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## Sweden's Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak

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### ABSTRACT

The Swedish Prison and Probation Service (SPPS) formed a national crisis management team on March 12, 2020, in response to the global Covid-19 pandemic. The team, consisting of experts from multiple departments within the SPPS, coordinated efforts within the government agency to support the jails, prisons, probation offices, and national transportation service in managing the pandemic while upholding operational security and the safety of staff and inmates. The SPPS handled the Covid-19 outbreak by taking measures to minimize the risk of contagion spread, consistent with the recommendations of the Public Health Agency in Sweden. These recommendations differ from those introduced in many other countries. For example, Sweden chose to avoid a general lockdown. The SPPS's measures to minimize contagion spread included: canceling all visitation at-and furlough from-jails and prisons, placing inmates with suspected and confirmed Covid-19 infections in isolation, creating digital solutions to minimize travel and in-person meetings, as well as providing protective gear to manage infected inmates and inmates within a risk group. To date, the SPPS has had 143 confirmed inmate cases of Covid-19 and no deaths due to the virus.

### KEYWORD

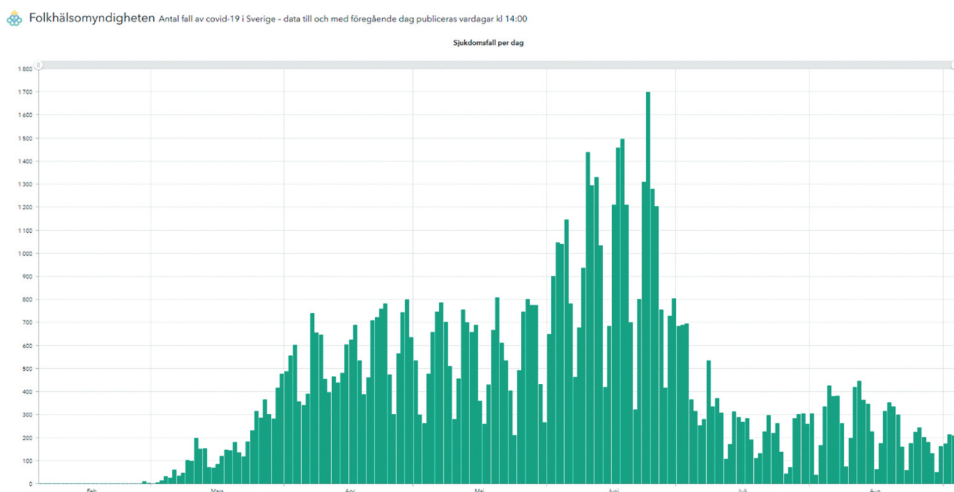
Covid-19; Pandemic;  
Alternatives to incarceration;  
Early release mechanisms;  
Prison reform; corrections;  
jail; prison; pandemic;  
Sweden

## Sweden and the Covid-19 pandemic

With the spread of Covid-19 in Sweden, all government agencies prepared for major changes in day-to-day operations. The Public Health Agency in Sweden maintains authority over recommendations and restrictions placed on citizens during a pandemic and chose an approach to minimizing contagion spread that differs from most other countries. Instead of enforcing strict general lockdowns or quarantines, the Public Health Agency in Sweden provided all Swedish citizens with recommendations to control and minimize the contagion, such as proper hand washing procedures, social distancing, working from home if possible, walking or bicycling to work instead of using public transportation, and avoiding crowds. Beyond these recommendations, the Public Health Agency in Sweden put forth measures to facilitate public compliance, including canceling sporting events and restricting shows and other gatherings to a maximum of 50 people. Currently, the Public Health Agency in Sweden reports 84,985 (8,415 per 1,000,000 inhabitants) confirmed cases of Covid-19 of which 2,574 have been treated at an intensive care unit and 5,835 (577 per 1,000,000) have died (Public Health Agency in Sweden, 2020). [Figure 1](#) specifies the contagion spread in Sweden throughout 2020.

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**Figure 1.** Number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Sweden – The Public Health Agency In Sweden.

