



European Crime Prevention Network

Theoretical Paper

Pickpocketing

In the framework of the project 'The implementation of the Multiannual Strategy of the EUCPN and the Informal network on the Administrative Approach'- EUCPN Secretariat, December 2017, Brussels



With the financial support of the Prevention of and Fight against Crime Programme of the European Union
European Commission – Directorate-General Home Affairs



Abstract

This theoretical paper is published by the EUCPN Secretariat in connection with the theme of the Maltese Presidency. The Maltese Presidency, in line with the Trio's subject of Organised Crime, focused on two topics, namely domestic burglaries and pickpocketing, committed by mobile organised crime groups. For the Theoretical Paper and Toolbox, the Maltese Presidency proposed the EUCPN Secretariat to concentrate on the phenomenon 'pickpocketing'.

This Theoretical Paper gives more information about 'organised property crime', whereof pickpocketing is just one phenomenon. Each year, thousands of citizens and especially tourists become victims of pickpockets. Luckily there are many things you can do to prevent yourself from being pickpocketed. Therefore, this paper provides a brief overview with prevention tips. Furthermore, since it is assumed that itinerant crime groups are responsible for a significant part of the committed pickpocketing, a notable part of this paper focusses on itinerant crime groups in general. Mobile organised crime groups commit a wide variety of crimes, including pickpocketing, and are active in many crime areas. They move quickly around within and across multiple jurisdictions, which makes it tough and difficult to identify and tackle them. A cooperation within and outside the EU is important to identify and dismantle the networks behind these mobile organised crime groups.

A toolbox with legislative measures, existing policies and best practices on this topic will follow.

Citation

EUCPN (2017). Pickpocketing committed by mobile organised crime groups. In: EUCPN Secretariat (eds.), *EUCPN Theoretical Paper Series*, European Crime Prevention Network: Brussels.

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Table of contents

- 1. Introduction 4
- 2. Pickpocketing: one category among a range of several criminal activities in the group (organised) property crime. 5
- 3. Pickpocketing: one of the oldest and most widespread crimes in the world.6
 - 3.1 Pickpocketing: one of the oldest crimes in the world..... 6
 - 3.2 Pickpocketing: one of the most widespread crimes in the world..... 7
 - 3.3 Shocking statistics..... 8
- 4. Organised itinerant criminal groups 13
 - 4.1 Characteristics of organised itinerant criminal groups..... 15
 - 4.1.1 Mobility 15
 - 4.1.2 Nationality 17
 - 4.1.3 Protective measures..... 18
 - 4.1.4 The use of minors 18
 - 4.1.5 Offender characteristics 19
 - 4.2 Differences 19
- 5. The prevention of pickpocketing..... 22
 - 5.1 The need for a European Policy 22
 - 5.2 Prevention tips: how to avoid getting pickpocketed. 24
- 6. Conclusion 25
- 7. Bibliography 26



1. Introduction

Organised property crime is a problem in almost *all the EU Member States*. It is a highly visible form of crime and has the potential to cause widespread feelings of insecurity. Organised property crime includes *several criminal activities* - such as organised burglaries, thefts, pickpocketing, motor vehicle crime, trafficking of cultural goods,... - carried out mostly by **mobile organised crime groups (MOCGs)** operating across the EU.

These **mobile organised crime groups** typically carry out a notable number of offences in a region over a short period before moving on. They move quickly around within and across multiple jurisdictions, which makes it difficult to tackle them. Although single offences committed by members of these groups do not fall into the category of serious organised crime, the accumulated offences have a significant impact on the security of EU citizens and legitimate business. MOCGs increasingly pose an EU-wide threat owing to their international networks and involvement in cross-border criminal and serious organised crime activities. As organised property crime encompasses a range of different criminal activities, the *OCGs carrying out these different type of crimes are also highly diverse*. Some of them are specialised in specific types of crime or *modi operandi*, while others are active in several types of property crime and other forms of serious and organised crime. MOCGs typically operate in and predominantly target Member States in Western and Northern Europe (Europol, 2017a).

Taken into account the organised nature of crimes in this category and its cross-border characteristic, it should be clear *that cooperation within the EU and between the EU MS is extremely important*. To combat this mobile form of criminality, *cooperation* between law enforcement within the EU, between the EU MS and with partner countries in the neighbourhood is important. This already appears in the fact that 'organised property crime committed by MOCG's' is **one the priorities in the EU Policy Cycles of 2014-2017 and 2018-2021**. The specific attention by the EU on this phenomenon clarifies the importance of this problem.

Although a major concern to EU law enforcement is the increase in domestic burglaries attributable to itinerant crime groups and the topic of the Maltese Presidency is domestic burglaries and pickpocketing committed by MOCGs, there was decided to focus in this thematic paper only on pickpocketing committed by MOCGs.¹

¹ Estimates suggest one burglary is committed every 1,5 minutes in the EU, with some EU Member States registering 1.000 burglaries every day (Europol, 2017).

2. Pickpocketing: one category among a range of several criminal activities in the group (organised) property crime.

Pickpocketing is a form of **larceny** that involves the stealing of money or other valuables from the person of a victim without them noticing the theft at the time. Larceny is the unlawful taking of property from the possession of a person and so includes pickpocketing, purse-snatching, shoplifting, bike theft, and theft from cars. Actually, robbery is the same, but this involves the use or threat of force. Pickpocketing is robbery without violence or threat and without aggravating circumstances, in a public place of an object the victim is carrying on or with him/her. Pickpocketing requires considerable dexterity and a knack for misdirection. Pickpocketing is, among other crimes as burglary, theft, motor vehicle theft, arson, shoplifting and vandalism, one category of **property crime**. Property crime involves the taking of property and does not involve force or threat of force against a victim. Crimes against property are divided into 2 categories: *destroyed property and stolen property*. When property is destroyed, it could be called arson or vandalism. An example of the act of stealing property is embezzlement. Although robbery involves taking property, it is classified as a violent crime, as force or threat of force on an individual that is present is involved, in contrast to burglary which is typically of an unoccupied dwelling or other unoccupied building. Besides property crime, pickpocketing is also an example of **volume crime**. Volume crime occurs frequently and affects many people. Other examples of volume crimes are theft of and from cars, bicycle theft and shoplifting, housebreaking, vandalism,...

Property crimes are often committed by **mobile organised crime groups (MOCGs)** that typically carry out a significant number of offences in a region over a short period before moving on. These groups are mostly engaged in opportunistic crimes, such as (armed) bank or jewellery store robberies, cash-in-transit and ATM physical attacks, cargo and metal theft, theft of luxury vehicles and high-volume crimes such as serial burglaries, organised shoplifting and pickpocketing. Every EU MS is affected by the offences of MOCGs to a greater or lesser extent. Characterized by transnational organisational structures, flexibility and adaptability to countermeasures taken by individual Member States, such groups belong to or are considered one step away from the organised crime field.

Organised property crime is a problem in almost all the EU MS. It is a highly visible form of crime and has the potential to cause widespread feelings of insecurity, not in the least among vulnerable groups such as the elderly who are the targets of various scams or deceptions thefts conducted over the telephone (EUCPN, 2017). Notwithstanding they typically operate in and predominantly target the most Member States in Western and Northern Europe, all European Union Member States are affected by the offences of these so-called **mobile organised crime groups** to a greater or lesser extent (Council of the European Union, 2014; Europol, 2017a). Organised property crime committed by MOCGs - such as (armed) robberies, burglaries, organised shoplifting and pickpocketing, cash-machine and cash-in-transit attacks, the theft of a range of high-value items - is one of **Europol's 9 priority crime areas** under the **2014-2017 EU Policy Cycle**, which clarifies the importance of this problem. Also, 'combating organised property crime by concentrating on disrupting highly mobile organised crime groups carrying out organised thefts and burglaries across the EU' is a priority in the **new EU Policy Cycle 2018-2021** (Council of the EU, 2017; European Commission).

Organised property crime encompasses a range of different criminal activities, carried out predominantly by mobile organised crime groups, operating across the EU. Motor vehicle crime, domestic burglaries, thefts, pickpocketing, (organised) robberies, metal and cargo

theft, the trafficking of cultural goods and the so-called grandchild trick² are some of the most common forms of organised property crime and fall into this broad category of criminal activity. A major concern to EU law enforcement is the increase in domestic burglaries attributable to itinerant crime groups originating mainly from south-eastern and eastern Europe. Characterized by transnational organisational structures, flexibility and adaptability to countermeasures taken by individual states, such groups belong to or are considered one step away from the organised crime field. Estimates suggest one burglary is committed every 1,5 minutes in the EU, with some EU MS registering 1.000 burglaries every day (Europol, 2017a).

