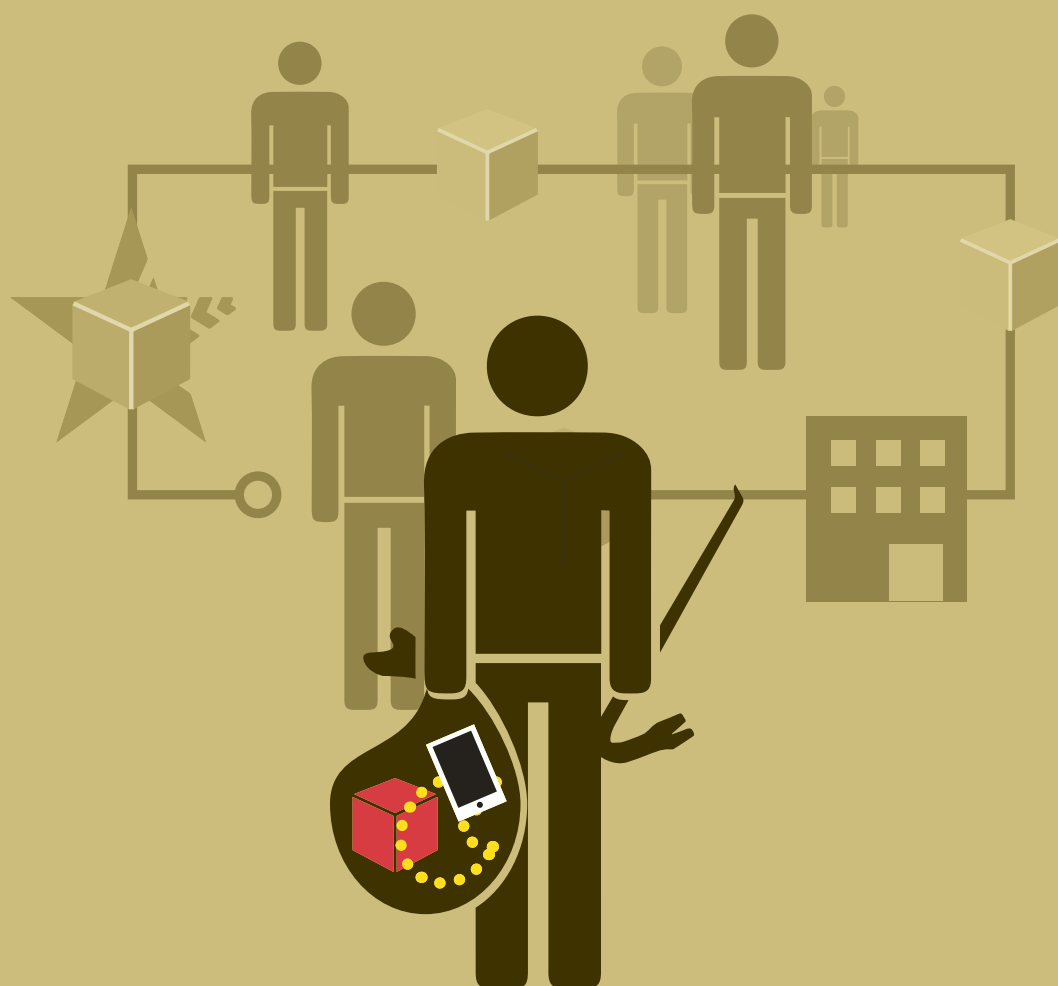


Focus on Fencing

summary and conclusions



Henk Ferwerda
Tom van Ham
Lieselot Scholten
Donald Jager

Beke *reeks*

At the request of

Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie, Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Documentatiecentrum (WODC)

Translation summary

Tim Mitchell

Cover and DTP

Marcel Grotens

Summary from:**Focus op heling**

Een onderzoek naar het functioneren van de helingmarkt, het beleid tegen en de gevolgen van heling

