RECOMMENDATION PAPER

A holistic approach towards preventing fencing

EUCPN
EUROPEAN CRIME PREVENTION NETWORK

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In order to tackle fencing, an elaborate approach aimed at several focus areas while including various partners is needed. This paper discusses four focus areas that make up the phenomenon of fencing.

”

INTRODUCTION

Fencing constitutes knowingly and willingly dealing in stolen goods, such as smartphones, vehicles or jewellery.[1] It includes a large variety of activities, not only buying, trading and selling stolen goods, but also safely transporting and storing these goods.[2]

It is often referred to as a 'victimless crime'. Typically, the selling and purchasing of stolen goods is a voluntary exchange in which both the seller and customer are helped instead of harmed. Moreover, many of the customers do not even realise they are buying stolen goods. For this reason, no one will report it, meaning that little is known about the prevalence of this phenomenon.[3]

Fencing inherently cannot exist without a different prior offence (e.g. burglary or theft) occurring.[4] According to criminal law, this constitutes two separate crimes, as first there is a theft, followed by selling or trading these stolen goods.[5] Yet, from the offender's perspective, these actions fall under the same objective, which is obtaining money. On one hand, the fences make an easy profit, and on the other, the thieves can acquire money to buy something else.[6]

In order to prevent fencing, it is necessary to implement a holistic approach that includes all the relevant partners and targets every aspect of the phenomenon. For this reason, four separate focus areas have been identified that together make up the general phenomenon (see figure 1). These focus areas are: (1) preventing (valuable) goods from being stolen, (2) preventing fences and their customers from selling as well as buying stolen goods, (3) tackling stolen goods markets in general, and (4) the creation of local and (inter)national partnerships. Many of the initiatives contained in this paper are already being implemented in practice and have great potential. The aim of these initiatives is to make it more challenging to deal in stolen goods and consequently also to discourage theft to begin with.[7]

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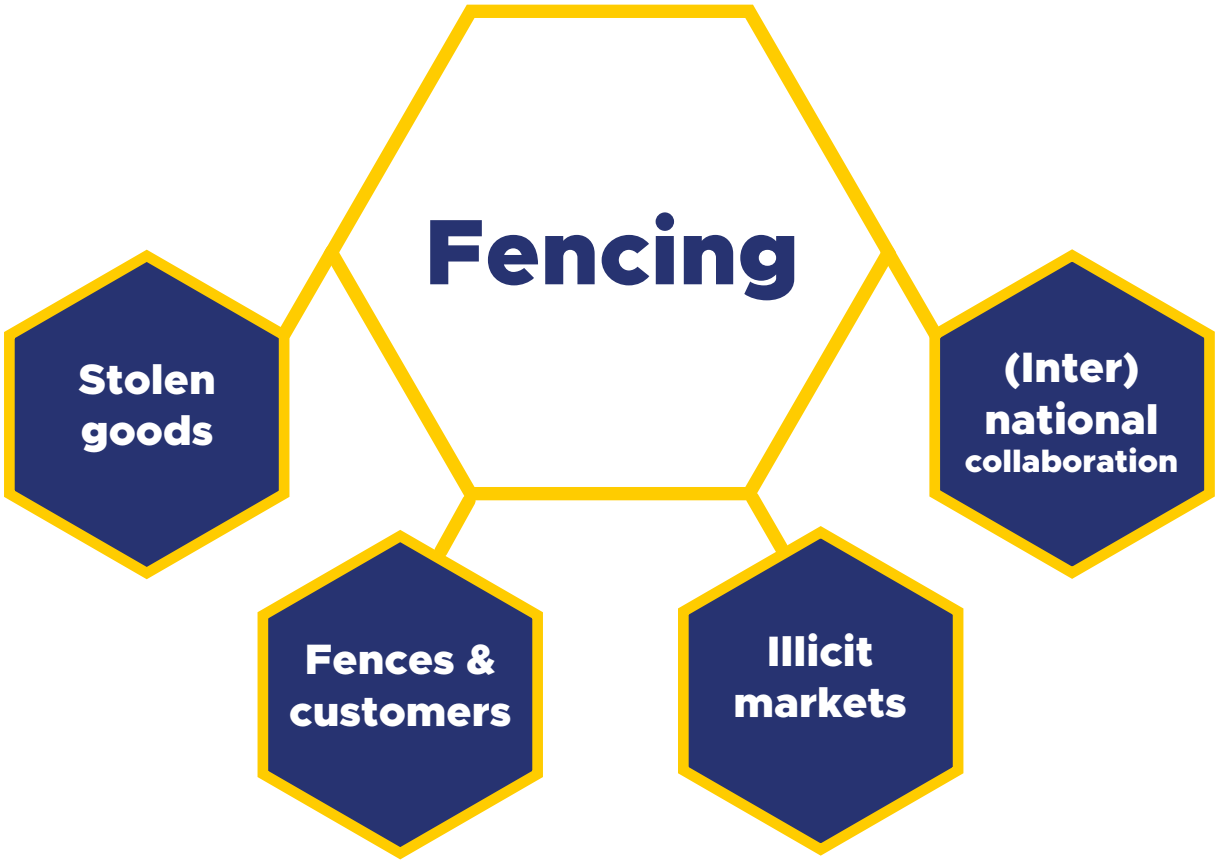

Figure 1: The main focus areas that constitute a holistic approach towards fencing.