Despite the highly organised nature of their operations, the organised crime involvement in property crimes remains under-investigated. In many cases, incidents of property crime are still classified as petty criminality without recognising the organised crime aspect. Many incidents of pickpocketing are not attributed to organised crime (Europol, 2017a). However, the scale and level of organisation of pickpocketing raids across many MS suggest that mobile organised crime groups are heavily involved. Despite the cross-border characteristic of this type of crime, these offenses are often investigated in isolation at the local level. An analysis at the national level is often lacking, which makes it even harder to detect and solve these sort of crimes. Also, online marketplaces have made it easier to advertise and sell stolen goods. These marketplaces are now used extensively to sell stolen goods, particularly low-bulk-high-value goods such as phones, tablets and other electronic equipment. Legal business structures are used extensively to fence stolen goods, often in the country of origin of the mobile organised crime groups involved in organised burglaries and thefts (Europol, 2017a).

3. Pickpocketing: one of the oldest and most widespread crimes in the world.

3.1 Pickpocketing: one of the oldest crimes in the world

In the 17th and 18th centuries, there was already an important number of pickpockets operating in public and/or private places, stealing different types of items. Some of them were caught and prosecuted for theft, however in most cases they managed to avoid punishment. In the 18th century, pickpocketing was a gender diverse crime. If we look at prosecuted cases of pickpocketing, it even seems that there were more female defendants (Palk, 2006). Most pickpockets stole out of economic needs: they were often poor and did not have any economic support (Schoemaker, 2010) and unemployment was 'the single most important cause of poverty' (Hitchcock & Schoemaker, 2010), leading the most needy ones to pick pockets. In most cases, pickpockets operated depending on the opportunities they had: if they saw someone wearing a silver watch or with a handkerchief bulging out of their pocket, the pickpockets took the item, which means that it was not premeditated. However, some pickpockets did work as a gang, in which cases they planned thefts, even though they could not be sure of what they would get. The prosecutions against pickpockets at the Old Bailey³ between 1780 and 1808 show that male pickpockets were somewhat younger than female ones: 72% of men pickpockets convicted at the time were aged from under 20 to 30, while 72% of women

² Grandchild trick fraud: a number of slightly varying crimes where criminals defraud the elderly. Most common modus operandi currently used by suspects is when the elderly targets are pre-selected and contacted by phone. The EUCPN published a thematic paper on 'organised crime targeting elderly people' (EUCPN, 2017).

³ Old Bailey: the Central Criminal Court of England and Wales.

convicted of picking pockets were aged between 20 and 40 (Palk, 2006). One reason that may explain why women pickpockets were older is that most of women pickpockets were prostitutes: at the end of the 18th century, 76% of women defendants were prostitutes, which resulted in the fact that the victims were more often men. Men who were robbed by prostitutes often chose not to prosecute the pickpockets, since they would have had to acknowledge their 'immoral behaviour'. That 80% of the male pickpockets operated in public areas and 78% of the female pickpockets operated in private places can be explained also by the fact that most women pickpockets were prostitutes, robbing their victims in their lodging after having sex (Palk, 2006). That they operated in other places, also resulted in the fact that they stole other types of items: men stole mostly handkerchiefs, because they were one of the easiest items to take from someone without them noticing it. Women tended to steal watches (some pickpockets also stole watches in public places, which was more difficult) and bags with money in.

The men who were prosecuted for picking pockets and who were under 20 years old were often children working in gangs, under the authority of an adult who trained them to steal. The children involved in these gangs were orphans and the whole relationship they had with the adult ruling the gang and the other children was that of a 'surrogate family' (Hitchcock, Schoemaker, 2010). Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* provides a good example of how orphans were recruited and turned into street criminals.

3.2 Pickpocketing: one of the most widespread crimes in the world

While pickpockets can be found in nearly any city, the biggest concentrations can be found in cities that attract the most tourists. Some pickpocket hotspots are Barcelona and Madrid (Spain), London (UK), Brussels (Belgium), Amsterdam (The Netherlands), Rome and Florence (Italy), Paris (France), Athens (Greece), Prague (Czech Republic), Lisbon (Portugal),... Barcelona and Rome are singled out as being particularly dangerous pickpocket havens. Knowing where pickpockets mainly operate, lead to the conclusion that **tourists** are strongly targeted victims. Every single summer day, hundred tourists are pickpocketed near the Coliseum in Rome, another hundred are hit in and around the Vatican, and another hundred near other tourist places in Rome. These victims will report their thefts to the local police stations, while three hundred more victims do not file a report, for the lack of time, late discovery or maybe other reasons. Florence, London, Barcelona, Paris,... and numerous other favorite tourist destinations report – unfortunately – similar numbers. We can conclude that yearly, thousands of tourists become victims of pickpockets. **So it is really important to be vigilant.** When you are traveling, a pickpocket can easily ruin your trip, lifting your money, credit cards and identification in a few seconds. Unfortunately, there is little hope of getting any of it back.

However we can conclude that tourists are strongly endorsed victims, it is important to know that **everybody is a potential victim.** Lots of lost money, hours of vacation ruined, aggravation, humiliation, hassle,... are just some of the many consequences of being pickpocketed. Luckily, there are many things that can be done to prevent yourself of becoming a pickpocketing victim (infra).

Pickpockets may be found in any crowded place around the world, pickpocketing not only occurs in big cities. Pickpockets mainly operate in public transportation, such as subways, city buses, train stations,...: very crowded and large places, full of confused tourists with their hands full of cumbersome luggage, which makes it easy for pickpockets to create confusion. Tourist areas, musea, retail stores, shopping districts, markets, catering establishments, the beach,... are other examples of loved places for pickpockets because

of the presence of many tourists that are more concerned about viewing the sights, taking pictures,... than being attentive to their surroundings.

3.3 Shocking statistics

Pickpocketing is a small crime with huge repercussions. It is a high visible form of crime, having the potential to cause widespread feelings of insecurity. Nevertheless, pickpocketing and several (organised) property crimes are often investigated in isolation at the local level. Which means that analyses at national level, European level and International level are (often) lacking. This makes it harder to detect and solve these kind of crimes.

Numbers of only the phenomenon 'pickpocketing' are difficult to obtain: it is estimated that at least half of all the pickpocketing incidents are never reported at all, for several reasons. Some people do not even realize they have been pickpocketed at all and think they just lost their property. Also, incidents reported as thefts are lumped under one of several legal descriptions. Larceny is the unlawful taking of property from the possession of a person, which includes pickpocketing, purse-snatching, shoplifting, bike theft, the theft of cars,... Robbery is the same, but involves also the use or threat of force. Therefore, the theft of a purse, wallet, phone,... can fall into these different categories and cannot be extracted for statistical purposes.

Eurostat produces articles where the latest developments for a range of specific categories or recorded crime within the EU are summarized. Theft – including pickpocketing and defined as depriving a person or organisation of property without force with the intent to keep it - is one of the crimes that is discussed in these articles. In this article, theft excludes burglary, housebreaking, robbery and theft of a motor vehicle. Although these numbers also include other subcategories besides pickpocketing, these numbers can already give us an idea on which MS suffers the most thefts, how these crimes evolve in time,... (Eurostat, 2017)

The level of *police-recorded theft* remained relatively stable across the EU-28, excluding Latvia and UK Scotland, during the period 2010-2015. Data from Germany and France have undergone methodological changes between 2008-2009 which affected the overall comparability for these years. The UK and the Netherlands showed a clear downward trend from 2008-2015. **Figure 1** (infra) proves that, after a relatively strong fall in 2009 - mainly due to a strong decline in Germany, England and Wales and despite a large increase in France - the level of police-recorded theft offences remained relatively stable across the EU-28 during the period 2009-2014.

Figure 1: Theft offences recorded by the police, 2008-2015.

