Summary

Suspected of crime
A closer look at persons of foreign and Dutch heritage

Reason for the study

This report describes the proportion of population groups of foreign or Dutch origin among those persons recorded by the police – after completing criminal investigations – as suspects of crime. For the very first time, statistical information has been compiled at a national level on the background of suspects of crime registered by the police, by linking these police registrations to a range of CBS data. The outcome is the result of a joint research project of WODC and CBS at the request of the Criminal Investigations Policy and Judicial Youth Policy departments of the Ministry of Justice.

Even back in 1997, the Memorandum on Crime in relation to the Integration of Ethnic Minorities (CRIEM) drew attention to the criminal involvement of members of ethnic minorities that is out of proportion to their numbers. Various studies point to an overrepresentation of such persons throughout the criminal system, from the police's computerised records system (HKS) and registration with the Public Prosecution Service to the penal institutions themselves. Today, more than seven years later, the situation has not changed and the government observes in the Annual Memorandum on Integration Policy 2004 (Lower House, 2004) that an excessive involvement of minority groups in crime can be regarded as an expression of few ties with society, which in itself is an expression of inadequate integration. The Action Programme on Justice for Young People (*Jeugd Terecht*), which aims to tackle youth crime, also requires a greater understanding of the ethnic backgrounds of the perpetrators in order to deliver more individual solutions for preventing, investigating and prosecuting crime. Registration of the ethnic origin of groups in crime has been a taboo subject for many years. However, in order to target crime effectively and achieve a proper balance in the policy pursued, a careful analysis based on accurate information is essential. Although there are strong indications that ethnic groups account for a relatively large share of crime, the sources, which should confirm this, have serious limitations (Kromhout and Van San, 2003). The records, on which statistics on investigation, prosecution and trials are based, in fact, only record the country of birth and nationality. The proportion of persons of Dutch origin born in the Netherlands and (second-generation) members of foreign origin is therefore unknown.

For this study, use has been made of the work carried out by the National Criminal Intelligence Service (DNRI) to build up a national database of suspects from the 25 regional HKS files. This database (reference date 2002) has been linked to the Social Statistical Database (SSB) of CBS, which also contains information from the municipal personal records database (GBA). The procedure was submitted to the Dutch Data Protection Authority (CBP),

which approved the procedure being followed. The result of the link between the police registration HKS and SSB is a database of persons who were registered in the Netherlands in 2002, with both the features of the crimes of which they are suspected and which they have been suspected of committing in the past, as well as their demographic and socio-economic backgrounds. The wealth of data this provides is self-evident, and its comprehensive nature means that it is possible to categorise the information in detail according to country of origin. Smaller immigrant groups such as those of newcomers can also be identified. The information also allows us to outline the demographic and socio-economic backgrounds of these various (small) immigrant groups.

Research questions

The central questions in the study were:
— What is the (absolute and relative) number of suspects among the population groups of Dutch origin and foreign origin and what crimes are they suspected of committing?
— How are suspected perpetrators and features of the crimes committed related to demographic and socio-economic features of these population groups?

Method

The computerised records system (*Herkenningsdienstsysteem – HKS*) provides national coverage, which has been used by the police since 1986 to record information on suspects. It contains both information on the reporting of crime as well as personal information on the suspects of these crimes. One or more official reports may be made against a single suspect in one year, while an official report may in its turn involve several offences. The information includes persons who are at least 12 years old and are named as suspects in a report of a crime. The HKS contains information on such matters as the offence, but also personal information on the suspect such as date of birth, sex, country of birth and nationality.
The HKS also has its limitations. It does not provide a complete description of crime in the Netherlands.
The information from the special investigation services (FIOD-ECD, Customs) is not included in the HKS. Various types of crime, such as economic crime, environmental crime or benefit fraud are therefore underrepresented in the HKS. In addition, the HALT settlements (out-of-court settlements offered by the Public Prosecution Service to juvenile offenders involving community or educational tasks) are not included. The perpetrators who are not caught, crimes for which no official report has been drawn up or crimes, which do not come to the attention of the police, are not recorded. In addition, the information concerns perpetrators and not those convicted of the crimes. Actually, an estimated 90% of suspects are offered an out-of-court settlement by the PPS, or are found guilty in court at a later stage.

