

Crime Investigation During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Slovenia: Initial Reflections

Gorazd Meško

University of Maribor



Vojko Urbas

General Police Directorate

Abstract¹

The article presents an introductory reflection on the COVID-19 epidemic, registered crime and police work in the field of crime investigation, especially during the first wave of the epidemic in the spring of 2020 in Slovenia as compared to the previous year. First, an analysis of recorded crime for the first nine months (January–September) of 2019 and 2020 is presented, followed by comparing the same period in the first wave of the epidemic from March to May 2020. Governmental measures for curbing the epidemic are also presented. The comparisons show that most recorded crimes decreased in Slovenia during the first wave of the epidemic in 2020 and the first nine months of 2020. We also present the insights of the heads of criminal investigation sectors at the Criminal Police Directorate on the incidence and nature of criminal offences during the epidemic and the criminal police responses. The findings indicate the need for additional victimisation and self-reporting studies of delinquency, which could be a qualitative supplement to the official statistical data on recorded crime during the COVID-19 epidemic in Slovenia.

Keywords: COVID-19, Crime, Investigation, Analysis, Slovenia

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present certain trends in crime during the COVID-19 pandemic, how crime has evolved compared to the past years, and how law enforcement has functioned. Japelj (2018) and Urbas (2019) note that since 2015 Slovenia has seen a downward trend in crime rates and that this trend was expected to continue. After reviewing the selected literature on changes in crime and social control during

the COVID-19 pandemic in the European environment (Peršak, 2020; Baker, 2020; Europol, 2020), the related aspects of the implementation of social control activities, and in particular the functioning of police and criminal justice, we will present the measures imposed by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia (hereinafter: the Government) during the first wave of the epidemic. Next, we will present data from police statistics databases to compare the number of criminal offences in the same periods before the epidemic (2019) and dur-

¹ Authors' emails: gorazd.mesko@um.si; vojko.urbas@policija.si

ing the epidemic (2020). Based on the data obtained for the first nine months of 2020 for the purpose of this article and given that the data for the entire year 2020 will not be available until late spring 2021, a comparison of the number of criminal offences from the police database was made for the first nine months of 2019 and 2020. This article presents a partial picture of the problem associated with criminal offences before and during the COVID-19 epidemic.

The pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, has had consequences all over the world. In addition to the cultural, economic, environmental, political and social implications, the dynamics and nature of crime have changed as a result of changes in people's routines, relationship dynamics, restricted movement, restricted socialising and increased activity on the internet. During the pandemic, the functioning of formal social control institutions, in particular the police, prosecutors, courts and prisons, has also changed due to the new situation and the adaptation of social control practices to a more challenging environment where there is a risk for the supervisors and others involved in proceedings to become infected.

Baker (2020) notes that the COVID-19 pandemic/crisis has changed everything in the modern world and that the nature and dynamics of crime have changed significantly in Europe. However, she observes that it is not possible to speak of the same situation in all countries.

During the pandemic, all countries rapidly adopted new punitive legislation related to violations of movement or socialising in order to curb the spread of pandemic. These changes were perceived by some as interference with people's rights and freedoms, while others saw them as emergency measures. All this was accompanied by ideas that COVID-19 was a fabrication designed to create a new social order and discipline the population through various forms of authoritarian practices.

Despite the torrent of fake news, conspiracy theories, pseudo-scientific explanations and an "infodemic"², police criminal investigation work followed the same routine (Baker, 2020; Cinelli et al., 2020; Peršak, 2020), with the added burden of investigating suspicions of

corrupt acts in the procurement of protective equipment, in particular protective masks, disinfectants, rapid tests and modern medical equipment needed to treat patients with COVID-19. Other forms of crime investigations were conducted in a somewhat reduced form to ensure the normal functioning of the police. It should be noted that employees of formal social control and criminal justice institutions were exposed to and some were also infected with the virus. This was also an important aspect in terms of effectiveness in investigating and dealing with suspects and perpetrators in some formal social control systems (Baker, 2020).

