



## Summary and conclusions of the survey 'Alerting systems needs'

Survey assigned by the WODC. April 2013

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### A. Background and implementation of the survey

#### Background

In recent years, various types of alerting systems have been developed to transfer information and/or get in contact with the public regarding their safety. These alerting systems serve different purposes. Systems such as Amber Alert and Burgernet are deployed to involve the public in tracing missing people and/or suspects of crimes.

In order to inform the public of incidents (such as crises and other emergencies), the alerting system NL-Alert has been introduced in 2012. To gain more insight into the perception and expectations of the public, the WODC of the Ministry of Safety and Justice has been commissioned to carry out a needs assessment.

#### Objective

The objective of this assessment is to provide insight into the expectations and needs of the public with respect to the use of alerting systems by the government. The assessment provides the government reference points in how to stimulate the public to register and commit themselves to alerting systems. In addition, the results can be used as input for an effective deployment of alerting systems that match the public's wishes and expectations.

#### Target group and assessments setup

The assessment aims to establish the perception and needs of both participants of alerting systems as well as people who (as yet) do not participate in alerting systems. The assessment has been carried out by means of a literature study, interviews and an online questionnaire among 400 participants and 800 non-participants.

### B. Perception and expectations of alerting systems

#### AMBER Alert awareness is significant; Burgernet and NL-Alert (as yet) much less known

The awareness of AMBER Alert is significant. Virtually all (95%) non-participants know the alerting system at least by name and in most cases people are also aware of the content. As a relatively new system, Burgernet is less known. Approximately one third of the non-participants know what Burgernet entails. NL-Alert is known by two thirds of the non-participants in alerting systems and one in every six knows what the alerting system entails.

#### Broad support for involving the public in solving crimes and tracing missing people

Both participants as well as non-participants in alerting systems largely believe it to be a good thing that the government involves the public in solving crimes and tracing missing people. There is also confidence in the effectiveness of the alerting systems. A large majority is of the opinion that the current alerting systems contribute positively to finding missing people, apprehending suspects and mitigating the consequences of incidents. Deploying the public in tracing missing children gets a lot of



support. To a somewhat lesser extent, this applies to tracing suspects of crimes. Although the support among non-participants is also significant, participants are significantly more positive towards alerting systems by the government.

A lot of public support for alerting systems for disasters and emergencies

There is also a lot of support for alerting systems regarding disasters and emergencies. Both participants in alerting systems as well as non-participants largely believe it to be a good thing that in case of disasters and emergencies the government informs the people present in the crisis area by mobile phone what is going on and gives instructions on the best course of action.

From the population there are no clear preferences for the amount of alerting systems: the majority is satisfied with the current amount

Most participants and non-participants have no strong opinions on the amount of alerting systems in our country. The opinions are balanced, whereby the majority considers the current amount to be sufficient. The group that does believe in expanding the number of systems is approximately the same as the amount of people that call for a reduction. The latter group has forwarded the suggestion of combining a number of existing alerting systems into one system. The group who would prefer to have more systems raised various different suggestions including alerts for missing pets, extreme weather and for the traffic situation.

### C. Appreciation for the workings of alerting systems

Participants have a lot of appreciation for AMBER Alert and Burgernet; the alerts are virtually always clear and reliable

Participants in AMBER Alert and Burgernet are largely positive about the systems in which they participate. Most non-participants who are broadly familiar with AMBER Alert and Burgernet, generally judge these alerting systems positively.

Participants who have received an alert at one point in time are positive regarding the clarity and the reliability of the alerts in virtually all cases. A majority is also satisfied on the ease of response and with feedback on the result. Still, some users have comments. Participants do not have heavy demands on the maximum number of alerts that they wish to receive. Only a few participants in alerting systems perceive the current amount of alerts received as being too large. The largest group believes the current frequency to be fine and a percentage would even like to receive more alerts.

