EVALUATION CRACKDOWN ON CRIMINAL YOUTH GROUPS

Van Montfoort/Bureau Alpha/Nederlands Jeugdinstuut
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Summary and conclusions

It is over 10 years since the police started to systematically map problematic youth groups. Beat officers periodically map the nature and size of the problematic youth groups using the so-called shortlist methodology.¹ Early in 2011, the Minister of Security and Justice made the targeting of problematic youth groups a major priority, laying great emphasis, as he did so, on the crackdown on the criminal youth groups. In cooperation with the Public Prosecution Service and the police, the Minister shaped his ambition to tackle the 89 criminal youth groups shortlisted in 2010 within 2 years in such a way that they can be scaled down or removed.

Municipalities, police and the Public Prosecution Service play a central role in the crackdown, which is to be deployed as a multi-track strategy (individual-oriented, group-oriented and domain-oriented). The various tracks comprise different kinds of measures: criminal measures, administrative measures, physical measures and care interventions.

The coordination and monitoring of the implementing and fine-tuning of the strategy on the various tracks requires the appointment of a controller. Municipalities fulfill this controlling role where the tackling of the nuisance and trouble-causing groups is concerned. Control specifically directed at criminal investigation is, given its statutory duties, invariably with the Public Prosecution Service. The Public Prosecution Service is in control of the crackdown on the criminal youth groups. That is bound up with the fact that criminality and the use of criminal interventions play a dominant role in the crackdown on criminal youth groups.

In order to support municipalities, police and the Public Prosecution Service in the crackdown, a troublesome youth groups action programme has been set up within the Ministry of Security and Justice. The programme’s key components are: improving collaboration between all partners, enhancing the information exchange and removing bottlenecks.

The Research and Documentation Centre [Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Documentatiecentrum, WODC] of the Ministry of Security and Justice commissioned Van Montfoort to evaluate the crackdown on the criminal youth groups. The investigation consists of 3 parts:

A. Description of how the numbers troublesome youth groups developed over 2009-2011.
B. Description and evaluation specifically of the crackdown on criminal youth groups 2010-2012.
C. Literature study into the characteristics of and the effective crackdown on criminal youth groups.

¹ Developed by Bureau Beke in cooperation with the police.

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Part A and Part B were both carried out by Van Montfoort in cooperation with Bureau Alpha. The Netherlands Youth Institute [Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, NJI] undertook Part C (in cooperation with Van Montfoort).

Use research sources to answer research questions

The research question in part A was answered on the basis of an analysis of the reports published annually by Bureau Beke detailing the number of youth groups short-listed by the police. A step-by-step approach was adopted to the research questions about the description and evaluation of the crackdown on the criminal youth groups:

- The regional offices of the Public Prosecution Service drew up reports in January 2012 and June 2012 on the progress made in the crackdown on the criminal youth groups, for the purpose of a national report of the National Office of the Public Prosecution Service for the Minister of Security and Justice. These reports concern the (89) criminal youth groups that were shortlisted at the end of 2010 and the (40) criminal youth groups that were newly shortlisted towards the end of 2011/ beginning of 2012.

- A secondary analysis of these reports was conducted in answer to the research question on the state of affairs concerning the crackdown on criminal youth groups.

- The reports of the regional offices of the Public Prosecution Service were also used to select those crackdowns that (on paper, at least) meet our criteria for an integrated tackling of a criminal youth group, sc. (1) a plan of action is in place that has been set down in writing (at the very least as to parts), (2) municipalities, police and the Public Prosecution Service collaborate in the implementation and (3) at the very least, criminal and care interventions are being deployed.

- Around 60% of the strategies we analysed to tackle groups shortlisted in 2010/ 2011 beginning of 2012 meet (on paper, at least) these criteria for an integrated tackling.

- From these crackdowns a random sample was drawn of 28 strategies whose plans of action were retrieved. This yielded 18 actions plans which were subsequently analysed. This answered the research questions about the objectives and content of the plans of action and the types of interventions mentioned in the action plan.

- Next, a more in-depth stage was entered into in order to answer the research questions on the implementation of the crackdowns and any developments. To this end, 10 out of the 18 crackdowns whose action plans had been provided were analysed further. For this in-depth study a total of 42 interviews were conducted with the key parties (municipalities, police and the Public Prosecution Service) and pertinent documents were analysed.

