



Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en
Documentatiecentrum

Cahier 2022-6

Incidenten en misdrijven door COA-bewoners 2017-2021

Summary

Cahier 2022-6

Incidenten en misdrijven door COA-bewoners 2017-2021

Summary

S.M. Noyon
A. Latenko
M.E. Vink
S.W. van den Braak

Cahier

De reeks Cahier omvat de rapporten van onderzoek dat door en in opdracht van het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Documentatiecentrum is verricht. Opname in de reeks betekent niet dat de inhoud van de rapporten het standpunt van de Minister van Justitie en Veiligheid weergeeft.

Summary

Incidents and crimes among COA-inhabitants 2017-2021

Introduction

This report on incidents and crime by COA inhabitants is not the first of its kind. Up until 2021, this annual report was published by the 'Migration Analysis Field lab' (*Analyseproeftuin Migratieketen*; APM) of the Migration Coordination department of the Directorate-General for Migration of the Ministry of Justice and Security. As of the current edition, the Research and Documentation Centre WODC will publish this overview on a yearly basis. In the coming years, the WODC will further refine this product, while retaining the characteristics of monitor. The typical characteristic of a monitor is its descriptive nature, which allows to paint a general image. Adopting an identical approach throughout the years allows for comparison of subsequent publications. Additional analyses are beyond the scope of the present report and will be the topic of (future) in-depth studies.

The purpose of the report is twofold. Firstly, it describes incidents taking place at housing of the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), in relation to the total population of COA inhabitants. Hereby, the report provides a general impression of the situation at COA housing facilities. Secondly, the report outlines crimes of which the suspects were living at a COA facility at the time that the crime was committed. Where possible, we draw comparisons with crime figures for the general population of the Netherlands to put the numbers into perspective. Furthermore, adopting a five-year report period allows for tracing of developments over time.

While the current and future editions of this publication will be comparable from one year to the next, the WODC has adopted a somewhat different approach than APM in its previous reports. This implies that the figures and trends reported here cannot be compared to those included in earlier editions.

Furthermore, concerning the interpretation of the reported figures, it should be noted that this report is based on data obtained from registration systems serving operational purposes that are aimed at monitoring primary processes rather than reporting purposes. In addition, this report presents a momentary impression (with reference months between February and April 2022). It is well possible that the overview reveals different figures if composed again at a later moment due to an update of the underlying data sources.

Definitions and contrast with previous editions

The current report focuses on people who lived at a COA facility at some point between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2021. Depending on the situation and legal status of the migrant, this may be at any of the following types of facilities. Most asylum seekers stay at (consecutively) a central reception centre (col), a process reception centre (pol), and a reception centre (azc). For unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (umas), COA provides specialized housing facilities, which are the process reception centres for umas (poa) and small-scale housing facilities (kwv). Migrants whose

asylum applications were rejected and who are awaiting deportation can be housed at a freedom-restricting centre or family centre (in the case of a family). The COA provides specialized housing with intense supervision and a strict regime for asylum seekers who cause exceptional trouble. As of 2020, this happens at the enforcement and supervision centre (htl), which has replaced the previous system of comparable nature (ebt). Other housing types, including the col waiting room and housing that falls under municipal responsibility, are beyond the scope of the population for the present report. The same is true for aliens without an identification number. This definition of the target population differs from that adopted in previous editions of the monitor and generally leads to lower figures in this edition.

With regard to the reported incidents, we only considered incidents involving persons living at one of the COA facilities within the scope of the report (thereby being part of the target population) at the time the incident took place. We did not include incidents in the analysis involving persons who were between housing facilities at the time the incident took place. We also excluded cases where a migrant was involved as a victim while there were no others involved who were part of the target population. Moreover, when reporting on (unique) persons involved in incidents, we did not include victims. In contrast, earlier editions of this report from 2019 and before did include victims in the incident reports. Concerning the *type* of incident reported, we have included only cases of verbal suicide threats, aggression and violence against others (physical, nonverbal, and/or verbal), and self-destructive actions. As opposed to previous editions, we have excluded transgressions of the COA house rules as well as suicides from the analyses. Consequently, the number of reported incidents is significantly lower in this report than in previous editions.