The Social Statistics Database (SSB) links about twenty registers (including those of the Tax and Customs Administration, benefit agencies and the Information Management Group) to the GBA per individual. This link enables the SSB to provide information on all inhabitants of the Netherlands concerning demographic features of persons and households, work, benefits and income. Based on the information from the GBA – that forms part of the SSB – the origin of the various groups (dividing the population into those of Dutch origin and first and second generation immigrants) can be established. In addition to these records, population surveys are linked to the SSB so that missing data can be added on a random sample basis. We have used the SSB data for 2001-2002 in our analysis.

There are advantages and disadvantages of using information from these records. Although records are generally comprehensive so that random sampling errors or problems of a selective non-response will not occur, the quality of the administrative information is not always adequate. In addition, not all theoretically desirable variables can be put into operation on the basis of registered information. A total of 89.9% of the *records* could be interlinked.

Grouping by country of origin is the feature that shows which country a person has an actual affinity with, given the country of birth of the parents or the person himself. This serves first and foremost to make a distinction between those of Dutch origin and those of foreign origin. A person *of foreign origin* is someone with at least one parent born abroad. A *first-generation person of foreign origin* is someone born abroad with at least one parent born abroad. A *second-generation person of foreign origin* is someone born in the Netherlands with at least one parent born abroad. A *person of Dutch origin* is a person whose parents were both born in the Netherlands.

In view of the substantial differences in socio-economic and cultural situations, two main categories are distinguished in accordance with the definitions used by Statistics Netherlands (CBS): Western and non-Western immigrant groups.

Results

The origin of suspects
By placing the emphasis on the share of the various population groups in (recorded) crime, it is easily forgotten that only a small minority of the population comes into contact with the police as suspects. In 2002, 0.9% of persons of Dutch origin were recorded as suspects by the police, and 2.2% of members of migrant groups.

Of all men belonging to immigrant groups, 3.8% were recorded as suspects in the HKS, compared to 1.6% of men of Dutch origin, and 0.7% of women belonging to immigrant groups (compared to 0.3% of women of Dutch origin). In absolute numbers, the largest groups apart from those of Dutch origin (102,000) are the Moroccans and the Surinamese with more than 10,000 persons each, followed by the Turks (7,500) and Antilleans (6,600). Within immigrant groups, the percentage of suspects among the first generation is somewhat higher than among the second generation. In

contrast to this *overall* picture, the results of the Moroccans and Turks, and a few smaller groups, show a different picture, with the percentage of suspects from the second generation being higher than that from the first generation. Significant differences can be observed, however, between Western and non-Western migrants, within both the first and second generation. The highest percentage of suspects is among male members of non-Western, second-generation immigrant groups. Of these, 7.1% were recorded by the police in 2002 as suspects. This result is more than three times higher than among male members of Western, second-generation immigrants.

Table	Percentage of suspects in 2002 according to group of origin, generation, sex and age category						
	total %	male	female	12-17 yrs	18-24 yrs	25-44 yrs	45-79 yrs
total of which	1.2	2.0	0.4	1.6	2.6	1.5	0.6
of Dutch origin	0.9	1.6	0.3	1.3	2.2	1.2	0.5
of foreign origin of which	2.2	3.8	0.7	3.1	4.4	2.9	1.0
1st generation of which	2.3	3.9	0.8	3.4	4.7	2.9	1.2
Western	1.3	2.1	0.5	2.1	2.6	1.5	0.8
non-Western	2.9	4.9	0.9	4.2	5.9	3.7	1.5
2nd generation of which	2.1	3.6	0.6	2.6	3.9	2.8	0.7
Western	1.3	2.2	0.5	1.9	2.9	1.7	0.6
non-Western	4.0	7.1	0.9	4.2	6.4	4.7	1.2