01 PREVENTING STOLEN GOODS FROM BEING SOLD

The first focus area concentrates on the most popular goods that are stolen to be sold afterwards. These are vehicles, bikes and boats (or their parts), electronic devices (e.g. smartphones or laptops), jewellery and metals (e.g. gold, copper or diamonds).[8]

Whether an object is appealing to steal and later sell depends on the characteristics described in the CRAVED-model. The stolen goods must be easily Concealable and Removable by the offender, as well as easily Accessible to steal. Furthermore, it must be Valuable and Enjoyable for the customers, as well as easily Disposable. One such example is a smartphone. A phone is a small object that is easily pickpocketed from the owner and, since many people have one, there are plenty of opportunities for theft. It is also a popular item, meaning it will be easy to sell to other customers.[9]

There are two prevention approaches relevant to this focus area. First, we need to facilitate the identification of (valuable) goods by marking them. Secondly, we can reduce the value of goods once they are stolen.

Marking valuable goods

If goods are easy to identify, it will be easier for law enforcement to trace them back to their owners and for unsuspecting customers or dealers to categorise them as stolen.[10] There are various marking methods for identifying goods. The most common way is to add **serial numbers** to objects. Serial numbers are unique identification codes often used for electronic devices and vehicle parts. One example is international mobile equipment identity (IMEI) numbers, which identify phones. These numbers are linked to the phone itself instead of the SIM card, which can be easily transferred to other devices. It can also be used to block a smartphone when lost or stolen.[11] Another example is VIN numbers (Vehicle Identification Number), which are used to identify cars, motorcycles, buses, lorries and trailers. This number can be found on the body of the vehicle (e.g. in the door of the driver's seat) and sometimes on the bottom of the windscreen.[12]

However, serial numbers could also be added to non-unique theft-prone objects to facilitate their identification. Certain offenders sell goods without removing their tags or labels. Therefore, by adding serial numbers to clothing labels or perfume bottles, these objects could be easily traced to the particular store or manufacturer they were stolen from.[13] This technique is already being implemented by clothing brand Lacoste, which adds unique registration codes in their clothes to counter forgery as well as theft and fencing.[14]

The use of serial numbers is an essential component for detecting stolen goods. Databases, such as in Interpol's project INVEX, collect serial numbers of stolen vehicles and share this information with other countries as well as dealerships. The database creates an alert for local dealers to help identify stolen components that might appear in their garages.[15]

Alternatives to serial numbers

Not all theft-prone objects are easily marked through serial numbers. Some require alternative and more creative identification methods. One such object is jewellery, for which the Netherlands is setting up an initiative called 'DNA of jewellery'. This pilot project involves jewellery stores providing their customers with an extensive description (e.g. what metal has been used or what gemstones are incorporated) of the jewellery they buy. In the event of theft, the owner already has the necessary information for the police to use during the investigation.[16]

Another example is cultural goods, such as paintings, statues and other artworks. They cannot easily be marked due to their age, material, fragility or size. In this case authentication certificates and licenses are often used. These certificates prove the legitimacy of an artwork and facilitate its transport between countries.[17]

A second marking method that is already frequently used is **engravings**. This is a technique that can be used to add serial numbers to an object. The unique numbers are carved into a robust surface of an object, such as on the frame of a bicycle. This could be an official serial number (e.g. the VIN number of a car engraved on its parts) or a different unique number (e.g. a date of birth engraved on an electric scooter). It is a durable method that creates an additional difficulty when selling a stolen object. Even though the engraving can be ground away relatively easy, it would still leave a trace or damage for law enforcement, second-hand dealers or customers to notice.[18]

Engraving is an accessible measure. Many municipalities and police departments organise engraving sessions, during which the general public brings objects to have them engraved for free. By making law enforcement responsible for these actions, they can inspect the goods receiving an engraving and apprehend suspicious-looking objects. However, manufacturers could play an important role by engraving their own products, such as bikes or car parts, during the production phase. Apple, for instance, offers free engravings of names, dates or numbers on their smartphones and Air Pods.[19] By making manufacturers responsible for engravings, the responsibility is taken away from the customers, which creates a more routine identification process.[20]

