

The European Crime Prevention Network

Position and Relevance for Policy and Practice

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The European Crime Prevention Network functions as a versatile and multipurpose network within the European crime prevention field. As such, the Network appears quite fit to meet its objectives. However, whilst keeping the focus on its current objectives, partnerships and target groups, it could boost its market value, position and relevance. The Network must therefore enhance its visibility, broaden its target audiences reached and tackle language barrier problems, especially in order to enhance its relevance for practitioners at local level in the Member States. The Network may also become a more unique and lead European crime prevention player were it to develop specialization in crime prevention policies and/or strategies and invest more in academic research.

1. Introduction

The European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) aims to promote crime prevention knowledge and practices among the EU Member States and to connect the local, national and European level in doing so. The Network is headed by a Board of National Representatives, which consists of a Chair (rotating with the Presidency of the Council of the EU), an Executive Committee and the National Representatives. Each Member State can decide on one National Representative and one Substitute which they send to the meetings of the Network. They are responsible for the approval of the Network's strategic approach, the realization of EUCPN's Work Programme and the adoption of the Annual Report of the Network's activities. They meet at least twice a year. EUCPN's Secretariat, which is based in Brussels and fully operational since 2011, is tasked with providing general administrative, technical and analytical support to the Network and with representing the Network externally. It acts as a focal point for communication with the Network Members, identifies ongoing research activities in the field of crime prevention and other related information that would be of use to the Network. The Secretariat hosts the website and is also responsible for delivering systematic output on crime prevention (newsletters, toolboxes, recommendation papers, ...). Through the Secretariat, the Network is collaborating with academic researchers and experts in the field bringing together scientific research, policymaking and (local) practice. EUCPN's funding is dual, relying on either Member State funding (for specific projects of interest to them) or Commission-managed EU financial programmes. Funding of the Secretariat is project-based, through an action grant of the Internal Security Fund (ISF), which seeks to reinforce the Secretariat to allow for a better alignment of EUCPN activities with EU priorities.⁴

Since its set up almost two decades ago, EUCPN has significantly developed⁵. Its activities and tasks have substantially increased, whilst its essential goals remained mostly the same, i.e. (1)

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⁵ Established originally by EU Council Decision 2001/427/JHA of 28 May 2001 setting up a European crime prevention network (OJ L 153 of 8 June 2001), which was repealed and replaced by EU Council Decision

to be a point of reference for its target groups, (2) to disseminate qualitative knowledge on crime prevention, (3) to support crime prevention activities at both national and local level and (4) to contribute to crime prevention throughout the EU generally and specifically at EU level having regard to the strategic priorities of the EU, i.e. by adding preventive actions to the EU Policy Cycle. The latter is a methodology adopted by the EU in 2010 to address the most important (including emerging) criminal threats affecting the EU by optimizing coordination and cooperation on crime priorities in 4-year cycles. Crime priorities are politically decided based on Europol's SOCTA (Serious Organized Crime Threat Assessment) reports, translated into Multi-Annual Strategic Plans (MASPs), approved by COSI⁶ and implemented by Operational Action Plans (OAPs), typically one per priority and per year. The 2018-2021 crime (prevention) priorities are: cybercrime, drugs, facilitating illegal immigration, organised property crime, trafficking in human beings, excise & missing trader intra community fraud, firearms, environmental crime, criminal finances & money laundering, and document fraud.

In view of the further implementation of its multi-annual strategy and in order to consolidate and reinforce its *market value* in the European crime prevention area, EUCPN has ordered a short-time study⁷ into its current and future *strategic market position*. This contribution presents the main findings of the study, conducted by the authors between May 2019 and March 2020 (Vermeulen et al, 2020).

