



Indicators drug-related crime

Summary

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Summary

Exploratory research

The Netherlands is an important production country for cannabis and synthetic drugs and an important transit country for cocaine. This drug production and trade have far-reaching and undermining consequences for society. Therefore, the fight against organised drug crime is justifiably a priority (Abraham, van Dijk, Hofstra and Spapens, 2021).

The Organised Crime Research Agenda of the Ministry of Justice and Security (JenV) aims to provide a solid knowledge base for fighting organised crime. With a view to an evidence-informed policy, the Ministry of JenV's Programme-Directorate-General for organised crime (pDGO) wants to realise a periodic monitor of drug-related crime and government interventions in the Netherlands. In order to give substance to the quantitative indicators of a possible future monitor, the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) commissioned DSP-groep to conduct an exploratory study on the subject.

The central question:

Which quantitative indicators are suitable for a possible future monitor in the field of drug-related crime and government interventions in the Netherlands?

It is a methodological study in which a longlist of quantitative indicators was first drawn up. This list was reduced to a shortlist of indicators that could become part of a possible future monitor in the field of drug-related crime and government interventions in this field.

We used various methods: literature research, interviews (13 respondents) and an expert session (6 participants) with data experts, scientists and policy officials from the police, the Public Prosecution Service (OM), the Trimbos Institute, the WODC, Regioplan, ICTU³ and the Ministry of JenV.

Our main findings and conclusions are described in this summary.

Conclusions

Inventory of quantitative indicators: longlist

The study shows that, at present, 56 quantitative indicators are theoretically suitable for providing insight into (aspects of) drug-related crime and government interventions in this field. Indicators relate mainly to the output (such as the number of hemp farms cleared) and, to a lesser extent, to the outcome of interventions (such as the disruption of drugs markets). Such indicators are also used to map out drug crime and drugs markets. The list of 56 indicators was considered a longlist within the study.

Data availability and quality

The question is to what extent these 56 indicators are suitable for inclusion in a monitor focusing on drug-related crime and government interventions. To answer this question, we examined for each indicator to what extent it is desirable and technically feasible for the Dutch situation. After assessing the desirability, availability and quality, 20 indicators were put forward that could be considered for monitoring - a shortlist. For most of the 20 indicators, data are periodically available, but the quality of these data could be improved. These indicators are derived from various data sources, mainly from the police, the OM, the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee (Kmar), Customs and other chain partners. The necessary disclaimers surround all these data. For instance, registration data such as those of the police, Kmar and Customs only reflect cases that are known and registered by the organisations concerned, and it is not always easy to make a distinction at drugs market level. Such disclaimers are however no reason for the data specialists, scientists and policymakers involved in the study to exclude an indicator in the monitor. They are something to bear in mind when analysing and interpreting the results.

There already is a monitor that provides some coherence with regard to drug-related crime and periodically gathers some of the indicators: the National Drug Monitor (NDM). This monitor - which mainly focuses on drug use and is compiled by the Trimbos Institute in collaboration with the WODC - annually and systematically reports on (a.o.) various aspects of drug-related crime. This primarily concerns registration data of the police, the OM, the Kmar, Customs and other chain partners.

In addition, there are several relevant indicators which, for various reasons, are only observable to a limited extent. For instance, the import - and to a larger extent the export - volume is only known based on estimates.² Data regarding the administrative approach are registered by municipalities, if they are kept at all, but they are not easily accessible in a central and uniform way. There are also few, if any, data available on indicators relating to the financial approach of drug-related crime. Such indicators do not (yet) qualify for monitoring.

Interviewees and participants in the expert session - including data experts from the police, the OM, the WODC, the Trimbos Institute, Regioplan, ICTU and the Ministry of JenV - emphasise that it is neither desirable nor opportune to open up new data sources for a possible future monitor. What we do need to do is invest in improving the quality of existing data, particularly about the indicators that focus on individual seizures, drug residues in waste water (sewage analyses), the availability of drugs, the number of requests for legal assistance, confiscations and collection results, and the number of closed drug premises.

Shortlist indicators

Based on the desirability, availability and quality criteria, the following indicators appear to be the most suitable for inclusion in the (possible) future monitor. The results are shown in the table below. We also indicate the availability of the data at present and the quality of the available data. We emphasise that this is an indication, and that data availability and quality may vary from one drugs market to another. Pagina-einde

Table: Shortlist indicators drug crime and government interventions in the Netherlands.

