



Residents of COA and temporary municipal shelters charged with incidents or crimes in 2019-2025

Summary

Cahier 2026-11

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Cahier

De reeks Cahier omvat de rapporten van onderzoek dat door en in opdracht van het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Datacentrum is verricht. Opname in de reeks betekent niet dat de inhoud van de rapporten het standpunt van de Minister van Justitie en Veiligheid weergeeft.

Summary

Residents of COA and temporary municipal shelters charged with incidents or crimes in 2019-2025

There is considerable attention to nuisance-causing behaviour among asylum migrants, both in public and political debate and among organisations in the migration chain, as well as the police and the Public Prosecution Service (OM). Although previous editions of this report have repeatedly shown that the group of people involved in nuisance behaviour constitutes only a small minority of the tens of thousands of asylum migrants accommodated each year, the behaviour of this small group can have a large impact. Such behaviour affects the liveability of reception centres for other residents, the working conditions of staff of the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), the liveability for residents of municipalities where reception centres are located, and ultimately also public support for asylum reception in the Netherlands. To develop effective policies to counter nuisance-causing behaviour and to conduct an informed debate about nuisance, factual information is essential. This incidents and crimes report contributes to this task. Since 2022, the WODC Research and Data Centre has produced the incidents and crimes report as part of a multi-year research programme that also includes in-depth studies.

In this report, figures on registrations of suspects and their judicial disposition are set against data on the general Dutch population. This is done solely to provide context and not to make a comparison. Such a comparison would not be sound, as differences in the demographic composition of the two groups are not controlled for. Previous research has shown that differences in involvement in crime between asylum migrants and other suspects in the Netherlands disappear once background characteristics such as age and sex are taken into account.

In this report, all figures for the whole reporting period of 2019-2025 have been recalculated on the basis of data we received in early 2026. We did this to ensure that, within each report, the figures for the different years are comparable, as they are all calculated using the same data and definitions. Because the data used for the report come from registration systems that can also be updated retrospectively, figures for earlier reporting years may differ from those published in previous editions of this report. For this edition, an IT-system migration at COA to a new reporting tool has made more data available to WODC on the occupancy of COA locations and thus on incidents involving residents and crime registrations. This has led to the figures for previous years in the current report being revised upwards. The methodological appendix provides a detailed explanation of the choices made in presenting the figures for this report.

Target group

In the period from 2019 through 2025, a total of approximately 285,500 unique individuals stayed at some point at a regular COA location, an emergency reception centre, or a temporary municipal reception centre (TGO). In this report we refer to residents of all reception forms as COA residents. Looking at the average daily

occupancy, we see that it has only increased since 2019, from 24,235 to 72,020 in 2025. This increase in occupancy is due to a combination of inflow of new asylum seekers, rising processing times at the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), and a stagnation in the outflow of status holders (refugees) because of the tight housing market. As a result, people often appear in the statistics presented across multiple years.

The target group in 2025 consisted largely of men (69%). Young adults aged 18–29 constituted the largest age group in 2025 (34%). There was also a large group of minors: 27% of COA residents in 2025. These included both unaccompanied minors (UMAs) and children in families. In 2025, 8% of all COA residents were UMAs.

The persons who stayed at COA locations or TGOs during the reporting period held the nationalities of more than 170 different countries of origin. In 2025, the most common nationalities were Syrian, Eritrean, Turkish, Somali and Iraqi. The nationalities with the largest share in occupancy change over time. Nationalities that appeared in the top 15 of 2025 but were not among the main nationalities in 2019 were Colombian, Ethiopian and Sudanese. A large share of those who stayed at a COA location or TGO in 2025 had Syrian nationality (38%), making it the most common nationality. Syrian has by far been the largest nationality throughout the entire reporting period.

In 2025, 112,745 unique individuals stayed for some time at a COA location or TGO. A small proportion of them were involved in an incident involving aggression or violence (11%) and/or were suspected of a criminal offence (3%).

Incidents involving COA and TGO residents

At no point earlier in the reporting period (2019–2025) was the occupancy of COA centres and TGOs as high as in 2025. We observe that the average daily occupancy in 2025 increased by 7% compared to a year earlier. In addition to this rise in occupancy, we also see a 6% increase in the number of incidents. In total, COA recorded 17,750 incidents in 2025 of verbal suicide threats, self-destructive acts, and physical, verbal and non-verbal aggression and violence. The year before, 16,740 incidents were recorded. Despite this increase in absolute numbers, only a minority of the target group were involved in an aggression or violence incident in 2025 (11%).

In 2025, COA imposed a measure 13,205 times in response to one of the incidents included in this report. This is an increase of 9% compared to 2024. This can partly be explained by the increase in average occupancy and the number of incidents in 2025. Over the entire reporting period, however, the number of measures imposed has increased much more strongly than the number of recorded incidents. The number of measures imposed is 4.2 times as high as in 2019, whereas the number of recorded incidents over that period is only 2.5 times higher. This indicates that the way COA staff deal with incidents has changed in recent years.

The 12,775 unique individuals who were involved in an aggression or violence incident in 2025 were predominantly male (83%), and most were under 30 (64%). About one in five (20%) were UMAs. In the total group of COA residents (including UMA), 11% were involved in an aggression or violence incident in 2025. For UMAs, this share was 29%.