Only a few participants experience barriers in responding to an alert: for as far as there are barriers, there is doubt regarding the added value of their own information and a fear of breach of personal privacy

A minority of the participants who have received an alert on missing or wanted persons have responded to every message. The reason most mentioned for not responding is that people simply cannot contribute to the solution: people have no useful information. Participants in alerting systems, generally do not perceive any barriers when responding to an alert. The group of participants who do perceive barriers mainly have doubts on the correctness and reliability of their own information. A small group of participants highlight the possible breach of privacy or fears that providing information on suspects of crimes may have consequences for themselves. This latter group also highlights the importance of being able to respond in absolute anonymity.



The criteria for sending out an alert are not always clear for public

When sending out an alert through Burgernet, AMBER Alert and now also NL-Alert there is prior careful consideration on the urgency of the situation and the possible added value of the alert. Nevertheless, among a section of the public the criteria for sending an alert or not are not always clear. Sometimes the public has the impression that the government waits too long before sending out an alert. This group indicates that people prefer to receive a 'false alarm', instead of missing a chance on tracing/solving due to not sending an alert. At the same time, the opposite plays among a section of the non-participants. One of the barriers to registering as a participant in alerting systems, is the fear that people will be flooded with alerts.

#### **D. Backgrounds and motives to participate in alerting systems**

Participants in alerting systems want to help and ensure a safe living environment

When civilians decide to participate in an alerting system aimed at tracing missing people and suspects of crimes, many factors play a role. When asked directly about their most important motive for participating in Amber Alert or Burgernet, the majority of the participants refer to the wish to help others and/or contribute to the safety of the society or living environment.

For many, unfamiliarity with the systems and the lack of a sense of urgency is an important reason for not participating (as yet). A lot of non-participants are interested in participating in an alerting system in the future. In one in every five cases, substantive or principled considerations play a role.

Profile of participants in AMBER Alert and Burgernet deviates from non-participants on some points

On average, participants in the alerting systems AMBER Alert and Burgernet are older than non-participants. Young people are underrepresented in both participant databases. Furthermore, participation in urban areas is relatively low. In contrast, there are hardly any differences in level of education, gender and household situation. Regarding their media behaviour, on average participants are more active on social media and they make use of mobile internet more frequently than non-participants.

Significant potential for participants in alerting systems aimed at tracing and missing people

The potential interest for alerting systems is significant: four in every ten respondents who do not yet participate in AMBER Alert say that the chances are high or very high that in the future they will register. There is somewhat less interest for Burgernet.

The majority is interested in receiving alerts on incidents in the local area; interest for NL-Alert is relatively large among participants in AMBER Alert and Burgernet

The public does not have to register to receive messages from NL-Alert. But their mobile phones do have to be set in such a way as to be able to receive the alerts. Amongst the public there is a lot of interest in receiving messages through their own mobile phone when there is an incident or emergency in their vicinity. Among those that presently participate in AMBER Alert and/or Burgernet, the interest is significantly larger than among non-participants. Interested people are happy to receive both factual information on the nature of the crisis situation as well as information on how to deal with the situation. More than one third of the current participants in AMBER Alert and/or Burgernet have set their own mobile phone to receive NL-Alert. Among non-participants in alerting systems this percentage is significantly lower.



Knowledge, attitude and behaviour characteristics play a role in possibly registering as a participant. An analysis has been made of the factors that might influence the willingness of the public to register as a participant in alerting systems. From scientific literature and the group talks that have been held within the framework of this assessment, various factors came forward that may partially determine whether an individual will participate in alerting systems.