- We found clear indications that this in-depth stage involving 10 crackdowns reveals, in particular, a picture of the crackdown on the most persistent and most difficult to tackle criminal groups. Thus, the picture that emerges of the progress of the crackdown and of the hindering and helpful factors playing a role applies especially to the most difficult criminal youth groups.
The last research question in part B concerned the effectiveness of the behavioural interventions deployed in the crackdowns on the criminal youth groups. In answer to this question 23 plans of action\(^2\) were analysed. This yielded an overview of the behavioural interventions that are (potentially) deployed. To answer the research question it was examined whether the behavioural interventions (1) are filed in the databank of the Netherlands Youth Institute, (2) have (provisionally) been recognized by the Dutch Accreditation Committee for Behavioural Interventions [Erkenningscommissie Gedragsinterventies] or (3) are stored in the database ‘Crackdown on Youth Groups’ ['Aanpak Jeugdgroepen’ on the Dutch-language website ‘Wegwijzer Jeugd en Veiligheid’ [Guide Youth and Security’].

The research questions in part C address what is known about criminal youth groups in the academic literature, both nationally and abroad. Factors and processes that play a role in joining a criminal youth group were looked into, as was the increase in offending behaviour upon joining and leaving a criminal youth group. Further, we looked into what is known about factors that are all-important in the emergence and disappearance of criminal youth groups and the potential evolving of disturbance-causing criminal youth groups into criminal youth groups. Finally, it was investigated what is known about the effectiveness or promise of interventions at group level, what preconditions need to be met and what requires further research. The question was ever taken into account to what extent criminal youth groups described in the foreign literature are comparable to Dutch criminal youth groups.

**Part A: Development numbers problematic youth groups**

Analysis of the national reports by Bureau Beke shows that the number of shortlisted problematic youth groups has declined over the past years. The year 2010 saw a decrease by 13% while numbers fell by 23% in 2011. This does not, however, indisputably prove that there are, in actual fact, fewer problematic youth groups. A growth or drop in numbers of shortlisted problematic youth groups does not necessarily imply that the actual number of groups has grown or dropped. Greater expertise in shortlisting may, for instance, lead to more careful shortlisting, with, in turn, a drop in numbers of problematic youth groups shortlisted (with fewer groups wrongly included). Conversely, increased police attention may, for example, well result in more groups being identified (earlier).

The drop in numbers is the greatest for the least problematic youth groups. The number of annoying youth groups decreased by 35% between 2009 and 2011. The number of disturbance-causing youth groups dropped by 32% while the number of criminal youth groups fell by 29%. The decline in numbers of shortlisted annoying youth groups is noticeable across most regions. The disturbance-causing and the criminal youth groups present a less straightforward picture.

There is a direct correlation between the number of problematic youth groups and the degree of urbanization. The most urbanized municipalities average the largest number of problematic youth groups per municipality. We notice, specifically so for the criminal youth groups, that the growth in newly shortlisted criminal youth groups is the largest in the less urbanized areas. Now, the smaller municipalities may indeed be witnessing a bigger growth in criminal youth groups. On the other

\(^2\) Besides the 18 plans mentioned above, another 5 general municipal plans for the crackdown on problematic youth groups.
hand, the smaller municipalities may have intensified their efforts specifically to identify their criminal youth groups. As it is, this growth is not seen in the disturbance-causing and annoying groups.

Part B: The number of criminal youth groups tackled (and scaled down or removed)

The secondary analysis of the reports of the regional offices of the Public Prosecution Service (and the national report of the National Office of the Public Prosecution Service) was carried out for 118 groups (78 out of the 89 groups shortlisted in 2010 and 40 groups newly shortlisted (in 2011/ beginning of 2012)).

This analysis shows that some form of crackdown has been imposed on the majority of all criminal youth groups. This has not (yet) been done for around 15% of all groups. Mostly, these are groups that disappeared or were scaled down. Around a quarter involved a crackdown on the part of one party or two parties, mostly without a fixed plan of action. We found clear indications of an integrated approach for the other groups (around 60%). As stated earlier, an integrated approach is defined as follows in this study: (1) a plan of action is in place, (2) collaboration between the 3 key parties (municipalities, police and the Public Prosecution Service) during the implementation and (3) at the very least, deployment of criminal and care interventions.