A third mechanism is **forensic marking** (e.g. SelectaDNA). Forensic marking is a type of marker or spray that contains a DNA code and microdots, which is very difficult to remove. It can easily endure on a surface for months or even years, which is why it is a good technique for non-unique goods, such as metals (e.g. copper on train tracks that endure harsh weather conditions). Nevertheless, it could be applied to any object, from vehicles to electronic devices.[21] DNA marking is often done through the use of **microdots**. These are tiny labels, barely visible to the naked eye, containing a unique code. They are embedded in a transparent, UV-reflective lacquer or glue and sprayed onto the surface or in hard-to-reach places of an object (e.g. under the bonnet of a car). They can be easily traced by law enforcement through the use of a small UV-light to find the dots and a portable microscope to read its unique code.[22]

DNA marking as well as using microdots can be used by both private and public actors. Various municipalities and police departments offer free forensic marking sessions to their citizens. Yet, similarly to engravings, it can also be implemented by manufacturers or second-hand dealers to consequently identify and protect their goods. Along with manufacturers, insurance companies could play an important role by offering favourable insurance packages to clients that implemented such marking measures.[23] However, caution must be exercised when distributing these methods to the wider public. It might become very easy for perpetrators or criminal groups to obtain forensic marking and use it on stolen goods that have not yet been previously marked. For this reason, the distribution of DNA-marking and microdots should be tightly regulated in order to protect its value and effectiveness. One example is for governments or private companies to distribute these measures to registered manufacturers, therefore retaining control over who is allowed to implement them.[24]

A private marking initiative

To avoid forensic marking falling into the hands of perpetrators, private companies could regulate its distribution. One such example is Securmark, a company offering a three-layered security mechanism. Firstly, warning labels are added on visible locations on all marked goods. Secondly, a unique number is engraved into the surface of the object. Thirdly, microdots are sprayed onto difficult to reach places and gaps of the object (e.g. underneath a hatch of a boat or at the back of engines). The microdots provide an alternative in case engravings are ground away.

The implementation of these anti-theft methods should be done by certified manufacturers and dealers. Instead of leaving this task up to the customers, manufacturers provide a more structured approach by marking their goods during the fabrication process. This way, an important level of control over who (legitimately) uses the product is maintained. Manufacturers can furthermore provide consistent and correct data that can be added to a database. The Securmark database, for instance, contains information necessary for identifying stolen and/or recovered goods. It includes information on the object itself, the identification codes from the engravings and microdots, and information on the manufacturer/dealer and owner. It can be accessed by law enforcement, manufacturers, dealerships and insurance companies to ensure multi-agency collaboration.

Find out more on their website: **https://www.securmark.no/en-gb/.**

Finally, a more straightforward device is a **UV-marker**. These are markers that are only visible under UV light. It can be used to write down a specific symbol or a unique code (e.g. a passport number) on personal items like a phone or laptop. When a stolen object is found, such a marking can serve as an indication of the original ownership of the object.[25]

Reducing the value of stolen goods

Secondly, there is the need to reduce the value of goods once they are stolen, making them less durable and therefore less appealing to steal and sell afterwards.[26]

A notable practice is **electronic immobilisers** that can be found on cars. Electronic immobilisers work in various ways, yet it generally consists of a built-in security mechanisms that disable the electrical circuits of a car when it is stolen without its key. The European Union even set up a regulation setting out rules and quality standards for these immobilisers.[27] It is important for this technique to be implemented consistently by all manufacturers in order to protect all vehicles from theft, as well as fencing.[28]

Another relevant example is anti-theft functions such as **tracking mechanisms**. GPS or tracking devices are either built-in mechanisms or external devices that can be attached to various theft-prone objects, such as (parts of) vehicles, bikes or electronic devices. If a bike is stolen, the police can then follow the signal towards the address where it is being held or sold, which makes fencing as well as theft less appealing.[29]

Trackers, however, have some shortcomings. Firstly, various tools exist to defuse them, such as sweepers (to find out whether the object contains a tracker) and jammers (to block the signal from the tracker). Yet new technologies are constantly being developed to stay ahead of crime. To avoid jammers, certain brands (e.g. Sigfox) created trackers that cannot be blocked due to their short and low power signals on random frequencies. Another shortcoming is the difficulty of specifically locating a tracker in a densely populated area. The smaller the objects (e.g. phones and laptops), the easier they can be stored within a fence's home. If this home is situated in an apartment building, it becomes very difficult to identify the particular flat. This also applies to larger objects; for instance, a stolen boat engine located in the back of a truck at a busy car park. In this case, a police patrol could visit the building or car park in question and observe any suspicious behaviour or gather data relevant to the investigation.[30]