Concerning measures following incidents, we have included only those measures that were taken following incidents included in the above definition. In doing so, we considered all types of measures that the COA has at their disposal. We can distinguish roughly three types of measures: rov (i.e. withdrawal of services), ebt/htl (i.e. transfer to an enforcement and supervision centre), and alternative measures (e.g. a corrective conversation). Previous editions did not include the latter type of measures.

Regarding suspects of crimes among COA-inhabitants, this report only includes those crimes that were committed while the suspect was living at a COA facility. This corresponds with the definition that was used for the incidents. As a result of this decision, the number of reported crimes is lower than in previous editions, which included all crimes that were committed in the year that a person was living at a COA facility. This included crimes that were committed after the alien left the COA facility or before moving into a COA facility.

With regard to the settlement of crimes by the public prosecution and the courts, we based the figures on the number of criminal cases rather than the number of offences, as opposed to previous editions. Another difference is the adopted method: the current report uses the retrospective method rather than the cohort method, which was used in previous editions. The retrospective method looks at cases that were settled within a certain year (regardless of the year in which the crime was committed). Instead, the cohort method used in previous editions looked at settlements taking place in the same year that the crime was committed. As such, it is not possible to compare the results of the current report with those of earlier editions.

Target population

Between 2017 and 2021, a total of 179,000 unique persons lived at a COA facility at some point in time. The yearly total number of people staying at COA facilities varies from year to year. The lowest observed yearly total in the reference period was 48,000 in 2020, while 2021 showed the highest yearly total with 66,000 people. This is a 38% increase. This variation in complement is caused by a combination of factors including the arrival of new asylum seekers, increases in waiting times at the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), and housing market shortages forming an obstacle for the outflow of asylum permit holders. For these reasons, unique persons often appear in several years in the statistics presented here.

Men form about two thirds of the target population. Young adults (aged 18-21) form 31% of the population in 2021, and are thereby the largest age group. There is also a large group of minors: 30% of the target population in 2021. This includes both umas and children in families.

The people who lived at COA facilities during the reference period had the nationalities of over 170 different origin countries. The most common nationalities in the population change over the years. The nationalities in the top 15 in 2021, by number of inhabitants, which do not appear among the 15 largest nationalities in 2017, are Yemeni, Nigerian, Pakistani, and Gambian. About a third of COA inhabitants in 2021 had Syrian citizenship, thereby forming the most common nationality. Syrians are by far the largest group across the entire reference period.

In 2021, 66,000 persons lived at a COA facility for some time. A small number among them (respectively 6% and 3%) was involved in an incident or were suspects of a crime in that year.

Incidents among COA inhabitants

In 2021, COA registered a total of 5,900 cases of verbal suicide threats, self-destructive actions and physical, verbal, and/or nonverbal violence. This is a decrease compared to the year before, when COA registered 6,300 incidents. This is especially remarkable since the number of unique persons that were living at a COA facility increased by 38% in that same year. The average daily occupancy however was comparable for both years. Comparing the number of incidents with both the total number of people staying at COA facilities and the average daily occupancy shows that there is no one-to-one relationship between the number of people staying with COA and the number of reported incidents. Rather, it could be possible that the number of incidents is related to the duration of the time spent at COA facilities. A comparison of the average daily occupancy of COA facilities over the years suggests that this duration has increased over the reference period. It should be noted that the relationship between (average) occupancy and incident rates might have been moderated by the measures that were introduced at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that the measures could have had both positive and negative effects on the number of (reported) incidents, interpreting this relationship for the years 2020 and 2021. The majority of the 3,900 people involved in an incident in 2021 were living at an azc. In addition, there were relatively many reports of incidents involving people living at uma facilities and at the htl. The high number of reported incidents involving azc residents might be due to the fact that the majority of COA inhabitants live there (i.e. there is a statistical explanation). With regard to the uma facilities and the htl, this

could perhaps be due to the fact that there is increased supervision (i.e. a registration effect) or (in the case of the htl) to the type of people who live there.

The majority of people who were involved in an incident in 2021 were men (87%) and most (72%) were between 18 and 39 years of age. Among those involved in incidents in 2021, 19% were Syrian nationals, thereby forming the most commonly involved nationality for incidents. However, considering the number of Syrians in the target population reveals that only 3% of Syrian COA inhabitants were involved in an incident in 2021. Nationalities with a relatively high rate of involvement in incidents are Moroccan (31%), Algerian (56%), and Tunisian (24%). Possibly, this is related to an overrepresentation of men and young adults among these nationalities. Importantly, the large majority of COA inhabitants with these nationalities were not involved in an incident in 2021.