We have some indication as to the results of the crackdown for 78 out of the 89 criminal youth groups shortlisted in 2010:
- 55% was either tackled and no longer shortlisted anew in 2011 as being criminal or did not again enter the picture in 2011 as being criminal without a crackdown being deployed.
- 45% was tackled yet appeared anew on the 2011 shortlist as being criminal.

Between 25% and 40% of the groups shortlisted in 2010 may be termed difficult-to-tackle groups. These groups were not only shortlisted as criminal youth groups in 2011 but also, anew, in the beginning of 2012.

What we term an integrated approach was more often deployed to tackle the groups that were shortlisted in 2011/ the beginning of 2012 than the groups shortlisted in 2010. That much is a positive development. At the same time, the research results reveal that a selective approach, consisting, for example, of a criminal justice intervention only, sometimes suffices to effect the scaling down or removal of a group. We have an idea that this is particularly so for the lesser criminal groups. On the basis of our research material, it is, however, impossible for us to express any definite and more detailed views on this matter.

The national report of the National Office of the Public Prosecution Service also details the age spread of the criminal youth groups’ members. The majority of the members (69%) turn out to be of age. In other words, the term ‘youth group’ is slightly misleading. Also, it renders it more difficult for the Public Prosecution Service to tackle offenders. The Public Prosecution Service applies a strict distinction between how it deals with under-18s and over-18s.
Part B: Objectives and content action plans: interventions and parties involved

Around 60% of the criminal youth groups shortlisted in 2010 and 2011/beginning of 2012 meets our criteria for an integrated approach (including the condition that an action plan has been drawn up). A check against actual practice confirms that action plans had indeed almost always been drawn up for these crackdowns. We do not know how often action plans were drawn up for those strategies (around 25%) that did not meet our criteria for an integrated approach.

In total, 18 of these action plans were analysed. That has resulted in the subsequent picture:

- Objectives aimed at a crackdown on criminality, the group and the disturbance caused prevail. Sometimes, emphasis is on offering the youngsters a future, more often, though, on a criminal justice intervention. Objectives aimed at calling the parents to account were relatively few.
- A multi-track strategy is almost invariably in place, which makes, then, not just for an individual and group-oriented strategy but also a domain-oriented strategy. We noticed, incidentally, that it is difficult, in practice, to distinguish between individual-oriented and group-orientated.
- Often, a well-founded description of the criminal youth group is provided.
- Two-thirds of the action plans comprise an overview of interventions to be deployed (usually in the form of actions and measures). For the greater part, such overviews outline possible measures across the 3 domains. The overview is built up systematically, linking, for instance, measures to (sub-)objectives. However, none of the plans of action presents a set of substantively underpinned interventions which, given the analysis of the problems and possibilities for a particular group, seem likely to be effective. That is understandable since so far little scientific knowledge has been gained of what constitute helpful factors and effective interventions in the crackdown on criminal youth groups (also cf. the results of the literature study).
- The municipalities, the police and the Public Prosecution Service are almost always mentioned as key partners in the plan of action. Many other parties are likewise mentioned, such as care partners, the Security House, a housing corporation, the tax office and the Fiscal Intelligence and Investigation Service [FIOD]. It is usually specified which parties are involved in which measures and, thus, who is accountable for what.
- Control has been placed with various (combinations of) parties. That the Public Prosecution Service has overall control was not something we found in the plans of action.

Part B: Characteristics groups, prioritizing and information position

The in-depth analysis of the crackdown on 10 criminal youth groups shows that the groups differ widely as to size, ranging from large (around 100 members) to small (8 members). Some groups count a great many underage members, while others mostly consist of over 23s. Half of the groups are largely or wholly made up of members of Moroccan-Dutch extraction. The nuisance caused is in all cases of a structural nature, and has usually been going on for many years. Often, local residents are being intimidated on a structural basis, with the criminal key members behaving arrogantly and abusively towards police officers and other professionals. The nature of the
criminality is for all groups serious to very serious. At least half the groups are involved in one or more of the following: supra-local operations, possession of arms, (serious) violent criminality and drug dealing. This illustrates our earlier remark that the hardened criminal youth groups are overrepresented in the sample of 10 crackdowns.