	Number								Index (2008 = 100)						
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
EU-28	9 053 651	8 630 460	7 755 972	7 972 783	7 856 003	7 847 273	7 762 188	7 542 702	95,3	85,7	88,1	86,8	86,7	85,7	83,3
Belgium	245 682	249 627	228 355	242 399	237 921	224 109	208 443	186 586	101,6	92,9	98,7	96,8	91,2	84,8	75,9
Bulgaria	42 553	44 278	50 479	47 323	44 462	45 256	41 246	38 315	104,1	118,6	111,2	104,5	106,4	96,9	90,0
Czech Republic	166 085	153 139	126 311	124 274	119 367	125 573	103 708	139 092	92,2	76,1	74,8	71,9	75,6	62,4	83,7
Denmark	246 663	247 388	241 703	244 099	238 367	229 050	214 359	194 475	100,3	98,0	99,0	96,6	92,9	86,9	78,8
Germany	2 052 913	1 308 687	1 219 983	1 276 065	1 267 576	1 285 767	1 309 678	1 337 196	63,7	59,4	62,2	61,7	62,6	63,8	65,1
Estonia	23 506	24 835	25 253	20 175	18 628	16 465	15 738	11 354	105,7	107,4	85,8	79,2	70,0	67,0	48,3
Ireland	76 861	77 031	65 416	66 581	67 954	71 369	69 934	69 462	100,2	85,1	86,6	88,4	92,9	91,0	90,4
Greece	114 900	126 080	118 518	129 148	119 078	103 399	93 677	100 298	109,7	103,1	112,4	103,6	90,0	81,5	87,3
Spain	237 525	217 648	144 618	155 122	165 297	163 464	155 253	205 751	91,6	60,9	65,3	69,6	68,8	65,4	86,6
France	962 583	1 383 325	1 172 553	1 163 793	1 173 885	1 225 816	1 255 668	1 227 974	143,7	121,8	120,9	122,0	127,3	130,4	127,6
Croatia	15 300	14 095	13 575	15 929	17 248	14 051	12 043	13 547	92,1	88,7	104,1	112,7	91,8	78,7	88,5
Italy	1 223 105	1 152 323	944 025	1 038 883	1 066 669	1 099 853	1 121 757	1 045 374	94,2	77,2	84,9	87,2	89,9	91,7	85,5
Cyprus	3 191	2 912	1 670	1 687	1 550	1 245	966	918	91,3	52,3	52,9	48,6	39,0	30,3	28,8
Latvia	25 844	29 163	25 659	:	21 341	20 623	20 578	19 387	112,8	99,3	:	82,6	79,8	79,6	75,0
Lithuania	29 610	30 379	26 530	27 299	23 478	22 856	21 546	20 121	102,6	89,6	92,2	79,3	77,2	72,8	68,0
Luxembourg	7 021	7 079	7 218	8 775	9 243	10 334	10 259	9 293	100,8	102,8	125,0	131,6	147,2	146,1	132,4
Hungary	127 125	125 247	161 051	157 234	159 047	148 788	132 018	101 677	98,5	126,7	123,7	125,1	117,0	103,8	80,0
Malta	8 525	7 244	7 769	8 520	8 690	8 469	8 198	8 653	85,0	91,1	99,9	101,9	99,3	96,2	101,5
Netherlands	704 160	703 315	662 105	669 680	652 250	644 725	587 210	544 100	99,9	94,0	95,1	92,6	91,6	83,4	77,3
Austria	174 008	170 683	150 728	144 326	146 520	148 861	144 073	136 098	98,1	86,6	82,9	84,2	85,5	82,8	78,2
Poland	214 414	208 194	203 916	230 247	230 751	200 030	160 777	138 166	97,1	95,1	107,4	107,6	93,3	75,0	64,4
Portugal	126 956	121 199	95 064	98 398	102 271	94 902	91 041	86 417	95,5	74,9	77,5	80,6	74,8	71,7	68,1
Romania	41 874	49 398	48 828	47 322	56 732	57 557	164 396	108 439	118,0	116,6	113,0	135,5	137,5	392,6	259,0
Slovenia	28 765	28 566	28 911	30 677	33 905	34 942	30 103	22 798	99,3	100,5	106,6	117,9	121,5	104,7	79,3
Slovakia	33 743	31 549	41 814	37 613	34 730	33 872	29 816	24 091	93,5	123,9	111,5	102,9	100,4	88,4	71,4
Finland	92 999	99 778	99 434	100 501	95 737	101 665	102 166	97 464	107,3	106,9	108,1	102,9	109,3	109,9	104,8
Sweden	436 446	425 878	367 965	380 558	379 494	383 038	385 394	373 130	97,6	84,3	87,2	87,0	87,8	88,3	85,5
United Kingdom:															
UK England and Wales	1 592 758	1 591 975	1 478 601	1 481 675	1 361 329	1 326 649	1 267 915	1 277 897	100,0	92,8	93,0	85,5	83,3	79,6	80,2
UK Scotland	117 033	115 891	107 894	108 956	94 551	95 894	89 598	:	99,0	92,2	93,1	80,8	81,9	76,6	:
UK Northern Ireland	24 380	28 608	23 579	24 480	23 824	25 168	24 806	24 016	117,3	96,7	100,4	97,7	103,2	101,7	98,5
Iceland	4 718	5 589	4 920	4 203	4 147	4 102	3 670	4 032	118,5	104,3	89,1	87,9	86,9	77,8	85,5
Liechtenstein	178	201	174	184	197	233	214	193	112,9	97,8	103,4	110,7	130,9	120,2	108,4
Norway	138 083	145 434	137 543	135 255	141 445	133 302	119 515	:	105,3	99,6	98,0	102,4	96,5	86,6	:
Switzerland	120 817	134 291	161 278	189 520	200 647	184 352	162 168	146 026	111,2	133,5	156,9	166,1	152,6	134,2	120,9
Montenegro	794	656	530	673	857	739	892	827	82,6	66,8	84,8	107,9	93,1	112,3	104,2
FYR of Macedonia	6 627	5 744	5 423	5 552	6 034	6 037	5 525	:	86,7	81,8	83,8	91,1	91,1	83,4	:
Albania	3 596	3 577	3 978	4 621	5 344	5 255	7 961	7 187	99,5	110,6	128,5	148,6	146,1	221,4	199,9
Serbia	19 863	17 833	15 912	17 529	17 900	31 680	26 736	22 603	92,1	100,8	111,1	113,4	200,8	169,4	113,8
Turkey	:	174 545	207 945	209 866	239 926	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Bosnia & Herzegovina	8 180	6 740	11 362	6 737	6 675	6 477	5 931	4 874	82,4	138,9	82,4	81,6	79,2	72,5	59,6
Kosovo	15 466	13 771	15 234	17 141	16 292	16 962	15 607	12 295	89,0	98,5	110,8	105,3	109,7	100,9	79,5

Note: EU-28 refers to the 28 jurisdictions reporting in all 8 years. Latvia and UK Scotland not available for all years.

(:) not available.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: crim_off_cat)

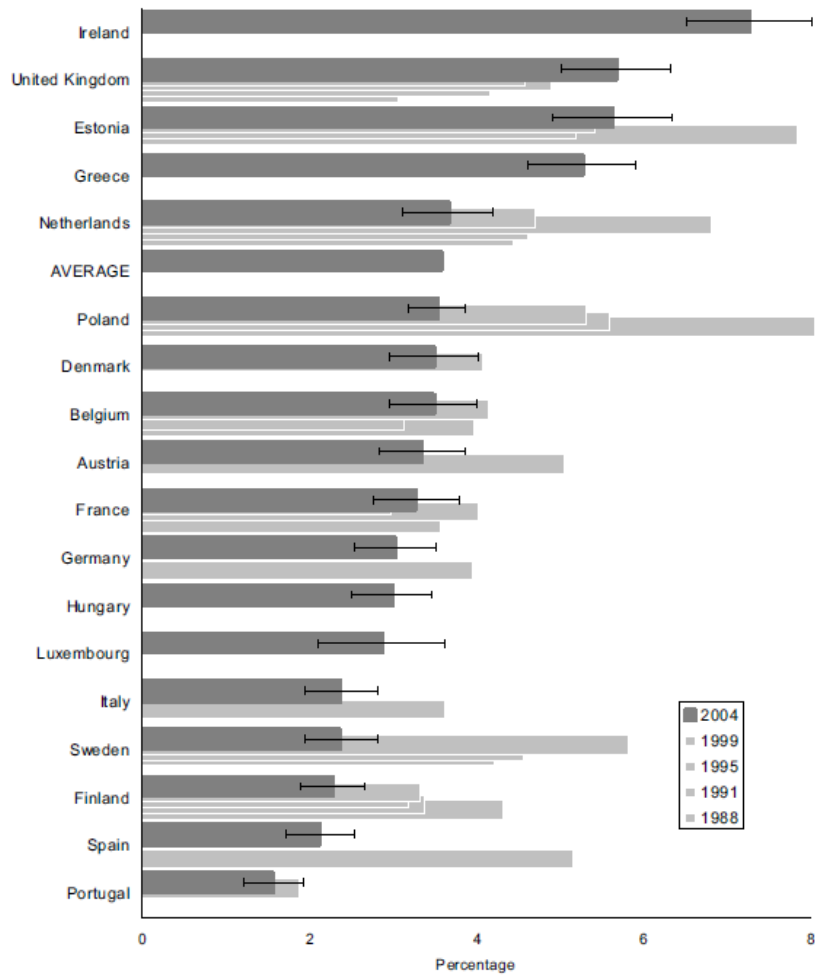
Source: Eurostat. (2017, November 27). Crime and criminal justice: detailed tables. Table 5.

