

Investing in Prevention: Time to Embrace the Research Evidence



There is a rich evidence base of experimentation and learning that demonstrates the societal benefits deriving from 'up-stream' prevention and early interventions. It is more effective to anticipate harm and pre-empt criminal opportunities by effecting social and technological change than responding to problems once they manifest themselves or by retrofitting solutions after the event.

Prevention has played a significant role in reducing aggregate crime rates in relation to traditional property and public crimes across many European countries. There is growing evidence and increased acknowledgement of the importance of early childhood development, adverse childhood experiences and trauma in influencing subsequent criminal behaviour and future trajectories of vulnerability, victimisation and offending, as well as lifelong health and wellbeing.



“ Politicians talk about prevention but do not do it, in part because they are not familiar with the evidence and in part because they are overly influenced by the special interests of police, lawyers and prisons. ”

Irvin Waller,
University of Ottawa

Nonetheless, crime prevention remains under-resourced and, too often, poorly implemented. Securing the necessary investments in prevention can be a hard sell to politicians and key policymakers, especially where evidence of success is not always easy to measure. While prevention efforts require investment, the resulting benefits may well outweigh the costs of the initial intervention, resulting in positive societal and financial gains. Not spending the necessary resources up-front on prevention can end up costing more in the long run, given the social and economic cost of policing, prosecution and prison.

Measuring Success

Evaluation provides a rich evidence-base upon which to develop good practice and justify public investments. However, there are evident difficulties associated with evaluating prevention as an event that subsequently does not occur.

Methodologically, it is difficult to evaluate a 'non-event', except in so far as comparisons can be drawn with a control sample that has not benefited from the intervention. Such studies can identify changes brought about during an initiative's implementation, but may only reveal correlations rather than establishing causation.



The success of crime prevention interventions is often measured by comparing police recorded crime data over time or between areas. Official statistics are but part of the picture, alternative measures, such as victimisation surveys, levels of perceived insecurity and community well-being provide a more holistic and often more robust picture of urban safety and security. Our Review of thirty years of learning highlights that we are often not implementing measures that we know will work, reduce crime, and cost less for law and order.

To ensure greater evidence-based practice in urban security through prevention, there is a need for better communication between research, practice and politics to ensure the translation and take up of successful prevention strategies. This requires structured knowledge exchange partnerships between researchers, practitioners and policy-makers. Moreover, ongoing promotion of prevention efforts and successes may yield wider benefits.

Case study: Rotterdam's Neighbourhood Profile

Rotterdam's Neighbourhood Profile. (**Wijkprofiel Rotterdam**) provides the city's residents with an innovative online tool to compare their neighbourhood to others and over time.

Drawing on both official and survey data on wealth of different social, physical and safety indicators, the Index is a valuable resource for researchers, administrators, and planners in developing strategies and policies, as well as an accessible, transparent, and useable tool for citizens.



The Courage to Innovate

There is a need for a bold shift to problem-solving through early interventions to avoid sticking plaster solutions that do not address the causes, but simply respond reactively to problems once they are manifested. The political reluctance to innovate through investments in prevention, results in continued reliance on the costly, damaging, and ineffective resort to reactive and punitive approaches to crime and harm.



“ In urban security interventions, innovation and risk-taking is necessary which collides with the risk aversion of our political culture. ”

Paul Ekblom
University of the Arts London

The recent Covid-19 pandemic inspired many local authorities to address certain problems and challenges in a more creative way, daring to innovate, collaborate and experiment where previously they might have been reluctant to do so. Learning from these experiences, innovative multi-sectoral approaches to problem-based prevention should be encouraged and promoted.

Commitment to long-term strategies and partnerships












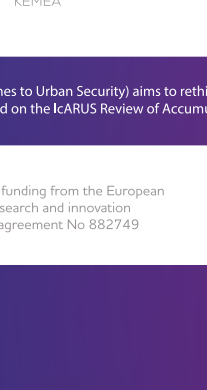
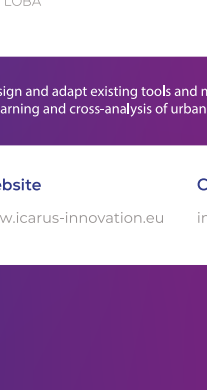
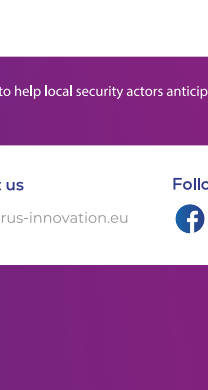
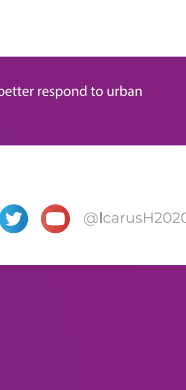



The importance of political leadership, public trust and institutional commitment, appropriate resources and buy-in from relevant stakeholders are all vital to the success of interventions. Demonstration projects may provide interesting insights and learning but will result in little change if they are not embedded within long-term strategies tailored to the local context, underpinned by sustainable funding and supported by long-term organisational commitments.

The Cost-Benefit Analysis of Prevention

Better evaluation of prevention could provide the foundation for cost-benefit analysis to be carried out. However, access to financial information is rarely shared. Accessing free tools, such as the **Manning Cost-Benefit Tool (MCBT)** (developed with criminal justice practitioners in mind) can help redress this void and help support the case for investment in prevention.



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The IcARUS project Innovative Approaches to Urban Security aims to rethink, redesign and adapt existing tools and methods to help local security actors anticipate and better respond to urban security challenges. This factsheet is based on the IcARUS Review of Accumulated Learning and cross-analysis of urban security.