(Availability and quality: green = periodically available, sufficient quality; yellow = periodically available, limited quality; orange = not periodically available, limited quality)

Indicator	Availability and quality	Available via	Data source
Import			
1. Seizures in the Netherlands and at the Dutch border (number and kg, large quantities)		o.a. NDM	Police, Kmar and Customs
2. Seizures in Belgium; with consignments to the Netherlands		o.a. European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)	Belgium Police
Production in the Netherlands			
3. Number of closed hemp farms		o.a. NDM	Police
4. Number of closed drugs labs and extraction locations		o.a. NDM	Police
5. Number of dismantled cocaine extraction sites		o.a. NDM	Police
6. Number of drug waste dumps		o.a. NDM	Police
Trade and distribution			
7. Wholesale and brokering prices		o.a. NDM	o.a. Antenna Survey ¹
8. Purity/quality at retail		o.a. NDM	Drug information and monitoring system (DIMS) and THC monitor of the Trimbos Institute
9. Street prices/consumer prices		o.a. NDM	DIMS, THC monitor and Antenna data
Gebruik			
10. Drug use and other usage figures		o.a. NDM	a.o. Statistics Netherlands (CBS) in collaboration with National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) and Trimbos Institute.
11. Drug residues in wastewater		o.a. NDM, EMCDDA	KWR: formerly the Water Products Inspection Authority

¹ Annual research initially focused on Amsterdam to follow trends in the drugs market and substance use, carried out in cooperation with Jellinek.

Indicator	Availability and quality	Available via	Data source
12. Availability of drugs (availability of drugs to consumers)		Not applicable	Large nightlife study; calculations by subject matter experts
Drug crime in society			
13. Number and type of offences against drug laws		a.o. NDM	Police
14. Number of liquidations attributable to drug-related crime		a.o. NDM	WODC
Criminal interventions			
15. Number of investigations		a.o. NDM	Police, OM
16. Number and type of OM settlements/decisions		a.o. NDM	OM
17. Number of disrupted criminal partnerships (csv's)		Not applicable	OM and Police
18. Number of requests for legal assistance		Not applicable	National Uniform Recording System for International Legal Aid (LURIS)
Financial interventions			
19. Total amount of confiscations and collection results for the various recovery methods		Not applicable	Central Judicial Collection Agency (CJIB) and OM
Administrative interventions			
20. Number of closed (drug) premises (Damocles Act, Victor Act, Victoria Act) ²		Not applicable	Municipalities

The table shows that the quality of the source data for nearly all indicators can be improved at present. Furthermore, the overview shows that a large part of the requested indicators is already collected in the NDM, and that source data come from different parties. With regard to availability, we note that five indicators are currently not periodically available.

Finally, where possible, indicators are specified per drugs market. We noted earlier that the quality and availability of source data might vary from one drug to another.

² The Damocles Act, Victor Act and Victoria Act are administrative measures municipalities can take to close or dispossess premises, establishments or homes. Based on the Damocles Act, residences can be closed in which drugs (mentioned in the first or second list of the Opium Act) are traded or are present. The Victoria Act authorises the mayor to close a dwelling, a room not open to the public or property belonging to that dwelling or room in the event of (serious fear of) disturbance of the public order around the dwelling or room caused by behaviour in the dwelling or room. Finally, Act Victor goes one step further. If a dwelling, residential caravan or other building is closed pursuant to Article 174a of the Municipalities Act, pursuant to an ordinance as referred to in Article 174 of the Municipalities Act or pursuant to Article 13b of the Opium Act, the municipal council may write to the owner to, at the discretion of the municipal council, either give the building to another person to use or give the building to a person or institution working in the field of housing. Source: hetccv.nl consulted 15 April 2022.

Relationships between indicators

The research determined whether it would be possible to establish a causal relationship in the monitor between the policy efforts on the one hand and the (output and outcome) results on the other. The research shows that no suitable indicators would provide insight into such a relationship. On the one hand, because the (custom-made) policy itself can hardly be quantified. On the other hand, because the isolated effect of the policy on the output and outcome variables cannot be measured either. After all, developments in drug-related crime and drugs markets are influenced by many more factors than policy efforts alone. And finally, the complex system of drug crime and drugs markets is difficult to measure because of its hidden nature.

