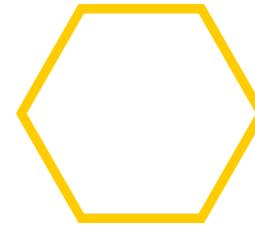




CRIME PREVENTION

a European definition



Crime prevention – a complex field to navigate. Luckily, you do not have to start from scratch. There is a wealth of information available to you through the European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN). We cover topics as diverse as trafficking in human beings, youth crime and environmental crime,... But what exactly is crime prevention?

The definition of crime prevention varies from programme to programme.¹ In order to move forward, a conceptual clarification is necessary.² This common understanding will allow to focus preventive actions, correctly allocate the available funds, evaluate the impact and share good practice. Acting as the centre of expertise in the EU, the EUCPN defines crime prevention as:

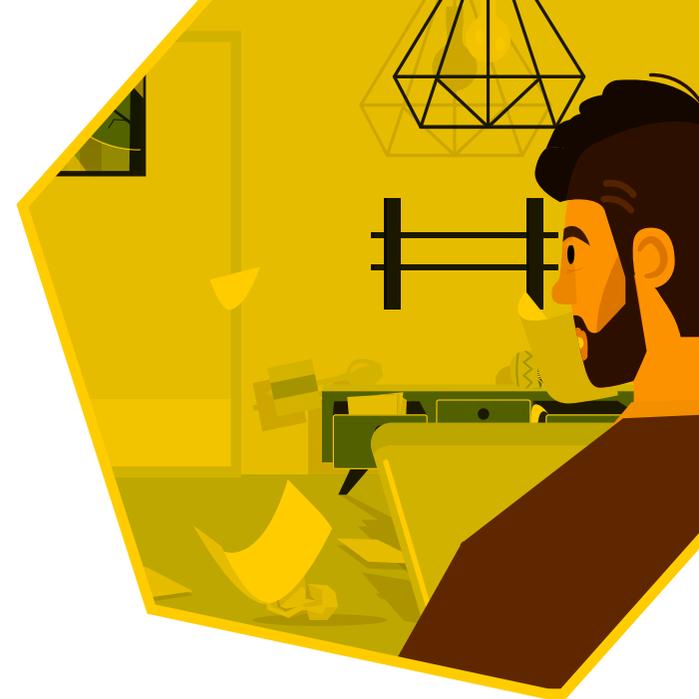
Ethically acceptable and evidence-based activities aimed at reducing the risk of crime occurring and its harmful consequences with the ultimate goal of working towards the improvement of the quality of life and safety of individuals, groups and communities

The following sections cover this definition in depth, offering information on the different aspects within our understanding of crime prevention.

CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL POLICY

Dealing with crime is not an easy task and, unfortunately, there is no catch-all solution. Society simply cannot rely on apprehending and incarcerating offenders alone. Instead, any response to crime should adopt a holistic approach and crime prevention is an integral part of that.³ Whereas most activities within the criminal justice system operate *after* the crime has been committed, crime prevention acts *before*.⁴

This temporal shift also opens the approach to a wide array of sectors and actors. A range of partners take on vital roles: schools, families, the community, the social welfare sector, the private sector, and many more. Who is in the best position to take on which responsibility depends on what you are dealing with.⁵ Given the complexity of crime, it should be clear, however, that in order to prevent crime, cooperation and partnerships are always key.⁶



No matter the subject, the European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) is your first point of reference when it comes to crime prevention. Our Network was set up in 2001 to help develop crime prevention in the EU. Bringing together all Member States, we aim to connect the local, national and European level and promote crime prevention knowledge and practices.

Want to know more about what we do?

Visit: <https://eucpn.org/list/activities-services>

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WHAT DO WE AIM TO PREVENT?

Crime preventionists set out to prevent crime, but what is crime anyway? The question seems straightforward, yet the answer deserves more attention. Although you might think otherwise, this can affect your work in many ways.⁷

The EUCPN defines the 'criminal scope' as ranging from a strictly legal understanding of crime – a breach of criminal law – to a broader interpretation that also incorporates other forms of antisocial behaviour.⁸ As such, our online database lists programmes aimed at cyberbullying, while also including measures directed at organised property crime.