Dividing the suspects into the various groups of origin produces a highly diverse picture. In 2002 there were a total of 56 immigrant groups of at least 4,000 persons in the Netherlands. Of these, the population groups from the Dominican Republic (5.9%) and Antilles (5.6%) account for the largest group of recorded suspects, while many groups of African origin are found among the top fifteen population groups. Angola (4.9%), Congo (4.5%), Sierra Leone (3.9%), Tunisia (3.7%) and Algeria (3.7%), Morocco (3.3%), the Cape Verde Islands (3.3%), Nigeria (3.2%), Somalia (3.1%) and Ethiopia (2.7%) have also high percentages.. Surinam (3.6%), the former Soviet Union (3.1%) and Iran (2.8%) complete these 15 population groups with the highest percentages. Relatively low percentages are found among most population groups of West-European and Asian origin. Also people of western origin – United States, Canada, South Africa and Australia – show low percentages of suspects. Japanese, with 0,6%, show relatively the lowest percentage of suspects, as do the Danish (0,7%) and the Hong Kong Chinese immigrants (0,7%).

Suspects recorded in the HKS
The results show that 61,000 of the total of 163,000 suspects recorded in the HKS in 2002 were of foreign origin. Of these suspects, 39,000 belong to the first and 22,000 to the second generation. Almost three times more suspects belonging to non-Western ethnic groups (46,000) were recorded as those of Western origin (almost 16,000).

This means that 37.5% of all recorded suspects of a crime living in the Netherlands are of foreign origin (including those of the second generation). The proportion of these persons in the suspect population is therefore twice as high as the proportion these ethnic groups form in the Dutch population as a whole.

Of all recorded suspects, one quarter belong to first-generation immigrants, and roughly one in seven from the second generation. Members of non-Western immigrant groups above all are overrepresented in these crime figures. Within this group, the proportion of the first generation in the suspect population is almost three times more that should be expected based on the proportion this group forms in the total population. Of the second generation this is almost four times more.

Juveniles

We examined the situation concerning *juveniles* in greater detail. The police more often records juveniles of foreign origin as suspects than juveniles of Dutch origin. Among those aged between 12 and 17 years the percentages are 3.1% and 1.3% respectively, and among those aged 18 to 24 years old this is 4.4% and 2.2% respectively. The age too at which they are reported for a crime for the first time is on average lower among immigrant groups than among juveniles of Dutch origin. The results are somewhat skewed because HALT settlements are not included in the data. It is precisely in the 12-17 years age category that a relatively large number of crimes are settled through HALT projects. Since persons of Dutch origin are overrepresented in HALT settlements, the results for these persons are somewhat underestimated.

The general picture that there is a problem group among those of Antillean and Moroccan origin is supported by our results. Among Moroccans, both the first and second generations are more frequently suspected of a crime than persons of Dutch origin and most other ethnic groups. They are involved relatively more frequently in property crime, whereas among the Antillean population it is mostly juveniles of the first generation that are involved, with a strikingly high percentage of girl suspects (4.5% of Antillean girls). Second-generation Antilleans are even more frequently recorded as suspects compared to juveniles of Dutch origin, but less frequently than the first generation. Both with the first and second generation of Antilleans, the 15-17 years age group are relatively frequently recorded as suspects. Among the Antilleans, 'other crimes' as well as property crime are relatively frequently involved, including drugs related crime.

As well as these two categories, the second generation of persons of Yugoslavian origin are relatively frequent suspects, here too often in the 15-17 years age group and frequently involving property crime. Surinamese juveniles are also suspected of crime more often than persons of Dutch origin.

If we analyse in greater detail the suspect population in the HKS, we reach the following main conclusions. Of the first generation, we can classify the majority of suspects from each group of origin as a young first offender. An exception to this is the group from Morocco, where the majority from the first and second generation are multiple or persistent offenders. Of the Turkish suspects of the second generation with one parent born abroad and

suspects from former Yugoslavia with both parents born abroad, more than half are multiple or persistent offenders. Among the second generation, children of two foreign parents are more frequently offenders than children from mixed marriages.