Prioritizing is often done along 2 lines. The first to be prioritized is the group, then follows the crackdown on some of the members in the Security House. The prioritization of a group is carried out within the local or regional triangle. As a rule, it takes a long time for this to happen. The significance of prioritizing is not always clear. Thus, prioritization is not always followed as a matter of course by a freeing up of investigative capacity to crackdown on the group.

Shortlisting, the follow-up analyses and the mutual exchange of information have over the past years led to an enhancement of the information position. Even so, the paradoxical situation has arisen where the results of criminal investigation remain but limited for the very groups on which a great deal of information is available and the analyses of which are generally met with satisfaction. So it remains difficult to state how good the information position actually is from a criminal justice perspective.

We notice that in the absence of (topical) hard facts the police base their picture for an important part on the frequently ample amount of soft information. In contrast, the picture of the Public Prosecution Service is much more based on hard facts whose availability is limited. This sometimes causes views on the seriousness (or its evaluation by partners) to diverge, which impedes the creation of a shared focus.

**Part B: Characteristics interventions deployed.**

The in-depth analysis of the 10 crackdowns shows a rich diversity of interventions. In a majority of the crackdowns, the focus was in practice firmly on the deployment of care interventions. A minority of the crackdowns focused primarily on the use of criminal measures. A strong focus on administrative interventions was found the least often across the 10 strategies. The most striking issues with regard to the use of interventions are set down below. By way of summary and conclusion, a picture is given of the most prevalent interventions and their effectiveness.

- Often, a final warning is issued to group members, mostly in the shape of a (mayoral) letter issued in person and followed by a personal talk. Criminal members are told that police and partners will be actively focusing on them. Followers are offered help or guidance on condition that they walk away from criminality. These talks yield a great deal of information, which increases the effectiveness of the crackdown. Indeed, this intervention directly produced results with one group.

- Police are often hampered by limited investigative capacity. That is an important reason why in only half the strategies moderate to considerable use is made of criminal investigation and prosecution of criminal ringleaders. Few strategies succeeded in getting ringleaders convicted. Where they did, detention does not seem to have a deterrent effect on other members. At most, loss of the ringleaders disrupts the group structure temporarily. Another
reaction we noticed is that other group members show themselves less in the street and the group closes (becomes less accessible to police and partners).

- The procedure that police and the Public Prosecution Service follow is often event-driven and aimed at separate criminal cases, partly due to a lack of investigative capacity. Such pin-pricks are clearly effective at district level (abating or completely stopping any nuisance for residents) yet they hardly, if at all, result in a drop in criminality.

- Banning orders are imposed relatively infrequently. It is difficult to infer from the material what the underlying cause is. Evictions require considerable concerted effort and action. They feature in just a few crackdowns but then did effect a considerable reduction of nuisance.

- Together with partners (municipalities, youth work, neighbourhood workers), police focus in great measure on conducting surveillance and monitoring group movements and obstructing criminal ringleaders. The measure in which this happens systematically and is recorded varies.

- In general, probation and other care institutions barely, if at all, succeed in reaching out to groups or group members on a permanent basis. They thus pay for the fact that in a number of cases, the municipality and care organisations concerned lack good insight into the seriousness of the punishable acts due to inadequate information exchange.

**Part B: Control and collaboration**

The national policy states that the Public Prosecution Service has overall control of the crackdown on criminal youth groups. We do not find this in the action plans or in the 10 strategies that were investigated more closely. In time, parties begin to notice that the Public Prosecution Service is not quite capable of fulfilling this controlling role. Various respondents indicate that the role of overall controller is not in line with the tasks of the Public Prosecution Service, the way in which the Public Prosecution Service is organised and the limited affinity of the Public Prosecution Service with non-criminal interventions.

Sometimes, the municipality took on the role of controller vis-à-vis the entire crackdown strategy while otherwise control was exercised in various ways. Even though all kinds of bottlenecks occur in the control (particularly so in the fine-tuning between municipalities and the Public Prosecution Service) we also observe a stepped-up collaboration between municipalities, police and the Public Prosecution Service, especially at executive level. Bureau Jeugdzorg sometimes plays an important part as well (3 crackdowns). The Security House is involved in 8 out of 10 strategies. The fine-tuning is usually carried out during and around periodic case consultations where the problems and crackdown strategy for the group are discussed.