In a narrow i.e. economic sense, the term *value* refers to "the monetary value of something, i.e. its marketable price" (Abrams, 2004). Applied to the field of crime prevention, *value* is related to the position one occupies within the field and the extent to which one competes with similar networks and institutions (Blattberg et al., 2008; Syrett, 2007), *in casu* to the relative and perceived importance attributed to EUCPN. In economic contexts, a market approach is a "a general way of determining a value of a business by using one or more methods that compare the subject to similar businesses" (Abrams, 2004, p. 286). A market value approach is a commonly used and adequate method for conducting explorative market research (van Hamersveld & de Bont, 2007; Birn & Birn, 2002). Consequently, for the sake of the study, a market approach is used as a valuation technique, providing an indication of the market value that can be attributed to an organization, *in casu* EUCPN. Whilst by determining its strategic economic market position, a company assesses how it relates to other similar companies in the field, the strategic market position of EUCPN is regarded as the value indication of the Network within the European field of crime prevention, next to other active institutions and organizations on the basis of the perception of partners and/or stakeholders.

Crime prevention, though a widely used concept, only has a loosely defined agreed meaning (van Dijk & de Waard, 1991). The definition applied in the study is the one recently adopted by EUCPN, i.e. "ethically acceptable and evidence-based activities aimed at reducing the risk of crimes occurring and its harmful consequences with the ultimate goal of working towards the improvement of the quality of life and safety of individuals, groups and communities" (EUCPN, 2019). Hence, the crime prevention concept used, is broad, and inclusive, among others, of both the perception of community safety and the (in)directly intended effects, the so-called key consequences.

2009/902/JHA of 30 November 2009 setting up a European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) and repealing Decision 2001/427/JHA (OJ L 321 of 8 December 2009).

⁶ COSI is the EU's Standing Committee for the operational coordination of the internal security strategy, founded by EU Council Decision of 25 February 2010 based on Article 71 TFEU.

⁷ Commissioned by the EUCPN Secretariat as part of the project 'The further implementation of the multi-annual strategy of the EUCPN and the Informal Network on the Administrative Approach', with the financial support of the European Union's Internal Security Fund – Police.

Insight in the strategic market position of EUCPN was gathered in a twofold fashion: (1) by identifying relevant European and international institutions and/or organizations within the European crime prevention landscape and by comparatively mapping therein of EUCPN (*infra*, under 2.1), and (2) by conducting a performance assessment of EUCPN, departing from the needs of the Network's target groups (*infra*, under 2.3) and its official National Representatives and Substitutes (*infra*, under 2.3). The integrated findings were mapped using a SWOT analysis (*infra*, under 3) and allow for conclusions and recommendations (*infra*, under 4).

2. Findings

2.1. EUCPN's position in the European crime prevention landscape

For the comparative mapping of EUCPN and other European and international institutions and/or organizations within the European crime prevention landscape, inspiration was drawn from the Guideline Public Company Method (GPCM). A substantiated classification system was designed to serve as an explorative comparison mechanism. It consisted of five axes, and was used to differentiate between 57 identified institutions and/or organizations that were selected and analysed on the basis of (1) desktop research, (2) an online quantitative survey (*infra*, under 2.2), using open questions and (3) qualitative expert interviews with National Representatives and Substitutes (*infra*, under 2.3). The five comparative axes were the following:

1. level of organization, i.e. local, regional, national, European or international;
2. organizational nature, i.e. public or private;
3. type of crime prevention focus, i.e. social or situational;
4. crime type focus, categorized according to the EU Level Offence Classification System (EULOCS) (Vermeulen & De Bondt, 2009): corruption, cybercrime, drugs, firearms, fraud, homicide, crimes within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, migration, money laundering, organized crime, property crime, offences relating to public health, offenses relating to public order, sexual offenses, terrorism and trafficking in human beings, and
5. activity type, differentiating between assisting, advising, connecting, coordinating, decision-making, developing, disseminating, evaluating, executing, facilitating, implementing, policy-making, promoting, research, supporting and training.