## The national crisis management team

The Swedish Prison and Probation Service (SPPS) is the Swedish government agency responsible for all correctional operations in the country, specifically jails, prisons, probation offices, and transportations within the SPPS and on assignment for other government agencies. The SPPS national crisis management team for Covid-19 formed on March 12, 2020 in response to the WHO classifying Covid-19 as a pandemic, as well as the start of contagion spread in Sweden. The SPPS appointed the head of the Security Department as the chairperson of the team and recruited experts from the security intelligence, HR, logistics, security, inmate placement, and legal departments. The national crisis management team met every day to evaluate potential and required measures for the SPPS. The team organized into five main operational tracks to allow the representatives to focus on their specific areas of expertise; the five operational tracks included security, staff, contagion spread, communications and legal. The team swiftly moved into action while the Director General decided on canceling all visitation at, and furlough from, jails and prisons while providing the inmates with no-charge phone calls as compensation.

In the months that followed, the national crisis management team made multiple decisions and specified instructions on how to enforce those decisions to control the pandemic to the best of the SPPS's ability, while complying with the recommendations of the Public Health Agency in Sweden. [Table 1](#) outlines the most prominent actions taken by the national crisis management team.

## The security operational track

Representatives of the security operational track in the national crisis management team focus on the general security and safety of all SPPS units across the nation. These representatives maintain communications with units that have flare ups due to Covid-19 outbreaks or reactions within the inmate population in response to decisions made by the SPPS. The first major reactions came immediately following the decision to cancel all visitation and furlough on

**Table 1.** Timeline for the SPPS national crisis management team.

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| March 12 | The SPPS national crisis management team formed<br>Visitation and furlough canceled   |
| March 13 | No-charge phone calls for all inmates<br>Specific Covid-19-site on the staff-only internal website<br>Shorter staff training programs canceled<br>All non-essential in-service trips canceled   |
| March 14 | Only "absolutely necessary" transports of inmates with confirmed or suspected Covid-19 will be carried out  |
| March 16 | Probation offices switch to digital meetings<br>Legal track added   |
| March 17 | All close-contact staff training canceled   |
| March 23 | The national correctional officer training program paused, students return to work at their respective units  |
| March 24 | Distribution of protective gear to all units  |
| March 27 | Working from home, if possible, recommended for staff at the SPPS headquarters<br>Decision to test inmates with symptoms of Covid-19, as soon as such tests are available<br>Headquarter staff inventory for potential reallocation of resources at jails, prisons, probation offices and national transportation service |
| March 30 | First confirmed inmate case of Covid-19   |
| April 1  | First outbreak at a SPPS unit, five confirmed cases of Covid-19 and high rate of sick leave within the staff at the unit  |
| April 15 | Skype available for treatment programs at probation offices   |
| April 27 | Skype-calls on tablets available for video calls to inmates' children   |
| April 29 | Instructions regarding handling of inmates with confirmed or suspected Covid-19 as well as inmates within certain risk groups published to the staff website  |
| May 7    | Staff magazine with Covid-19 focus published  |
| May 9    | 800 reusable protective visors, produced in prison workshops, distributed to units  |
| June 4   | Compiled "terminology and instructions" document published to the staff-only Covid-19 page  |
| June 5   | Training materials regarding Covid-19 for summer staff distributed  |
| June 23  | Decision to commence the national correctional officer training program during the fall   |
| June 25  | Decision to gradually return to "regular" probation office services starting July 1, with regular practices in place by September 1<br>Decision to gradually return to regular visitation and furlough from prison starting July 1, with regular practices in place, at the lowest security class prisons, by September 1 |
| July 13  | New directives for protective gear, must be CE-marked upholding the European Union security demands   |
| July 21  | CE-marked protective gear distributed to units  |

March 12. Two of the low security prison populations engaged in minor mass actions; at one of the prisons, the inmates activated the fire alarm and refused the nightly lock-down. At the other prison, some inmates attempted to create a barricade, but when the special tactics force entered the wards all inmates followed instructions and returned to their respective cells.<sup>1</sup> The SPPS transported the instigators to higher security facilities. That night, three inmates escaped from the prison. However, it is important to highlight that the lowest security class in Sweden requires minimal supervision, with no use of cameras or fences. The inmates simply removed their ankle monitors and ran away. Two of the three escapees have been caught and placed at higher security facilities (TT, 2020). As escaping from a prison is not considered a crime in Sweden, the escapees' sentences were simply paused until they were caught. With support from representatives of the security operational track, local crisis management teams managed to resolve the situations with no injuries or further incidents. Other prisons had some minor reactions with inmates refusing to attend their mandated prison jobs. The local units managed to deescalate these situations and return to normal practice quickly. The refusal to work continued peacefully at one unit until March 19. The motive behind the refusal to work could also have been the changes in rules regarding commissary fund transfers from family and relatives, as the SPPS discontinued transfers to inmate commissary accounts only a few weeks before the cancellation of visitation and furlough.<sup>2</sup> The decision to stop commissary fund transfers and the Covid-19 outbreak were unrelated, but the unfortunate timing most likely influenced the inmates' emotional reactions.

