Summary

Reason
Traffic safety is an important theme for the police and the judicial authorities. In the area of traffic safety, the measures taken are often offender-focused. It is assumed that a small number of offenders of traffic regulations are responsible for a large part of the total number of traffic offences committed. In order to realise a personalised approach, it is important to have knowledge of the backgrounds and ‘criminal careers’ of the traffic offenders. The Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Security and Justice developed the Traffic Crime Monitor for this purpose. This Monitor can be used for studies into the overall scope of traffic crime in the Netherlands and into the backgrounds and recidivism of traffic offenders.

This report endeavours to answer the following questions:
1. Which developments occurred in the nature and scope of registered traffic crime in the preceding years?
2. What are the background characteristics of various subgroups of traffic offenders?
3. What is the recidivism rate among traffic offenders?

Method
The study provides figures of registered traffic crime and is conducted by applying the methodology of the Dutch Recidivism Monitor (Wartna, Blom & Tollenaar, 2011b). The data were retrieved from the Research and Policy Database for Criminal Records, which is a pseudonymised version of the Criminal Records System. The use of the Research and Policy Database for Criminal Records implies that the overview provided only concerns registered crime. This is presumably only a small part of the actual number of criminal offences. Offences that remain unnoticed by the police are not recorded in the registers. In addition, only the relatively serious traffic offences are recorded in the Criminal Records Register. Offences that fall under the Traffic Regulations (Administrative Enforcement) Act, such as minor speeding offences, were, for instance, not taken into consideration.

This study relates to all persons in the Netherlands who came into contact with the law in the period of 1997 up to and including 2007 for violating the Road Traffic Act 1994, the Road Traffic and Traffic Signals Regulations 1990, or the Civil Liability Insurance (Motor Vehicles) Act. The total population studied consisted of nearly 1.5 million persons, varying from well over 150,000 traffic offenders in 1997 to well over 215,000 traffic offenders in 2007. In order to emphasise the figures relating to the traffic offenders a bit more, the researchers also used a reference group. This reference group consisted of all adult offenders who had been guilty of other offences than traffic offences in the relevant year. In the years before and after the relevant year, they may also have been involved in traffic cases. The reference group of other offenders consisted of nearly 800,000 persons, from well over 90,000 persons involved in one or more cases (not being traffic cases) in 1997 to nearly 110,000 in 2007.

Nature and Scope of the Registered Traffic Crime
In 2007, more than 250,000 serious traffic offences were registered in the Research and Policy Database for Criminal Records. The offences committed most frequently were serious speeding offences (35%), driving without valid third-party insurance (23%), and driving under the influence (19%). In the period of 1997-2007, the number of traffic offences that were settled increased by 43%. In particular, driving
without a driving licence and driving without insurance increased significantly. From 2000 onwards, the number of serious speeding offences was considerably higher than in the preceding period. This increase was presumably largely due to the introduction of regional projects and Special Traffic Enforcement Teams — and the related intensification of the enforcement — at the end of the nineties of the previous century.

**Settlement by a Criminal Court and Offender Characteristics**

- Nearly all traffic offences were settled by means of a financial sanction. The court hardly ever imposes unconditional prison sentences on traffic offenders. In the cases where a court did impose a prison sentence on traffic offenders, this was usually for causing death/serious bodily harm as a result of negligence, or for repeated driving without licence. What is furthermore notable is that in more than half of the cases of death/serious bodily harm, the offences were settled by means of a community punishment order.
- Most traffic offenders were men (84%). Among the traffic offenders, the proportion of men is slightly larger than in the reference group of other offenders (adults and minors). People born in the Netherlands Antilles or Aruba were registered twice as often for traffic offences as people who were born in Morocco, Turkey, and Surinam and nearly three times as often as people who were born in the Netherlands. Driving without a licence occurred relatively often among people who were born in foreign countries.
- Contrary to serious offences under ordinary law, for which minors were, in particular, responsible, the majority of the traffic offences were committed by adults. Driving without a driving licence, displaying objectionable or dangerous behaviour, and causing death/serious bodily harm as a result of negligence occurred relatively often among young adults; proportionally, hit and run occurred more often among people over 50 years of age.
- Compared to the other offenders, traffic offenders in 2007 are relatively old when they come into contact with the law for the first time: on average when they are 29 years of age compared to 27 years of age in the reference group.
- With respect to the traffic offenders registered in 2007, 40% came into contact with the law for the first time in that year. In the reference group of other offenders (adults and minors), the percentage of first offenders was, approximately, just as high.
- Offenders of traffic offences were, increasing more often, persons who were already 'known to the police'. Further research revealed that this applied, in particular, to driving without a driving licence or without third-party insurance. The increase in the proportion of recidivists may relate to the intensified and targeted investigation of such offences.
- Approximately half of the previous contacts that traffic offenders had with the law were traffic cases as well. In the reference group of other offenders, only a third of the cases were the same as the baseline case. Traffic offenders were relatively often 'specialists', offenders who limit themselves to one type of offence.