The full study encompassed a brief descriptive analysis for all identified institutions or organizations, an overview of which goes beyond the remit of this contribution. Overall, most institutions or organizations identified are situated at European level, as is EUCPN. Reference can be made here to European institutions (e.g. Council of Europe, Council of the European Union, European Commission, European Council, etc.) and their centers, networks or agencies (e.g. Pompidou Group, EMCDDA, CEPOL, Europol etc.). The majority has a public nature and involves in both social and situational crime prevention, just like EUCPN. They either have a crime-unspecific prevention focus or a focus on certain crime types, phenomena or trends that resemble or mirror priorities set in the EU Policy Cycle, which EUCPN is also supposed to focus on (*supra*). The type of activity for the identified institutions or organizations is in most cases multifold and varied, often involving genuine policy- and decision-making, with crime prevention constituting only one of many activity areas. EUCPN stands out in that its focus is specifically and exclusively on crime prevention, both all-round and for a broad range of crime types, encompassing EU policy cycle crimes. Its unique nature could be further strengthened by stepping up its (underexposed) roles of assistance and training.

2.2. Quantitative Assessment of EUCPN's Performance by Target Groups

The quantitative dimension of EUCPN's performance assessment consisted of an online survey, distributed amongst the (potential) target groups of EUCPN through the internal network of both National Representatives ($n=27$), Substitutes ($n=24$) and other relevant contact points of the Network, provided by the Secretariat. The web-based survey was developed via Qualtrics and consisted of four question clusters, relating to:

1. general information about the participants;
2. the extent to which, according to the participants, EUCPN carries out its official goals (*supra*);
3. the participants' degree of familiarity with and effective consultation of EUCPN's tools (i.e. Toolbox Papers, Policy Papers, Monitor Papers, Annual Reports, Newsletters, Best Practice conference, etc.), as well as their perceived usefulness of the latter, based on their needs, and
4. whether and to which extent the participants consider themselves EUCPN target groups, irrespective of their prior familiarity with the Network.

The survey was eventually completed at least once per Member State, save for Slovakia ($n=26$). In total, 70 valid responses were registered, using a validity cut-off threshold of at least 20% survey completion.

Most participants defined themselves as practitioners and/or policymakers, familiar with EUCPN and belonging to its target groups. The vast majority was from public institutions (i.e. public government bodies, often ministries of Interior or Justice), usually situated at a national level, with a dual focus on both social and situational prevention. Interestingly, the survey also triggered responses from participants who were unfamiliar with the EUCPN, thus reaching also beyond traditional target groups.

EUCPN's performance is *not* perceived strong for its first three key goals, i.e. to be a point of reference, to disseminate qualitative knowledge and to support crime prevention activities. Only its fourth core task (i.e. to contribute to the EU policy and strategy on crime prevention) is primarily viewed as positively performed. Furthermore, only a minority of target groups seems to consult EUCPN outputs. Whilst being familiar with, among others, Toolbox Papers, Monitor Papers, Policy Papers and Best Practices, they hardly consult the documentation and/or consider it less useful. The vast majority, moreover, is unfamiliar with EUCPN social media channels. In contrast, international and often more practically oriented events score (very) well. Examples are the well-reviewed campaigns, the Best Practice Conference, the European Crime Prevention Award and the EU-Wide Focus Day. The EUCPN website and particularly its Knowledge Centre score relatively well, most participants being familiar with the tool and effectively consulting the provided documentation.

2.3. Qualitative Assessment of EUCPN's Performance by its Official Representatives

The qualitative dimension of EUCPN's performance assessment consisted of expert interviews with EUCPN National Representatives and Substitutes, all mainly employed by government agencies and policy services and strongly involved in crime prevention. They were held in order to gauge their opinions and expectations about the current and future strategic market position of the Network. The interviews were conducted by means of a semi-structured question protocol containing a logically constructed list of questions, built up around specific themes. In total, 16 expert interviews were carried out, covering 15 Member States (in alphabetical order: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Sweden, and The Netherlands). Interviews were primarily ($n=11$) conducted during both the EUCPN Board Meeting and the Best Practice Conference/European

Crime Prevention Award session in Helsinki (December 2019). The remaining interviews were held in January 2020 via FaceTime ($n=1$), telephone ($n=3$) and face-to-face ($n=1$).