Baker (2020) notes that we can talk about various burdens that are placed on the police when detecting, dealing with and investigating crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research, which included the analyses of statistics of reported crime during COVID-19, has produced various findings, ranging from crime having increased or remained at the same level to the level of reported and dealt with crime having decreased significantly (Kokoravec & Meško, 2020). At this point, reference should also be made to the regional analysis of organised crime in the Balkans at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic (Djordjević & Dobovšek, 2020), which delved into the supply of and demand for personal protective equipment (PPE), disinfectants and medical alcohol and changes in other forms of crime. Media portrayals of the social reality of crime in Slovenia contained, in particular, reports about the increase in domestic violence as a result of distress and restrictions on movement, and inaccessibility to law enforcement authorities due to restrictions on movement. However, the first analysis of crime in Ljubljana during the first wave of COVID-19 does not confirm such portrayals (Kokoravec & Meško, 2020).

Presented below are measures to contain the epidemic and police statistics for the first nine months of 2019 and 2020. Our attention will be focused on the analysis of data on crimes committed in the spring during the measures imposed by the Government in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic. In addition, we will also present data for selected crimes in the Slovenian capital during the first wave of the COVID-19 epidemic and compare the findings on the investigated crime trends with the statistical data for the whole of Slovenia.

² The term "infodemic" means an upsurge of excessive amount of misinformation, which spreads rapidly, making it more difficult to identify the solution to the problem, in this case the COVID-19 pandemic (Cinelli et al., 2020).

Measures adopted by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia to contain the epidemic in spring 2020 – the first wave of COVID-19

Before providing police statistics, we present the key findings and measures adopted by the Government during the spring 2020 epidemic wave in chronological order (IUS info, n.d.)³:

March	
4	The first COVID-19 case was confirmed in Slovenia
7	Ban on indoor public events for 500-plus visitors
9	Restrictions on all sporting and other events expecting 500-plus visitors
10	Ban on indoor public events for 100-plus visitors and ban on the landing of aircraft from risk areas
11	Suspension of the provision of preventive healthcare services (with exceptions) and control at the border with Italy, with border crossing allowed only at six checkpoints (IUS info, n.d)
12	Declaring the epidemic
13	Closure of cultural institutions across the country (including libraries), drafting of a financial incentive for businesses on favourable terms of EUR 115 million
14	Publication of a call to postpone all travel abroad
16	Publication of the Ordinance temporarily prohibiting gatherings of people in educational institutions and universities and independent higher education institutions (2020); suspension of public transport (except taxis) and the ban on freight transport through Italy (with exceptions); temporary prohibition on offering and selling goods and services (with exceptions); prohibition of operation and closure of bars and restaurants, hotels, wellness services, gambling services, fitness and other exercises, cinemas, museums and galleries, and hairdressing and beauty salons and allowing the performance of only the most urgent tasks and matters (courts and notarial offices, administrative units and veterinary clinics)
17	The Ordinance prohibiting the provision of air services (2020) and the Ordinance temporarily prohibiting roadworthiness tests and other procedures related to motor vehicle registration and tachograph workshop activities in the Republic of Slovenia (2020); the Ordinance on the National Security Council (2020) (the Council is transformed into the National Operations Staff due to the emergency situation); the introduction of distance selling and delivery services (in-home support services, "take away" or "drive-in" services were not allowed; the provision of online and delivery services was allowed); the provision of car tyre services, car mechanic and towing services was allowed; the provision of other emergency health and safety services (e.g. psychological assistance) was allowed (with the exception of physiotherapeutic and massage services); funeral and cemetery services were allowed; activities could be carried out by chimney sweeps, plumbers and ceramicists but not by real estate agents
18	Introduction of work from home (employers can organise work processes as work from home); crossing the border with Italy was permitted only at four checkpoints; closure of 27 local border crossings with Croatia
19	Adoption of the measure banning gatherings and movement in public areas (a fine of approx. EUR 400); change in the working hours of shops (open at least from 8:00 to 20:00; between 8:00 and 10:00 priority was given to vulnerable groups – people with disabilities, pensioners and pregnant women; all shops were closed on Sunday, with the exception of service stations and pharmacies)
20	Adoption of the Act Determining the Intervention Measures on Salaries and Contributions (ZIUPPP, 2020), the Fiscal Intervention Measures Act (ZIUJP, 2020), the Act Determining the Intervention Measure of Deferred Payment of Borrowers' Liabilities (ZIUOPOK, 2020), the Act Determining the Intervention Measures in Agriculture, Forestry and Food (ZIU PKGP, 2020) and the Ordinance on the temporary exemption from payment of charges for support for the production of electricity from high-efficiency cogeneration and renewable energy sources for end-users in the LV consumer group without measuring power and household electricity customers (2020) (for small business customers and household consumers of electricity); the minimum working hours of grocery stores was reduced to 18:00 (as a response to the demands of the trade union of shop workers, who threatened to go on strike); the Enterprise Fund published a tender for bank loan guarantees with a reduced interest rate worth almost EUR 80 million (for faster, easier and cheaper acquisition of bank loans)
30	Adoption of the Ordinance on the temporary general prohibition of movement and public gathering in public places and areas in the Republic of Slovenia and the prohibition of movement outside one's municipality (2020) (with exceptions); older people were allowed to go shopping between 8:00 and 10:00 only (IUS info, n.d.)
April	
2	Adoption of the Act Determining the Intervention Measures to Contain the COVID-19 Epidemic and Mitigate its Consequences for Citizens and the Economy (ZIUZEOP, 2020) (measures worth EUR 3 billion)