The decision to allow inmates no-charge phone calls was a strategic move to compensate the inmates for the loss of visitation and furlough as well as a way to maintain the treatment plans of many inmates who need prosocial contacts as a part of their rehabilitation. The positive reactions that followed from the inmate population allowed the representatives of the security operational track time to focus on creating risk analyses in preparation for future decisions, possible new outbreaks of Covid-19, and other potential situations that may arise throughout the pandemic. They also coordinated with representatives from the contagion spread track to create practical solutions for managing suspected and confirmed infected inmates. One of these practical solutions was to create a template that was sent out to all SPPS regional offices requesting information about the number of inmates with Covid-19, suspected and confirmed, and the number of inmates within a risk group.<sup>3</sup> Each of the six regions utilized the template to compile reports provided by their local units and sent it back to the national crisis management team. This action provided the national crisis management team with daily structured information for the contagion spread, staff, and security operational tracks.

The national crisis management team continually reviews the decision regarding the no-charge phone call policy each month. By the first update of the decision, the SPPS decided to keep providing no-charge phone calls within Sweden but to charge all international calls at half the normal rate. The SPPS made this decision based on a major increase in the cost of international phone calls. Because inmates may not leave Sweden while on furlough and visits from family and friends from other countries are rare, the reduced charge for international calls serve as a form of compensation for the restrictions in place during the pandemic.

A common problem during the spring of 2020 has been new inmates feeling threatened, as the inmates in their wards feared the new inmates would be infected with Covid-19 and spread it within the population. The SPPS has the option of placing inmates in isolation for a variety of reasons, one of which is to minimize the risk of spreading a disease (Chapter 6, section 7, Act on Imprisonment (Sveriges Riksdag, 2010)). This regulation allowed the security operational track to create routines to use isolation as a form of quarantine for new inmates, as well as inmates with suspected or confirmed Covid-19. Because someone can be asymptomatic for Covid-19, representatives from the security, legal, and contagion spread operational tracks created instructions to place new inmates in isolation until the jail/prison health care professionals could ensure that they would not introduce the virus into the ward.

The security operational track supports all SPPS units in specific cases of inmates acting out due to the virus; however, the security situation has remained stable throughout the pandemic. The SPPS accredit this maintained security mainly to the staff's ability to follow new instructions and maintain good communication with the inmates, but also to the quick decisions made by the national crisis management team. Many units have had weekly information meetings with inmates; a strategy to keep the inmates aware of the situation in society but also to inform them of the different measures taken by SPPS to keep them safe. The SPPS remains cautiously optimistic regarding future security threats and reactions from the inmate population since the SPPS has proved able to handle the rare and uncertain situation of a global pandemic.

### **The staff operational track**

The representatives of the staff operational track of the national crisis management team solely focus on the SPPS staff. They observe trends in staff sick leave, maintain

communications with the unions, and provide support in all staff-related issues connected to Covid-19, while safeguarding the staff's protection during the pandemic. At each meeting of the national crisis management team, the representatives of the staff operational track report the sick leave on a national basis, divided into four main groups: jails/prisons, the national transportation service, probation offices, and headquarters. Sick leave spiked quickly at the beginning of the pandemic and became the highest recorded sick leave within the SPPS.<sup>4</sup> However, the rate started to decline in April and, currently, the SPPS sick leave is at an all-time low. The reasons for the low sick leave rate have not been investigated yet; however, it may be attributed to a large portion of the staff working from home and the opportunity of working from home on days they would not typically attend work due to minor symptoms. In addition, the government enforced new legislation to remove the qualifying period of one day required for receiving sick pay in order to encourage people with symptoms to stay home. The SPPS also quickly enforced these rules and ensured staff felt comfortable to work only if they were completely healthy. These actions may also have had a big impact on sick leave and minimizing contagion spread in the workplace.