02 TARGETING FENCES AND THEIR CUSTOMERS

A second focus area is aimed at the fences and their customers. The fence is the criminal go-between amid the thief and the (either knowing or unknowing) customers. They take on the task of selling stolen goods and therefore take this risk away from the thieves.[31]

This sale occurs in various ways. A large group of fences sell stolen goods through a legitimate business or set up a seemingly legitimate business to conceal additional illegal activities. Another sales method is to sell stolen goods from within their own home. A third group of fences uses their (criminal) network to sell stolen goods to family, friends or acquaintances. Alternatively, they implement the hawking method, in which stolen goods are sold directly to random customers, for instance on the street.[32]

The main drivers behind fencing are the customers, who demand cheap products. Only a small number of customers buy what they know (or believe to be) stolen goods. A much larger part are unknowing buyers who, for instance, buy stolen goods on legitimate websites (e.g. eBay).[33] In either case, complicity is an important aspect. Buying stolen goods, either intentionally or unintentionally, supports an illicit market supplied by theft. It is therefore equally important to focus on the fences as well as their often-unknowing customers.[34]

Targeting fences and their business

It first and foremost needs to become increasingly difficult for fences to operate. A noteworthy initiative is creating a **fencing database**, such as the database *StopHeling* that is implemented in the Netherlands. This database consists of official police reports on stolen goods (e.g. phones or laptops) and only law enforcement is able to add information to this database. However, the general public can also use it to inspect serial numbers and check whether a second-hand object is possibly registered as stolen. A second aspect of this database constitutes a private inventory for the general public to use (i.e. on the website or through the app). Citizens can register their (valuable) goods, by saving the serial numbers, providing descriptions and adding photos. This inventory provides a quick overview for both the police and insurance companies to use in the event of theft.[35]

A second aspect of this anti-fencing strategy is the **Digital Buyers Register**. This register can be compared to general sale records that stores have to maintain. It legally requires second-hand buyers to maintain an overview of all their purchases and sales. This includes information on the date the object was bought, its price as well as the name and address of the seller. Metal scrap dealers even have to register the ID number if the payment was conducted in cash. By connecting this register to the general database, an automatic match is created if a buyer registers the serial number of a stolen object.[36]

Finally, certain buyers, e.g. second-hand stores or dealerships, are also obligated to register themselves and their business in the **Digital Buyers Counter**. This is a third database, connected to the previous two. It provides an administrative overview of all active businesses within a municipality and consequently facilitates the monitoring of these businesses.[37]

Various European countries have implemented similar initiatives for law enforcement or citizens to register valuable and/or stolen goods (either online or through a paper form).[38] However, the automatic and integrated Dutch system is ahead of the curve. Providing this online service facilitates its use for both businesses that have to use it and customers who want to take preventative measures. Furthermore, by connecting several databases, a much larger variety of information is shared and linked, making it easier to find and track stolen objects. This digital linkage reduces the expanding workload of law enforcement, which is a struggle many countries are facing.[39]

Nevertheless, to increase the relevance of such databases, it should be further expanded to non-unique goods. This includes objects without serial numbers, such as art, cultural goods or jewellery. Instead of registering serial numbers, photos and detailed descriptions of such objects (e.g. DNA of jewellery) could be used for identification. Through the use of image-recognition software, photos could be compared and matched to one another, as is currently the case with serial numbers.[40] A relevant example is the 'ID-art' app created by Interpol. This app contains an inventory of photos and information on stolen artworks, available for law enforcement, citizens or art dealers to use.[41]

Raising awareness

The second target group to focus on is the general public, whose awareness regarding the seriousness of this phenomenon is too low. While people generally disapprove of theft, many turn a blind eye when it comes to fencing because it benefits them. As long as there is no social change, the supply and demand of stolen goods will continue.[42] For this reason, prevention should additionally focus on increasing citizens' awareness as well as their participation in detection.[43]

> It first and foremost needs to become increasingly difficult for fences to operate. A noteworthy initiative is creating a fencing database.

Campaigns could be implemented in various manners to reach all groups within society. Flyers encouraging the registration of valuable objects could be distributed in stores. This method targets customers 'at the source' and urges them to register their goods as soon as possible. These measures could be implemented by governments or by companies themselves. Instead of relying on flyers, sales personnel could provide specific preventative advice when selling certain goods. They could, furthermore, add serial numbers or other identification measures to the receipt the customer takes home.[44]

Another example is online communication. Online commercials, websites and web pages could be used to inform the public of the risks of online shopping and advise them on necessary safety measures (e.g. checking serial numbers or comparing the price offered with the market price).[45] For instance, eBay and DoneDeal (an Irish motor marketplace) have web pages on their platforms providing tips and tricks for their customers, as well as for their sellers.[46] Nevertheless, as many customers are not aware of the risks, these pages should be clearly advertised or even presented as mandatory to every user of an online marketplace.

