Summary

Recidivism among traffic offenders

As part of an evaluation of changes in traffic laws and regulations, the Dutch Ministry of Justice commissioned a research study of the reconviction rates of traffic offenders. WODC carried out the research using data from the Dutch Offenders Index (DOI), a database containing information about all criminal cases handled by the Prosecutor’s Office. The records of all individuals convicted of a traffic offence at least once in 1997 were extracted from the DOI. The study then examined the criminal histories of these 146,000 offenders. More than 750,000 criminal cases involving traffic offences and other types of offences were analysed.

Key findings:
– The traffic offences most frequently prosecuted were: serious speeding violations, driving while intoxicated (drink driving) and driving without insurance.
– Traffic offenders were predominantly male, older than other offenders and more likely to have been born in the Netherlands.
– Generally, traffic offenders had only 1 or 2 convictions on their criminal record. Offenders who had more convictions for traffic offences had usually been prosecuted for other types of offences too. There was no evidence among frequent offenders of specialisation in traffic offences.
– Seven out of ten traffic offences were dealt with by the Prosecutor’s Office (rather than by the Courts); nine out of ten traffic offenders were sanctioned by fine.
– In 40 percent of the cases handled by court, additionally the offender’s driving licence was temporarily suspended.
– Forty percent of all traffic offenders were convicted again at least once within four years, 8 out of 10 of a new traffic offence.
– The chance of being reconvicted within four years was greater for males, offenders born outside the Netherlands, offenders with previous records, and those with a low onset age.

Overall, traffic offenders are less serious offenders than offenders involved in other types of crime. Their offences are punished less severely. Their criminal careers are as a rule not very extensive and they are less likely to be reconvicted than those involved in other types of offending. This study focused on crime recorded by the police. Due to the low risk of being caught the real rate of re-offending among traffic offenders could be much higher.