One of the first actions of the national crisis management team was to cancel all shorter staff training programs. Most of the staff in these short programs needed to travel by train and other forms of public transportation to and from the programs, which the Public Health Agency identified as hot spots for the spread of Covid-19. By March 23, all training programs and physical practices, including the national correctional officer training program, were paused or canceled. This decision proved to be one of the most successful actions of the national crisis management team. The reason for the decision was threefold; first, minimizing the risk of contagion spread between staff at the training facilities; second, minimizing travel by public transportation to and from the training facilities, and; third, providing the SPPS units with more staff to cover for the projected increase in sick leave while minimizing the need to bring temporary workers into the units. Temporary workers often work in multiple units and would therefore increase the risk of contagion spread, and more effective use of regular staff reduced the number of different people passing through each unit. Along with the cancellation and pausing of training programs, the SPPS canceled all non-essential work trips consistent with the recommendations from the Public Health Agency to minimize travel by public transportation – the SPPS's preferred form of work-related transportation.

As the pandemic spread in Sweden, the representatives of the staff operational track proactively searched for solutions to a possible shortage of correctional officers at the units due to sick leave as the number of overtime hours at the units began to rise. One of the measures taken was to do an inventory at the SPPS headquarters to identify staff who previously had worked at jails, prisons or probation offices, or for the national transport service. The plan was to reallocate resources to units that may have a large volume of sick leave cases due to the pandemic. The units of SPPS cannot run without staff and as an important public function of Swedish society, the work cannot be paused or stopped. However, largely due to the return of students from the national correctional officer training programs, the SPPS, thus far, has not needed to reallocate any headquarter staff.

During the early stages of the pandemic, representatives of the staff operational track worked closely with the units and kept monitoring recommendations from the Public Health Agency in Sweden to develop strategies to protect staff within the identified risk groups for Covid-19. A few of the staff were excused from work and asked to stay home with

pay since the SPPS did not have the necessary information and instructions to protect them from the virus. This safeguard was a manageable measure for the SPPS as the units were over-staffed due to the return of correctional officers from the national correctional officer training program. The units also received extra staff from the national transportation service because of a decrease in transportations conducted. All units completed a voluntary inventory of staff who may be within a risk group and these individuals were not to interact with inmates with suspected or confirmed Covid-19. In May, the national crisis management team decided that all staff who had worked with inmates with confirmed cases of Covid-19, without the necessary protective gear, were to stay at home with pay for 14 days. The goal of this decision was to protect staff and inmates from potential asymptomatic Covid-19 carriers.

As sick leave began to reduce, the staffing situation within the SPPS stabilized and, as previously mentioned, the staff sick leave has been at an all-time low. Currently, the representatives of the staff operational track focus on the restart of the national correctional officer training program and solutions to protect students by minimizing the risk of contagion spread, while providing them with the necessary tools to be confident and competent correctional officers.

### **The contagion spread operational track**

The representatives of the contagion spread operational track focus on the risks of contagion spread, handling of suspected or confirmed cases of Covid-19, organizing protective gear for staff, and providing support to experts creating creative solutions for the new “normal operations” for the SPPS throughout the life span of the pandemic. One of the first actions of the contagion spread operational track was to identify all inmates within any of the known risk groups to know the actual number of inmates who might need extra protection from Covid-19.<sup>5</sup> The national crisis management team realized early on that the SPPS needed strategies to obtain the necessary protective gear to protect both staff and inmates since no such inventory was readily accessible within the government agency. As such, the representatives of the contagion spread operational track made a request to the Swedish Armed Forces to borrow protective masks; the Swedish Armed Forces provided the SPPS with some borrowed masks to use until the SPPS could obtain protective gear from manufacturers. At this time, prison workshops across the nation began to produce temporary protective gear and the SPPS used the communications operational track to inform all staff and inmates about hand washing procedures and the importance of general hygiene and social distancing.

The Covid-19 outbreak required mitigation strategies both inside prisons and in the community corrections system. An important step in minimizing risk of contagion spread in community corrections was to discontinue most in-person meetings at probation offices. All operational tracks coordinated with departments at the SPPS headquarters to introduce a digital form of probation office services. The probation officers were able to conduct meetings and treatment programs over FaceTime and Skype. Probation offices nationwide identified a few of their clients as having a high-risk of recidivism and need for control; these clients required in-person meetings to ensure personal and public safety. At this time, the SPPS does not have records of an aggregated total of these individuals as the identification and decision process was delegated to each individual probation office. The probation officers conducted the in-person meetings in accordance with the recommendations of the



Public Health Authority in Sweden. Thus, the SPPS could minimize the risk of contagion spread while continuing the necessary rehabilitation activities and upholding safety for individuals on probation.