It is important to emphasise that these campaigns should not only target customers, but also stores and organisations within various industries (e.g. second-hand car dealers, art or antique stores or insurance companies). These businesses should also receive brochures and information sessions, or have forums containing tips on recognising stolen goods and increasing the general awareness.[47]

03 TACKLING STOLEN GOODS MARKETS

The third focus area tackles illicit markets. These markets exist for all types of goods: drugs, firearms, diamonds, pirated software or films, endangered species, cultural goods, etc.[48] They facilitate the demand for stolen goods which drives (property) crimes, such as theft and burglaries. Nonetheless, in practice, many prevention efforts remain focused on theft instead of on the markets.[49]

These markets take on many different forms and sizes, from large online spaces to fragmented individuals selling goods in public areas.[50] Illicit markets can cause many social harms, such as violence and victimisation, within a community. It can furthermore lead to an increased fear of crime by the population, which discourages business investments and affects the general thriving of a community.[51]

For this reason, stolen goods markets need to be tackled on a larger scale. Governments could produce legislation, combined with administrative measures, to complicate the existence of stolen goods markets. Particular attention is likewise required for the online market spaces.

The need for legislation and administrative policies

Legislation and (administrative) policy initiatives can have an impact on the existence of stolen goods markets. One such example is a purchasing policy. A purchasing policy enforces rules and guidelines on businesses (e.g. second-hand buyers or dealers), with the aim of hindering illegal activities. These rules may include: not accepting cash payments, implementing in-store CCTV cameras, requiring customers to provide a valid ID, obligatory registration of goods purchased and sold and implementing a retention period before second-hand goods can be sold again.[52]

Another administrative measure is the implementation of the previously mentioned Digital Buyers system. This system provides municipalities and/or governments with an administrative overview of all active businesses. It facilitates the monitoring of businesses that might come into contact with fences, such as second-hand stores or metal scrap dealers. It furthermore offers guidance when setting up specific preventative actions. For example, this database provides a quick overview of all businesses dealing in bicycles, which could receive brochures on how to identify stolen or suspicious bicycles.[53]

Both law enforcement and municipalities could intervene when businesses disregard purchasing policies or other types of legislation. Law enforcement could enforce legislative sanctions, such as fines or arrests. However, municipalities could also play an important role by implementing administrative consequences, for instance by revoking licences.[54]

Special attention for online market spaces

Along with physical illicit markets, the virtual world also poses an important trade location. However, as these spaces are online, they are easier to disguise, remove and renew. It is therefore more complicated for national governments to regulate and control them.[55] Yet several prevention mechanisms could be set up to incorporate online platforms within a holistic anti-fencing approach as well.

Firstly, online platforms and market spaces (e.g. Facebook, Amazon or eBay) could be encouraged to enforce their own code of conduct, including sanctions – for instance, by requiring the sellers to verify their ID before receiving access to the platform. If sellers do not obey the rules, they could be reported or (temporarily) blocked.[56]

Another method is for governments and online companies (e.g. online auctions) to create their own websites or web pages to inform customers of the risks of online shopping. These webpages should include information on how to recognise suspicious offers and sellers, provide links to databases to search for stolen items and set up an easy tool to report suspicious activity. It is important for this information to be actively offered to the customers. Because many are not fully aware of the possible risks, they will often not look for this information either. Therefore, online companies could set up push notifications that they are obligated to read before entering their platform.[57]

04 THE NEED FOR LOCAL AND (INTER)NATIONAL COLLABORATION

A final overarching focus area emphasises the need for a holistic approach that entails collaboration with both public and private partners throughout our society (see figure 2).[58]

