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Presentation title: On a mission to bust crime prevention myths

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In the crime prevention field, there is a move towards an evidence-based policy, as there is in other policy domains. In spite of that, many practices persist in crime prevention even though there is abundant evidence that they are ineffective.

Inspired by Dutch researcher, civil servant and crime prevention wizard Jaap de Waard, the European Crime Prevention Network has begun to publish a series of “Mythbuster” papers. The objective is to debunk widely held but false beliefs and assumptions, in hopes that decision-makers and prevention workers stop basing their work on them. In doing so, the EUCPN aims to contribute to a more effective crime prevention and a more responsible use of public resources.

As an EU-wide organisation focused on sharing good practices between Member States, the European Crime Prevention Network has a bird’s-eye-view of crime prevention initiatives, both local and national, across the EU. Consequently, it is in a position to identify such myths and observe how they influence policy and practice.

In this presentation, I discuss two such myths. The first concerns awareness-raising campaigns, the second is the use of deterrence in crime prevention. Awareness campaigns are tremendously popular in the field, but there is little evidence that awareness in and of itself is able to cause behaviour change, and consequently, that it can contribute much to the crime prevention. Deterrence is a valid crime prevention mechanism, but we also note the persistent use of fear-based deterrence even though there is evidence that that is counter-productive.

I make some suggestions as to why and how it is that false assumptions govern crime prevention policy, canvass the evidence and indicate why this leads to ineffective and inefficient crime prevention.