Henk Ferwerda, Tom van Ham, Lieselot Scholten en Donald Jager

Summary and conclusions

This report focuses on the phenomenon of receiving/handling stolen goods also known as fencing. The study investigates how the market for stolen goods functions, and examines prevention policy and the consequences of fencing. Here we provide a summary of the study and answer the study questions formulated by the client – the WODC of the Ministry of Security and Justice. These questions arise from the following aims of the study: *‘To map the functioning of the market for fencing, thereby identifying the policy and instruments for tackling fencing, and to provide a picture of the consequences of fencing for trade and industry and individual citizens and to find points of departure for reducing fencing in the future.’*

A multi-source study

To be able to fulfil the aims of the study, a variety of sources were consulted. As well as consulting literature and policy documents, use was made of a variety of existing sources and records. These include records of figures as well as information from files on police investigations, the Digitaal Opkopers Register (DOR - Second-hand Dealers Register), quarterly reports, information from the Public Prosecution Service (OM) and from the three Probation Service organisations (3RO). A great deal of information was also collected ‘in the field’. This was achieved by questioning 62 experts on the theme of fencing in interviews and expert meetings and holding interviews with 21 receivers. Finally, in collaboration with Intomart GfK, a questionnaire was drawn up, that was completed by 3,053 respondents aged 15 and older. We refer to this as the citizens’ panel.

Characteristics and developments on the market for stolen goods

In this paragraph we first sketch an outline picture of the scale of fencing, before discussing the types of goods that are handled, the characteristics and methods of the receivers, and the developments that have taken place since the previous national study into fencing in 2007.

Fencing is concealed and appears to be a victimless crime

It is important to remember that the handling of stolen goods cannot take place without it being preceded by another property offence – such as theft, burglary, mugging or robbery. There are sources that suggest that 80 percent of all thefts and burglaries take place with the purpose of subsequently selling on the stolen goods. This implies that without receivers, there would be far fewer thieves, so tackling the handling of stolen goods (fencing) should also be given priority. Based on the number of almost 554,000 thefts, embezzlements and burglaries registered by the police in 2015, the annual average of 12,000 registrations of fencing over the past five years is on the low side. This would seem to suggest that many of the cases of fencing never come to the attention of the police. Based on information from our citizens' panel, we can also deduce that the *dark number* for fencing is high, as 3 percent of Dutch people aged 15 years and older – more than 422,000 people – admit to having occasionally been guilty of fencing. As we know from the sources consulted, fencing is a common, concealed crime that appears victimless. It is possible for that reason that there is little attention for this crime, among others within criminal investigation.

Marketable goods are popular among fences

Fencing relates to goods stolen from private individuals, businesses or institutions. These goods have a number of similarities. Firstly they are easy to conceal and easy to transport and to steal. Furthermore they are goods with a high value that can be sold relatively rapidly and simply, and which can be enjoyed by people, or for which there is demand. According to an analysis based on more than 43,000 goods registered by the police in fencing cases over the past five years, 79 percent can be characterised as unique and 21 percent as not unique. Unique goods – such as a car or mobile telephone – have a serial number or other specific characteristic which makes identification of the item easily possible. More than half of the registered fenced goods (52%) consists of (parts of) vehicles, in which category bicycles, passenger cars and delivery vans and mopeds and scooters form the largest subcategories. In second and third place (both scoring 7%) of the fenced goods registered by the police are audio-visual equipment – above all communication equipment – and tools. The sources consulted by us outside the police agreed on the top 3, but pointed out that the police only registers a small proportion of what is actually fenced.

Drugstore and supermarket articles from organised crime – including cargo theft – are offered on (second-hand) markets, in pubs and in residential districts, under the false flag of being second-hand goods or from bankruptcy buy-ups. This fact (largely) removes them from the attention of the police. Experts also refer to the popularity of E-bikes, radio-navigation systems, jewellery and gold in the fencing circuit. Members of our citizens' panel who have occasionally been guilty of handling/receiving stolen goods indicated that they above all bought/sold mobile telephones and audio-visual equipment.

Why these goods?