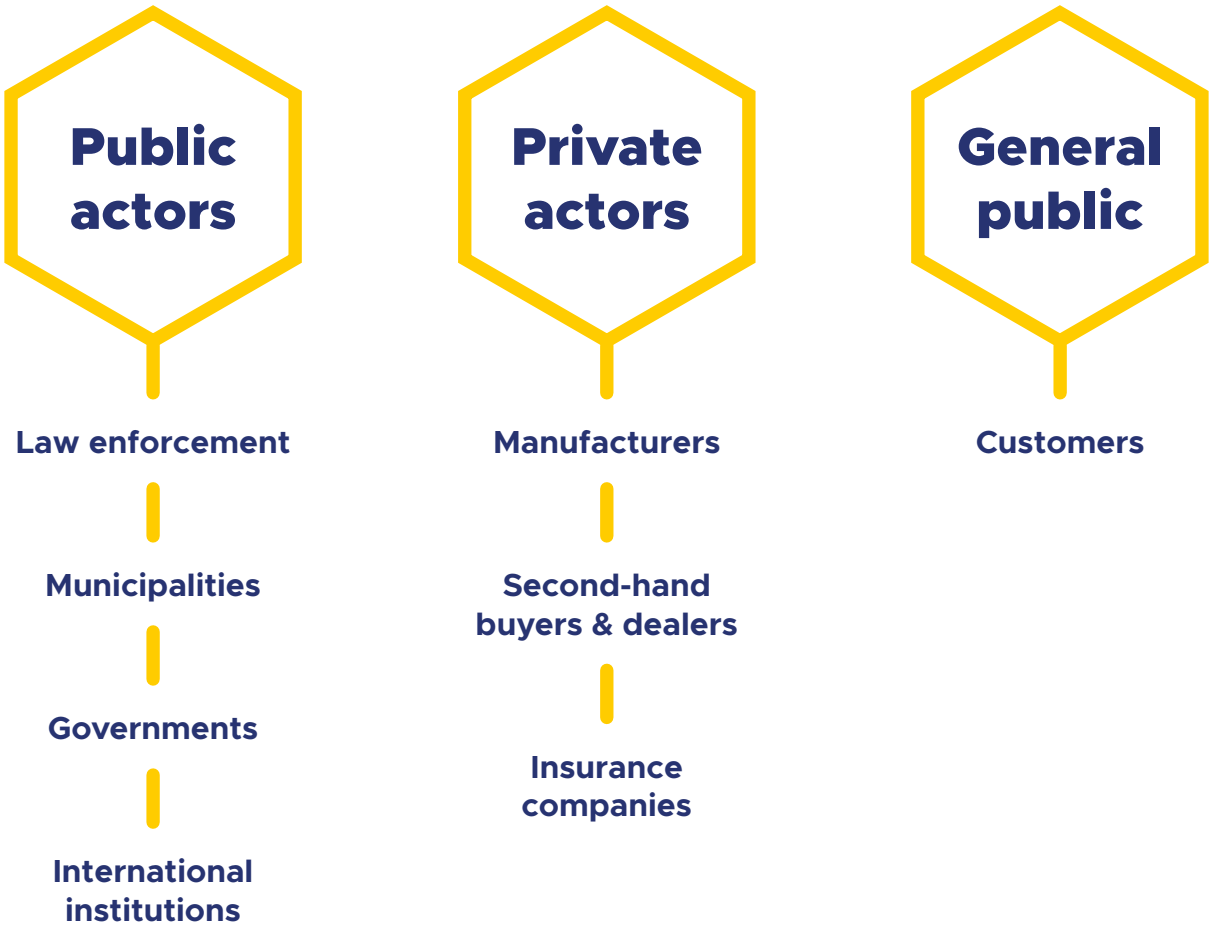

Figure 2: Necessary partners to involve in a holistic anti-fencing approach.

Public partners

Within the public sector, the most prominent partner to consider is **law enforcement**. They take on both a preventative (e.g. providing marking sessions) and reactive (e.g. data collection and sharing though databases or enforcing legislation) role against fencing. However, for different police departments to collaborate efficiently, they need to know which activities are or have been conducted by whom. For this exact purpose, the Dutch anti-fencing strategy implemented the Digital Buyer Control System. This is a shared database within law enforcement that provides an overview of which legal measures (e.g. police check-ups or fines) have already been carried out by which unit. It facilitates communication and collaboration between different departments.[59]

Furthermore, it is necessary for local and national police departments to set up international partnerships. Fencing is a trans-national phenomenon in which objects can be stolen in one country and sold in another. For this reason, specialist teams, for instance focused on stolen art or metals, could build formal and informal networks with teams from other countries to facilitate information-gathering and sharing. These partnerships can also improve the effectiveness of border controls. When receiving correct and accurate information on suspicious vehicles, for instance, police and customs can target their efforts more efficiently.[60]

A second public partner is the **local and national governments**. They can assist law enforcement by setting up a comprehensive anti-fencing strategy that includes legislation and administrative policies, such as the previously mentioned databases for law enforcement. Yet, their involvement can be extended by including certain departments and municipalities in the data collection procedures. The Digital Buyers Counter includes municipalities by providing essential information needed to follow up and monitor local businesses, consequently preventing fencing activities.[61]

Fencing is not considered a priority by all European Member States. Even if it is a general priority, not all objects that are prone to fencing are similarly prioritised. Goods such as boat engines or cultural goods are often less highlighted than cars or firearms. Therefore, governments can step up by identifying fencing as a general priority. They can furthermore inform law enforcement, through training or information sessions, about stolen objects they are less familiar with.[62]

A final public partner is **European institutions and organisations**. Many stolen goods are transported across national borders into different countries or even continents. For this reason, information-sharing and joint action should also be increased at a European level.[63]