3 We present all the measures imposed by the Government, which in the period of the first wave of COVID-19 were listed on the IUS info (n.d.) website. Although not all measures are related to crime, they indicate that the movement of people was restricted to municipalities and that, in addition to the formal control aimed at curbing the COVID-19 epidemic, there was an increase in informal control in family and narrower community settings. In particular, the Government provided information to the public through the media and carried out general preventive measures of police surveillance and other forms of supervising violations to control the epidemic. These measures are not the subject of analysis in this article but are an attempt to put crime into context during these specific social emergencies in Slovenian society.

The implementation and effects of the measures require further analysis by aspects of the response to the epidemic in the past, in the wider European and global context, and, above all, after the end of the epidemic.

9	The ban on passenger air transport in the EU was extended until 27 April 2020 (the ban was in force for other countries until revoked)
11	The first anti-corona act (ZIUZEOP, 2020) entered into force, the performance of non-urgent outpatient specialised activities was allowed and the scope of police powers was widened to take action against violators of anti-corona measures
18	Maintenance and seasonal work on private land outside the municipality of residence (under special conditions) was permitted; some sports/recreational activities in the municipality of residence were again allowed
20	Stores selling construction materials, cars and bicycles and dry cleaners were reopened; car tyre services and vehicle road-worthiness testing were again available
26	Insurance brokerage and car wash services were allowed
29	Public libraries, galleries and museums were reopened and permission was given for the provision of services of real estate agents and chimney sweeps
30	The ban on movement between municipalities was lifted and it was again allowed to visit older people in homes for the elderly (IUS info, n.d.)
May	
1	Adoption of the second anti-corona act (Act Amending the Act Determining the Intervention Measures to Contain the COVID-19 Epidemic and Mitigate its Consequences for Citizens and the Economy [ZIUZEOP-A], 2020)
4	Catering service were allowed on terraces and restaurant gardens; certain non-food shops, hairdressing salons, goldsmiths, watchmakers and churches were reopened
5	Courts were allowed to reopen non-urgent cases;
9	The provision of all medical and dental services was again allowed
10	Slovenian citizens who own real estate or vessels in Croatia were again allowed by the Republic of Croatia to enter the country and visit their property (a seven-day quarantine was imposed on citizens returning from Croatia)
11	Public passenger transport was restored (international passenger transport continued to be banned)
12	International flights to and from Slovenia were restored
15	Adoption of the Ordinance on the temporary restriction of the gathering of people in the public places and areas in the Republic of Slovenia (2020) (up to 50 people in public places)
18	Kindergartens were reopened; pupils in the first three grades of primary school and final-year students at secondary schools (small groups) returned to schools; all shops reopened; tourist accommodation providers with fewer than 30 rooms were allowed to receive guests; restaurants were able to serve guests indoors again
19	Adoption of the third anti-corona act (Act Amending the Act Determining the Intervention Measures to Contain the COVID-19 Epidemic and Mitigate its Consequences for Citizens and the Economy [ZIUZEOP-B], 2020); introduction of tourism vouchers (amounting to EUR 200 for all adults and EUR 50 for minors)
23	Relaxation of restrictions for most sporting activities (excluding fitness centres and similar facilities)
25	Ninth-graders returned to schools; other primary school pupils returned to schools in June; secondary school students completed the school year by remote learning
31	Declaration of the end of the first wave of epidemics (IUS info, n.d.)

Crime in Slovenia in 2019–2020 (January–September)⁴

Overall, police work on crime decreased in the first nine months in 2020, as shown in Table 1. The number of investigated criminal offences decreased by 17.6%, while the percentage of investigated criminal offences

remained almost the same. The estimated damage caused by criminal offences decreased by 18%, with the number of suspects falling by 19.9% and the number of injured parties by 17.1%.