Cooperation with EUCPN is perceived very positive by interviewees and described as both fruitful and mutually beneficial. However, a minority signals to not (currently) have the domestic capacity to strengthen their relationship with the Network but would like to (be able to) do so over time. Few interviewees explicitly voice to have higher expectations from EUCPN, for example in terms of tangible assistance for and hands-on support in implementing, monitoring, coordinating and evaluating specific domestic or local crime prevention activities or projects. Hence, they consider their investment of time and resources in the EUCPN partnership to prompt a poor return.

Overall, EUCPN is seen as an important partner in the crime prevention area that has well-established connections with the main partners in the field. Since most crime prevention domains are covered and the existing partnerships are usually evaluated positively, interviewees believe that it would be more favorable for EUCPN to invest in existing partnerships rather than to identify new partners or stakeholders or to establish new collaborations. Asked about the core tasks of EUCPN, the official representatives are unanimously highly positive, whilst recognizing room for improvement. These results are, to state the least, quite inconsistent with the quantitative target group survey results, which is most likely explained by a positive bias of official representatives.

The respondents' general expectations are essentially in line with EUCPN's current tasks. On a negative note, however, they express preference for, among others, a translation of the EUCPN English-language outputs in domestic languages and insist on an improved visibility at the local level, more simplified tools for practitioners and more European widespread events (such as the Best Practice Conference, the European Crime Prevention Award, the EU-Wide Focus Day or the European Crime Prevention Conference). Quite surprisingly, a minority of official representatives lacked proper knowledge regarding the EU Policy Cycle and pleads to not necessarily focus on the priorities set by the Council. In this respect they appeared to be in favor of allowing EUCPN (and the Board) to set its own priorities. Interviewees further pointed out the importance of strengthening communication, especially through social media. Suggestions also pertained to commissioning more academic research and taking the lead in crime prevention policies and/or strategies.

3. Swot analysis

The above findings allow for a SWOT analysis, typically used in the process of environmental scanning to monitor the business environment and gain insight in the competitive position of an organization concerned (Pickton & Wright, 1998). This type of analysis, consisting of internal and external factors, is designed to support the determination of a (future) strategy and, *in casu*, to obtain a more detailed view of the current and future strategic market position of EUCPN. Strengths and Weaknesses form the internal factors, while Opportunities and Threats are part of the external analysis.

	Strengths	Weaknesses
internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - well-known actor - important partner - high quality partnerships - fruitful and mutually beneficial collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - outputs under-consulted - limited local impact - insufficient support of national or local crime prevention activities

external	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - dissemination of qualitative knowledge - activity within the EU Policy Cycle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unfamiliarity with the EU Policy Cycle
Opportunities	SO strategy	WO strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improve visibility - broaden target audiences reached - overcome language barrier - involvement in academic research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more European widespread events - publishing rate - upgrading Knowledge Center - taking lead in crime prevention policies and/or strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more simplified tools - translating working documents (and abstracts) - communication strategy - multimedia materials - use of social media
Threats	ST strategy	WT strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of resources Member States - poor return on investment - drop in EU funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - intensified support from a better-resourced Secretariat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - intensified support from a better-resourced Secretariat

3.1. Strengths

The EUCPN has four clearly defined core tasks on which the Network should continue to focus (more), namely:

1. to be a point of reference regarding crime prevention;
2. disseminating qualitative knowledge on crime prevention;
3. supporting crime prevention activities and;
4. contributing to the EU policy and strategy of crime prevention.