For these kind of crimes, it can be an excellent alternative to look at **victimisation surveys**, in which a random sample of the population is asked about their experiences with crime and victimisation. Especially for volume crimes, these surveys give a better idea of the amount and the effects. The *International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS)*⁴ is a large scale international survey project about crime and victimisation, whereof we found more information and numbers about pickpocketing. Although these data and figures were already collected some while ago, it can be relevant to mention these. The national rates for thefts of personal property are somewhat difficult to interpret, because they are

⁴ ICVS was set up to fill the gap in adequate recording of offenses by the police for purposes of comparing crime rates in different nations and to provide a crime index independent of police statistics as an alternative standardized measure. It is the most far-reaching program of standardized sample surveys to look at a householders' experience with crime, policing, crime prevention and feelings of insecurity in a large number of nations. There have been 6 rounds of surveys to date (1989 – 1992 – 1996 – 2000 – 2004/05 – 2010). Surveys have been done in 80 countries and provides info about criminal victimisation in 41 countries and 66 main (capital) cities from all continents.

likely to be heterogeneous in nature. Taken as a whole, the population of Ireland, Iceland, England & Wales, Switzerland, Estonia, Greece and Northern Ireland experienced the most of such thefts (5% or more were victimized). London, as city, stood out with a rate above 10%. Other Western cities with comparatively high theft rates were Tallinn, Reykjavik, New York, Zurich and Oslo. Lowest levels (below 2,5%) were in Portugal, Spain, Finland, Sweden and Italy. The trends in personal theft are mainly downwards.

Figure 2: One year prevalence victimisation rates for theft of personal property in 2004 and results from earlier ICVS surveys.⁵



Source: Van Dijk, J.J.M., Manchin, R., Van Kesteren, J. & Hideg, G. (2005) The Burden of Crime in the EU. Research Report: A Comparative Analysis of the European Crime and Safety Survey (EU ICS) 2005.

⁵ England & Wales (6,3%), Northern Ireland (5,1%), Scotland (2,9%)

Figure 3: Theft of personal property (including pickpocketing); One year prevalence rates in 2003/04 in countries and main cities and results from earlier surveys. 1989-2005 ICVS and EU ICS

<i>Countries</i>	1988	1991	1995	1999	2003-2004	<i>Main cities</i>	2001-2004
Ireland					7.2 *	London (England)	10.2 *
Iceland					6.9	Tallinn (Estonia)	9.6
England & Wales	3.1	4.2	5.0	4.6	6.3 *	Reykjavik (Iceland)	8.2
Switzerland	4.5	.	5.7	4.4	5.9	New York (USA)	7.7
Estonia		7.8	5.2	5.4	5.6	Zurich (Switzerland)	7.7
Greece					5.3 *	Oslo (Norway)	7.5
Northern Ireland	2.2		2.5	2.2	5.1	Dublin (Ireland)	6.8 *
Norway	3.2				4.8	Brussels (Belgium)	6.0 *
USA	4.5	5.3	3.9	4.9	4.8	Belfast (Northern Ireland)	5.9
Mexico					4.3	Vienna (Austria)	5.7 *
New Zealand		5.3			4.1	Budapest (Hungary)	5.5 *
Canada	5.5	5.5	5.7	4.7	4.0	Warsaw (Poland)	5.4
Netherlands	4.4	4.6	6.8	4.7	3.7 *	Berlin (Germany)	5.2 *
Australia	5.0	6.5		6.5	3.6	Paris (France)	4.8 *
Poland		8.1	5.6	5.3	3.5	Copenhagen (Denmark)	4.6 *
Austria			5.0		3.4 *	Edinburgh (Scotland)	4.6
Belgium	4.0	3.1		4.1	3.4 *	Amsterdam (Netherlands)	4.4 *
Bulgaria					3.4	Madrid (Spain)	4.4 *
Denmark				4.1	3.3 *	Stockholm (Sweden)	4.0 *
France	3.6		4.0	3.0	3.3 *	Sydney (Australia)	3.7
Germany	4.0				3.0 *	Hong Kong (SAR China)	3.6
Hungary					3.0 *	Athens (Greece)	3.5 *
Scotland	2.6		4.5	4.6	2.9	Rome (Italy)	3.2 *
Luxembourg					2.9 *	Istanbul (Turkey)	3.2
Italy		3.6	.		2.4 *	Helsinki (Finland)	3.0 *
Sweden		4.2	4.6	5.8	2.4 *	Lisbon (Portugal)	2.4 *
Finland	4.3	3.4	3.2	3.3	2.3 *	Average	5.4
Spain	5.2				2.1 *	<i>Cities in developing countries</i>	
Portugal				1.9	1.6 *	Phnom Penh (Cambodia)	12.8
Japan				0.5	0.3	Lima (Peru)	12.3
						Maputo (Mozambique)	9.9
						Johannesburg (RSA)	6.9
						Buenos Aires (Argentina)	6.6
						Sao Paulo (Brazil)	2.9
						Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)	2.5
Average**	4.0	5.1	4.7	4.1	3.8	Average	5.9

* Source: European Survey of Crime and Safety (2005 EU ICS). Brussels, Gallup Europe.

** The average is based on countries taking part in each sweep. As countries included vary across sweeps, comparisons should be made cautiously.

Source: Van Dijk, J.J.M., Van Kesteren, J.,N. & Smit, P. (2007). Criminal victimisation in international perspective: key findings from the 2004-2005 ICVS and EU ICS. The Hague: Ministry of Justice, WODC.

Specifically for pickpocketing, rates were the highest in Greece (4,3% were victimized once or more) and also relatively high in Ireland and Estonia. Trends in pickpocketing, unlike most other types of property crime, showed no downward trends across the board. Pickpocketing showed an average of 1,7% in the dataset of countries and a European average of 1,9%. In previous ICVS sweeps, **rates were particularly high in Central and Eastern Europe**. Levels of pickpocketing seem to have dropped there. Although we have to take into account that these are numbers from a relatively old victim survey, it is remarkable that Lisbon and Rome have relatively low rates and that we do not see Barcelona in this list. This is in contrast to the information we extracted from literature where we read that these cities are hotspots.