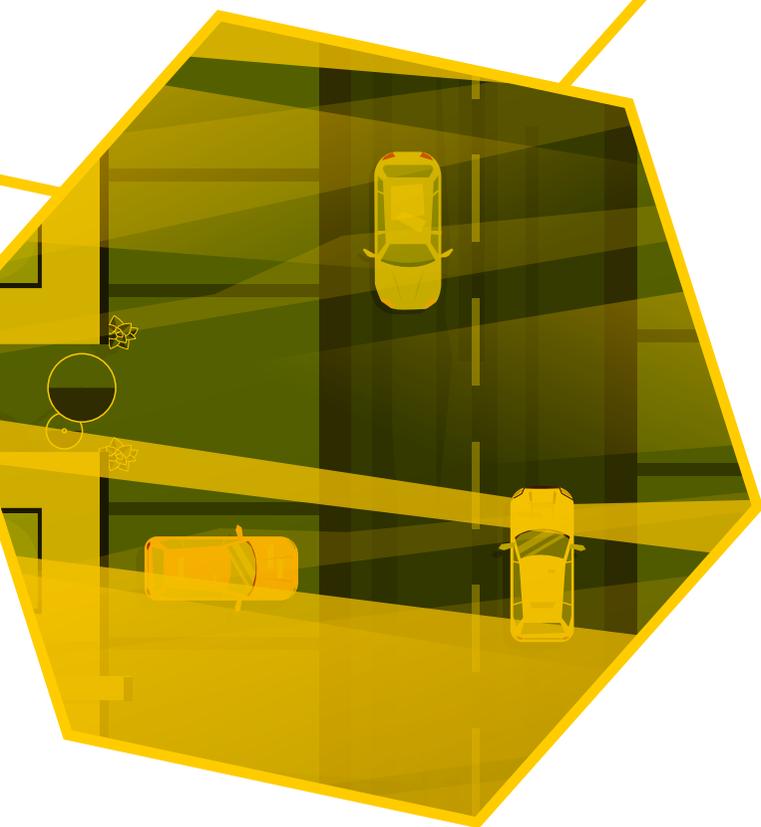
As much as we would want to, we cannot prevent every crime. We can, however, along with our goal of preventing crime, direct our attention to prevent and reduce the harmful consequences of future crimes.⁹ Advance actions can potentially mitigate financial losses following an ATM attack, for example by limiting the available amount of cash.¹⁰ Another innovative example is administrative barriers to impede and lower the ability of organised crime to undermine the legal societal infrastructure.¹¹

Fear of crime and feelings of insecurity deserve a special mention in discussing the harmful consequences, although their relationship with crime (prevention) is not always direct. Fear of crime might be the result of personal victimisation, yet it could also be caused by personal or more collective concerns or anxieties that are not necessarily connected with objective levels of crime.¹² Working towards improving the quality of life and safety of all (see below), crime prevention must also be mindful of both these objective and subjective levels of crime.

ORGANISED CRIME PREVENTION?!

Crime prevention is typically thought of as measures directed at conventional forms of crime such as urban or youth-related crimes.¹³ The EUCPN also initially started out with this focus.

Gradually, more attention was also given to tackling organised crime in the European Union and crime prevention efforts have followed suit. The EU Policy Cycle to tackle organised and serious international crime concentrates the Union's efforts on a number of priorities, such as organised property crime or environmental crime. Crime prevention is an integral part of that approach and the EUCPN actively supports this work.¹⁴



Ethically acceptable and evidence-based activities aimed at **reducing the risk of crime occurring and its harmful consequences with the ultimate goal of working towards the improvement of the quality of life and safety of individuals, groups and communities**