Demographic and socio-economic features of suspects
In order to answer the second question posed by the study, namely the relationship between being a suspect of crime and the features of crime and demographic and socio-economic features of the suspects, a selection was made of a number of prevailing static and dynamic criminogenic factors based on criminological literature. First, simple relationships were investigated, after which multi-variate analyses were carried out to gain an understanding of how strongly each of these features, and in particular the origin of the suspects, are related to the incidence of being recorded as a suspect by the police. The purpose of these latter analyses was to examine to what extent the underlying circumstances that are potentially conducive to crime – such as a weak socio-economic status – could offer a better explanation for a higher percentage of the suspect population.

Age and sex appear to be strongly related to whether or not one is recorded as a suspect by the police. Men are considerably more frequently recorded as suspects. Suspects are most often found among those aged 18 to 20 years: the likelihood of becoming a suspect rises in the 12-18 yrs age category and then falls again after 21 years.

The differences between the groups *of origin* appear sometimes to be substantial. After correcting for various background features that are known to explain (being a suspect of) crime such as age (e.g., young adults commit more crime than older persons), sex, type of household, educational qualifications, dependence on benefit, percentage of those in the neighbourhood belonging to non-Western immigrant groups, the relationship with origin is still very strong. In other words: the above-mentioned background features go a long way to explain the differences between persons of Dutch and foreign origin in the extent to which they are recorded as suspects by the police. However, although the overrepresentation of most migrant groups among recorded suspects is relatively smaller, it is still present.
There are also clear differences between first-generation immigrants and those from the second generation where one or both parents were born abroad. In almost all immigrant groups the second generation with two parents born abroad have higher percentages of suspects than the second generation with one parent born abroad.

Among *juveniles between 12 and 17 years old*, nearly all immigrant groups, with the exception of German, South American and Indonesian juveniles and first-generation Asians, are recorded as suspects relatively more frequently than persons of Dutch origin. For the first generation group of Antillean, Aruban and Moroccan juveniles, the likelihood of being recorded as a suspect of a crime is three times greater than for persons of Dutch origin.

If the analysis is limited to violent crime, the likelihood of these groups being suspects is 3.5 times greater than for persons of Dutch origin.

The second generation of juveniles with two parents originating from Yugoslavia (recorded 4.1 times more often, relatively speaking, than persons of Dutch origin), Morocco (3.5 times) and the Antilles and Aruba (2.3 times) appear relatively frequently in registers of suspects, even after taking into account other background features.

Drop-out rates from school are often regarded as potential indicators of crime. The likelihood of a young person *without school qualifications* being suspected of committing a crime is almost 2.5 times greater than that of a young person who has school qualifications, even after a correction for other background features. Young people without an educational qualification are also 2.5 times more often found in registers of suspects of a violent crime compared to young people with educational qualifications. The importance of this feature is also evident from the proportion of the variance that this explains: as well as the group origin, age and sex, educational qualifications also explain the likelihood of being recorded as a suspect more than all other background features together that have been examined here.

Roughly speaking, a comparable picture is obtained among young people aged *18 to 19 years.* In general, members of immigrant groups are more likely to be suspects than persons of Dutch origin. There are a few exceptions, though: the first generation of Indonesians and West-Europeans and the first and second generation of Asian immigrants are in fact relatively less frequently recorded as suspects than the population of Dutch origin, and there is no difference between first-generation West Europeans and the population of Dutch origin.

The results for first-generation Antilleans and second-generation Moroccans where both parents were born abroad are the most striking. The latter are almost four times more likely to be suspects than persons of Dutch origin, taking into account the other background features.

Apart from the above-mentioned group origin, persons with the following features are also overrepresented in the population of suspects: men, single-person households, and those dependent on benefit. The risk of becoming a suspect rises until about 20 years of age and then declines again.

Significance of the findings

A few general conclusions
Statements on the number of suspects and the crimes they are suspected of committing must be distinguished from statements on the nature and extent of crime in the Netherlands. There is a large 'dark number'. In *Criminaliteit en Rechtshandhaving 2001* (Crime and Legal Enforcement) (Van der Heide & Eggen, 2003, p.199) it is estimated that 4.65 million crimes were committed against the civilian population in 2001, of which only 1.6 million (34%) were reported to the police. This led to 277,000 interviewed suspects.

