Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Datacentrum

Cahier 2024-9

Insights into incidents and crimes among COA residents

A quantitative study of the background characteristics of the individuals involved

Summary

Kennisinstituut voor de rechtsstaat

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Cahier
De reeks Cahier omvat de rapporten van onderzoek dat door en in opdracht van het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Datacentrum 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

Insights into incidents and crimes among COA residents

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The Research and Data Centre (WODC) has been implementing the Incident Overview Project since 2022. This research project aims to map incidents at COA-locations and (suspected) criminal behaviour among COA residents. Under the aegis of this project, WODC publishes a monitor and conducts an explanatory study annually. The present report presents the 2023 explanatory study, which is based on the monitor published earlier that year, and elaborates on a number of findings from that report. More specifically, this study focuses on the background characteristics of individuals involved in incidents and criminal suspects, covering both demographic indicators (age, sex, family situation and nationality) and external factors (duration of residence and residence permit grant rates per nationality). As such, the study tests a number of common assumptions about involvement in nuisance and attempts to contribute to combating nuisance behaviour by granting insight into patterns relating to background characteristics. We should emphasise that the incidents and suspect registrations discussed here involve a minority of COA residents and the majority of asylum migrants do not appear in the nuisance registries.

Definitions and method

While the public debate often relates to nuisance in a general sense, this report focuses on only two specific forms of it. These include incidents at COA locations (i.e. physical, non-verbal and verbal violence, verbal suicide threats, and self-destructive actions), as well as crimes or more particularly suspicions thereof. Although the monitor published earlier also devotes attention to handling of suspect registrations by the police, Public Prosecution Service and Judicial System, this report considers suspect registrations by the police only. The CBS (Statistics Netherlands) crime classification system is used for classification of (suspects of) crimes in this report, which means that misdemeanours (such as traffic fines) are not included.

This study uses the same data as the 2022 incident and crime monitor published earlier. We included all COA residents and investigated, on a monthly basis, whether they were involved in incidents and/or suspected of crimes in the period from 2017 to 2022, and if so, how often the events in question occurred and what their nature was. We applied event history analysis (EHA) and Cox regression models for the analyses. These advanced statistical techniques are eminently suitable for identifying status changes (e.g. from non-suspect to suspect) whilst taking into account predictors that vary over time (e.g. residence permit grant rates per nationality). We used these methods to analyse at what point in the residence period any events occurred and their association with the specified background characteristics and external factors.
Since the dataset does not contain any information on incidents that may have occurred prior to the reporting period, persons residing at a COA site prior to 1 January

2017 were excluded from the analytic dataset. As such, the analyses cover a subpopulation of COA residents in the period from 2017 to 2022.

Research questions and results

This study focused on the following research questions, which will be answered below:

Is there a correlation between background characteristics such as age, sex and family situation on the one hand and the occurrence of (specific types of) incidents and crimes on the other?

Based on previous research, we expected the risk of involvement in incidents and suspect registration would be higher for men, young adults, and individuals travelling alone. Our results are largely in line with these expectations. Analysis shows that men run a higher risk of being involved in incidents or registered as criminal suspects. This specifically applies to young males. For example, the risk of being registered as a suspect is 10 times higher for male minors than for female minors, whilst this risk is only 3 times higher for males in the age category '40+'.
Generally speaking, young individuals run a higher risk of being registered as involved in an incident or as suspects in a crime. Contrary to our expectations, we have found the highest risk of involvement in incidents and suspect registrations to occur in the group of minors (instead of young adults). However, the predicted risks drop with age for almost all forms of crime suspicions. Suspicions of property crimes are an exception here. This type of offence, mainly shop theft, is the most common type among COA residents. While the risk of suspect registrations for other types of offences is the same for minor and young adult COA residents, this is higher in the latter age categories for property offences.
As expected, the risk of being registered as involved in an incident or as a criminal suspect is higher among those travelling alone compared to individuals who are travelling with others. For instance, the risk of being involved in a crime is 70% lower for individuals travelling with one other person and as much as 83% lower for individuals travelling with two or more other persons compared to unaccompanied individuals.
These results are in line with our expectations based on the literature and patterns established in earlier editions of the incident and crime monitors. It is important to emphasise that the majority of young adults, men, and unaccompanied travellers are not involved in incidents or registered as criminal suspects. The higher risks identified for these groups can be used to formulate targeted policies that comply with specific needs and characteristics of these groups, for instance with regards to unaccompanied minors or unaccompanied travellers with family in their country of origin.

