group constellations that had previously received limited attention, and the multi-agency structure enabled the activation of several of GVI’s core mechanisms at the same time. This supported a more integrated approach combining communication, coordinated enforcement, and support, but also required extensive collaboration and organisational capacity. In Copenhagen, important collective and community-based elements of the original GVI model could not be implemented. However, custom notifications developed into a flexible and useful way of engaging directly with high-risk individuals. These contacts also provided new knowledge about violence dynamics, including how knife attacks could trigger escalating retaliation, and showed that even individuals deeply involved in gang violence could be open to dialogue about reducing violence. The comparison therefore points to different strengths and trade-offs rather than a simple distinction between successful and unsuccessful implementation.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis shows that the differences between Sweden and Denmark are not best understood as variations in implementation success, but as differences in what the intervention becomes under distinct legal and institutional conditions.

A central finding is that GVI’s operation seems to depend on the activation of the interdependent core mechanisms: deterrence, coordinated enforcement, and support. Their activation is made possible through information sharing, collective communication, and multi-agency collaboration. The legal constraints that were present in Denmark suggest that GVI is highly contingent on legal and institutional compatibility. Where such compatibility is lacking, the strategy cannot be transferred without losing its defining features. Other implementations have demonstrated similar adaptations under constrained conditions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, several GVI sites, including Malmö and Philadelphia, temporarily replaced call-ins with custom notifications in order to maintain contact with target groups while adhering to public health restrictions (Ivert & Mellgren, 2025; Moyer, 2023).

Such adaptations may result in a qualitatively different intervention characterised by individualised communication, limited, mainly police-led collaboration, and a reduced role for community-based legitimacy.

At the same time, the Danish experience points to an important gap in existing crime prevention approaches. Through custom notifications, the Danish police realized that direct, sustained engagement with high-risk individuals enabled insights into the dynamics of violence and suggested that even deeply embedded offenders may be receptive to dialogue. This indicates that preventive strategies targeting the most violent actors may benefit from stronger emphasis on relational and communicative approaches grounded in a procedural justice framework (Tyler, 2006).

Taken together, these experiences suggest that individualized communication can function as a flexible substitute when collective meetings are not feasible. However, they also indicate that such adaptations may alter the balance between the core mechanisms of the strategy. While custom notifications can sustain direct engagement and allow for timely, situation-specific interventions, they do not fully reproduce the collective dimension of call-ins, particularly the public articulation of norms and the involvement of community actors. Instead of community actors' normative and moral approach, the police have to act on behalf of the community, and while this may be effective, even in a more personalized way, it places a great responsibility and some strong inter-personal skills on the police. In this sense, the shift from call-ins to custom notifications represents not only a practical adjustment, but a transformation of how deterrence, legitimacy, and support are communicated within the model.

The findings also complicate common assumptions about Nordic penal policy. Despite Denmark's reputation for more punitive, deterrence-oriented approaches, legal constraints limited the implementation of a strategy explicitly grounded in deterrence. This highlights a key tension: punitive policy frameworks do not necessarily translate into implementable deterrence strategies, particularly when they depend on coordination, information sharing, and multi-agency collaboration.

More broadly, the study contributes to research on focused deterrence and policy transfer by demonstrating that GVI is not a "plug-and-play" model. Its transfer requires not only organisational capacity but also alignment with legal and institutional infrastructures. This underscores the need to treat legal feasibility as a central component of implementation planning, rather than a secondary consideration when deciding to integrate foreign crime-prevention programmes into existing policing structures.

The different implementation outcomes can thus be viewed through a policy-transfer lens. The two cases represent different forms of translation rather than different degrees of implementation success. Our analysis suggests that policy transfer is not only a question of whether an intervention can be implemented with sufficient fidelity; transfer itself may change the

intervention. In this sense the concept of organisational readiness for change (Weiner, 2009) complements the policy-transfer perspective by helping explain why the same intervention encountered different implementation opportunities. Rather than assuming that differences in implementation were solely a consequence of legal constraints, the comparison suggests that Malmö and Copenhagen also differed in their readiness to implement GVI as an organisational innovation. From this perspective, policy transfer depends not only on whether an intervention is legally feasible, but also on whether the receiving organisations possess the collective commitment, capabilities, and institutional arrangements required to implement it successfully.

Finally, this study contributes to a broader discussion about the limitations of programme-oriented approaches to evidence-based crime prevention. Evidence of effectiveness is not evidence of transferability, particularly when both the intervention and the crime problem are shaped by the contexts in which they occur. Gang violence is not a stable phenomenon that can be assumed to take the same form across places and over time; groups, conflicts, criminal markets, type of violence, and patterns of retaliation change, as do the institutional capacities to respond to them. This greatly challenges the assumption that evidence-based interventions can be treated as standardised solutions that are transferred between settings primarily by preserving programme fidelity.

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