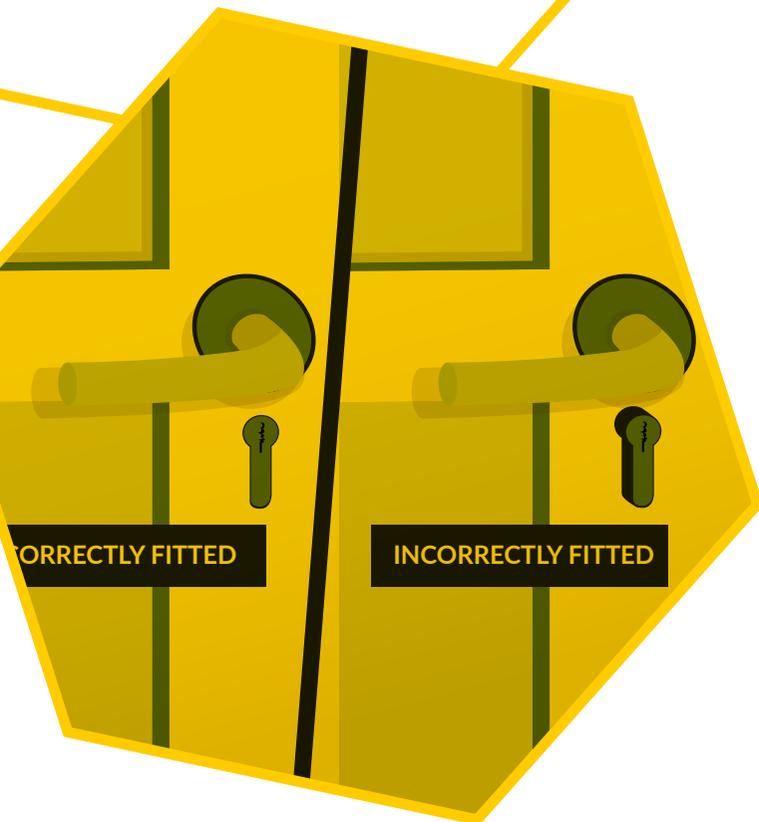
HOW TO REDUCE THE RISK?

Since we are dealing with an uncertain future – crime and its consequences have not happened (yet) – the present goal is to reduce the risk of their occurrence.¹⁵ The better you can target this risk, the more impact your intervention can have.

The EUCPN's definition refers to crime prevention activities when they aim to reduce the risk of crime occurring. This involves intervening in the processes that lead to crime. In order to effectively achieve this goal, we can use criminological and other relevant theories as our guide. These theories provide the right tools to address crime-specific risks and the ways in which we can change the outcome.¹⁶ Crime is complex; inevitably, intervening in that process is equally complex and requires a diverse set of methods and theories. To give a brief overview of these theories and activities under the heading 'crime prevention', we follow a widely used classification: *Developmental prevention, community prevention, situational prevention and criminal justice prevention*.¹⁷

In **developmental prevention**, the bulk of the activities are situated well in advance of any criminal event. Typically, insights from psychology, education, medicine and public health guide these activities. By reducing identified risk factors or increasing protective factors, the goal is to prevent the onset of criminal behaviour.¹⁸ Developmental prevention mostly involves interventions at earlier stages of life, among them improving parenting skills, children's physical and mental health, and school performance.¹⁹

Community prevention aims to influence behaviour by changing the social conditions and institutions in the community.²⁰ Preventive efforts are directed to activate social and community prevention mechanisms, such as informal social control, or to deactivate crime generation mechanisms, such as for example having deviant peers.²¹ A number of activities fall within this scope: community engagement, employment strategies, peer and mentoring programmes, etc.²²





*Ethically acceptable and evidence-based activities aimed at **reducing the risk of crime occurring and its harmful consequences with the ultimate goal of working towards the improvement of the quality of life and safety of individuals, groups and communities***

Whereas developmental and community prevention are oriented towards criminality, **situational prevention** has a prime interest in the criminal event.²³ The focus is on modifying the immediate conditions in which crimes are committed.²⁴ By making changes in this criminogenic situation, the opportunity to commit a crime or to be victimised is reduced and/or the risk and difficulty of offending is heightened.²⁵ Many activities here fall under the rubric of 'security'. Classic examples include security measures such as alarm systems or firewall protection, and design changes to make products inherently harder to steal or misuse.²⁶

Criminal justice prevention takes a particular place in our overview. The majority of activities within the criminal justice system operates *after* a crime has been committed. However, several aspects have a future-oriented aspect and therefore have a preventive focus.²⁷ These aspects can work through specific and general deterrence, incapacitation and rehabilitation and indirectly through effects on socialisation.²⁸

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AN ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

Preventing crime is a laudable effort, yet there are limits to what can be done in the name of prevention.²⁹ For the EUCPN, it goes without saying that legal boundaries are respected and that preventive actions are not disproportionate.³⁰ In addition, crime prevention should not lead to social exclusion or stigmatisation.³¹

Trade-offs between crime prevention and other domains will have to be made however, though carefully-crafted creative approaches can enjoy the best of all worlds.³² Privacy issues are of a particular concern here. Whatever the case, preventive efforts should not cause any harm to the target groups. Working in an evidence-based way and evaluating your work by multiple criteria, not just on how it cuts crime, is the way to avoid just that.