Figure 4: Pickpocketing: one year prevalence rates in 2003-04 (percentages) in countries and main cities and results from earlier surveys. 1989-2005 ICVS and 2005 EU ICS

<i>Countries</i>	1988	1991	1995	1999	2003-2004	<i>Main cities</i>	2001-2004
Greece					4.3 *	Tallinn (Estonia)	6.5
Estonia		3.2	2.5	3.3	3.3	London (England)	5.2 *
Ireland					3.0	Brussels (Belgium)	3.8 *
Australia	0.8	1.0	.	1.2	2.8	Budapest (Hungary)	3.7 *
England & Wales	1.3	1.3	1.7	1.7	2.7 *	Warsaw (Poland)	3.6
Poland		6.7	4.0	4.0	2.5	Vienna (Austria)	3.6 *
Belgium	1.7	1.3		2.1	2.2 *	New York (USA)	3.3
Bulgaria					2.1	Oslo (Norway)	3.3
Iceland					2.0	Madrid (Spain)	3.2 *
Switzerland	1.8		2.0			Paris (France)	3.1 *
Austria			2.8		1.8 *	Berlin (Germany)	3.0 *
Northern Ireland	0.8		0.5	0.4	1.8	Hong Kong (SAR China)	2.9
Luxembourg					1.7 *	Istanbul (Turkey)	2.7
Netherlands	1.5	1.8	2.7	1.9	1.7 *	Dublin (Ireland)	2.6 *
Norway	0.8				1.6	Athens (Greece)	2.6 *
Hungary					1.6 *	Sydney (Australia)	2.4
France	1.8		1.9	1.3	1.6 *	Amsterdam (Netherlands)	2.4 *
Denmark				1.8	1.5 *	Reykjavik (Iceland)	2.4
Spain	2.8				1.5 *	Rome (Italy)	2.2 *
Germany	1.6				1.4 *	Copenhagen (Denmark)	2.0 *
Italy		2.3			1.3 *	Edinburgh (Scotland)	1.6
USA	1.1	1.4	0.9	0.8	1.2	Belfast (Northern Ireland)	1.5
Portugal				1.2	0.9 *	Lisbon (Portugal)	1.4 *
Sweden		1.0	0.9	1.2	0.9 *	Helsinki (Finland)	1.3 *
Scotland	1.0		1.2	1.4	0.8	Stockholm (Sweden)	1.2 *
Finland	1.9	1.7	1.5	1.5	0.7 *	Average	2.9
Canada	0.8	0.6	0.8	0.7	0.7	<i>Cities in developing countries</i>	
New Zealand		0.7			0.6	Lima (Peru)	11.4
Mexico					0.4	Phnom Penh (Cambodia)	11.3
Japan				0.1		Maputo (Mozambique)	8.2
						Buenos Aires (Argentina)	5.5
						Johannesburg (RSA)	4.5
						Sao Paulo (Brazil)	2.3
						Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)	1.4
Average**	1.4	1.9	1.8	1.5	1.7	Average	6.4

* Source: European Survey of Crime and Safety (2005 EU ICS). Brussels, Gallup Europe.

** The average is based on countries taking part in each sweep. As countries included vary across sweeps, comparisons should be made cautiously.

Source: Van Dijk, J.J.M., Van Kesteren, J.,N. & Smit, P. (2007). Criminal victimisation in international perspective: key findings from the 2004-2005 ICVS and EU ICS. The Hague: Ministry of Justice, WODC.

4. Organised itinerant criminal groups

As mentioned before, the prevalence of property crime is not new. However, the growing involvement of criminal gangs and their particular features are a more recent phenomenon. A significant part of this thematic paper will focus specifically on 'organised itinerant criminal groups', because organised property crime – including pickpocketing – by organised itinerant criminal groups is a growing concern in the European Union.

'*Itinerant criminal groups*' entered the picture when at the end of the '90s – early 2000s, Eastern and Central European gangs were increasingly found responsible for systematic burglaries in houses, companies and shops, ram-raids and certain forms of car thefts. Based on their *modi operandi*, it was already obvious back then, that they were well-organised, that they operated systematically and that they were mainly interested in cash and goods which could sell on illegal stolen goods markets and second-hand markets.

Since the start of the 21st century, organised property crime and itinerant criminal groups have received considerable attention by several European Member States, law enforcement agencies and the European Union. Notwithstanding they typically operate in and predominantly target the most Member States in Western and Northern Europe, all European Union Member States are affected by the offences of these so-called **mobile organised criminal groups** to a greater or lesser extent (Council of the European Union, 2014). However it is not a necessary condition for itinerant crime groups, it is often mentioned that these groups are from Eastern European origin (*infra*). A notable part of these MOCGs let the people in their home country benefit from their criminal behaviour. They do this by transporting their stolen goods (mostly by car), stolen vehicles (mostly driven, rarely by boat) or sending money home (through money transfer companies or by car). **Fencing activities** for MOCGs vary from own use and local activities⁶ through international fencing and letting the family benefit from the earnings (Van Daele, Vander Beken, 2010). Nevertheless, it is stated that legal business structures are used extensively to fence stolen goods **often in the country of origin of the MOCGs** involved in organised burglaries, thefts,... The trade in stolen goods undermines the regular economy and operates at the interface between the underworld and the overworld. Within the retail trade, certain retail sectors, such as jewellers, and transport sectors (cargo theft) suffer huge negative consequences of the trade in stolen goods. **However fencing is a form of commonly occurring crime, it receives too little attention because it appears to be victimless and large numbers of the public view it as normal** (Ferwerda, Ham, Scholten, Jager, 2016). It is a facilitating crime which ensures that serious property crimes – sometimes with violence – will continue to be committed, based on the ever present demand. It is important to figure the entire criminal chain, including the fencing, which involves a cooperation between the different EU MS. Another consequence of this type of crime committed by MOCGs is the **document fraud** that is used widely to facilitate all types of organised property crime including burglaries, robberies, motor vehicle crime, cultural goods trafficking,... Members of MOCGs involved in these types of crime regularly rely on the use of fraudulent ID documents to facilitate their movements throughout the EU. Professional fences use false certificates and other documents to obscure the origin of their goods and sell on jewellery and other high-value goods to customers who are unaware or indifferent to the origins of these products (Europol, 2017b).

⁶ Local fencing takes place via locally embedded persons or within the informal networks of the group, for example the gypsy communities. These groups steal easily disposable goods like jewelry, money and small electronics. Most groups find easy ways to sell their stolen goods. (Van Daele & VanderBeken, 2009).

All these things considered, it should be clear that this type of crime deserves a special attention at national and European level. Especially because all the EU Member States are affected by this type of crime and its consequences, and because of the existing huge differences between the MS in relation to the police, administrative and judicial approach. There was a need to take common action at European level, wherefore a common description or definition of mobile (itinerant) criminal groups was needed. For this purpose, in 2010, a common definition of mobile itinerant criminal group has been established in Europe.

A mobile (itinerant) criminal group is an association of offenders, who systematically acquire wealth through theft of property or fraud (e.g. theft, residential and non-residential burglaries, organised shoplifting, pickpocketing, cargo thefts, metal thefts, thefts on construction sites and skimming) having a wide ranging area of operations and are internationally active.

According to this definition, mobile banditry implies the following 4 characteristics: (1) The systematic committing of (2) property crime, in which (3) offenders collaborate who (4) operate internationally.

However these kind of offenders are known under a variety of names – such as ‘mobile banditism’ in the Netherlands, ‘itinerant crime’ in France and ‘Eastern European criminal groups’ in Germany – a common element of these groups is that they **systematically commit property offences and that they are mainly active in the area of ‘ordinary’ property crimes**. Mostly, they are engaged in opportunistic crimes and range from rather easily approachable examples, such as *burglary and car theft*, to more specialized offences like *cargo and metal theft, commercial burglary, theft of documents, skimming and ram raiding* – the latter being mostly committed by border region crime groups. Other examples are (armed) bank or jewelry store robberies, cash-in-transit and ATM physical attacks, theft of luxury vehicles and high-volume crimes such as serial burglaries, organised shoplifting and organised pickpocketing (Council of the European Union, 2014). We want to emphasize that the criminal repertory of itinerant crime groups does not stop here. Some itinerant crime groups – especially the highly structured ones - are also engaged in trafficking in human beings, prohibited use of weapons, violence and manslaughter (Van Daele & Vander Beken, 2010). Systematically committing property crimes does not make these groups completely different from other criminal gangs or organisations. Since the phenomenon has been studied, different and other non-criminal characteristics have been identified.

4.1 Characteristics of organised itinerant criminal groups

4.1.1 Mobility

Although the choice of words varies to describe these groups, *mobility* is a major and important recurrent basic characteristic. Due to their *mobile* nature, the term 'itinerant crime groups' has been used. These so-called 'itinerant crime groups' travel over greater distances and are more mobile than other offenders: these groups can be called 'itinerant' with reason (Van Daele & VanderBeken, 2009).

Itinerant criminal groups typically carry out a significant number of offences in a region over a short period before moving on. Even though it is accepted that **organised itinerant criminal groups travel (long) distances to commit their crimes**, it is generally known that most offenders commit crimes in the vicinity of their homes according to the rational choice theory. Knowing that travelling takes time, effort and money and stating that offenders weigh

The rational choice perspective states that offenders weight their costs and benefits.