The popularity of these goods relates first and foremost to the lower price that has to be paid for the items. *'We are after all Dutch'*, or as one respondent put it, *'... buying from a fence is simply the cheaper option.'* Interviews with respondents revealed that the price difference as compared to new value can be easily 50 percent. The ease of selling stolen goods via the Internet or on other (second-hand) markets, or the ease and security of buying stolen goods within a familiar social network of for example a local neighbourhood or district, plays an important role. Thirdly, there is the relatively low perceived risk of being caught. In the citizens' panel, 70 to 80 percent of the respondents – depending on the item in question – estimated the risk of being caught as small to very small. Finally, in the view of various experts, there is insufficient attention for fencing from the police and justice authorities. The fences we spoke see the handling of stolen goods as a relatively risk-free crime too.

Fences; who are they?

On the basis of police figures and information from the probation service about arrested fences, fences can be described as having the following characteristics. This information probably relates to receivers of stolen goods with a 'more hard-core' profile as compared to the fences from the citizens' panel. Approximately nine out of ten receivers are men, with an average age of 30 years. Among arrested receivers, multiple life areas – such as education, income, drug and alcohol abuse, criminal history, contacts in the criminal circuit, thinking patterns and attitude – are criminogenic factors. In practice, this means there are often (multiple) psychosocial problems. This picture is confirmed in the interviews with habitual receivers: the group regularly guilty of handling stolen goods and generally selling on those goods. On the basis of the citizens' panel, many individuals (more than 400,000 Dutch people aged 15 years and older) are guilty on an incidental basis of handling stolen goods, and are often aware of the fact (criminal receiving). These consumers – as confirmed in the interviews – carry out their searches and purchases on markets or via the Internet for goods of which, based on the (excessively low) price, they (should reasonably) know or could reasonably suspect that the item was 'not honestly' obtained.

With this type description of receivers, we have been able to type the first group of receivers – *private individuals*. This group of private individuals on the one hand consists of ordinary citizens who purchase stolen goods. They make incidental use of the opportunity that arises to purchase an item that they wish to obtain at a lower price. The saying ‘the opportunity makes the thief’ would appear particularly apt in respect of this group, whereby it is notable that these individuals trivialise the seriousness of the crime. On the other hand, there are people who come into the picture more frequently for property crime. This latter group of individuals, as shown by police investigations, are (also) guilty of stealing and selling on stolen goods. These then are persistent or habitual offenders; young people from problem youth groups, as well as addicts and the homeless.

A second category of fences consists of *regular trading organisations*, including garages and breakers’ yards in the automotive sector and buyers of second-hand goods. It is noticeable that these businesses rarely occur in police records. In a period of five years, just 67 such non-natural persons were involved in or suspected of the crime of handling stolen goods. These numbers are in shrill contrast with the information we have received from experts. They repeatedly report handling by buyers of second-hand goods, gold buyers who with their ‘pop-up stores’ are particularly illusive, and garage companies who make use of stolen parts for repairs, or who facilitate the ringing/cloning of cars.

The records contain least information about the third category – *criminal organisations*. Following considerable effort – because only few investigations are carried out into cases of fencing – we obtained a picture of seven more or less recent criminal investigations into ‘handling’ crimes. Together with a re-analysis of seven police investigations focused on organised vehicle crime and various interviews with experts, a picture emerges of organised groups (mobile bandits) operating nationally and internationally. They are involved in organised theft, the ringing and selling on of cars and car parts, bicycles, E-bikes, milk powder (for Asia), perfumes and other cosmetics, copper and other metals. Reference was also made to organised cargo thefts in which large batches of marketable goods were stolen and subsequently resold in the Netherlands and abroad. Finally, we see relationships between fencing and (*mala fide*) businesses and entrepreneurs, representing evidence of interaction between the underworld and the overworld.

Markets for stolen goods and the modus operandi of fences

The locations where fencing takes place – the markets – can to a greater or lesser extent be linked to the different types of perpetrators. A distinction can be made between local and digital markets, and domestic and foreign markets.

Local markets involve the (informal) trading in residential districts, on school playgrounds, (black) markets and in pubs, certain eateries and self-storage com-

panies from which stolen goods are offered for sale. Otherwise we see buyers and ‘pop-up markets’ in shopping centres and hotels, where above all gold and jewellery are traded. Finally, regular trading companies are part of the local market. Interviews with receivers suggest that a large volume of goods are traded within secure social networks in residential districts and neighbourhoods. They are considered safe because the people know and trust one another; via this social network, demand and supply of stolen goods are brought together in what is practically a second economy. From these social networks, there are also lines to organised forms of handling. Large numbers of bicycles and E-bikes are for example stolen to order. These are then bought up by middlemen and subsequently disappear abroad, via organised groups.