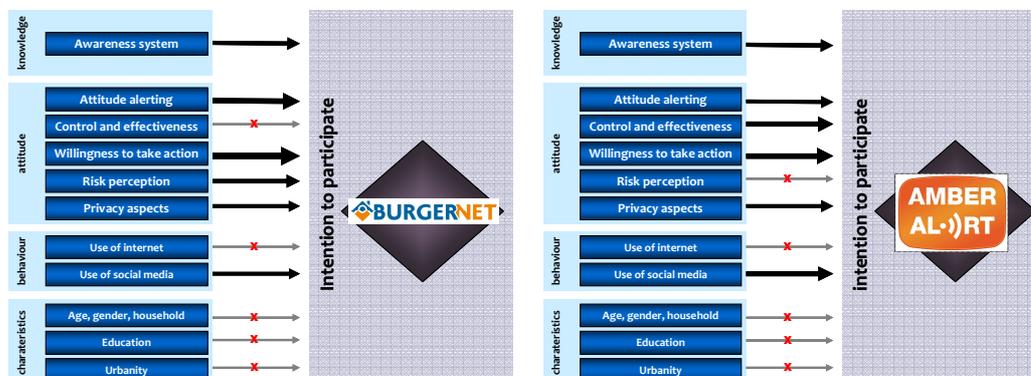
In the assessment, these factors are further elaborated and analysed, which has resulted in the following attitude aspects:

- *Attitude towards alerting*: the extent to which people advocate the government involving the public in tracing activities and informing the public of emergencies through mobile phones.
- *Control and effectiveness*: the extent to which the public wants to have insight into the safety situation and has the confidence to themselves have an impact by means of alerting systems.
- *Willingness to take action*: the extent to which the public feels responsible for the safety in their local area and want to take action to ensure or enhance this safety.
- *Risk perception*: the extent to which the public feels at risk and the estimation of the chance to be affected by an emergency or crime themselves.
- *Privacy aspects*: the extent to which people fear they can be traced through their mobile phones.

Combined with a number of other behavioural characteristics and background characteristics, these attitude aspects have been analysed for extent to which they play a role in determining participation in the alerting systems AMBER Alert, Burgernet and NL-Alert.

Intention to participate in both AMBER Alert as well as Burgernet is largely determined by the same factors

The factors that play a role in determining participation in the various alerting systems are to a certain extent quite similar. This is not surprising because people interested in one system are often also interested in participating in other systems. Potential participants in both systems show a slightly higher willingness to take responsibility for the safety of their local area, have a relatively strong need for information on their own safety and are relatively confident in their ability to influence events by means of alerting systems. Furthermore, they make above average use of social media. To a lesser extent the awareness of the system and the attitude towards alerts and privacy-aspects plays a role. Both for Burgernet as well as AMBER Alert, personal characteristics such as education, age and gender provide no predicting factor as to the likelihood of participation.

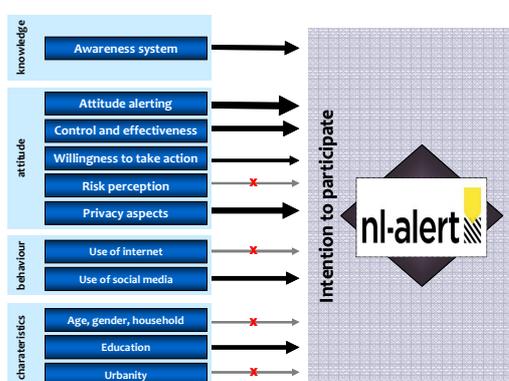




Nevertheless, there are certain differences in the factors that are of importance when considering whether or not to participate in alerting systems. At Burgernet the factor 'willingness to take action' plays an even larger role as an explanatory factor for determining participation than for AMBER Alert. Furthermore, the risk perception at Burgernet is an explanatory factor, while for possible participation in AMBER Alert it plays no role worth mentioning. For AMBER Alert, the use of social media shows a stronger link with the intention to participate.

Intention to participate in NL-Alert is determined by the same factors, privacy issues also carry great weight

The interest in receiving messages through NL-Alert in the future is partly determined by the same factors that play a role when registering for AMBER Alert and Burgernet. This is mainly the attitude



towards alerting systems in general, the need for information and control, the willingness to take action and the use of social media. When determining participation in NL-Alert, privacy issues weigh more heavily than for the other systems. The main fear is that people can be traced through their mobile phone. In contrast to Burgernet, the factor 'willingness to take action' plays a much smaller role than for NL-Alert. In addition, the level of education also appears to play a modest role as a predictor of 'participation' in NL-Alert. More highly educated people are more interested in the messages through NL-Alert.