It is fair to say that collaboration is now well underway in most crackdown strategies. Yet, ideas still differ all too often as to what is necessary and what is possible. This is bound up with the fact that the supply of information (as far as the law allows) given by the police and the judiciary to the care partners about the criminal status of the group’s members is insufficient. But it also has to do with the fact that parties still too often take the view of their organisation for their own. Youth work in particular regularly finds it difficult to sound the same warning to criminal youngsters as police and
the judiciary issue. Equal treatment and joint strategies are often still missing; yet, where these have been heavily invested in, they show visible results. For instance, separating ringleaders from followers is then easier to accomplish, which in turn enables youth workers to tackle and impact the followers even better.

**Part B: Results**

The most marked results were achieved in the area of collaboration. In 7 out of the 10 crackdowns, much had been gained in this respect. Another encouraging result is that at district level, the situation improved considerably with 4 crackdowns and improved somewhat with another 4. In other words, no more, or less, nuisance is caused and residents experience an increased sense of safety. Results in the crackdown on the criminal youngsters and the crackdown on the group were achieved less often. In 3 strategies, marked results were achieved in the crackdown on the group. In 2 instances, marked results were achieved in the crackdown on separate young individuals. Half the strategies showed hardly any results in this respect.

**Part B: Helpful and hindering factors**

Three factors together are held to promote an effective crackdown: a shared sense of urgency, a committed leader and deployment of concrete and goal-oriented actions. Almost all crackdowns feature instances of successful interventions based on this interplay of factors. Collaboration between different organisations is of the essence here. We also notice that in some cases, separating ringleaders from the rest of the group effects a better reaching out to followers. Maintaining structural contact through a front-line professional who continually comes inside group members’ homes ensures the retention of a good information position and facilitates referral to care and assistance workers. A smooth information supply on the part of police and the judiciary to the care partners contributes to the creation of a shared vision of the seriousness and size of the criminality pattern. A focused gathering of information about group movements has proved to be helpful in some crackdowns while the use of cold cases at the Public Prosecution Service is likewise effective in demonstrating the structural character of a crime pattern.

Hindering factors are inherent in the problem (being persistent as well as serious) but are also to do with bottlenecks in how the crackdown is organised. The main hindrances have a bearing on 3 factors often occurring simultaneously: too little capacity, insufficient evidence and the insufficient informing of partners on the part of police and the Public Prosecution Service. Often, what is structurally missing is a prioritizing of the crackdown within the police and the Public Prosecution Service, which, in turn, leads to a structural shortage of available investigative capacity. At the same time, it is also true that the criminal investigations that are launched experience problems gathering sufficient evidence.

The deployment of fitting interventions on the part of the care partners is often hindered by their having insufficient perception of both the seriousness of the punishable acts and the crackdown envisaged by police and the Public Prosecution Service. This is attributable to a lack of police and
Public Prosecution Service information or to the information, when provided, being insufficient or coming too late.
The organisations’ operating procedures have also emerged as a major hindering factor. Since organisations may often work too slowly and too little flexibly and creatively in their implementation of the crackdowns, the criminal youth groups, and in particular those that are of longer standing and are the most professionalized, can easily hold the lead. In this respect, special mention is made of the Public Prosecution Service, which is equipped to complete criminal cases and to target punishable acts. That is difficult to relate to cracking down on a small or larger criminal youth group. The actions of professionals in the Public Prosecution Service are guided by internal procedures, which leave these professionals too little room to effectively think along with partners about a jointly shared, broad crackdown. On the other hand, there are also positive developments to be observed in the Public Prosecution Service: more and more often, public prosecutors are allotted to similar cases on a regular basis while the use of liaison meetings and super-fast-track courts has likewise increased.

A final hindering factor that is mentioned more often concerns the fact that it frequently takes too long before a punishment is actually imposed. Moreover, the punishments meted out to the youngsters often do not seem to hit home. Special conditions are imposed all too infrequently while involvement in a criminal youth group merely carries limited weight when a sentence is passed.

