

Towards evidence-based crime prevention in the EU

Timeline: 2022-2025

Adopted by EUCPN Board on 8 December 2021

Background

1. To improve crime prevention at the local, national and European level, the EUCPN and its Secretariat (SEC) have several tools at their disposal. Fundamentally, the Network shares information and good practices regarding crime prevention. Yet, despite all foundational documents referring to ‘effective’, ‘evidence-based’ or ‘evaluated’ information, there has been no clear understanding of what the Network should share – or not. No fixed criteria or assessment procedures have ever been established and, as a result, there has been no quality assurance on what the Network shares among its members and the wider public. This Strategy lays out the framework for addressing this predicament and aspires to further improve the field while strengthening and supporting an evidence-based approach throughout the European Union.
2. However, some early steps have already been taken, as in the SEC’s publications, through the development of QUALIPREV¹ and the recent adoption of the Network’s definition of crime prevention.² These first steps and discussions culminated in the Multiannual Strategy 2021-2025 (MAS), where the Member States emphasised the evidence-based approach throughout the Network’s approach to continue improving crime prevention.
3. The present Strategy supports that goal and aims to improve the Network's internal functioning and processes in this sense.³ It includes:
 - a. A set of criteria that serve as minimum thresholds for assessing crime prevention interventions for further dissemination by the Network;
 - b. A set of other types of evidence and knowledge that the Network should continue to share with its target groups in order to improve the crime prevention field;
 - c. A roadmap containing the actions the Network will take to increase the uptake of evidence-based practice in the EU crime prevention field.

¹ In 2016, the Network subcontracted a study to Ghent University in a bid to assess the quality of projects. See Anneleen Rummens et al., *Criteria for the Evaluation of Crime Prevention Practices*, Research report, Brussels: EUCPN, 2016.

² 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”. See European Crime Prevention Network, *Crime Prevention: A European Definition*, Brussels: EUCPN, 2020.

³ European Crime Prevention Network, *Multiannual Strategy 2021-2025*, Brussels: EUCPN, 2020.

To share or not to share

4. As the conduit for good practices in crime prevention, the EUCPN and its target groups will benefit from having clear criteria that establish what should or should not be shared under the label of 'good practice'. These good practices rely on current evidence and other quality criteria that assist the target groups to select effective preventive action to emulate in addressing their own crime problem in their own context and simultaneously facilitate efforts at knowledge synthesis across projects.⁴
5. Henceforth, the following minimum criteria will have to be met before a crime prevention intervention⁵ can be disseminated by the EUCPN under the label of 'good practice':⁶

- a. **There is a clear description of the crime problem(s) the activity wishes to address**

Crime prevention is aimed at reducing the risk of crime occurring and its harmful consequences. Project descriptions should clearly define what specific crime problem(s) the activity wishes to prevent. Among other things, this contains information and evidence about its nature, scale, context, involved actors, etc.

- b. **There is a clear description of the way in which the intervention addresses the identified problem(s) and why it is expected to be effective**

Project descriptions provide information about the targeting of the intervention (universal, selective, indicative); its beneficiaries; statements on why the intervention is expected to work (underlying mechanisms, principles, logic model, theory of change,...); and indications of any contextual factors that may have been necessary for success.

- c. **There should be a robust and positive outcome evaluation, or at least strong indications of theoretical plausibility**

The intervention presents convincing evidence of its effectiveness, while also describing the methodology of the underlying evaluation (approach, design, basic parameters, etc.). Tested theory can be used both to buttress empirical

⁴ The burden of proof for meeting these criteria lies with the interventions. The process of capturing this information will, however, be facilitated by the EUCPN and guided by an updated framework (cf. *infra*).

⁵ These minimum criteria can be applied to projects that can cover both individual interventions and general implementation systems (where a programme both empowers and guides local actors to select interventions from a menu of evidence-based methods or principles, e.g. Communities That Care).

⁶ Karen Bullock and Paul Ekblom, Richness, Retrievability and Reliability—Issues in a Working Knowledge Base for Good Practice in Crime Prevention, *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 16:1 (2010); Anja Meyer et al., The Beccaria Standards for Ensuring Quality in Crime Prevention Projects, and Ruth Linssen (Eds.) (2005).

evidence of effectiveness, and to substitute for it in circumstances when none is available. This leaves space for innovative interventions that may not yet have had the chance of measuring their effects or in cases where evaluation is difficult.

d. There is sufficient information available about the nature of the intervention, its original context, and the implementation of the activities to help practitioners select, replicate or innovate from it

The project provides sufficient information about the nature of the intervention, its original context, and the implementation of its activities. This includes information regarding the planned and achieved inputs, processes, outputs; institutional and organisational contexts; mode of delivery; and management. This information should allow practitioners to select, replicate or innovate from this activity in ways that are intelligently customised to their own local problem and context.