## E. Conclusions

Among the surveyed citizens, there is broad support for public involvement in solving crimes and tracing missing people. There is a lot of public support for alerting the public in case of incidents, crises and emergencies as well. This shows that, among both participants and non-participants, there is confidence in the effectiveness of the alerting systems. People expect that the current alerting systems contribute positively to finding missing people, apprehending suspects and mitigating the consequences of incidents.

The assessment paints a picture of alerting systems that are functioning well. Participants are largely satisfied with the workings of the existing systems and there are no clear indications that the current amount of alerting systems are too large or too small. Some assessment results do highlight the possibility of integrating or even combining the existing alerting systems into one system. Firstly, the current participants in Burgernet and AMBER Alert not only partially overlap, but they also have an above average interest in receiving messages through NL-Alert. In other words: a participant in one system is often interested in participation in other systems. Also, the motives of potentially interested people in the various systems are largely similar. Additionally, a significant part of the current participants and people interested in participation have no strict demands with respect to the maximum amount of alerts they wish to receive. Based on this, it is expected that someone who registers for a specific alerting system, can be relatively easily convinced of registering for a wider range of alerts.



Outside of the current scope of participants in alerting systems, there is still a significant potential for including citizens who have a serious interest in participating. There are only a few people who have substantial or principled reasons for rejecting or dismissing participation in alerting systems. This means that the potential number of participants is quite large.

When 'capitalising' on this interest, the following assessment results are of importance:

- The current participants in one alerting system are also generally more interested in participating in other systems. This means that it is relatively easy to acquire participants in other systems from amongst the current participants.
- For all three investigated systems, the perceived effectiveness of the alerting systems appears to be an important predictor of possible participation. In other words: the more confidence in their effectiveness, the bigger the chance that people will participate in alerting system or follow up alerts. This means that an increase in faith in the effectiveness of an alerting system is expected to lead to a higher willingness to participate.
- Risk perception – the extent to which the public feels unsafe and the estimation of the chance to be affected by an emergency or crime themselves – only plays a modest role in predicting the intention to participate in alerting systems. Emphasising the advantages of participation in alerting systems in relation to their own safety is therefore expected to have little effect.
- For the public, the possible privacy issues are of importance in their perception of alerting systems and their intention to participate. This mainly applies for participation in NL-Alert. Due to the applied technology of cell-broadcasting, receiving a message through your mobile phone depends on one's location and this gives the public – whether wrongly or not – the impression that they are traceable. When this fear is taken away, an important barrier to participation, or of setting a mobile phone to receive alerts, is removed.
- The current awareness of AMBER Alert is significant. That applies to awareness of both the purpose and the workings of the system. At the time of this assessment (end 2012) this was not yet the case for the newer alerting systems Burgernet and NL-Alert. From the analyses it appears that the awareness of the system is interdependent with the intention to participate. Enhancing understanding of the content and workings of both systems is expected to lead to a higher willingness to participate.
- Amongst current participants in alerting systems, young people are underrepresented. At the same time it appears that participation in social media and mobile internet use are predictors for the intention to participate. In other words: mobile internet users and those who are active in social media generally have a stronger intention to participate. Distributing information on the content, workings and effectiveness of the alerting systems through these media will also reach a lot of young people and in this way contribute to a larger willingness to participate.
- The group of Dutch of ethnic origin is an underrepresented group in this assessment. It is a known fact that immigrants are underrepresented among participants in alerting systems (mainly Burgernet). However, in the data collection and analysis, in consultation with the Advisory Board, the choice was made not to include this personal characteristic as a possible explanatory factor. However, insight in this is of importance in order to be able to acquire a sufficient number of participants in urban areas where a lot of people of ethnic origin reside.