**Part B: promise and effectiveness behavioural interventions used**
The behavioural interventions deployed in 23 action plans were looked into, whereby it was also examined if these have (provisionally) been recognized by the Dutch Accreditation Committee for Behavioural Interventions or are stored in the databank of the Netherlands Youth Institute or in the database “Crackdown on Youth Groups” ['Aanpak Jeugdgroepen']. In the 23 action plans, mention is made of 21 behavioural interventions being used. The investigation did not examine whether the behavioural interventions are used as intended, i.e. in conformity with the preconditions set. Of the 21 behavioural interventions 4 have been recognized by the Dutch Accreditation Committee for Behavioural Interventions (FFT, MST, NPT [New Perspectives after Detention] and OLG [Parenting through Love and Setting Boundaries]). A further 4 behavioural interventions were assessed as ‘theoretically well-underpinned’ in the databank of the Netherlands Youth Institute (Ouders van Tegendraadse Jeugd [Parents of Unruly Youngsters], NP, TITAN and Beter omgaan met Pubers [Handling Adolescents Better]). In addition, 3 behavioural interventions are stored on the database ‘Crackdown on Youth Groups’ (EOG approach, Resocialisation and Guidance and 8 to 8 project). The remaining 10 behavioural interventions do not appear in the databanks/database.

**Part C: Results literature study**
Research into criminal youth groups has mostly been carried out in the US. Research in the European countries is less comprehensive. The literature study has listed gaps in our knowledge that are important for future research into criminal youth groups.
It is clear from the literature study that there are resemblances and differences between criminal youth groups, both within countries and between countries. The research literature shows that criminal youth groups across different countries share similar elements. The foreign literature offers starting points on how to gain more insight into criminal youth groups in the Netherlands and apply this knowledge to a further underpinning and developing of the crackdown in the Netherlands.

In the forming, disappearing and transforming of criminal youth groups, 3 factors or processes seem to play a role: (1) macro-factors, such as urbanization, poverty and economic transition, (2) neighbourhood or community processes such as social control and cultural differences and (3) spread of ‘gang culture’ by (social) media. From the literature it emerges that non-delinquent problem behaviour, negative life experiences, a positive attitude towards delinquent behaviour, little parental control and monitoring of activities and delinquent friends constitute the main risk factors that play a part in youngsters becoming involved in a criminal youth group. The risk of getting involved in a criminal youth group is increased by an accumulation of risk factors across a number of domains. Involvement in a criminal youth group goes together with an increase in offending behaviour and use of violence. Apparently, this is especially brought about by the facilitation effect, whereby standards and group processes within the group render it easier to commit offences and violence, but also by turning point factors, whereby joining a criminal youth group goes together with a loosening of the social ties with relatives, pro-social peers and school. Whether a youngster walks away from a criminal youth group seems mostly to be up to the youngster himself. A wish to avoid violence and other problems connected with involvement in a criminal youth group form important motives for leaving a group. External factors such as family or a job are less frequently seen to play a role.

In the crackdown on criminal youth groups, multi-track strategies or integrated tackling show most promise. The ‘Pulling Lever’ strategy and the ‘Gang Reduction Program’ are crackdowns whose effectiveness research has to greater or lesser extent proved. Similarly, the preventative programme G.R.E.A.T. seems to contribute to a smaller risk of involvement in a criminal youth group. On the other hand, interventions may also have unintended negative effects. If an intervention increases group cohesion this may lead to increasing criminal behaviour.

**Main conclusions**
- Over the past years, the crackdown on, particularly, the criminal youth groups has been deployed emphatically in the Netherlands. It has been given political priority since 2011. The action programme aims to raise the level of the crackdown on the criminal groups by removing such hindrances that get in the way of a jointly shared strategy as barriers between punishment and care. The first results of this show themselves in our research. A methodical approach is adopted more often across various domains, showing a concrete objective. Collaboration between the key partners is evolving in a positive way and is intensifying in the implementation of interventions. At the same time, people come up against limits. A jointly shared approach
requires a different manner of working and, with it, a cultural shift from organisations. The process of change needed for this requires more than the 2 years of the action programme.

- The results of this evaluation should be viewed in the light of some special circumstances. First, both the police and the Public Prosecution Service are in the midst of a fundamental reorganisation process. Further, the municipalities are faced with a considerable workload increase and of course, the economic situation requires all partners to economize. Viewed in this light, a pertinent research result is that a one or two-pronged strategy may also be successful. This suggests a tailor-made approach. A non-integrated approach may suffice for a specific category of criminal youth groups, i.e. those groups that have only been around a short time and that are known, through hard police information, to commit less serious offences.