However, the monitor will become more meaningful by combining the quantitative data with qualitative, in-depth research and interpretation sessions with subject experts.⁵ Only then can something possibly be said about the relationship between various indicators and - only to a certain extent - about the relationship between policy, approach and observed developments.

Tools for a future monitor

The study provides the following tools for a possible future monitor:

- ③ Focus on improving existing indicators. Every indicator has its limitations. Tackling these limitations contributes to the further development of the indicators and thus to the meaningfulness of a monitor.
- ③ Consider linking up with existing monitors. Consideration should be given to who collects, analyses, interprets and reports on such data. Respondents - including data experts from the police, the OM, the WODC, the Trimbos Institute and the Ministry of JenV - have made a plea for the new indicators produced by this study to be included in an existing monitor. However, it is too early to go into the details of a monitor, without it being clear exactly what form it will take and who will analyse and report the data.
- ③ Evaluate the monitoring method periodically. Given current developments, it seems wise to regularly check whether the monitoring method is adequate and whether it can answer the desired policy-relevant questions. Developments to follow in this regard include the developments regarding the Phenomenon Report on Drugs of the police⁶ and the improvement of indicators for drug residues in wastewater/sewage analysis. The Phenomenon Report on Drugs 2021 is a report drawn up by the police during the period covered by the present study to gain a better picture of developments in drug-related crime and to follow them.

Overall conclusion

The Ministry of JenV wants to realise a periodic monitor of drug-related crime and government interventions in the Netherlands.

Based on this exploratory study, we conclude that at the time of the research, much is already being measured. However, the requested coherent monitor focusing on drug-related crime and government interventions does not (yet) exist. Not everything measured is of sufficient quality or relevance, and some things are missed. The administrative and financial approaches of drug-related crime, in particular, are still only partly visible. Cohesion of the indicators identified in one coherent monitor is lacking. The added value of a monitor focusing on drug-related crime and government interventions in that field may lie in the periodic and systematic interpretation of data.

This study shows that a relevant basic set of drug indicators is potentially available. A section of these indicators is already part of the NDM. In addition to the systematic collection of the indicators identified, the main gain lies in improving the quality of the source data of the indicators in this basic set for different drugs markets. In this respect, the Phenomenon Report on Drugs of the police is expected to be an interesting source to keep an eye on. According to the police, several indicators from the NDM have been developed further and made more specific so that developments over time can be monitored more accurately for several aspects of drug crime and the various drugs markets.

A possible future monitor will always have to be accompanied by qualitative research. After all, not everything can be measured. Drug-related crime is a complex phenomenon that is not easy to quantify, and it also develops more quickly than the data on it. Moreover, drug-related crime is a global phenomenon of which the Netherlands is only a part.

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DSP-groep is een onafhankelijk bureau voor onderzoek, advies en management, gevestigd aan de IJ-oeveren in Amsterdam. Sinds de oprichting van het bureau in 1984 werken wij veelvuldig in opdracht van de overheid (ministeries, provincies en gemeenten), maar ook voor maatschappelijke organisaties op landelijk, regionaal of lokaal niveau. Het bureau bestaat uit 40 medewerkers en een groot aantal freelancers.

Dienstverlening

Onze inzet is vooral gericht op het ondersteunen van opdrachtgevers bij het aanpakken van complexe beleidsvraagstukken binnen de samenleving. We richten ons daarbij met name op de sociale, ruimtelijke of bestuurlijke kanten van zo'n vraagstuk. In dit kader kunnen we bijvoorbeeld een onderzoek doen, een registratie- of monitorsysteem ontwikkelen, een advies uitbrengen, een beleidsvisie voorbereiden, een plan toetsen of (tijdelijk) het management van een project of organisatie voeren.

Expertise

Onze focus richt zich met name op de sociale, ruimtelijke of bestuurlijke kanten van een vraagstuk. Wij hebben o.a. expertise op het gebied van transitie in het sociaal domein, kwetsbare groepen in de samenleving, openbare orde & veiligheid, wonen, jeugd, sport & cultuur.

Meer weten?

Neem vrijblijvend contact met ons op voor meer informatie of om een afspraak te maken. Bezoek onze website www.dsp-groep.nl voor onze projecten, publicaties en opdrachtgevers.