On March 30, a medium security prison reported the first confirmed inmate case of Covid-19. While supporting the units with confirmed and suspected infection, the contagion spread operational track focused on creating clear and correct instructions to minimize contagion spread of Covid-19 within the SPPS. The instructions covered, for example, safe placement strategies for inmates with suspected or confirmed Covid-19 and inmates within risk groups, use and disinfection of protective gear, and transportation of inmates during the pandemic.

The SPPS confirmed the first cluster of infected inmates at a medium security prison on April 1. Five inmates tested positive for Covid-19 and the prison acted immediately, following the instructions issued by the SPPS national crisis management team. The infected inmates were isolated and staff used proper precautionary actions when in contact with the inmates. This first cluster case allowed the contagion spread operational track to learn and develop better strategies for future outbreaks. One of the measures taken was to conduct webinars with heads of all SPPS units to provide information and lessons learned from the first major outbreak. The head of the unit with the cluster of infected inmates led the webinars. He provided his colleagues all over Sweden with first-hand information regarding Covid-19 procedures, questions and reactions from inmates and staff, and lessons he and his staff learned from the experience. By the end of the webinars, the unit heads shared their appreciation for the information and that they felt better prepared for future outbreaks and clusters of infected inmates.

To date, the SPPS has had 143 Covid-19 cases among the inmates. The testing procedures for each unit differ since the Swedish health care system of each county has different conditions and opportunities for testing. The SPPS only receives data about inmates at jails and prisons; clients reporting to the probation offices handle their own health care, and the SPPS does not have access to their potential test results. Most of the cases can be connected to local outbreaks at a few isolated units and there have been no deaths. Most of the 143 inmates have recovered, with only a handful requiring health care at a hospital. Those who are yet to recover are handled according to the instructions and routines provided by the national crisis management team. The SPPS expects more cases of Covid-19 with the intake of new inmates and contagion through asymptomatic staff. However, all units prepare for the contagion spread with instructions in place for the safe management of Covid-19, making new confirmed cases a part of day-to-day operations. Currently, the representatives of the contagion spread operational track are working closely with the jail/prison and probation office departments at the SPPS headquarters. The goal is to provide them with enough information and competence to handle all Covid-19 related questions and issues starting in September 2020. The primary focus is to provide support to all units in preparation for visitation, regular furlough, and normal probation services while managing social distancing and using creative solutions in situations where social distancing is not possible. One of these solutions is to use Plexiglass to separate individuals during meetings at the probation offices or during visitation at jails and in prisons.

### **The communications operational track**

Throughout the pandemic, the communications operational track has provided information regarding the SPPS's work with Covid-19 to the SPPS staff and inmates as well as the



media. The communications operational track acted fast after the formation of the national crisis management team and created a dedicated Covid-19 page on the internal staff website by March 13. Representatives of the communications operational track maintain the website and publish all decisions, instructions, videos, and news related to Covid-19 for all staff to see. The site also has a Frequently Asked Questions page to streamline the information staff most commonly ask for. In addition, the staff magazine May edition focused on the Covid-19 pandemic (Swedish Prison and Probation Service, 2020).

The communications operational track created informational posters that featured proper hand washing techniques, information about the importance of social distancing, and general Covid-19 information. The SPPS encouraged all units to post the posters in both staff and inmate areas. As the national crisis management team made decisions, the communications operational track created and used channels of communication with units to provide all inmates and staff with updated information in the most efficient way possible. By June 1, the communications operational track provided inmates with general Covid-19 information in the four most commonly spoken languages in Swedish jails and prisons (English, Arabic, Spanish, and Russian). In preparation for summer temporary workers, the communications track coordinated with all other operational tracks to create educational packets to expedite the learning process regarding Covid-19 for all new correctional officers.