BETTER DO IT RIGHT, AND MAKE SURE YOUR ACTIVITIES WORK!

Ethically acceptable and evidence-based activities aimed at reducing the risk of crime occurring and its harmful consequences with the ultimate goal of working towards the improvement of the quality of life and safety of individuals, groups and communities

Making use of the best available evidence at every decision leading up to and throughout the implementation of crime prevention activities, is the cornerstone of an evidence-based approach.³³ Although the EUCPN recognises that scientific evidence is not the only consideration when you are planning and implementing an intervention, it should be your base line and applied wisely. Knowing what, why, how and where something works is a vital competency for both policy makers and practitioners to make sure the activity has a real impact.³⁴

Assessing that impact and evaluating these interventions then quickly become absolute necessities.³⁵ We cannot work based on a mere hunch and having a culture of evaluation benefits us all. The EUCPN was set up to share good practices and evaluations are a necessary prerequisite in this regard. This is even more the case with innovative and new approaches. Working in an evidence based way and conducting evaluations are not in conflict with innovation but instead a common sense approach to ensure that these interventions actually work and are intelligently-tuned to your local problem and context.



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FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL

Ultimately, the EUCPN and the activities we have described here not only strive to prevent something we want less of – i.e. crime and its consequences – but also seek to improve the quality of life and safety of everyone in our society.³⁶ In this sense, our activities are oriented towards socially just and beneficial outcomes; something we want more of.³⁷

Being able to safely walk through the city, trusting the capacity of the police to solve problems and deliver the necessary services, having a resilient community that is able to address its issues as a collective, ... these are but a few examples of how crime prevention is intertwined with and contributes to the safety and quality of life of individuals, groups and communities.³⁸

Since this is a benefit to us all, there is all the more reason to work and prevent crime together.³⁹



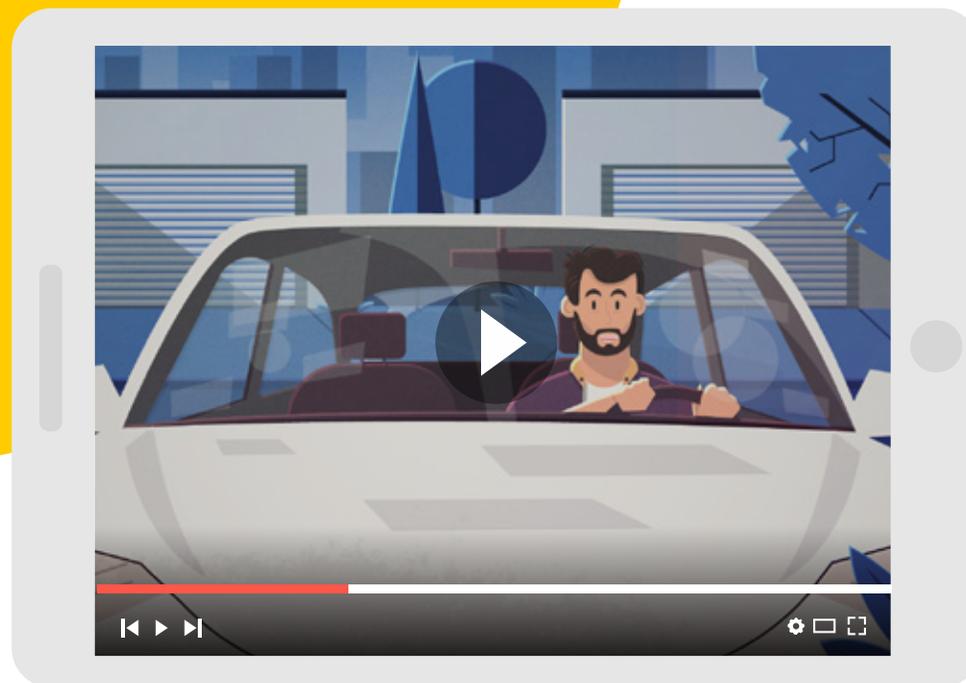
Want to know what works? Check out our knowledge centre!

One of the main activities of the EUCPN is sharing knowledge. We regularly produce prevention-oriented manuals in which we look at the challenges in efforts to prevent crime. We also provide good practices and recommendations on how to prevent a specific crime type or policy recommendations.

All of this information is compiled in our knowledge centre!

Visit: <https://eucpn.org/knowledge-center>

WHAT EXACTLY IS CRIME PREVENTION?



Watch our video

ENDNOTES

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