- It is generally true that a multi-track strategy or integrated approach shows most promise in the crackdown on criminal youth groups. This starting point underlying the national policy is corroborated by the literature study. It clearly indicates that an integrated approach deployed across a number of domains (youngster, family, school, friends) and a combination of strategies are indispensable. This combination needs to concern itself with offering youngsters a future, providing care, taking preventative action as well as administering punishment. The most important element for this to work well lies in collaboration between the several organisations.

- The ‘Pulling Lever’ strategy shows some positive results in the literature. It consists of a coordinated judicial response in which police play an important part. Various elements of this promising strategy have meanwhile been found to feature in the crackdown adopted in the Netherlands. One of these denotes the active communication with offenders to make it clear to them why they receive special attention in the crackdown on the criminal youth group. Just as with the ‘Pulling Lever’ strategy, the police in the Netherlands have a prominent role to play in the implementation, as, for instance, in the communication with offenders. In this promising strategy, too, it is seen that a ‘coordinated response’ is required from the police / judiciary and care partners, implying that collaboration and control are indispensable.

- The number of shortlisted problematic youth groups is dropping. As much is true for the shortlisted criminal youth groups. The minister pronounced it to be his ambition (in 2011), within 2 years to successfully tackle all groups that had been shortlisted in 2010. By the end of 2011, 55% of the criminal youth groups shortlisted in 2010 had not been shortlisted anew as a criminal youth group. Halfway through 2012, this percentage had risen to 60 to 75%. Although the new growth in criminal youth groups has not been factored in here, it is yet fair to say that parties are well underway towards realising the ambition as it was formulated.

- The research also shows that a special, long-term effort is required to successfully tackle the remaining groups (25 to 40%). After all, these are the most serious groups. A joint effort will usually be able to stop or reduce any nuisance caused by these groups. However, the results of the crackdown on the criminality have remained limited so far.

- The way the strategy is organised is as yet not well geared to the crackdown on the criminal youth groups. In part, this has to do with the process of change mentioned earlier which is to effect a shared view, mutual information exchange between organisations (within the legal
framework) and an equal treatment profile becoming more matter-of-course parts of the strategy.

- A point of special attention concerns the overall control of the crackdown. The national policy has placed this controlling role with the Public Prosecution Service. Evaluation shows that the Public Prosecution Service failed to assume this role in a sample of 10 relatively serious criminal groups. But then, the current organisation of the Public Prosecution Service offers professionals in the Public Prosecution Service little space to fulfil such a leadership role (in part owing to the framework firmly imposed by criminal law). Municipalities assumed overall control in a number of cases. Apparently, this works better (provided it is acceptable to all parties).

- Lack of sufficient evidence to deal with the members of the serious criminal youth groups according to criminal law is another point that features prominently in the evaluation. We have not been able to form a complete picture of the underlying reasons. This would require further analysis of a number of criminal investigations that were carried out. Even so, some factors may be mentioned here by way of explanation. First, the gathering of information about the criminal youth groups is not primarily directed at amassing evidence for a particular (alleged) punishable act. Second, in practice, too little investigative capacity is available to (continue to) pursue criminal investigations of the criminal youth groups. Third, the criminal youth groups often operate cleverly, without grassing each other up and fourth, citizens are often afraid to mention or report an offence committed by these groups.

- Lack of sufficient investigative capacity is another thread running through the evaluation. The crackdown on the long-standing serious criminal youth groups (analysed during the in-depth stage) generally turns out not to receive the required high priority within the police and the Public Prosecution Service. There may be good reasons for this. But it does put pressure on the significance of the political prioritizing on the part of the minister and the prioritizing in the local triangle. Basing ourselves on the analysis of the crackdowns on 10 relatively serious criminal groups we draw the conclusion that there does not seem to be a generally shared feeling of great urgency across the regions to crackdown on these (serious) criminal youth groups in a combined effort.

- Finally: a general picture has emerged from the evaluation to the effect that the longer a group has been in existence as a criminal youth group, the harder it is to tackle the group successfully. Thus, the motto ought to be ‘quick and effective crackdown’ rather than ‘wait and see’. Even better would be preventative action and preventing an annoying or nuisance-causing group to slip down to the status of a criminal youth group. At the very least, this requires the local partners to adopt a joint strategy springing from a single shared vision and to offer the youngsters a future.