Digital markets include large and well-known second-hand selling sites on the Internet, as well as WhatsApp groups (above all young people and in local neighbourhoods) and innumerable Yard sales on Facebook.

With the more organised forms of handling stolen goods, goods – also brought in from abroad – are sold on markets in our country, as well as travelling from our country to foreign markets. Cars for example are currently transported to Eastern Europe and Asia, expensive watches to Sweden, milk powder to China, Norway and Dubai, radio navigation systems to Lithuania, England and China and (electric) bicycles to Poland. All in all, fencing is a highly demand-based crime and as such highly dynamic.

It emerges that the Netherlands is also an attractive market for foreign suppliers. The goods in question are batches of electronics or drugstore articles from cargo thefts or batches of new mobile telephones – obtained via fraudulent means – which are sent in postal parcels to our country and sold here on second-hand markets.

Developments over the last ten years

The last national study into the handling of stolen goods was carried out in 2007, so it is now possible to map out the developments and changes over the last ten years. We have identified four. Firstly, the digital world has achieved a huge outreach and popularity for example via sales sites and social media (WhatsApp and Facebook). This has resulted in a new infrastructure within which goods can be (illegally) traded. This means that fencing in the digital world enjoys a relatively low profile. The second development is that there is a link between local markets – safe social networks in neighbourhoods where goods change ownership – and more organised forms of fencing. Thirdly, the opportunities for fencing goods have increased not only online but also offline. For example – partly influenced by the economic recession – a market has emerged for chains of buyers for a whole variety of second-hand goods, and pop-up stores that purchase gold and jewellery have gained ground. Finally, due to the expansion of the European Union (EU), the handling of stolen

goods seems to have taken on a more international and organised character. Mobile bandits, among others, have responded to this development, certainly in relation to costly and marketable goods.

Based on the opportunity theory (increased outreach and opportunity) and the rational choice theory (low risk of capture and high returns) combined with the limited attention from the investigating authorities (as a result of which few barriers are raised), all of these developments can be easily explained.

Where is the blind spot for the police?

Assuming that many goods that originate from theft end up in the stolen goods market, it can be argued that the police – based on the relatively small number of around 12,000 cases of fencing per year – misses more than it sees. Our citizens' panel also reveals that by large numbers of citizens, the handling of stolen goods is in fact viewed as relatively innocent, whereby personal interests prevail (obtaining goods at a lower price). Interviews with fences have made it clear that there are social networks where the buying and selling of stolen goods is relatively normal.

Police records also reveal that the police has little idea of the selling of stolen goods via digital markets. According to the representatives of second-hand sales sites, this is logical, because customers are always satisfied. After all, they have been able to purchase an item for a relatively low price, and thus are unlikely to report the practice. For these websites, scamming (when the purchased goods are not actually delivered to the buyers) is a far greater problem.

The fact that the handling of stolen goods appears to be a victimless crime means that it is rarely ever reported. Experts suggest that the approach to tackling fencing and then above all the criminal investigation of the crime, regularly receives far too low priority. In itself this is unusual, because fences with their demand for stolen goods continue to drive the offenders of thefts and High Impact Crimes. The low number of criminal investigations into fencing is illustrative for the limited attention and priority given to this crime. On this basis, it is only to be expected that the police also have a considerable blind spot when it comes to internationally oriented and organised forms of fencing.

Measures, consequences and perceived seriousness

Despite the fact that respondents consider the priority given to the handling of stolen goods by many parties as too low, in comparison to other countries, we in the Netherlands are frontrunners when it comes to tackling fencing. In this paragraph, we discuss the approach, the consequences and the perceived seriousness.

