

# 'Very chaotic situation': Gun violence on the rise in Sweden

Rate of fatal shootings in Sweden ranks 'very high' compared to other European countries, says Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention

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In the last decade, gang-related shootings have escalated in Sweden, with authorities struggling to contain the war-like violence.

The Scandinavian country is now often referred to as “the capital of Europe” when it comes to deadly shootings.

This year has been the bloodiest on record in Sweden as 48 fatal shootings have taken place so far, with the number expected to rise by the end of the year, according to local media reports.

“My son Marley was only 19 here,” Maritha Ogilvie said with tears in her eyes while staring at a photograph of the smiling teenager.

He was in a car with a friend when someone shot him in the head with an automatic weapon.

He later died in a hospital.

The teenager was murdered in 2015 in Varby Gard, a suburb southwest of Stockholm.

For Ogilvie, the nightmare continues.

“It’s been seven years. He’s still as dead today and he was my only child,” she said.

Apart from losing her son, she has also lost her “identity as a mother” and a chance to ever have a grandchild.

“And he lost his chances to have kids and to grow up and move from home and travel and get married and all those things. So, it’s horrible,” she added.

## Rate of fatal shootings ‘very high’ in Sweden

According to a report published by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRA), the rate of fatal shootings in Sweden ranks “very high” compared to other European countries, with roughly four deaths per million inhabitants per year, while in Europe, approximately

1.6 deaths per million inhabitants are recorded every year.

“The current situation is very chaotic here when it comes to the criminal gangs,” said Diamant Salihu, a journalist in the country.

Generally, older gang members recruit teenagers from vulnerable areas to commit shootings, as if you're under 18, you risk being in youth custody for a maximum of four years in Sweden.

“It's a very toxic environment at the moment and we see that teenagers have been used as some kind of Hitman's to kill (gang) rivals,” Salihu added.

Ardavan Khoshnood, a criminologist at Lund University and an emergency doctor at a Swedish hospital, said that most victims are from immigrant backgrounds, between 15 and 29 years old.

Since the shootings in Sweden started in 2010, Khoshnood used to witness gunshots to arms, hands, and legs. However now, he said, he is seeing shots toward the head as gangs are now “shooting to kill.”

“And that's clearly seen at the emergency departments all around Sweden,” he said.

Khoshnood pointed out that ever-increasing criminal networks have been able to “mature and to nurture quite freely without the involvement of authorities.”

### **Negative portrayal of immigrants**

According to him, the large inflow of illegal weapons to Sweden and a failed integration played a role when it comes to the shocking gang-related fatalities.

In the Scandinavian country that was once a political and economic role model, things started to change in the 1990s when the gap within the society started to grow, according to Alexandra Pascalidou, another journalist and author.

Pascalidou, who is also a human rights activist, believes that marginalization in the country has led to the shootings in which many innocent children and young people have been killed.

The negative portrayal of immigrants in the society and media has intensified in Sweden in the last two decades, she said.

“When other kids (non-immigrant children) and young people are being killed, you know, they publish their essays, neighbors say, oh, he was such a good guy. And everybody loved him, and he used to play football or whatever.

“But when these kids – these brown or Black kids or Muslim kids or minorities – in the stigmatized suburbs were shot to death, people were like, okay, it was only statistics. And it was only numbers. And it was like, very brief stories about gang members shooting, and so on,” Pascalidou added.

Swedish media has framed immigrants as a threat which has led to prejudice and mistrust toward individuals with migrant backgrounds, she said.

### **'Criminals running around freely'**

Most gang-related homicides remain unsolved by the police as according to Khoshnood, only 18% of cases are successfully dealt with.

“So, this means that criminals are running around freely,” Pascalidou added.

The author's research has led her to conclude that a big number of those who were killed in the shootings were not gang members and were simply shot because, for instance, they were mistaken for someone else.

Still, she said they were portrayed and described in the media as criminals.

“It was like the stereotype of the kids, kids of color and migrant kids and minority kids, the stereotype was that they were all criminals.

“They were worth being shot to death. And nobody cried, nobody cared. Nobody really grieved these losses,” she said.

According to Pascalidou, the Swedish authorities are not putting enough resources into investigating these murders with many cases being closed after just several months.

“So, kids live in fear out in the suburbs, and they are very, very disappointed,” because they get the feeling that their lives “are not worth anything that even if they are shot to death, nobody will really care about them.

“And nobody will write in newspapers or report that these kids, they had dreams, they had visions, they struggled in school, they did their best,” Pascalidou said.

The 19-year-old Marley's murderer was never brought to justice as the police decided to close the case just after 10 months.

"Marley was a warm, genuinely kind-hearted person. He was funny. He was forgiving, oh, I don't know who killed him, and I don't know why, and it makes me feel sad because I don't feel like there's any justice for him," Ogilvie said.

### 'Structural violence'

She urged the Swedish authorities to work on structural racism and segregation.

"I would say, it's the structural racism, that is the main problem here in Sweden, and with that comes segregation, and with that comes economic differences, and with that comes poverty, and with that comes this type of events, shootings, gangs, and criminality," Ogilvie emphasized.

Pascalidou interviewed 21 mothers whose children were victims of the deadly shootings, and they all told her stories about "structural and symbolic violence" that comes from society "that doesn't hit you with its hands, and it doesn't leave marks on your body.

"But it's the violence of silencing. It's the violence of degrading you. It's the violence of ... segregating you, and not giving you the same chances. Racism is also violence," she added.

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