Suspects of crime among COA inhabitants

In 2021, the Dutch police registered 4,000 suspects of crimes who were living at a COA facility at the time the crime was committed. This number is lower than in the previous year, while the number of people living at COA facilities increased significantly in that same period. Hence, as was the case for incidents, we cannot speak of a one-to-one relationship between number of people living at COA facilities and suspects of crime. Again, it is possible that the duration of stay at a COA facility plays into this. Moreover, from 2020 onwards crime rates as well as policing and judicial proceedings were affected by the measures that were introduced following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The most common crime that COA inhabitants are suspected of are crimes against property (73%). This share is higher than for suspects in the general population of the Netherlands (35%), while the share of suspects of violent crimes among COA inhabitants is relatively low (13% of suspects as compared to 20% for the general Dutch population).

The characteristics of suspects of crimes mirror those of the previously described people involved in incidents at COA facilities to some extent. Again, most of the 1,800 suspects are living at the azc, and again we observe relatively high rates of suspects among inhabitants of uma facilities and the htl. Crime suspects, too, tend to be male (98%) and young adults, with 59% of suspected COA inhabitants being between 18 and 29 years old. Nationalities with relatively high shares of suspects within the group are Algerian (35%), Tunisian (33%), and Moroccan (29%). As was the case for incidents, this could in part be due to the age and gender composition of these nationalities. This is especially relevant since men and young adults are over-represented among crime suspects in the general Dutch population, too. Out of all unique crime suspects in the Netherlands in 2020, only 1% were COA inhabitants.

Regarding crimes, we report settlements in a given year. These figures may concern crimes that were committed in previous years. Adopting this approach implies that there is no correspondence between the number of suspects as registered by the police in a given year, the number of cases handled by the public prosecutor in that same year, and the number of settlements by the courts in that same year. In 2021, the public prosecution decided on 2,800 cases in which the suspect was living at a COA facility at the time the crime took place. In the majority of these cases (71%), the

prosecutor decided to issue a summons. Compared to the general population of the Netherlands, in which 44% of cases went to court, this is a relatively high share. In 2021, the courts ruled 1,600 cases in which the suspect was living at a COA facility at the time the crime took place. Compared to the general Dutch population, suspects were found guilty relatively more often (94% vs. 91% for the general Dutch population in 2020). Moreover, in case of a sentence, suspects in the target population were sentenced to (juvenile) prison more often (77%) than the general Dutch population (38% in 2020).

The observed differences in settlements at different levels could perhaps be due to the type of crimes committed and/or how likely the execution of a sentence or measure is considered to be.

Directions for future editions and research

The figures presented in this report give rise to a number of working hypotheses for future research. Some topics that might be included are:

- the potential relationship between the duration of stay at a COA facility and the frequency of incidents and crimes;
- the relationship between a migrant's legal status and involvement in incidents and crimes;
- the relationship between the number of incidents and crimes and the type of procedure (e.g. regular, accelerated, or extended asylum procedure) that those involved were enrolled in;
- the potential relationship between imposed measures following incidents and the frequency of incidents at COA facilities;
- the situation in countries of origin (with a particular focus on changes of status from a 'safe country' to an 'unsafe country' or vice versa) and the frequency and type of incidents and crimes;
- characteristics of specific facilities (e.g. the average occupancy rate, living conditions, or specific composition of inhabitants, such as large numbers of people with a similar origin or gender) and its relation to the number and type of incidents and crimes;
- crimes committed by aliens who do not live at a COA facility at the time the crime takes place (e.g. migrants who leave the facility to return at a later moment);
- the difference between types of crimes committed by COA inhabitants and the general population of the Netherlands, and the extent to which this explains the difference in settlements between the two groups;

the potential relationship between incidents and crime, and the extent to which involvement in incidents at COA facilities predicts criminal behaviour.

Het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Documentatiecentrum (WODC) is het kennisinstituut voor het ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid. Het WODC doet zelf onafhankelijk wetenschappelijk onderzoek of laat dit doen door erkende instituten en universiteiten, ter ondersteuning van beleid en uitvoering.

Meer informatie:

www.wodc.nl