In 2025, 36% of the unique individuals involved in incidents were Syrian; Syrians also constituted the largest nationality within the target group in 2025, at 38%. Within the Syrian group, the share involved in 2025 was 11%, equal to the average for the entire group of COA and TGO residents. Nationalities with above-average shares of those involved include Moroccan (36% of Moroccan COA and TGO residents), Algerian (33%), Gambian (23%), Egyptian (19%) and Nigerian (19%). This may be related to an over-representation of men and young adults within these groups. For these nationalities as well, the majority of people in these groups were not involved in an incident in 2025.

Crimes of which COA and TGO residents were suspected

In 2025, the police registered 7,515 suspects who were staying at a COA centre or TGO at the time of the offence. This is an increase of 23% compared to 2024. As noted earlier, average daily occupancy increased by 7% between 2024 and 2025. On the basis of these data, it cannot be determined what the increase in the number of suspects is attributable to. A comparison of the development in (average) occupancy of COA centres and TGOs and suspect registrations over the period 2019–2025 shows that there is no direct relationship between the number of people accommodated by COA and the number of persons suspected of a criminal offence.

Among COA and TGO residents suspected of a criminal offence, property offences were the most frequent. In 2025, 64% of recorded suspects concerned this type of offence. A considerable share of this was shoplifting, 36% of the total number of suspect registrations among COA and TGO residents. In 2024, the percentage of property offences was still 68%, whereas for suspects among the general Dutch population in that year it stood at 33%. The share of suspects of property offences among suspect COA and TGO residents is therefore relatively high compared to suspects among the general Dutch population. However, there are many demographic differences between these groups (including age distribution and socioeconomic background) that may explain why the percentages diverge so markedly.

In total, the police recorded 3,270 unique suspects of criminal offences within the target group in 2025. This corresponds to 3% of the unique individuals who were accommodated at a COA centre or TGO in 2025. This share is fairly constant over the reporting period. Of the unique suspects in the Netherlands in 2024, 2% were COA or TGO residents.

The composition of the group of suspects is similar to the incident-involved group described above. Suspects of criminal offences were also predominantly male (97%) and young adults: 52% of suspect COA and TGO residents were between 18 and 29 years old. Striking is the high share of minors: 21% of the unique suspects were minors. This share is comparable to 2024, whereas for the total Dutch population that year it was 11%. Again, there is an overrepresentation of UMAs among suspect COA residents. In 2025, 8% of UMAs were suspected of a criminal offence, compared to 3% among the total group of COA residents (including UMAs). Nationalities with relatively high shares of suspects were Algerian (33% of Algerian COA and TGO residents were suspected of a criminal offence in 2025), Moroccan (31%) and Tunisian (25%). As previously published WODC research has shown, differences in the shares of suspect registrations between nationalities can partly be explained by refugee recognition rates. Another possible explanation lies in the demographic composition of these

nationality groups – especially given that men and young adults were overrepresented among criminal suspects, which was also the case for the general Dutch population.

Regarding the figures on the handling of criminal cases by the OM and the judiciary, we looked at the number of case dispositions per year. These may also concern offences committed in previous years. Due to this counting method, the number of suspect registrations by the police in a given year, the number of criminal cases handled by the OM in the same year, and the number of criminal cases handled by the courts in that year do not align. This discrepancy is unavoidable for such an annual monitor, given the processing times of cases at the OM and the judiciary.

In 2025, 4,145 cases were disposed of by the OM in which the suspect was residing at a COA location or TGO at the time of the offence. In the majority of these cases (59%), it was decided to issue a summons. In 2024, this still applied to 65% of cases involving suspect COA residents – this is relatively high compared to the general Dutch population, for whom 42% of cases went to court that year.

In 2025, the courts delivered judgments in 1,810 cases in which the suspect was residing at a COA centre or TGO at the time of the offence. In 95% of the cases, the suspect was found guilty. In 2024, suspect COA residents were found guilty relatively more often than the general Dutch population: 92% in the general population vs. 94% among COA residents. Where a sentence was imposed, judges also imposed imprisonment or juvenile detention relatively more often on COA and TGO residents (72% of sentences in 2025, 81% in 2024) than on the Dutch population (36% in 2024). The differences in case disposition mentioned (by both the OM and the judiciary) may be related to the nature of the offences committed, or considerations about the expected feasibility of enforcing an (alternative) sentence or measure may play a role. Incidentally, the share of custodial sentences in 2025 was lower than in previous years, while the share of community service sentences has increased.

Data and methodology

To aid interpretation of the figures, it is important to note that the data used to generate figures for this report come from operational registration systems geared to the primary process and not intended for reporting purposes. This should be taken into account when interpreting the figures.

The data required to compute the figures, drawn from the registration systems of the various organisations involved, were requested and linked at the individual level by the WODC. All figures in tables and plots were rounded to the nearest five to reduce the risk of traceability to individuals. Where rounded numbers are reported in the text, they were rounded to the nearest thousand, hundred, or ten depending on the magnitude. The exact rounding methodology, together with other methodological considerations, is explained in the methodological annex.



Het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Datacentrum (WODC), Kennisinstituut voor de rechtsstaat, is een onafhankelijk kennisinstituut dat valt onder het ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid. Het WODC draagt bij aan behoud en verbetering van de rechtsstaat via het (laten) uitvoeren van kwalitatief hoog wetenschappelijk onderzoek. En door het aanbieden van gevraagde en ongevraagde kennis, verbeterpunten en (waar mogelijk) denkrichtingen.

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