Except for supporting crime prevention activities, EUCPN appears to perform relatively well. In connection with its first core task, EUCPN has become a well-known actor in the European crime prevention area and is involved in the general promotion of crime prevention. The Network maintains high quality partnerships with the Secretariat and Member States, as well with other institutions and/or organizations with a role in crime prevention. EUCPN is considered an important partner in the field of crime prevention and, moreover, partnerships with the Network are perceived both fruitful and mutually beneficial. In connection with its second objective, EUCPN has been producing significantly more outputs in recent years, disseminated via the EUCPN Knowledge Center. Also, the number of annual events has increased with the recent introduction of both the EU-Wide Focus Day and the European Crime Prevention Conference. The fourth and last goal is equally evaluated positively, considering that the Network is sufficiently active within the EU Policy Cycle and that the 6-monthly changing presidential topics of Member States seem sufficiently in line with those priorities.

3.2. Weaknesses

Given its many publications and its dissemination of, among others, Toolbox Papers, Policy Papers, Monitor Papers, Best Practices and Annual Reports, EUCPN is contributing properly to the state of play in the domain of crime prevention. However, when asked about the extent to which EUCPN outputs are in fact consulted and about the extent to which they are deemed useful by representatives, policy makers and practitioners, the answer is quite negative. Hence, there is a distinct margin of improvement as regards EUCPN's second core task, relating to the

dissemination of qualitative knowledge on crime prevention. Exceptions are the international events and conferences organized by EUCPN such as the Best Practice Conference, the European Crime Prevention Award, the EU-Wide Focus Day launched since last year and the newly introduced European Crime Prevention Conference. Target groups furthermore indicate that the EUCPN tools are often deemed insufficiently practical. Put differently, there is a demand for evidence-based and more simplified tools that are easy to implement by policy makers and practitioners and not require any methodological knowledge.

The supporting of crime prevention activities at national and local level, the third core task of the EUCPN, needs to be intensified. When asked whether EUCPN is consulted in the context of implementing, monitoring, coordinating and evaluating crime prevention activities, only a minority seem to agree, implying that a strengthening of this objective is desirable. In addition, the Network must become more visible at both regional and local level. Interviews with official representatives show that the role of EUCPN is essentially unknown at the local level.

EUCPN's communication strategy and especially its social media channels also deserve the necessary attention. EUCPN profiles on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn score very poor to poor. At the end of the research project, EUCPN had 477 likes on Facebook and 472 and 783 followers on LinkedIn and Twitter respectively.

Lastly, but remarkably, the Network's official representatives are not always fully aware of the importance of the EU Policy Cycle, prompting a minority among them to favor allowing the Network to set its own priorities and to not necessarily focus on the priorities set by the EU Council.

3.3. Opportunities

Improved visibility seems appropriate, especially at the local level. A role should be given to the representatives of the Member States concerned, since they are responsible for the national representation of the Network. However, EUCPN could support its National Representatives and Substitutes in this task. One possible way to reach the local level may be by promoting output through interactive multimedia materials. This could include, among others, posters and promotional videos. Another suggestion is to increase the use of social media as part of a reinforced communication strategy, as a direct way to get in touch with the Network and the Secretariat in particular.

Translation of both working documents and abstracts from English into national languages may, at least theoretically, lead to a larger share of target audiences.

Another opportunity is in a more prominent role in and focus on scientific research, as well as in a pioneering role regarding crime prevention policies and/or strategies.

A final opportunity is to continue and even step up the number of European widespread events.

3.4. Threats

A lack of domestic capacity and/or resources may hamper the further strengthening of the current relationship. Also, the labeling by some representatives of their collaboration with the Network as a poor return on invested time and effort, is worrisome. Furthermore, the co-financing principle poses a threat to the further functioning of the EUCPN. Non-payment of annual membership fees by Member States negatively affects the distribution key and may imply a significant reduction in funding and thus operating resources for the Network.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

The market value assessment, based on the comparative mapping of related institutions and/or organizations in the European crime prevention landscape and the subsequent performance assessment (based on an online survey of EUCPN's target groups and interviews with its National Representatives and Substitutes) show that EUCPN functions as a versatile and multipurpose network within the European crime prevention field. In doing so, the Network appears well-equipped to meet its objectives. However, by addressing certain shortcomings, EUCPN could consolidate and/or boost its market position and relevance.