6. Good practices alone are, of course, not the sole influence on policymaking and practice.⁷ Other considerations include political preferences, democratic legitimacy, cultural beliefs, values, available resources, and other contextual specificities. To accommodate this reality, the EUCPN will continue to share and facilitate the use of additional information originating from research, evidence and other sources of knowledge.⁸ Effective crime prevention needs to

a. Know why (preventive) action is needed

Policy and practice need to know why action is needed to address a given problem, and specifically why preventive action would be necessary and beneficial. These issues relate to matters as values, ethics, criminal justice, future policy directions, etc.

b. Know about crime problems, their nature, patterns, trends, causes, offenders, victims, etc.

Dealing with crime problems requires knowledge about its nature, patterns, trends, causes, offenders, victims, consequences, context, etc. Only when there is an understanding of the complexity of crime problems, can prevention efforts be tailored efficiently and effectively.

⁷ David P. Farrington and Brandon C. Welsh, *The Science and Politics of Crime Prevention: Toward a New Crime Policy*, in: David P. Farrington and Brandon C. Welsh (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Crime Prevention*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁸ Paul Ekblom, *Crime Prevention, Security and Community Safety Using the 5is Framework*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; H.T. Davies and A.E. Powell, *Communicating Social Research Findings More Effectively: What Can We Learn from Other Fields?*, *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice* 8:2 (2012).

c. **Know who to involve in designing and implementing interventions**

Crime prevention is not a one-person or one-agency job. The complexity of crime problems necessitates the identification and involvement of various actors. This includes setting up partnerships that work across different policy domains and actors to design and implement interventions together.

d. **Know how to put actions into practice**

Process knowledge or know-how informs action and practice. Although remaining largely tacit, this includes knowledge of the implementation of interventions, while always respecting ethical issues, matters of privacy, aesthetics, fair distribution, etc.⁹ It also encompasses an understanding of contextual factors (value systems, institutional frameworks, target group, characteristics) which is especially relevant when transferring interventions from one setting to another.

e. **Know how to evaluate**

Evaluation helps to know if policies and programmes have their desired effects, provide value for money and have no negative or unintended consequences. Evaluation contributes to better planning, more efficient resource allocation, lessons learned and identification of areas of improvement, and helps create more transparency and accountability. Practitioners and policy makers need to know how to evaluate their interventions, how to design relevant indicators, who to involve in the evaluation, etc.

f. **Know what works and what does not**

Synthesising evidence helps to make the most out of the available resources by presenting what is effective and what is not, at a higher level of abstraction. This synthesis should also inform practice and policy with how interventions are supposed to work and in which contexts they are effective. These provide transferable lessons learned about what (not) to do, leading up to an accumulation of knowledge that in turn leads to more and better informed policy making and practice.

Increasing the uptake of evidence- based practice

7. Getting research findings into practice is traditionally portrayed as bridging the 'knowledge gap': a gap between active evidence producers (research) and passive evidence users (policy and practice). The gap is present because policy and practice do not know this evidence, do not find it useful or ignore it. Closing this gap is

⁹ European Crime Prevention Network, Crime Prevention: A European Definition.

commonly attempted by pushing out information to its users, hoping that this increased awareness will change their daily practice. This, however, has been proven largely ineffective.¹⁰ Effective approaches, on the other hand, address this ‘gap’ as an ecosystem, where all players interact, where research is more attuned to the needs of policy and practice, and where efforts are also made to increase the motivation to use evidence.¹¹

8. To increase the uptake of evidence-based practice effectively, the EUCPN and its SEC will update existing tools and activities and design new approaches. These are presented below together with an action roadmap.
9. The exact implementation of the various actions is to be specified in the yearly Work Programmes of the EUCPN. The Strategy, however, sets out the broader time frames in which these actions must be completed:
 - a. Short-term: 2022-2023
 - b. Medium-term: 2024-2025
10. Responsibilities are divided among the SEC, the Board and its Members, and the Advisory Board. The Board and its Members, in accordance with the Council Decision¹² and Rules of Procedure¹³ have a pivotal role in providing the link between the European, national and local level. Every National Representative should promote the Network’s activities as well as facilitate the provision, maintenance and interactive exchange of crime prevention knowledge between the Member State, its national and local activities and the Network.
11. In case of shared responsibilities, the first listed actor leads the action.