StopHeling (Halt Fencing) and the Digitaal Opkopers Register (Digital Buyers Register) as leading features of the approach

The Ministry of Security and Justice, together with its partners, has over the past few years made serious advances in introducing the website and app StopHeling and the Digitaal Opkopers Register (DOR). Within the app and website of StopHeling, citizens and second-hand buyers are able to check whether an item has been registered as lost or stolen via a serial number. If this is the case, via StopHeling, the police can be notified, so they can take action. Consumers can also register their own goods preventively, which in the event of theft facilitates reporting and increases the likelihood of retrieving the stolen goods. From its BVI records, the police tops up the StopHeling database, with records of stolen goods. On 1 May 2016, the database listed 925,000 mainly unique goods. Bicycles, communication equipment and computers are the top-3 stolen and registered goods. Unfortunately, it is not possible to create a regional distribution of products in the database. Despite the fact that only unique goods with a serial number can be included in StopHeling, a further analysis (reference date 18 January 2016) reveals that 14 percent of the goods in StopHeling are non-unique, and thus have no serial number. This shows that it is essential that the database be periodically maintained and cleaned. The StopHeling website and app are widely used. The counter rose from almost 456,000 search requests 2014 to almost 670,000 in 2015, and in the first quarter of 2016 it has already topped 283,000 (extrapolated to the whole of 2016, this amounts to almost 850,000). In that sense, StopHeling seems to be meeting a need among the public and second-hand buyers for checking the reliability of an item they are considering purchasing.

Buyers of second-hand goods have been required since 1880 to register purchased goods (what they buy, when and from whom). Since 2011, a digital variant of this record was developed in the form of the DOR. The DOR is linked to the StopHeling database, so it is possible to automatically check whether a unique item that has been offered is registered as stolen. If there is a match, the police automatically receives a report, to which they are then able to respond. Since the implementation of the DOR at all police units in 2015, the number of municipalities with affiliated second-hand buyers has risen rapidly. On the reference date 1 May 2016, 265 municipalities were affiliated with in turn 3,023 affiliated second-hand buyers. To illustrate the speed of the rise: on 1 May 2015, there were 190 registered municipalities and 1,663 registered second-hand buyers.

Other measures at home and abroad

In addition to the DOR and StopHeling, as part of the study, we assessed other measures focused on fencing. Linked to the DOR these are (1) a helpdesk for businesses, (2) an automated tool to help second-hand buyers comply with their legal

reporting obligations to the municipality, and which offers buyers the possibility of linking up to the DOR, (3) the development of an investigation module and (4) the development of the DNA of jewellery, a system for making non-unique goods unique. Also worthy of mention in this connection is the possibility available to buyers of second-hand goods to collect (in)direct damages suffered from the handlers of stolen goods, via the Service Organisatie Directe Aansprakelijkheidsstelling (SODA – Service Organisation Direct Liability System). There have also been a series of local and national campaigns aimed at increasing awareness among the public and second-hand buyers, and informing them of (the consequences of) handling stolen goods, in addition to which a web file has been developed for sharing best practices with parties involved in tackling the problem of handling stolen goods. The technical, organisational and communication measures are encouraged and facilitated by the Ministry of Security and Justice.

In addition to these measures, focused specifically on fencing, a series of measures have been charted out, aimed first and foremost at preventing theft. After all, these measures can also have a preventive effect on the handling of stolen goods. These are measures aimed at increasing awareness among individual citizens, making non-unique goods traceable or unique, and the use of decoy items fitted with GPS trackers.

Finally, an inventory of measures aimed at tackling the handling of stolen goods abroad was drawn up. If any such measures are taken, they appear similar to the measures taken in the Netherlands. One exception is a specific measure – which studies have in fact not shown as resulting in a direct fall in crime levels – which could be interesting for implementation in the Netherlands. This is the *Market Reduction Approach*, which has been implemented by various police forces in the United Kingdom and the aim of which is to disrupt the trade in stolen goods. The heart of this approach is the introduction of a focus in which on the basis of information about the (local) market in stolen goods, targeted interventions are carried out.

