

Approach of domestic burglaries: What needs to be done at the European level?

Rodney Bos, National coordinator domestic burglary, Dutch police

Mr. Bos starts his presentation by introducing himself and explaining his mission. He hereby emphasizes his function as a national coordinator for the domestic burglaries issue and as a leader of a European project with Belgium and Germany on itinerant criminal groups. He is also a European action leader of the operation "Archimedes", which aims at dealing with organized criminal groups and their infrastructure within the European Union as a whole.

Domestic burglaries

Mr. Bos states that 4 aspects are important within the framework of the domestic burglaries issue:

- Victims
- Offenders
- Objects
- Modus operandi

The most important factor consists in preventing victimization. A burglary always has an impact on the persons concerned and it is essential to try and avoid it.

In the Netherlands, prevention is not a primary task of the police. The police are merely the final link. The general idea is that the citizen is responsible for the preventive part. The Netherlands applies the (police) label 'Veilig wonen' (live safely), with a view to examining if houses meet all preventive criteria.

But considering the low percentage of solved cases in burglaries (only 9%) the police does work on awareness-raising and alertness among the citizens. The best way to solve criminal facts is catching burglars in the act. In the Netherlands, anti-domestic burglary teams were created and inhabitants are permanently informed or asked to call 112 in case they notice a suspicious situation.

Among the 9% solved facts, 80% are apparently committed by local offenders (in the Netherlands). In the speaker his work area, the number of burglaries has recently decreased by 18%. The main goal is to come to a 20% drop by the end of the year. When analyzing the total amount of domestic burglaries, the proportion between itinerant criminal groups and local burglars is 50/50, according to the speaker.

Problems and challenges

Different problems can be dealt with when examining burglaries at the European level. These are:

- The issue of itinerant criminals and criminal groups
- The lack of a uniform legislation and regulation

- Each member state implements different sentences and uses other definitions, which makes cooperation more complicated and is an obstacle to a harmonized approach of the phenomenon.
- The international judicial help
 - More attention must be given to the exchange of operational measures (Intelligence).
- An inadequate information sharing
 - The member states should share their knowledge more often on aspects that are working, so as to take them over.

Challenges

- Intelligence
 - In the Netherlands, there are 26 regional corps and the aim is to ultimately develop 1 national police.
 - There is a contrast between regions where people still work with cardboxes instead of automated systems such as the ones we use in Western Europe. Those regions handle cases therefore much slower.
 - If the differences remain, it will be impossible to exchange operational measures.
- Repressive approach
 - ISEC project (Prevention of and Fight against Crime) on itinerant criminal groups.
- Information sharing
 - Clear analysis of what works and what does not work, so as to be able to share and/or take over methods.
- Roles and tasks
 - Mr. Bos emphasizes the importance of using the existing channels for more power and energy, instead of systematically creating new networks. Ex. Eurojust and Europol.

What else?

- Best of 3 worlds (also title of an analysis)
 1. Problem-oriented approach

Making a good problem analysis in order to examine which steps can be repeated.
 2. information-led policing/partners

Borough/police/justice/....., all partners must share information with each other.

3. Citizen participation

The main key to success is the citizen. It is important to invest in social cohesion. In the Netherlands, the project 'claim je straat ' (claim your street) has been developed in order to disseminate the following message: a safe place to live in does not end at the walls of your own house. There is a lot to be found in the street. The purpose is to help inhabitants have more impact on their direct housing and living environment.

It is essential to develop a proactive police in cooperation with their partners, and aim at a preventive and not only reactive approach, only when something happened.

Prevention remains crucial since 25% of the burglaries are due to a door which has not been closed by the inhabitants. Preventively addressing potential offenders can also take place within this framework. In this way, it is possible to avoid criminality, instead of react afterwards.

As far as thefts in houses are concerned, the Netherlands has a 'mascot' called HARM ALARM, which is the spokesperson of the new anti-burglary campaign 'maakhetzeniettemakkelijk' (don't make it too easy for them) of the Department Public and Communication. The message of this campaign is that citizens should not make it too easy for burglars. A website was also created with prevention advice to help change the citizen's behavior.

In the Netherlands too, citizens have to take action themselves. Neighborhood agents address citizens.

The Netherlands have been developing some innovative concepts, such as:

- Crime maps
 - o Mapping crime so as to allow citizens to examine what is going on in their neighborhood. It gives them a view of petty crime, such as bicycle thefts, domestic burglaries, car theft,... which take place in a well-defined area. The citizen is receiving information.
- Predictive Policing
 - o Trying to predict where certain facts can be committed.
 - o Carrying out a thorough analysis in order to be able to estimate where certain facts can take place, and be there.

Conclusions

Don't look only for the 'best practice', but rather for the 'next practice'.

Thefts in houses are a challenge, not a problem.



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