Some of the identified weaknesses are inherent to the Network's strengths, which implies that keeping the focus on its current objectives and the prioritization of potential opportunities provides EUCPN a certain margin for growth. In addition to tackling the identified weaknesses, the opportunities presented in the SWOT analysis should be fully exploited. Hence, EUCPN should not necessarily change course, but rather enhance its visibility, broaden its target audiences reached and tackle the language barrier problem, especially in order to enhance its relevance for practitioners at local level. Furthermore, the Network may genuinely become a more unique and lead European crime prevention player were it to develop specialization in crime prevention policies and/or strategies and invest more in academic research.

Substantively, the following detailed recommendations can be made:

- a. EUCPN produces outputs in the form of documents, conferences and campaigns. Contrary to the Annual Reports, Monitor Papers, Policy Papers, Toolbox Papers and Best Practices, international events score well to very well and seem to be popular. Examples of existing events are the Best Practice Conference, the European Crime Prevention Award and the recently launched EU Wide Focus Day. The newly introduced EUCPN Conference scores equally high. The way forward is to become even more actively involved in the organization of European widespread events;
- b. The publishing rate of the Secretariat is quite high, with 195 contributions in 2019 and somewhat lower numbers in previous years. The Network should at least maintain its publishing rate and ideally increase it.
- c. Whilst already widely involved in crime prevention, EUCPN should further specialize in the implementation, monitoring, coordination and evaluation of crime prevention policies, strategies and/or activities;
- d. The results of the online survey having pointed out that EUCPN outputs are hardly or not consulted due to their impractical nature, the Network should develop and disseminate more simplified tools for practitioners. Whilst the tools are and must remain evidence-based, the implementation requirements should be kept to a minimum;
- e. Equally in connection with the limited consultation of EUCPN outputs, a broader target audience could be reached by translating the published and disseminated documentation from English, as EUCPN's working language, into the national languages of the Member States. Since several Member States have reported not to have translation capacity themselves, translation by EUCPN would clearly impact the usefulness of the outputs for policy makers and practitioners in the Member States. Moreover, translation provides an opportunity to sharpen EUCPN visibility at the local level and to reach practitioners at that very level, which, according to certain interviewees, often master English insufficiently;
- f. With a view to strengthening its communication strategy, the Network's social media channels, which a strong minority of its target groups has indicated to be unfamiliar with, should be more widely promoted. Since sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words, it is advisable to enhance the use of multimedia materials and to promote outputs more often using multimedia tools. An enhanced use of both social media and visual content has the potential to also help bridging the gap with (practitioners at) the local level;

- g. Whilst the EUCPN partnership is overall considered fruitful and mutually beneficial, most Member States are in favor of strengthening their relationship with the Network, against the backdrop of a lack of domestic capacity and/or resources. Some Member States voiced to find their participation to have a poor return on investment of own time and effort. This external threat may likely only be addressed through intensified support from a better-resourced Secretariat;
- h. EUCPN depends on external funding (i.e. Internal Security Fund, European Commission) requiring co-financing by the Member States. Allocation of the latter amongst Member States is calculated via a distribution key. Non-payment by certain Member States sometimes leads to a significant reduction in available resources and equally threatens the share of EU funding, thus impacting the further functioning of the Network. Hence, a re-evaluation of the current co-financing and associated distribution key principle may be needed;
- i. EUCPN has established well-functioning connections and partnerships with the main institutions and organizations active in the European crime prevention field. It is more favorable and sustainable to invest in and intensify the partnerships with these traditional partners rather than to establish new and additional ones.

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