Summary

Forecasting for the criminal justice system

This report describes forecasting the “demand” for police, prosecution service, courts and prisons until the end of 2010. The forecasts are made using the new prediction model developed for the Dutch criminal justice system (PMJ). The models for the civil and administrative justice systems are still in their developmental stages and have not yet been used to produce forecasts. The base year for our forecasts was 2003. Legislative and policy changes after 2003 have therefore not been incorporated into these forecasts. The present report focuses on background information about the forecasts rather than on the forecasts themselves.

The PMJ model is based on developments in society outside the sphere of influence of the Ministry of Justice. The basic underlying assumption of the model is that problems that occur in society drive trends in crime and the criminal justice system. Three groups of factors can be distinguished: changes in the demographic structure of the population, economic factors, and social problems. Within each category, a number of background factors are chosen that taken together indicate problems like delinquency, social inequality, culture conflict, social isolation and economic inequality.

The demographic determinants used in the PMJ model are: the number of migrants, the non-working proportion of the labour force and the number of 12- to 17-year-olds. The economic determinants are purchasing power, the number of motor vehicles, average yearly income and the police budget. The social determinants are the number of children involved in divorce proceedings, alcohol consumption, drug abuse and the number of people belonging to a religious or philosophical belief.

External forecasts of these indicators determine the forecasts for the criminal justice system. If there are no policy changes or new legislation, the number of reported crimes can be expected to increase by 27 percent over the period 2003-2010. This will affect the rest of the criminal justice system, but this growth cannot be extrapolated in a straightforward fashion to the other components of the system. It will not be possible, for example, to identify a suspect in all additional reported crimes. Therefore, the number of suspects will only increase by 11 percent over the same period.

As charges will not be pressed against all suspects, the inflow of cases into the prosecutorial system will increase by no more than six percent. On the other hand, the inflow of minor offences is expected to rise sharply, resulting in 74 percent more court-imposed fines.

As far as cases involving serious offences are concerned, the increased number of police and prosecutorial transactions, summonses and guilty verdicts will keep approximate pace with the rise in the number of suspects. This in turn will lead to increased applications for legal aid. The increase in guilty verdicts will result in a 25 percent higher demand for prison capacity for adults and a 17 percent boost for minors.
A word of caution is in order. These forecasts are based on the information available at the moment of calculation. Both the forecasting process and the external forecasts of the determinants are surrounded by uncertainty. For this reason, these forecasts should be seen as no more than a warning about what could happen if nothing changes, rather than as prophecies. Unexpected events and new policy or legislation will alter the outcomes.