Within this context a number of general conclusions can be drawn from our results. Although only a small percentage of the various population groups

are recorded as suspects of crime by the police, there are some groups that are cause for concern.

At the same time it can also be observed that the differences that exist between groups of foreign and Dutch origin can be half 'explained' because of differences in age and sex. Moreover, by taking account of socio-economic features, another significant number of differences disappear, even despite the limited measurement of socio-economic status in this study. The conclusion that members of immigrant groups are generally more frequently suspected of crime does not change as a result, but also shows that only considering this factor is rather one-sided.

The second generation of members of non-Western immigrant groups perform relatively badly, in contrast to what is often thought. Positive exceptions are Asians and second-generation immigrants from South and Central America.

Also striking is the finding that those of the second generation with both parents of foreign origin are (relatively) frequently recorded as suspects by the police compared to those who have one parent of Dutch origin and one of foreign origin. This raises the question whether parental involvement and participation in Dutch society is a protective factor against criminal behaviour of their children. Further study will have to show whether this is indeed the case and, if so, how a positive influence can be exerted on this.

There are marked differences between immigrant groups as regards the distribution of suspects according to age and across the generations. This means that a more precise study of these groups must be made to find out exactly what is going on in order to explain patterns of crime (see Kromhout and Van San, 2003). This study is merely a first step, based on a limited number of features available in the records.

How can we explain the differences?
Literature on ethnic differences in crime tends to focus more attention on the prevalence (the extent of occurrence) of ethnic differences in criminal behaviour than on the question whether the causes of such behaviour are the same among the various ethnic groups (Loeber and Farrington, 2004). These authors state that whoever is interested in the putative causes of ethnic differences should also study the prevalence of risk factors in each ethnic group. Attention should also be given to the question whether the effect of an accumulation of risk factors and the 'dose-response relationship' (the higher the number of risk factors, the greater the risk of delinquency) vary between migrant groups.

We have to conclude that the background features we have studied only provide a picture of some of the differences in the likelihood of being a suspect to the police. This raises the question whether other and/or better characteristics should not be selected that would be better predictors of crime and would be relevant to crime policy. It is important to remember in this respect that many of the 'risk factors' mentioned in the literature (see e.g. Loeber et al, 2001) in fact do not provide a sufficient explanation. For example, there is a relationship between poverty and crime, but this is not a direct causal link: after all, the majority of people on low incomes by far do

not commit crime. It is more often an exception than the rule. The same applies to the feature of 'origin'. As this study has shown, only a small minority of persons from immigrant groups are recorded as suspects by the police, and within the group that is recorded, we can observe differences. 'Origin' is a blanket term that provides an insufficient basis for a generally effective policy on crime.

With many of the possible criminological explanations and/or risk factors put forward, the question still remains as to why only a minority of persons who find themselves in a high-risk situation choose to perpetrate or end up perpetrating criminal activities.

The factor of *social capital* could form an interesting impetus for creating a further theoretical basis for research into (ethnic) background and crime in which the interaction between the individual and environment is properly acknowledged. Social ties and relationships and the shared knowledge, standards, rules and expectations present within these relationships form the core of this approach. Shedding light on the social bonds *within*, for example, the ethnic groups, the social bridges with members of other groups and the social links with institutions such as government bodies (Ager & Strang, 2004) can help to clarify how people do or do not get involved in crime. The choices that people ultimately make and the degree to which they make use of their own social networks and those further removed from them can be explained through the social capital approach. This may help to clarify what type of approach to crime at what level (individual, group, society) would seem to be the most effective.

Origin and crime
Although certain subgroups within particular immigrant groups perform relatively badly, obviously it would be unwise to make generalised conclusions about the relationship between origin and crime, and such conclusions are often not correct. More insight into the underlying processes and mechanisms among the various groups is required. At the very least it would be especially relevant to try and find out why some immigrant groups (such as Asians) 'do well' as far as criminal behaviour is concerned – sometimes even better than persons of Dutch origin – and to what extent we can learn any lessons from this. What are their formulae for success, and can these be applied and used in today's problem groups?