Consequences of the handling of stolen goods and perceived seriousness

When it comes to the consequences and perceived seriousness of the handling of stolen goods, a distinction can be made between citizens and trade and industry. Among relatively large numbers of citizens – including fences – the threshold for buying an item originating from theft is low. Combined with the fact that there appears to be no direct victim, and the perception that the risk of being caught is low, while the penalties are also viewed as low, it can be argued that individual citizens do not view fencing as a serious criminal act. At the same time, given the large numbers of thefts, it is clearly evident that these goods are stolen from other individuals and businesses. The crime of handling therefore clearly does conceal the

presence of a victim. The representatives of selling sites on the Internet realise all too clearly that goods are fenced on the Internet, but this leads to no or almost no complaints from buyers. On this point, clients are indeed above all satisfied. This is illustrated by the above.

On the basis of the sources consulted by us, it can be concluded that fencing and the related crimes such as theft and burglary lead to direct and indirect losses for bonafide businesses; they suffer damages and are forced to incur costs to prevent and tackle theft and/or the handling of stolen goods. On the other hand, mala fide traders, including second-hand goods traders, do profit on an incidental or structural basis from the supply of and demand for stolen goods. If for the consumer there is no perceivable difference in terms of appearance between ‘honest’ and stolen goods that are offered more cheaply, this can to some degree explain why (also mala fide) traders are able and willing to profit from the market for stolen goods.

In interviews, experts suggest that the trade in stolen goods not only undermines the regular economy, but also operates at the interface between the underworld and the overworld. Within the retail trade, certain retail sectors (jewellers) but also the transport sector (cargo theft) suffer huge negative consequences of the trade in stolen goods. There are however other sectors that benefit. Take for example the sectors selling bicycles, cars, car components and electronic equipment, which items are sometimes nonetheless repurchased following theft and fencing. In that sense, theft and fencing not only support an alternative (second) economy, but also a part of the regular economy.

According to certain respondents, it is essential that the crime of fencing be *reframed*, before the approach to the crime can be prioritised and made more conclusive. Fencing is a form of commonly occurring crime, but because it appears victimless it receives too little attention, and large numbers of the public view it as normal. However, it is a facilitating crime which ensures that serious property crimes (sometimes with violence) will continue to be committed, based on the ever present demand.

Effectiveness of the measures

In this paragraph, we consider the effectiveness of the measures introduced since 2013: the DOR and StopHeling databases.

Matches between StopHeling and the DOR

When a second-hand buyer purchases an item and registers his purchase in the DOR, a match may appear if the item is registered as stolen in StopHeling. Over the years, stolen goods have become increasingly digitally recorded, a fact that makes it possible to initiate follow-up action. The number of matches has risen from 4,149

in 2014 to 11,560 in 2015 (a rise of 179 percent) to 4,486 matches in the first quarter of 2016. As compared to the number of goods stolen each year, this number of matches is low. This may of course be related to the fact that buyers of second-hand goods are not the only domestic sales market, because serial numbers are incorrectly typed in so that no match occurs, or because goods disappear abroad. At present, it is unfortunately not technically possible to determine which follow-up action was taken by the police and with which result in the event of a match. It is also not (yet) possible to obtain a picture of how many cases of fencing are registered by the police, outside the StopHeling and DOR systems.

The processing of fencing cases by the Public Prosecution Service

On the basis of the DOR and StopHeling, we are unfortunately not yet able to give an idea of the processing of the reported crimes. In the framework of the approach, we are able to give some insight into the status of the criminal justice approach to and the processing of cases of fencing. On the basis of analyses, it turns out that 27 percent of fencing cases registered by the police end up with the Public Prosecution Service. Of the 9,651 cases analysed from the last five years, in 44 percent of the cases the suspect(s) was (were) called to appear. Wherever a suspect was called to appear, in more than three quarters of the cases the final judgement was a penalty or judicial measure. It is important to note that a match (in the systems) can also result in prosecution for burglary and/or theft. As a consequence, the overall risk of being caught for property crime then rises.

Side effects of the DOR

Because the DOR has not yet been introduced nationwide, goods originating from theft can still be relatively easily sold on. As a result, a waterbed effect can occur within and around municipalities where the DOR has been introduced. Interviews for example reveal that in particular experienced and calculating criminals (non-addicts, persistent and habitual offenders) are aware of the existence of the DOR, and therefore offer their goods to second-hand buyers not affiliated to the DOR (whether or not in other municipalities). These may include social networks in neighbourhoods and residential districts, pop-up buyers, online and offline (second-hand) markets with no or only limited controls, and criminal organisations. In principle, the awareness of the existence of the DOR among experienced criminals means that practically all the goods they steal and trade on end up in other circuits.