Is there a correlation between nationality and the occurrence of (specific types of) incidents and crimes? If so, can this correlation be explained by residence permit grant rates per nationality?

Variations between nationalities in involvement in incidents and suspect registrations among asylum migrants have been documented frequently in both the literature and earlier editions of the incident and crime monitor. The current study did not aim to replicate this finding as much as to test a possible explanation for it. Specifically, we aimed to test the hypothesis that differences in residence permit grant rates could explain the observed differences between nationalities in terms of involvement in

incidents and criminal suspect registrations. The findings support this hypothesis. For instance, the risk of being registered as suspect of a crime is 63 times higher for Algerian COA residents than for Syrian residents, but this difference drops to 10 times when residence permit grant rates are taken into account. With regards to Eritrean and Afghan COA residents, differences between these nationalities and Syrian COA residents in the risk of suspect registrations can be fully explained by differences in residence permit grant rates. We should note that the great majority of groups with a low probability of receiving a residence permit are not listed in incident and suspect registries.
The impact of residence permit grant rates is high but not such that it can fully explain differences between nationalities. Differences remain even after correcting for this factor in the models. It does mean, however, that even if there are (or appear to be) problems with a group of specific origin, these can probably be ascribed to the characteristics of the specific group of individuals and not (exclusively) to their ethnic or national background. It is possible that other factors play into this that cannot be observed on the basis of our current (quantitative) data, such as debt, addiction and/or psychological problems, involvement in criminal networks, or a combination thereof. Multiple problems in this context can be researched further by means of qualitative research.

Is there a correlation between duration of residence and the risk of (specific types of) incidents and crimes, and what does this look like?

Based on the literature on residence in asylum seeker centres, we expected to find that a longer duration of residence correlates with a higher risk of involvement in incidents and suspect registrations. This would be the case in particular due to long-term exposure to austere conditions as well as the potential presence of opportunity structures for criminality at COA locations. However, our results do not show a clear correlation between duration of residence and involvement in incidents and suspect registrations in the long term. In the first ten months, there even appears to be a slight reduction in the risk of involvement in incidents and suspect registrations. This is a notable result, especially since previous research has shown that duration of residence is relevant to integration outcomes and psychological wellbeing in the long term.

Directions for future research

This study shows that there is a correlation between asylum residence permit grant rates per nationality and the risk of involvement in incidents and suspect registrations. *Why* this should be the case cannot be explained on the basis of the analyses presented here, however. This finding can be interpreted in different ways, for instance the importance of future prospects for COA residents, as well as differences in background characteristics between groups of individuals with varying probabilities of receiving a residence permit in the Netherlands. Arguably, a family that has fled a war zone and an unaccompanied male from a country considered safe will differ in ways beyond merely the probability that their application for asylum will be granted. A better understanding of such differences and how they affect observed behaviour can be achieved through qualitative methods.

The correlation between duration of residence and involvement in incidents and suspect registrations should also be subject to further research. In order to study this relationship, specific attention should be paid to events that may cause nuisance

behaviour, such as rejection of an asylum application. Future research may improve our understanding of these issues. A possible explanation for the fact that we did not find a correlation between duration of residence and the risk of nuisance behaviour in the long term is that individuals who are at higher risk of nuisance behaviour remain in COA locations for a shorter period of time. It is highly likely that these people leave COA-locations for unknown destinations (‘going mob’). In order to further investigate this possible explanation, we need data on the reasons for people to leave the COA locations. Future editions of the incident and crime monitor and explanatory studies may provide further insights.

Het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Datacentrum (WODC), Kennisinstituut voor de rechtsstaat, is een onafhankelijk kennisinstituut dat valt onder het ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid. Het WODC draagt bij aan behoud en verbetering van de rechtsstaat via het (laten) uitvoeren van kwalitatief hoog wetenschappelijk onderzoek. En door het aanbieden van gevraagde en ongevraagde kennis, verbeterpunten en (waar mogelijk) denkrichtingen.

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