**Recidivism**

**Total group**

- In 2007, nearly 30% of the traffic offenders repeated a traffic offence within two years after the baseline case. The same applied, however, to the other offenders in the reference group.
• In 2007, offence-specific recidivism among traffic offenders was 23%. This means that nearly a quarter of the traffic offenders were responsible for committing a new traffic offence within two years.

• Among the other offenders, the recidivism rate fell in the last part of the research period. This reduction was not found — at least not yet — in respect of the traffic offenders.

• Within two years from the baseline case, for each group of 100 traffic offenders there were 54 new criminal cases for serious offences or minor traffic offences. The recidivism rate among the other offenders in the reference group was slightly higher, namely 63 new serious offences or minor traffic offences for each group of 100 offenders.

• In well over two thirds of the offenders who came in contact with the law for the first time, the offence committed concerned a traffic offence as well. In the reference group of other offenders, the proportion of new contacts within two years from the baseline case for the same type of offence as the baseline case was approximately one third. This also shows that traffic offenders ‘specialised’ to an increasing extent.

Driving under the influence
Recidivism after driving under the influence concerned, in approximately one third of the cases, once again a case of driving under the influence, in one third of the cases it concerned other types of traffic offences, and in one third of the cases it concerned other serious offences that were not traffic-related. A large portion of the cases of recidivism after driving under the influence was consequently related to other offences, traffic-related or otherwise.

Speeding
The scope of recidivism in this group is relatively small compared to the offenders of other types of traffic offences. If speeding offenders came into contact with the law again, this was, in approximately 40% of the cases, once again for a serious speeding offence. A quarter of the new cases concerned serious offences that were not traffic-related.

Driving without a driving licence/ driving without third-party insurance
The scope of recidivism is largest after driving without a driving licence or without valid third-party insurance. The recidivism does not remain limited to repeating the offence of driving without a driving licence or without third-party insurance again; other types of traffic offences and offences under ordinary law as well constituted a considerable part of the overall scope of recidivism. The high specific recidivism rate among drivers without a driving licence or without third-party insurance is presumably partly — or fully — connected with the targeted investigation of these offences.

Hit and run
The recidivism rate among those people who failed to stop after an accident is relatively high. Approximately half of the cases are new, other types of traffic cases. Offence-specific recidivism — i.e. being prosecuted for hit and run again — hardly ever occurred.

Displaying objectionable/dangerous behaviour on the road, and causing death/serious bodily harm as a result of negligence
The aspect that distinguishes these two types of offences from the other offences is the very low offence-specific recidivism rate. The likelihood of somebody being
prosecuted for displaying objectionable or dangerous behaviour on the road or causing death or serious bodily harm as a result of negligence is very small. Recidivism after these offences usually relates to other types of minor or serious traffic offences. It is obvious that a small chance of being caught plays a significant role in this respect. The majority of offences remains unnoticed to the police and the judicial authorities and is not registered in any database.

**Tailgating**

Compared to the overall scope of recidivism after other types of traffic offences, the overall scope of recidivism for tailgating is relatively small. Another notable fact is that recidivism by tailgaters consists, in particular, of new traffic offences, different from tailgating. It should be noted in this respect that the chance of being caught for tailgating is presumably very small. Tailgaters are typical traffic offenders who are guilty of all types of traffic crime.

**In Conclusion**

This study provides only an overall picture of the backgrounds and recidivism rates among registered traffic offenders. In order to get a clearer picture of the backgrounds of recidivism, the underlying processes, but also of the effectiveness of the sanctions imposed for delinquent behaviour in traffic, it is highly essential that more information is made available. About minor traffic offences, about the exact nature of the offences and the circumstances in which they are committed. Also, additional research is necessary into factors that may provide an explanation for the observed trends in the registered traffic crime.