There has been a steady public and media interest for the SPPS's operations and actions during the Covid-19 pandemic. Many of the articles posted by media outlets have been in response to the cancelation of visitation and furlough. Family members and friends of inmates have spoken out in media about what they consider inhumane treatment since they are restricted from visitation. For example, a local newspaper in the southern region of Sweden published an article about a six-year-old boy named Vincent who had not met his father for four months because of the cancellation of visitation. The article describes the negative emotional impact on children when denied access to a parent and comments on the SPPS's decision to maintain the prohibition of visits for so long (Wester et al., 2020). At the end of April 2020, before the article was published, the SPPS provided all units with tablets set up for video calls via Skype. These tablets may only be used for video calls to the inmates' children; the inmates may use the no-charge phone calls for communication with their adult family members and friends. Many media outlets requested information regarding specific units where Covid-19 has spread. Along with the legal operational track, the communications operational track referred to the protection of information related to inmates' health care. However, due to the Swedish public access principle, media representatives made freedom of information requests to obtain decisions relating to the isolation of inmates. These decisions are public information according to Chapter 6, section 7 in the Act on Imprisonment (isolation in order to prevent risk to another inmate) and media representatives could therefore identify the units with Covid-19 spread.

### **The legal operational track**

The national crisis management team identified the need for a separate track to manage the many legal issues that surfaced and would arise during the pandemic and therefore added the legal operational track on March 16. Most of the decisions made by the national crisis management team could have legal ramifications and the representatives of the legal operational track ensured that the SPPS would follow all laws and regulations in the

management of the pandemic. While correctional departments in some countries decided to release some of their inmates due to the pandemic, Sweden did not and the SPPS handled the situation with all inmates serving their sentences as ordered by the courts.

The cancelation of all furloughs and visitations initiated many questions and appeals from inmates, since inmates maintained their right to apply for furlough. The SPPS denied all requests because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The legal department and the representatives of the legal operational track assisted the units in how to formulate furlough decisions during this time, while handling the appeals from inmates. Following the changes of some of the national recommendations from the Public Health Agency in Sweden, and as the understanding of the virus grew, the SPPS could grant a few furlough requests; however, all furloughs require staff monitoring to ensure the inmate follows the social distancing recommendations.

In April, a parliamentary ombudsman investigated the SPPS actions in response to the Covid-19 outbreak. The investigation was completed and delivered to the SPPS by June 30 (Katarina Pahlsson, 2020). The parliamentary ombudsman criticized the SPPS's preparedness for the pandemic, questioned the large restrictions placed on inmates through the cancelation of visitation and furlough, and regarded the information to the inmates as poor. The parliamentary ombudsman requested a quick return to "regular" visitation and furlough operations, with measures to minimize contagion spread. Before the parliamentary ombudsman finished their report, the SPPS decided on June 25 to return to normal operations starting July 1, with "new regular procedures" in place for the low security prisons by September 1, and a team working to create solutions for medium and maximum security jails and prisons. The parliamentary ombudsman also criticized the SPPS for the common practice of using one-person cells for two inmates as they pointed to the impossibility to practice social distancing and minimizing contagion spread. Currently, and over the past year, the SPPS has placed two inmates in one-person cells due to overcrowding. Within the SPPS, standard practice is to provide each inmate with their own cell, however, because the inmate population in relation to the capacity is continuously reaching well over 90% and even over 100% at times since 2019, two inmates per cell has become a strategy to handle the large inmate population. On October 2, 2019, the SPPS identified overcrowding as a "special event" requiring the formation of a national crisis management team with operations focused on solutions to prepare for larger inmate populations (The Swedish Prison and Probation Service, 2019). The overcrowding issue still stands (currently 97% of capacity filled and rising (World Prison Brief, 2020)) and the national crisis management team for overcrowding is still active. The SPPS is building more facilities but the progress cannot keep pace with the continuing large intake of inmates. Importantly, the SPPS has never, and never will, allow an inmate with suspected or confirmed infection to share a cell with another inmate. The head of the national crisis management team, along with the communications operational track, issued a statement to clarify this standpoint.