Cornish & Clarke, 1986

their costs and benefits, it seems obvious that offenders operate near their starting point. Short crime trips are favoured, because travelling takes time and money and the explained principle of least effort stipulates that individuals want to make minimal effort to achieve their goals. Therefore, offenders would select a suitable target as close as possible to their starting point, which means that crime trips should be short. Offender mobility in general and the journey to crime in particular are governed by profit maximization and effort minimization: offenders will only travel far when their earnings will make their trip worthwhile.

Furthermore, it has been confirmed in various empirical researches that the *offender's awareness space* plays a crucial role herein, which refers to all spaces of which an offender has knowledge (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1981). In this awareness space offenders choose their targets, because they know where the most

Spatial awareness does not only provide opportunities for crime, it can actually limit it at times. Although the size of a criminal's awareness space may provide opportunities for offending, it may also create limitations in the operation area, since people may look only for possible targets within this area. If offenders lack this awareness, they are not bound by their perceptions of targets and are likely to consider other elements, which means that they are less bound to what they know and may choose to travel further in their criminal operations

Van Daele & Vander Beken (2011)

suitable targets are situated and because they can better estimate and minimize the risk involved. Because of their knowledge of escape routes and proximity of police stations they can improve their chances of success. Nevertheless, it is possible that offenders commit a crime when they pass a place for other reasons, which means that not all crime travelling is initiated with a criminal purpose. We can conclude that crime trips into unknown territories are relatively rare. This being said, **travelling to commit crimes** - such as burglary and shoplifting - **seems to have some benefits**, therefore the *role of awareness space* needs to be differentiated.



- ✓ Firstly, it is possible that offenders choose a longer travel time to reduce their risks of getting caught. Lammers & Bernasco (2013) showed that the probability of arrest, decreases with increasing geographical dispersion and making further distances. The chance of getting caught decreases as the number of areas in which crime is committed increases. One possible explanation for this is the lack of information-exchange between different police regions.
- ✓ Secondly, research showed that longer crime trips are associated with markedly *higher criminal earnings* (Morselli & Royer, 2008). If the expected profits outweigh the efforts associated with travelling further, longer crime trips might be a favorable undertaking. This implies that offenders will travel further if the crimes they commit are more lucrative. For example, commercial robberies will likely be committed further than the anchor point, than residential burglaries (Van Koppen & Jansen, 1998). Also, these offences *require more planning*, so the additional costs of travel are then marginal compared to other investments that need to be made. Because the earnings play an important role in the crime travel, it is not the crime type itself that primarily affects crime travelling behaviour, but the size of the expected benefit. Also other studies conclude that perpetrators who travel from the city to the countryside to commit their crime, are driven by high profits to be gained in prosperous rich municipalities outside the city, which refers to the term 'rich pickings' again (Mawby, 2001; Van Daele, 2010a; Van Daele & Vander Beken, 2011). Following this – as mentioned before – the presence of major highways appear to be of importance to perpetrators who take longer distances to commit property crimes.

In general, the good preparation of property crimes leads to longer distances. This with the purpose to assess and limit the risks as good as possible and to achieve the greatest possible profits. Thus, the benefits of high profits compensate the extra costs of greater efforts and the big time investing.

The target oriented approach – offenders will only travel far when their earnings will make the trip worthwhile – can be broken into 3 elements (Bernasco & Luyckx, 2003). Accessibility is related to distance (Van Daele & Vander Beken, 2011) and refers to the ease with which a target area can be reached. Special attention herein is paid to certain barriers (Elffes, 2004) and the structure of street networks (Beavon, Brantingham & Brantingham, 1994) which can influence the crime trip also. Offenders aim mostly for their targets which are easily accessible on local level, but also on national level. So an important element for external offenders, is the presence of important, good and fast highways. In this way, they limit the risk of accessing an unknown region (Fink 1969; Van Daele & Vander Beken, 2011). Attractiveness of targets – the expected gains – aimed at by itinerant crime groups refer to the target choices and the areas. It seems that itinerant crime groups tend to go less for commercial targets than other offenders, although commercial targets are expected to be more profitable (Van Daele & Vander Beken, 2009). Although the crimes committed by itinerant crime groups are not the most profitable ones, they do target rich areas. In a study of Mawby (2001) it is explained that rich areas attract more offenders from outside while poor areas are targeted mainly by near-by offenders. Which brings us to the term 'rich pickings': perpetrators who focus particularly on the high profits, more than on reducing the risks. General spoken, these '**rich pickings**' are willing to travel more to commit their crimes, which is also the case for itinerant crime groups. **The latter tend to commit their crimes in richer areas, while they mainly live in poorer areas than other offenders do.** Furthermore, they appear to select their target area and only later on choose their particular targets (Bernasco & Nieuwbeerta, 2005). Finally, it is observed that these groups commit more crimes in rural areas, which leads us to the last element: opportunity or the expected chances of success. Although the *expected chances of success* in these areas is lower, offenders can perceive otherwise, because there are less people around.

We want to emphasize to be careful linking itinerancy with criminality: while for some groups itinerancy is a way of life, others may travel because they function as what has been called 'criminal commuters' (Canter and Larkin, 1993). It is possible that people are only mobile in their criminal behavior, travelling further when committing crimes but not travelling as a way of life at all, which is in conflict with the 'distance decay theory'. However, especially for the group where travelling is a part of their lifestyle, it is important not to generalize and to link itinerancy with criminality. People with higher mobility deal with presumptions as being criminal already and suffer from the preconception that they are criminals (James, 2007; Van Daele & Vander Beken, 2010). However, this option involves that criminal behavior of these groups challenges the distance decay theory, since these groups have no fixed residences or anchor points. This makes it even harder assessing their offending patterns. Also other studies showed that most offenders stay somewhere illegally only for rather short periods, which seems to confirm the travelling lifestyle hypothesis. However, linking itinerancy with criminality is rather controversial - just as linking criminality with nationality.

4.1.2 Nationality

Notwithstanding, linking criminality with nationality is controversial and creates the risk of targeting these groups, it is often mentioned that these groups are from Eastern European origin. For example, organised property crime by these groups is known as 'Eastern European criminal groups in Germany (Dortans, 2007). As such, they can be considered as part of an ethnic minority. However, it is important to mention that this

does not mean that only Eastern European offenders systematically commit property crimes: some groups contain a mix of nationalities, within or outside Eastern Europe. Mostly, it occurred that there is one dominant nationality, surrounded and supported by several figures or other nationalities. These main nationalities are Rumanian – with or without Moldovan – and former Yugoslavian, Albanian, Georgian,... Even so, the Eastern European nationality is not a necessary condition for itinerant crime groups. Several groups do not have a homogenous composition: surrounding people have nationalities ranging from all sorts of Eastern European nationalities, to Western European offenders and even Southern European and Northern African offenders. So it appears that 'itinerant crime groups' is a heterogeneous concept (infra).

4.1.3 Protective measures

Itinerant crime groups use several **protective measures** to reduce the chance of getting caught and to stay out of sight of the police. Using false identity papers, the use of aliases, various nicknames and code names are some examples of these measures. The use of straw men for the purchase or lease of cars is a much-used method to reduce the chance of getting caught.

Another important protective measure is to remain silent under police questioning if caught. Also, it seems that group members are been put under pressure not to talk to the police, which even can sometimes include violence. In contrast to the use of this internal violence, the itinerant crime groups do not or hardly apply external violence. By not using violence, these groups seek to avoid drawing the police's attention and hence to minimize the risk of detection.

Furthermore, various communication tools, such as skype, sell phone jammers, walkie-talkies, continually changing telephones and SIM cards,... are used to avoid police wire taps. Lots of communication takes place via online communication as investigations are unable or scarcely able to decrypt the content of such digital communication. Many of them use Facebook to communicate with people in their country of origin and to communicate with group members.

