

# Conclusions and recommendations of the National Audit Office

## Reducing recidivism during and after punishment

The aim of the audit was to establish how well the Ministry of Justice and the Criminal Sanctions Agency have succeeded in reducing and preventing recidivism during and after the enforcement of criminal sanctions. The aim was also to determine how the work is carried out in criminal sanctions regions and what are the prerequisites for the work. The auditors also examined the cooperation aimed at achieving the recidivism target and the networks between administrative branches and between central government authorities, municipalities and other stakeholders.

The Ministry of Justice and the Criminal Sanctions Agency have worked to promote the achievement of the target in many ways. New types of sanction have been introduced, the content of the enforcement has been developed in accordance with the target, recidivism rates have been monitored and the organisation has been developed so that it can support the achievement of the target. At the same time, however, the activities have been adjusted in accordance with the budgetary constraints, which has made it more difficult to achieve the recidivism reduction target.

## Recidivism can only be reduced through cooperation

The recidivism reduction target is based on the law and it is also one of the societal effectiveness targets of the Ministry of Justice and the Criminal Sanctions Agency. Reducing recidivism also requires cooperation in central government across administrative boundaries and the input of the local government and non-governmental organisations.

Because of shrinking resources, it is increasingly important to ensure that the service and support systems provided by the public sector are working and provide a continuum to the measures started during enforcement. This helps to ensure that the measures taken during enforcement will succeed. In fact, the audit findings suggest that ministries and central government agencies should jointly make the resources and measures aimed at reducing recidivism into a single package at an early stage and especially when central government spending limits and the state budget are being drafted.

## There is a need for clarification in the competence and division of tasks between the central administration and region centres of the Criminal Sanctions Agency

The responsibilities and roles of the central administration and region centres of the Criminal Sanctions Agency are unclear, which has resulted in slow steering and decision-making and inconsistent practices. For this reason, local units have themselves resolved problems concerning application and interpretation and prioritisation issues. Local-level actors in the criminal sanctions sector expect the central administration to provide stronger strategic steering and up-to-date application guidelines and regulations, in which consideration is given to practical needs. Region centres are expected to provide clear operational

steering that is relevant to the content of the enforcement. This helps to ensure the quality and equality of enforcement in penal institutions.

### Differences in operating practices make it more difficult to enforce sanctions on an equal basis

There are differences in practices and operating procedures between criminal sanctions regions and units. Establishment of uniform practices has been slowed down by a three-tier organisation, problems concerning the division of competence and steering and the existence of three criminal sanctions regions, each of which has a fair degree of autonomy. The practices have also been shaped by challenges in criminal sanctions training and the fact that the penal institutions have long traditions in their practices. Many of the problems identified in the audit are connected with the absence of steering or important process descriptions. By continuing the process of specialisation in individual prisons and by centralising prisoner operations, the Criminal Sanctions Agency can cope with the problems arising from shrinking resources and the use of expertise. One way of promoting good practices and developing operating practices is to include job rotation in criminal sanctions careers.

### A more active approach by the Criminal Sanctions Agency would be a better way of ensuring the future of the cooperation networks and service continua

On practical level, no specific party has been responsible for bringing the actors of the Criminal Sanctions Agency, municipalities and third-sector organisations together so that individual criminal sanctions clients could be provided with support measures or continua or network cooperation could be established between these partners.

There is variation between regions and units in the service continua provided for individuals being released from prison. The individuals are motivated to cope with the challenges of daily life but at the same time, the success of the release phase depends on how the units of the Criminal Sanctions Agency, municipalities and organisations operate and how the network cooperation practices in the regions have been built. The success of the service continua depends on how early the information exchange process and cooperation are started during imprisonment and the release. At the moment, there is room for improvement in these matters.

The establishment of local cooperation networks should be the responsibility of the Criminal Sanctions Agency. The central administration and region centres of the Criminal Sanctions Agency should agree on a division of tasks under which the prerequisites for network cooperation can be uniformly developed on a nationwide basis and to create concrete operating models for cooperation at local level. As part of the development work, the practices of network cooperation should be described as a process so that all actors are aware of their own responsibilities.

The practices of the network cooperation should be simple and apply to all units. In practice, the concept used in the project "Yhteistyössä rikoksettomaan elämään" (Together towards a life without crime) could be applied to the network cooperation but the model should be on a nationwide basis. At the same time, the use of supervised probationary freedom should be systematically extended on

a uniform basis in different parts of the country. More extensive use of probationary freedom is a natural part of network cooperation.

Municipalities are an essential partner in the cooperation taking place during the release phase. This would be a good opportunity for the Criminal Sanctions Agency to start developing network cooperation because the new Social Welfare Act is in effect and the tasks connected with basic social assistance will be transferred to Kela (Social Insurance Institution of Finland) at the start of 2017.

### More attention on the support for training paths

When consideration is given to ensuring access to and uniform quality of education and training during imprisonment, there should be more focus on whether the Criminal Sanctions Agency could divide its resources between programme activities, education and training and work activities so that the provision of training paths could be supported more effectively. It is also essential to continue to influence the structuring of the steering and financing of education and training and the establishment and maintenance of cooperation with the organisers of education and training.

### Recommendations of the National Audit Office

1. The central administration of the Criminal Sanctions Agency must establish a clear division of responsibilities and tasks with the region centres. At the same time, it should also sharpen its own strategic steering and encourage region centres to develop their own operational steering.
2. The central administration and region centres of the Criminal Sanctions Agency should, in accordance with a jointly agreed division of tasks, develop the prerequisites for network cooperation. The practices of network cooperation should be described in a process so that all actors are aware of their own responsibilities.
3. The Criminal Sanctions Agency should work more actively to ensure the flow of the information with its partners so that services and support can be provided.
4. The Ministry of Justice and the Criminal Sanctions Agency should work to ensure that the recidivism reduction target is already considered in the drafting of central government spending limits and the state budget and when decisions on them are made. The aim is to ensure that cooperation in central government across administrative boundaries aimed at achieving the target could be more effective.
5. The Criminal Sanctions Agency should consider whether its functions should be centralised to specific regions and penal institutions so that resources could be used more efficiently and the necessary expertise could also be provided in the future. It should also be considered whether job rotation should be made into a regular part of the work so that operating practices could be harmonised.