### **Other functions within the national crisis management team**

Beyond the head of the national crisis management team and the operational tracks, the team has a few other representatives. The national transportation service representative provides information about transportations both within the SPPS and transportations conducted for other government agencies; due to the reduction of inmate transportations

during the pandemic, the national transportation service provided jails and prisons with extra staff and transported protective gear to units within the SPPS. The security intelligence representative allows the national crisis management team to keep track of security threats and general security within the SPPS. The IT department representative provides information about technical solutions needed to successfully take the SPPS through the pandemic; these solutions included increasing capacity for video meetings and the inmate telephone system (as phone calls increased when the SPPS offered no-charge calls). Representatives from the logistics department provide the national crisis management team with solutions regarding equipment distribution and procurement. Lastly, a representative from the security department handles administrative organization, notes, all-around assistance for the head of the national crisis management team, e-mail administration, and local, national, and international news monitoring to ensure that the national crisis management team stays up-to-date with Covid-19-related information.

### **Current operations and preparations for the future**

The workload of the national crisis management team is reducing and will cease in September 2020. The representatives assist the jail/prison and probation office departments in overtaking Covid-19-related questions and issues in their day-to-day operations. The current focus is to create the best possible conditions for visitation and furlough. The SPPS prepares for the pandemic to continue and possibly worsen; regardless, the SPPS has strategies in place to handle the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Closing remarks**

In summary, the SPPS has taken a structured approach to managing the Covid-19 pandemic through the initiation of a national crisis management team, with important lessons learned. The investigation by the parliamentary ombudsman shed some light on what the SPPS as a government agency needs to improve on in the future, and the Covid-19 process has provided the SPPS with an opportunity to learn and prepare for future pandemics. Even though the SPPS's handling of the pandemic was not perfect, the government agency can take some pride in that to date, the SPPS has not had any deaths due to Covid-19 and maintains a low contagion count. The pandemic is not yet over, and systematic evaluation is needed to draw conclusions regarding the quality and efficiency of SPPS's crisis management. With that said, perceived facilitating factors of the SPPS's management of the Covid-19 pandemic include: the rapid formation of the national crisis management team; competent and compliant staff who managed to minimize the contagion spread even before they had access to proper protective gear; the swift decision to cancel all furlough and visitation; the cancelation of the national correctional officer training program to provide additional staff for the units; and lastly, continuous communication with our units, staff, and inmates. The SPPS met many challenges, mostly due to the lack of knowledge about the virus and the lag in updated national recommendations from the Public Health Agency in Sweden. In addition, the shortage of protective gear globally required creative solutions, such as producing temporary protective gear in the prison workshops. The SPPS prepared for more and worse reactions from the inmate population, but the negative reactions were few. The SPPS attributes these beneficial outcomes to the hard work of correctional officers

and other staff as they managed to keep the inmate population calm and informed during these trying times.

It is too early to foresee the potential long-term impact of the SPPS Covid-19 strategies, especially since the pandemic is still active. However, the experience of handling Covid-19 has given the SPPS insight into future needs of correctional practices. The SPPS will need to consider the necessary infrastructure when building new units, such as options to isolate and place inmates in quarantine quickly and efficiently, ability to utilize video services for meetings, probation meetings, and maintaining relationships between inmates and their children, as well as readily available protective gear in preparation for future outbreaks of Covid-19 or other viruses. The SPPS has focused on managing the pandemic and keeping up with the national recommendations from the Public Health Agency in Sweden throughout the spring and summer of 2020. A systematic evaluation of the SPPS's actions is necessary to draw conclusions and evaluate the long-term impact of both the pandemic and the SPPS's actions in response to it.

## Notes

1. Observation by coauthor EA present at the unit during the mass action.
2. On February 24, 2020, the SPPS decided to discontinue transfers to inmate commissary accounts to eliminate the possibility to laundered money through the government agency. (Ny hantering av intagnas medel, 2020).
3. The Public Health Authority in Sweden classified risk groups for Covid-19 as individuals of high age, anyone who has received an organ transplant, has cancer, neurological disorders, obesity, chronic breathing disorders, heart disease, or liver disease. (The Public Health Agency in Sweden, 2020). The average rate of SPPS inmates within the risk group from March 2020 to August 2020 has been 4.7%.
4. The average recorded rate of sick leave from March 9, 2020 to August 24, 2020 was 12.7% (jails/prisons: 13.1%, National transportation service: 16.8%, Probation offices: 12.0%, Headquarters: 8.8%). The average sick leave between March 9, 2020 to August 24, 2020 has been 5.4%. On August 24, 2020, the sick leave average was 3.4%.
5. The average rate of SPPS inmates within the risk group from March 2020 to August 2020 has been 4.7%.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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