4.1.4 The use of minors

Another method to avoid drawing attention is to use children and minors. Although both adults and children can be exploited to commit these crimes, it is recognised that organised itinerant criminal groups prefer to use **minors** – from the age of 8 - in their activities. **Especially the phenomenon of pickpocketing is very problematic because of the highly organised use of minors, which they send out on a large scale to commit this form of theft** (Federal Government Department (FGD) of the Interior, FGD of Justice, Board of General Prosecutors, the Federal Judicial Police and the Permanent Commission of the Local Police, 2010). The insertion of these minors makes it even more difficult to detect and arrest the perpetrators. These minor offenders are difficult to take care of within the existing police and judicial structures. Besides, the strongly organised criminal groups and crime networks, who are behind this form of criminality and of which the minor is a victim, are difficult to detect and tackle. The challenge is to determine the real age of these minors or certainly of the adults posing as minors in order to escape justice. Several methods are developed to determine the age: X-ray of the wrist, the teeth, the collarbone,...

Despite these minors are offenders of these form of crimes, it is possible that they are also victims of trafficking in human beings. Although trafficking for the purpose of sexual

exploitation is the most widespread form of trafficking in human beings (67 % of registered victims) (Europol, 2016), followed by labour exploitation (21 % of registered victims) 12 % are still registered as victims of other forms of trafficking, such as the *exploitation for criminal activities*, organ removal, forced begging and *pickpocketing*, sham marriages, domestic servitude. Trafficking for forced or petty criminality, such as property crime, particularly affects children (European Commission, 2016). Identifying victims and suspects appears to be one of the most important embarrassments in the approach to the exploitation of these minors. It is difficult to identify them correctly, because they give false names, use aliases, do not have identity papers or only false ones,... They live somewhere temporarily and disappear again. It is of great importance that professionals recognize these potential victims of criminal exploitation.

4.1.5 Offender characteristics

The vast majority of these offenders are *men*. Although men have the highest functions, this does not mean that women do not play a role within the organization as well. Most of these women are partners of one of the male offenders and are mostly active in supporting activities, such as providing accommodation, logistic support, fencing,... (Van Daele & Vander Beken, 2010).

Most offenders are *rather young or middle-aged*: most of them are in their twenties or thirties. Also, most offenders are *experienced*: they often have a criminal record, either in their home country or in other EU MS. The crimes they have been known for mostly include *property crimes*. However, also violence – whether or not while committing property crimes – fraud, forgery and sometimes even drug crimes are crimes they are known for. While most of the offenders are – often experienced – adults, minors are used for criminals purposes also (supra). They are supported by older offenders.

4.2 Differences

In addition to these non-criminal characteristics of itinerant crime groups mentioned above, a large degree of variation exists too. As organised property crimes encompasses a range of different criminal activities, itinerant criminal groups carrying out these different types of crimes, are highly diverse too: some of them are highly specialised in specific types of crime or *modi operandi*, while others are active in several types of property crime and other forms of serious and organised crime. Groups can differ in size, mapping, *organizational level and structure*, mobility, the criminal fence and risk management. Also, differences can be observed in offender characteristics, the crimes in which they are involved and the methods they use.

4.2.1 Composition, size and structure of itinerant crime groups

A large variety of crime groups is captured. Some itinerant crime groups consist of family members, which explains their origin and the offenders' origin. However, not all offenders within these groups are family. There are mostly composed of a number of families, surrounded by other individuals which results in a mix between families and other offenders. This leads us to the term 'clan-wise structure' instead of family structure. The clan structure is observed in most gypsy groups. Nevertheless, not all groups are characterized by a clan structure; within some groups, the members have no previous relationship at all. It is possible that members have no personal relationship, but are accepted in a certain group because they are part of the broader structure within which the group operates. Group sizes can differ as well, which is not always linked to



organizational levels. Highly structured groups have, of course, several offenders. In general, hierarchically structured groups are larger.

Van Daele, Vander Beken (2010) made the division of two main group types is made: on the one hand the gypsy type groups is described, on the other the crime gangs. For each of these groups, two extremes have been noticed, of which each type has its own features. It is important to know that there can be mixed groups too.

Itinerant Crime Groups					
Criminal Communities: Clan wise structure			Crime gangs: Working together		
Ranging from:		To:		Ranging from:	
Border groups	region	Flexible groups	gypsy	Fortune-hunters	Professional groups

The **criminal communities** are characterized by a number of kinship relations: one or several families live together and know of each other’s activities. Often, they form a part of the gypsy community, but as stressed before it is important not to stigmatize the whole gypsy community. In this group, you have at the one hand **border region crime groups**, which are small clans staying mostly in trailer camps in the border regions. They mostly stay within the same region, are active in various types of property crimes, particular vehicle thefts and ram raids. Their targets have often been repeatedly victimized and they make few efforts to stay unnoticed. When confronted with police, they flee, create distractions and try to eliminate their traces. On the other extreme, there are the **flexible gypsy groups**, which have international connections with other clans. Their members are connected to several groups in various countries, and their international fencing makes it difficult to trace the nature of certain goods. In their criminal behavior, flexibility is observed too: they do not only commit property crimes. Also, whereas in other group types, crimes are mostly committed by adult men, in these groups, children and women are also sent out to commit some crimes. Typical is that they avoid conflict with victims and other actors such as witnesses and the police. They use tricks and deception to gain access to houses and to rob people.

The second main type consists of **crime gangs**: they organize themselves not as a part of their lifestyle, but as a part of their criminal behaviors. The two subtypes made herein is more of a continuum. One type is clearly characterized by higher levels of organization, professionalism and specialization than the other. The **fortune-hunters** come over to Western Europe to create a better life. They are loosely structured and are not specialized in particular crime types. Involvement in burglaries and car thefts, crimes for which only limited skills are requires are typical for this group. Offenders of this group come over for short periods, regularly together with people they know and return to their home country afterwards: they do not try to build up a life in Western Europe. This is reflected in their criminal earnings, which are transported to their home country: the relations with their homeland stay vital. At the other hand, the **highly professional and skilled groups** who were described: they engage in all sorts of criminal behaviour. Links



have been found with drugs smuggling, THB, violence,... They have international connections: these connections are multilateral and linked to several Western European countries. The group composition changes because members are transferred to other groups. The Western European focus of these groups is translated in the criminal fence: goods are more likely to be sold in the West or transported to the East, there is more investment in other criminal activities and items such as real estate, luxury goods and art. The reason they are brought under the heading 'itinerant crime groups' is mainly because of their eastern European origin and not because of their itinerant behaviour.

4.2.2 Methods and strategies

As not all groups have a similar structure and since they are active in various domains of property crimes and beyond, it is no surprise that methods and strategies differ too. As mentioned before, itinerant crime groups generally engage in the serial breaking and entering of dwellings, cars, shops and businesses. Some itinerant crime groups focus on car theft or pickpocketing, while others concentrate on ATM skimming or ram raids. Exceptions as cargo theft, metal theft, introducing counterfeit money and armed robberies exist too.

A part of the differences in methods and strategies is related to these several crime types: commercial burglaries require more sophisticated or quicker methods than most home burglaries, cars can be stolen either on the street by force or by stealing the keys inside the house first, the latter case being called 'garage theft', ram raids require cars and some degree of violence. Offenders engage in some form of risk management, trying to maximize their chances of success. One of these strategies is preparation and planning, that occurs mostly in case of more advanced forms of crime and/or specific targets (Van Daele & Vander Beken, 2010).

Also, the choice of locations where organised itinerant criminal groups work, is determined partly by the specialty of the itinerant crime groups. As mentioned before, pickpockets are mainly active in shopping districts and on market areas, in tourist areas, cafes, public houses and catering establishments and of course the public transport,... A number of publications explicitly mention itinerant crime groups identify their specific targets in advance (Van Gestel, 2017). On the other side, other studies show that offenders do not always know exactly where they will strike: they simply drive or walk around at random until they chance upon a suitable target or victim (Van Gestel, 2017).

5. The prevention of pickpocketing

The best way to reduce the level of crime, is to take effective measures to prevent it from ever occurring. Crime prevention is recognized as an important tool to contribute to citizen's safety and security. Crime prevention includes all the activities that are intended to reduce or contribute reducing crime and citizens' feeling of insecurity, both quantitatively and qualitatively, either through directly deterring criminal activities or through policies and interventions designed to reduce the potential for crime and the causes of crime. This involves the participation of government, competent authorities, criminal justice agencies, law enforcement agencies, the judicial system, social services, the education system, industry, banks, local authorities and politicians, specialist associations, private and voluntary sectors, researchers and the general public, supported by the media (European Commission, 2004). Crime prevention requires a multi-disciplinary approach.