Cooperation between parties, and do we stick to our agreements?

During the interviews with experts, it emerged that there are ‘believers’ in the approach, who are only too aware of the negative consequences of fencing, and are very much in favour of the approach. There are few hindrances to information

exchange, but it has proven extremely difficult to transfer the enthusiasm and awareness of the believers to others, and to convert this into an active approach. For the police and Public Prosecution Service, the investigation of fencing activities does not have a high priority; municipalities sometimes experience difficulties in introducing the DOR and (customers of) online marketplaces effectively experience no inconvenience from fencing. As a result, the willingness to invest more in the approach to tackling the handling of stolen goods among such parties is limited. Many insurers – who do of course suffer damage – are still very much in the initial stages of an approach to tackling fencing. The link between the handling of stolen goods and the tackling of High Impact Crimes appears to be meaningful and offers clear opportunities, and will help boost awareness that the two are related.

It is important that this takes place, because despite the fact that the introduction of the DOR is advancing steadily, there are still many municipalities and police forces where the approach to fencing in general and the introduction of the DOR in particular, leaves room for improvement. Although investments are being made in tackling fencing by appointing implementation managers and by freeing up capacity within the police to encourage second-hand buyers to sign up to the DOR, in particular in investigations into more complex cases of handling there are clear bottlenecks. However, above all the Ministry of Security and Justice and a number of very keen professionals within municipalities and police forces are working hard to establish an approach to tackling fencing.

Do the measures work?

The principles of the rational choice and opportunity theory can offer points of departure for tackling fencing, creating a framework for evaluating the (side) effects of the policy as implemented and can be useful in mapping out the relevant effective mechanisms. We would distinguish between mechanisms at micro level (perpetrator level), meso level (the handling process) and macro level (the local/regional/national context). On the basis of the various study activities, it has emerged that the measures introduced at macro level – albeit sometimes with considerable effort – are proving effective. This is important because StopHeling and the DOR do help raise barriers. In raising those barriers and restricting the opportunity to fence stolen goods – via offline and online markets – a great deal can still be achieved at micro level. There is room for improvement in terms of the understanding among individual citizens and fences about the perceived risk of being caught, and the seriousness of the crime (the level of punishment). Information about the seriousness and impact of the impact of stolen goods and measures that can be taken, and selecting the right tone of voice and the most effective wording could mean that at least among the average man or woman on the street, greater resistance will be created to buying stolen goods. In the past, in another campaign, a similar intended

effect was achieved when it came to prostitution (by framing prostitution in the light of human trafficking).

Elsewhere, more than is currently the case – at meso level – it should be possible to identify which barriers could be raised to make the act of fencing more difficult – from the initial crime through to the transfer and acquisition of stolen goods. Knowledge about the process of fencing, the parties involved and their modus operandi (for example about the type of stolen goods on offer) would appear to be relevant, effective mechanisms.

At macro level much is advancing smoothly, but the priority and capacity currently given to fencing at local, regional and national level deserve (permanent) attention within various organisations. Joint consultation and agreements for example in respect of the introduction of the DOR, the carrying out of checks by the police and municipal supervisors and organising specific investigation activities would appear in this respect to be not only relevant but also essential.

Opportunities for the approach

The analysis of the effect of the measures has revealed a number of opportunities when it comes to improving the approach as put forward in the interviews with experts. We referred earlier to the *Market Reduction Approach* from the United Kingdom, the objective of which is to disrupt the trade in stolen goods.

A second opportunity for the approach is to ensure that the crime of fencing be more clearly brought to the attention of professionals. On the one hand, this involves the framing of handling as a facilitating crime for property crimes – including *High Impact Crimes* – and on the other hand as a process that undermines the regular economy. In combination with this approach, at both local and national level – also within criminal investigations – the handling of stolen goods should be placed higher on the agenda. It is important that fencing has been included as a priority in the Security Agenda 2015-2018.