One method already in place is the Schengen Information System (SIS). The SIS is a pan-European database that can be accessed by national authorities (e.g. police or border officers as well as vehicle, boat or aircraft registration authorities) and European agencies (e.g. Frontex or Europol). The system contains alerts on stolen objects, such as vehicles or firearms.[64] National authorities are responsible for entering data into their national databases, which are connected to the SIS. This is where a lot of problems occur. Firstly, by entering false data, a cascade of negative effects occurs, for instance by legitimate vehicles receiving a theft alert. A similar problem is entering insufficient data, such as the wrong or a limited fragment of a serial number. This happens due to numerous reasons. If officials are inexperienced with a certain object (e.g. a boat engine), they might not know which serial numbers to enter or how to recognise false numbers. Likewise, if a crime phenomenon is not a priority, law enforcement might not know what objects to look for or how to recognise suspicious activity. Therefore, less information on these objects will end up in the SIS. A final difficulty is the discrepancy between national databases and the SIS. Many national databases are not compatible with the SIS. For instance, several national databases only accept one serial number per object, however a boat engine, for instance, has several serial numbers, making it impossible to automatically link all those numbers to the SIS.[65]

To prevent information-sharing difficulties, all national databases should be updated to better match the SIS. This will consequently facilitate the data exchange between both levels. Moreover, national authorities should be better trained on gathering relevant data on all objects prone to fencing. Several institutions, such as the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) and Interpol, already organise information sessions and training regarding this topic. The focus, however, should be twofold. General sessions can provide basic education for all authorities that might come in contact with fencing, for instance police officers targeting drug gangs who use stolen cars for transport. Yet, specific trainings on a particular topic (e.g. the use of trackers) could bring together expert teams and create a knowledge exchange, as well as facilitating new partnerships.

Increasing privacy protection measures

An important matter to consider for databases containing personal information is the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This regulation imposes extensive obligations and restrictions (linked to penalties) on any organisation that collects or processes personal data on European citizens. This also includes the national and international databases mentioned in this paper.

Personal information can range from names or phone numbers to religious or political beliefs and IP addresses. The GDPR targets any action linked to this data, including collecting, using or erasing it.[66] It is therefore essential for any database containing personal information to integrate data protection into the technological design of the program to ensure the highest possible privacy protection. For instance, by encrypting data to limit its access to authorised personnel only.[67]

This regulation creates additional considerations for both public and private initiatives. A fencing database for instance, is only allowed to collect as much data as is absolutely necessary. It is for them to closely consider what information is essential for preventing fencing and what can be left out. In addition, the data needs to be accurate and kept up to date so far as is feasible. This is to say that, when a stolen vehicle is retrieved, the database administrators have a responsibility to update this information in the database.[68]

It is the responsibility of the owner of the database to keep up with all these rules. A private company obtaining such a database must be able to demonstrate GDPR compliance or else be held accountable. Various companies (e.g. Facebook and Google) have already received GDPR fines, yet these fines are often negligible compared to the profits these companies make. It is therefore necessary for fines to be increased in order to create a significant impact. Another stumbling block is the weak and irregular implementation of this regulation. Certain European Member States have not yet implemented the entire GDPR into their national legislation, making it difficult to fully enforce the regulation and its penalties across Europe.[69]

Apart from the SIS, many other European and international databases exist concerning various objects. Interpol's ID-Art app contains certified information on stolen cultural goods provided by law enforcement.[70] EUCARIS is another example that refers to the European Car and Driving Licence Information System, in which countries share various types of transport-related information (e.g. driving licence numbers and car registrations).[71] Similar difficulties arise in these systems. For instance, only a certain quality of photos is included in the ID-art database. A lot of information is therefore not included, since many people do not proactively photograph their belongings.[72]

However, the Interpol Stolen Motor Vehicle (SMV) database might pose as a good example. This is a database in which national law enforcement agencies can find information on stolen or suspicious vehicles (i.e. cars, lorries, trailers, caravans, and buses). Several car manufacturers are also included to facilitate the information collection and gather accurate information straight from the source. Another strength is the specialist task force consisting of experts, which supports the participating countries in their actions. This guarantees a level of expertise for national law enforcement to use.[73]

Private partners

Along with public partners, private partners constitute a relevant yet often forgotten sector.[74] First and foremost, the **manufacturers and second-hand dealers** of theft-prone goods should be involved. By taking preventative measures such as marking or gathering information for databases, manufacturers could make a big difference. They could engrave bikes or car parts during the production phase or add forensic marking to metals that are about to be sold. For jewellery or art, they could invest time in making certificates specifically linked to the object. This would take much of the responsibility away from customers and create a far more unified as well as established approach.[75]

Admittedly, not all manufacturers or dealers have the time or resources to implement such initiatives. Small jewellery stores might not have the personnel or expertise to provide descriptions for all their products. Retail chains and large brands might find it too expensive or insignificant to label all their clothes or car components with unique serial numbers.[76]