5.1 The need for a European Policy

Overall, the EU dimension of crime prevention has been strengthened in many ways in recent years. With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has the possibility to establish measures to promote and support EU Member States' actions in the crime prevention field. With **the blurring of the distinction between organised and the so-called 'volume' crime and the increasingly cross-border nature**, it is important having an **effective EU framework for crime prevention efforts at all levels** to have a greater chance of success (European Commission, 2012). This sentence, coming from the 'evaluation report on the EUPCN', is entirely applicable to the theme of this paper, since crimes such as shoplifting, metal theft, cargo theft, house burglaries and pickpocketing, committed by mobile 'itinerant' criminal groups are a good example of the *blurring between organised and volume crime*. Next to this, itinerant crime groups use their *mobility across borders* to commit several kinds of crimes, including pickpocketing: purposely exploiting the national and regional borders is a measure that itinerant crime groups use to protect themselves. By crossing borders and spreading their activities across multiple MS, the chance of getting caught is reduced.

Despite the fact that the cross-border characteristic of this type of crime is common knowledge, these offenses still are often investigated at local level. An analysis at national level is often lacking, which makes it even harder to detect and solve these sort of crimes. On top of that, the information exchange between (police and judicial authorities of the) Member States remains not sufficient. Each Member State has its own organisations, legislation, procedures and competences with respect to investigation and prosecution. The information exchange between Member States does not happen automatically, which means that information about itinerant crime groups remains fragmentary (Van Gestel, 2014).

Although the awareness of the links between local crime and organised crime and the complex cross-border dimension is increasing and despite the highly organised nature of MOCG's operations, the organised crime involvement in property crimes remains under-investigated. In many cases, incidents of property crime are classified as petty criminality without recognising the organised crime aspect (Europol, 2017a). However the scale and level of organisation of pickpocketing raids across many MS suggests that mobile organised crime groups are heavily involved, many incidents of pickpocketing are not attributed to organised crime. Additionally, online marketplaces make it easier and are used extensively to advertise and sell stolen goods, particularly low-bulk-high-value goods such as phones, tablets and other electronic equipment. Also, legal business structures are used to fence stolen goods - often in the country of origin of the mobile organised crime groups that are involved in organised burglaries and thefts.



Even though the EUCPN toolbox no. 11 (EUCPN, 2018) will go deeper into the legal measures, the policy in the MS as well as on EU level,... we want to emphasize already in this paper that **collaboration within the EU and between the EU MS** is important. **Cooperation between law enforcement within the EU and with partner countries in the neighbourhood** is a priority to counter this highly mobile form of criminality (European Commission, 2017). Organised property crime committed by MOCGs (such as robberies, including armed robberies, burglaries, organised shoplifting and pickpocketing, cash-machine and cash-in-transit attacks, the theft of a range of high-value items) is one of **Europol's 9 priority crime areas** under the **2014-2017 EU Policy Cycle**, which clarifies the importance of this problem. In 2017 the Council adopted the Council Conclusions on setting the EU's priorities for the fight against serious and organised crime between 2018-2021. Combating organised property crime by concentrating on disrupting highly mobile organised crime groups carrying out organised thefts and burglaries across the EU is described as **a priority for the 2018-2021 EU Policy Cycle too**. (Council of the EU, 2017; European Commission).

Although cooperation between Member States and within the EU is important, an EU framework is helpful and the attention of institutions such as Europol is necessary, we want to emphasize that it remains extremely advisable to pay attention for pickpockets. It remains important to sensitize people and to make them aware of the fact that they can do a lot of things themselves to avoid becoming a pickpocket victim. That is why we list some tips below. In the toolbox, there will be focussed on the existing policies in the MS and EU and on the legislative measures.

5.2 Prevention tips: how to avoid getting pickpocketed.

✓ **Beat pickpockets**

- Keep purses secure and carry wallets in an inside pocket
- Be careful with wallets in the back pocket of your pants
- Zip up hand and shoulder bags
- Carry bags in front of you with flaps against your body
- Keep straps short and bags tucked under your arm
- Don't display jewelry
- Don't show your money – keep it safely in your pocket
- Let personal papers, that you do not need with you, at home
- Do not walk around with large sums of money and make maximum use of bank cards
- Spread your money across different pockets.
- Close your jacket when you are in a crowded place.
- Always close your bag. Ensure that the zipper or locking system is against your body.
- Carry your purse on the side of your partner.
- Pay attention if you are approached by a stranger.

✓ **Keep your luggage safe**

- Try to keep luggage close by and in view and check on your bags regularly.
- Do not leave valuable items unattended on a train when you visit the toilet or buffet car
- If you are going to sleep on a train, do not leave valuables in view on the table or seat next to you. Keep them hidden.
- Ensure any bags placed on the floor are in front of you, so that any movement of the bag will be noticeable

✓ **Protect your gadgets**

- Install a tracker application on your smartphone, which could help trace your device if it is stolen
- Stay alert and aware of what's going on around you when using your phone in public
- It is more likely to recover your property, if you have marked it (bikes, phones,...) properly
- Always use your phone's security lock or PIN number

6. Conclusion

Organised property crime in general and **pickpocketing** as specific phenomenon is a highly visible form of crime with the potential to cause widespread feelings of insecurity. The scale and level of organisation of pickpocketing raids across many Member States suggest that mobile organised crime groups are heavily involved. Mobile organised crime groups typically carry out a high number of offences in a region over a short period before moving on. Also, they typically operate in and predominantly target MS in Western and Northern Europe. MOCGs increasingly pose an EU-wide threat owing to their international networks and involvement in cross-border criminal and serious organised crime activities. We can conclude this paper emphasizing that organised property crime committed by mobile organised crime groups represents a current and major threat to all EU Member States. The scope and range of MOCGs offences is wide and is sometimes linked with THB, tax frauds or firearms. However, these groups are especially very active on property crimes due to the low punishments and the wide diversity of crimes, where pickpocketing is only one of them.

Despite the fact that pickpocketing is a problem in almost all the EU MS, pickpocketing remains an under-investigated and often an undetected phenomenon. In any case, pickpocketing has a *high dark number* because many victims do not even realize they have been pickpocketed, because many people do not want to go to the police,... In addition, many cases of pickpocketing committed by MOCG's, are being classified as petty criminality *without recognising the 'organised' crime aspect, which means that many incidents of pickpocketing are not attributed to organised crime*. Despite the highly organised nature of MOCG operations, the organised crime involvement in property crimes really remains under-investigated (Europol, 2017a). Furthermore, these offenses are *often investigated in isolation* at the local level. Most crimes perpetrated are perceived as small-scale when they are reported and investigated at local level. Since analyses at the national level is often lacking, the detection and solution of these sort of crimes is difficult. Furthermore, the information-exchange between MS does not happen automatically, which results in a fragmented image of this phenomenon.

In this paper, it is stressed that cooperation at EU level and between the EU MS is important to oppose organised property crime. To counter this high mobile form of criminality, cooperation between law enforcement within the EU and with partner countries in the neighbourhood is important. Organised property crime, including pickpocketing, committed by MOCGs is one of **Europol's priority crime areas** under the **2014-2017 EU Policy Cycle**. Also in the SOCTA 2017, organized property crime has been identified as one of the phenomena in which serious and organized criminal groups are active and has been identified as one of the priority crime threats. Combating organised property crime by concentrating on disrupting highly mobile organised crime groups carrying out organised thefts and burglaries across the EU is described as a priority for the 2018-2021 EU Policy Cycle, which clarifies the importance of the problem. (Council of the EU, 2017; European Commission, 2017) Also, since 2011 there are measures within the framework of a 'European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats', EMPACT, to combat this type of crime. The existing policies and legal measures in the MS and the EU will be discussed in more detail in Toolbox no. 11 (EuCPN, 2018).

We can conclude that pickpocketing - and organised property crime in general - committed by MOCGs is taken very seriously and is receiving increasing attention within the European law enforcement. Pickpocketing is an ubiquitous phenomenon, driving crime numbers and affecting the perceived security of citizens all over the EU. It has more than ever become necessary for law enforcement to coordinate and cooperate on European/International level, just because MOCGs committing crimes such as pickpocketing use their mobility across borders to challenge the established law enforcement practices.

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