Facilitating access to research and evidence

12. The EUCPN produces a variety of publications (toolboxes, recommendation papers, myth-busters,...) and also hosts a crime prevention registry. All of these share research and evidentiary content that is linked to the Network's priorities. To guarantee the scientific quality and practical relevance of this output, the following actions will be taken to facilitate the access to research and evidence for practice and policy and increase the opportunity to make use of it.
 - a. Improving the communication of research and evidentiary content

Actions	Timing	Responsible
Tailor SEC publications and communications and address segmented target groups (programme)	Short-term	SEC Board

¹⁰ Laurenz Langer, Janice Tripney, and David Gough, *The Science of Using Science: Researching the Use of Research Evidence in Decision-Making*, London: EPPI-Centre, University College London, 2016.

¹¹ Ibid.; EMCDDA, *Drug Prevention: Exploring a Systems Perspective*, Technical report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019; Rosemary Rushmer et al., *Knowledge Translation: Key Concepts, Terms and Activities*, in: Marieke Verschuuren and Hans van Oers (Eds.), *Population Health Monitoring: Climbing the Information Pyramid*, Cham: Springer, 2019.

¹² Council of the European Union, *Decision 2009/902/JHA: Setting up a European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN)*, Brussels, 2009.

¹³ European Crime Prevention Network, *Rules of Procedure*, Brussels: EUCPN, 14 Mar. 2018.

managers, front line practitioners, policymakers) ensuring its relevance		
Communicate in easily understandable language, only using jargon if needed or appropriate and ensure such terms are defined in a glossary	Short-term	SEC
Produce attractive and easily accessible output, exploring new and interactive ways of communicating publications such as videos, factsheets, conferences, webinars and podcasts	Short-term	SEC Board
Activate more resources to translate publications into the various languages of the Member States. When resources are low, translating glossaries or executive summaries can serve as an alternative	Medium-term	SEC Board

b. Ensuring quality and relevance of output

Actions	Timing	Responsible
Consult the target groups while preparing publications or other output. This includes asking for feedback, and bringing in their perspective and experience	Short-term	SEC Board
Consult with academic experts while preparing publications or other output	Short-term	SEC Advisory Board
Guarantee bottom-up agenda-setting, including an assessment of the current process deciding topics and timelines	Medium-term	Board SEC

c. Updating the crime prevention registry and knowledge capturing process of interventions

Actions	Timing	Responsible
Create assessment methodology for new crime prevention registry, using QUALIPREV as its starting point	Short-term	SEC
Pilot and assess new crime prevention registry, ensuring user-friendly design	Medium-term	SEC Board
Renew the ECPA entry form to maximise knowledge capturing from good practices, using the 5Is framework	Short-term	SEC Board

Increasing the capacity of prevention workforce to use and produce evidence

13. To improve and evaluate individual practices, the prevention workforce would benefit from additional training and support. This will increase its capacity to use evidence, while simultaneously enhancing the effectiveness of those interventions and expanding the current evidence base.

a. Training

Actions	Timing	Responsible
Develop and implement training on evaluating crime prevention, using a train-the-trainer model	Short-term	SEC Board
Develop and implement training on crime prevention knowledge and evidence, using a train-the-trainer model	Medium-term	SEC Board

b. Support

Actions	Timing	Responsible
Provide evidence-based	Short-term	SEC

counsel to Network requests		
Offer technical assistance to practitioners and policy makers wishing to make use of evidence or to conduct an evaluation	Medium-term	SEC Board

Increasing the motivation to use and produce evidence, including strategies to influence national and local policy.

14. To increase the uptake of evidence-based practice, the motivation to use and produce evidence should be enhanced. This not only refers to individual motivation, but also to favourable organisational cultures and beliefs. This increased motivation will ultimately create a “pull dynamic” from policy and practice to use and produce evidence.

a. Advocacy and incentives

Actions	Timing	Responsible
Communicate about the benefits of evidence-based practice and popularising its implementation	Short-term	SEC Board
Create social incentives and identity cues that support the formation of professional norms favouring evidence-based practice	Medium-term	SEC Board
Provide financial and reputational incentives for evidence-based practice through the Best Practice Conference and European Crime Prevention Award	Short-term	Board
Offer technical assistance to promising or innovative interventions	Medium-term	SEC Board
Build a ‘change team’ with a compact but committed group of practitioners and policymakers wishing to work (more) evidence-based	Medium-term	SEC Board

- b. Support national and local strategies aiming to build organisational capacities or targeting organisational culture

Actions	Timing	Responsible
Support national and local implementations of the activities proposed in this Strategy	Medium-term	Board SEC
Support and encourage national and local changes to institutional frameworks and mechanisms (e.g. improve and harmonize information capture on interventions, conditional funding, accreditation processes, organisational learning, etc.)	Medium-term	Board SEC

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