A small but not unimportant third opportunity for the approach is a prohibition on the paying out in cash to sellers of second-hand goods, by jewellers, gold buyers and metal dealers, and other purveyors of second-hand goods. Payment by bank transfer automatically raises a barrier to offering stolen goods, because the provider of the goods in question can easily be traced via details of the account holder.

A fourth line of approach relates to public information that makes people start to think, by approaching stolen goods in the same way that public campaigns have been organised in respect of battery hens. Despite all the advertising campaigns so far, many citizens still perceive fencing as a non-serious crime (penalties) while the link to theft and the presence of victims is still insufficiently identified.

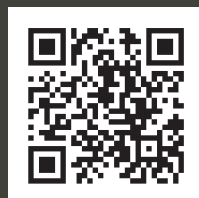
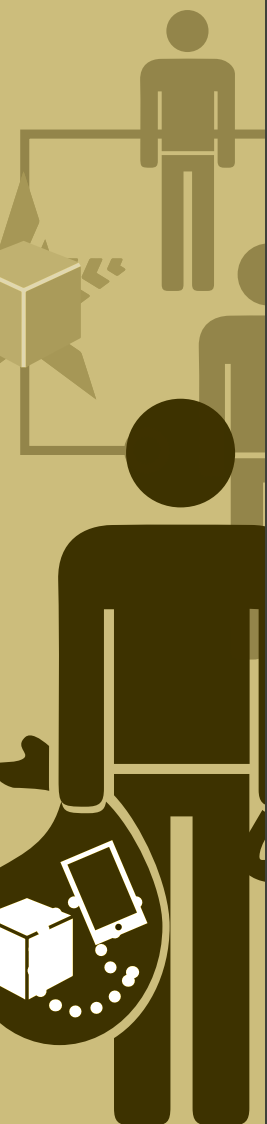
We have seen that as well as the municipalities, not all buyers of second-hand goods are as yet affiliated to the DOR. The pilot project in Rotterdam according to which second-hand buyers are able to comply with their statutory reporting obligations with the municipality via an automated tool, which also offers those same buyers the possibility of signing up to the DOR, could be converted into a national reporting model – based on the positive experiences accrued. It would be helpful if the Chambers of Commerce were willing and prepared to notify new second-hand buyers of their notification obligations, by referring them to this reporting system. Supervision and enforcement should then not only be undertaken in respect of the businesses affiliated to the DOR, but also (and perhaps specifically) those not yet affiliated.

One key element in the current approach to fencing relates to the fact that goods are unique, as a result of which they appear as stolen in databases via a serial number. One final suggestion to improve the approach is to facilitate this registration process for citizens and the police. Among many citizens discipline to register goods is low, and many mistakes are made when inputting serial numbers. This process should be automated or at least encouraged, as far as possible in a public private partnership. The methods – including jewellery DNA – for making certain non-unique goods unique should be further developed for other sectors, too, with a clear focus on user friendliness. At the end of the day, a user-friendly system should be made available to citizens and manufacturers of non-unique goods, so that those goods can also be made unique.

Epilogue

Within this study, use was made of a large number of sources. The study shows that many stolen goods end up in the fencing circuit but that this process takes place largely beyond the view of the government. Which stolen goods are fenced, just like in the regular economy, depends on supply and demand. In that sense, the market for stolen goods is a dynamic market. In many cases, the goods in question are easily concealed and easily stolen and transported, and can be sold on at a reasonable price. The sales market for the thieves is diverse. They can offer their goods online on the Internet, but also to mala fide second-hand buyers, regular trading organisations and individual citizens. The approach to tackling fencing has gradually taken form over the past few years, but there are still challenges. In particular in more complex cases, the handling of stolen goods does not receive the priority it deserves, from the police or Public Prosecution Service. In addition, municipalities sometimes find it difficult to introduce the DOR system. A final important element is that the handling of stolen goods is viewed as a victimless crime, in which the end users of stolen goods effectively reap the profit from a lower price at which these

goods are offered. At the same time, it goes without saying that there are victims of this crime: the stolen goods were after all removed from other citizens or businesses. Despite the challenges facing the approach to tackling fencing, from an international perspective, the Netherlands is moving forwards steadily. This study offers new points of departure for giving further form to this approach.



www.beke.nl