To tackle these issues, governments should promote prevention as well as offer support for manufacturers in their efforts. For instance, prevention could be considered an additional customer service that manufacturers and companies offer their clients. Bike manufacturers that add engravings to their products are putting in an effort that would otherwise be left to their customers. Along with promoting the additional benefits, prevention can also be reinforced by supporting the private sector through the use of handbooks or guidelines, information sessions and incentives. A short and understandable manual containing guidelines could help jewellery stores to create consistent descriptions of their products. Even incentives, such as a small tax reduction, could be offered to businesses that are implementing effective prevention strategies.[77]

A second private partner that is to be included are **insurance companies**. They can partner up with, for instance, a manufacturer selling motorcycles. In exchange for manufacturers automatically (forensically) marking their products, insurance companies could offer favourable rates or packages (e.g. a longer warranty period) to the customer who buys this motorcycle. Such an agreement is beneficial for everyone involved. Customers will receive a discount on insurance policies that they want or have to take on, while manufacturers and dealers could use this as an incentive to gain more customers. Moreover, insurance companies will suffer fewer losses, since their property has further protection.[78]

The general public

Finally, the general public plays an essential part in the continuation of fencing. By buying stolen goods, they allow for these markets to persist. It is therefore detrimental that probable customers are made aware of the risks and social harms of fencing. Governments, law enforcement, salespeople even insurance companies can present customers with prevention mechanisms for them to use.[79]

CONCLUSION

In order to tackle fencing, an elaborate approach aimed at several focus areas while including various partners is needed (see Table 1). This paper discusses four focus areas that make up the phenomenon of fencing. The first focus area targets frequently stolen goods by sharing some marking techniques, as well as methods for making stolen goods less sustainable. The second focus area is aimed at the fences and their customers by discussing databases and awareness-raising methods for reaching both target groups. The third focus area discusses several legislative and administrative measures that can be implemented to tackle stolen goods markets as a whole. Finally, the fourth overarching focus area elaborates on various stakeholders that should be included to tackle fencing as a whole.

Stolen goods	Fences and their customers	Stolen goods markets
Identifying goods through marking: - Serial numbers; - Engraving; - Forensic marking & microdots; - UV-markers.	**Targeting fences and their business:** - Fencing database; - Digital Buyers Register; - Digital Buyers system	**Legislation, policies & the administrative approach:** - Purchasing registers; - Digital Buyers system
Reducing the value of stolen goods: - Electronic immobilisers; - Tracking and blocking systems.	**Awareness raising towards customers:** - Campaigns (e.g. flyers) for customers and businesses; - Online communication (e.g. web pages and advertisements);	**Special focus on online markets:** - Use of a code of conduct with sanctions; - Online awareness-raising through push messages.
Local and (inter)national partnerships **Public partners:** - Law enforcement - Local & national governments - European institutions & organisations **Private partners:** - Manufacturers & second-hand dealers - Insurance companies & loan firms **The general public:** -Customers		

Table 1: Overview of the three focus areas and their respective prevention initiatives.

Factsheet

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TOWARDS FENCING

Manufacturer/ car brands

Marking the car parts with engravings and forensic marking;

-

Reducing the value of stolen parts by installing tracking mechanisms;

-

Collect and share data of the car parts in designated databases.

Insurance companies

Partner up with manufacturers and dealers and provide discounts for customers that bought a car with marked parts.

Customers

Checking the legitimacy of second-hand car parts before buying them;

-

Mark their own car and its parts.

Second-hand car dealerships

Checking the legitimacy of car parts they buy and sell;

-

Exchanging information with law enforcement in case of suspicious parts;

-

Keeping record of all car parts that are bought and sold.

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Hereby an overview of possible measures different stakeholders can implement to help prevent car parts from being stolen and sold afterwards.

Online marketspaces

Set up a code of conduct for online sellers;

-

Raise awareness for online customers using these websites.

Law enforcement

Facilitate information exchange by adding data to designated databases;

-

Set up cross-border partnerships to facilitate investigations;

-

Create awareness among the general public.

Municipalities and governments

Help law enforcement by providing tools;

-

Set up national legislation and policies for car parts dealers.

European institutions

Set up rules on how to mark car parts and how to register this information;

-

Provide databases and linking them to the national level;

-

Provide trainings for law enforcement to increase the general expertise.

To tackle fencing, an elaborate approach aimed at several focus areas while including various partners is needed. More info:
eucpn.org/document/recommendationpaper-fencing

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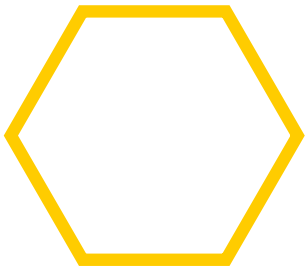

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