⁴ Source of statistics:

– A record of the offences dealt with as of 11 January 2020.

– Crime statistics are displayed by the date on which the crime was detected by the police.

– The investigated criminal offences are statistically presented in cases where the Police filed a criminal complaint or a report to supplement the criminal complaint [148/9 ZKP]; exceptions are criminal offences relating to road transport. The presentation does not cover criminal offences with respect to which the Police submitted a report to the State Prosecutor's Office [148/10 CKP] and with respect to which no suspicion of the offence or no grounds for a criminal complaint was found after the completion of investigation. Nor does the presentation cover minor criminal offences where the injured party withdrew from the case.

Table 1: Criminal offences committed in the January–September period in 2019 and 2020 (source: Criminal Police Directorate, 2021)

January–September	2019	2020	
Number of criminal offences detected (CO)	39,991	33,697	-15.7%
Number of criminal offences investigated	19,516	16,077	-17.6%
Percentage of criminal offences investigated	48.8%	47.7%	-1.1%
Estimated damage in EUR	EUR 126,466,457	EUR 103,655,392	-18.0%
Number of suspects – statistical data	25,302	20,257	-19.9%
Number of injured persons – statistical data	41,107	34,076	-17.1%

An overview of statistics by police directorates shows a drop in the number of criminal offences in 2020, as evident from Table 2. There was a decrease in the number of criminal offences in all police directorates, but the General Police Directorate (Criminal Police Di-

rectorate – CPD) and National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) saw a significant increase in such offences. The percentage of criminal investigations did not change significantly.

Table 2: Crime in the area of police directorates (source: Criminal Police Directorate, 2021)

January–September	2019		2020		Increase/decrease of CO
	Number of criminal offences (CO)	Percentage of investigated CO	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	
Celje PD	4,413	59.3%	4,348	61.8%	-1.5%
Koper PD	2,977	48.5%	2,564	45.3%	-13.9%
Kranj PD	2,420	45.4%	2,360	50.6%	-2.5%
Ljubljana PD	17,468	43.1%	13,511	37.5%	-22.7%
Maribor PD	5,810	50.6%	4,433	50.0%	-23.7%
Murska Sobota PD	1,490	62.5%	1,268	63.7%	-14.9%
Nova Gorica PD	1,578	52.2%	1,400	55.3%	-11.3%
Novo mesto PD	3,806	55.3%	3,735	56.1%	-1.9%
GPD	29	93.1%	78	92.3%	169.0%
Total	39,991	48.8%	33,697	47.7%	-15.7%

Table 3 shows a decrease in criminal offences with respect to all categories of crimes dealt with in 2020.

Table 3: Overview of criminal offences by categories, 2020–2021 (source: Criminal Police Directorate, 2021)

Types of crime	2019		2020		Increase/decrease of CO
	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	
Organised crime	440	98.0%	315	93.3%	-28.4%
Economic crime	4,950	67.9%	3,872	64.6%	-21.8%
Juvenile crime	1,017	99.7%	728	99.7%	-28.4%
General crime	35,041	46.1%	29,825	45.5%	-14.9%

Table 4 presents data on the criminal offences dealt with by month. In the first two months of 2020 alone, there was a small increase in the number of criminal offences dealt with, while in all other months from March to September the number of criminal offences decreased by an average of 15.7% compared to the previous year.

Table 4: Number of criminal offences by months in the 2019–2020 period (source: Criminal Police Directorate, 2021)

Month of detection	2019		2020		Increase/decrease of CO
	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	
January	4,552	53.7%	4,608	48.3%	1.2%
February	4,158	51.5%	4,235	48.7%	1.9%
March	4,959	52.5%	3,593	50.5%	-27.5%
April	4,286	49.9%	3,106	54.3%	-27.5%
May	4,425	48.3%	3,804	52.5%	-14.0%
June	4,512	49.8%	3,819	48.4%	-15.4%
July	4,398	45.3%	3,998	42.2%	-9.1%
August	4,284	42.0%	3,350	41.1%	-21.8%
September	4,417	45.6%	3,184	43.1%	-27.9%
Total	39,991	48.8%	33,697	47.7%	-15.7%

Table 5 shows only the statistics on the criminal offences for which the number increased during the first nine months of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. It should be noted that percentages could be misleading, especially in criminal offences with a low frequency rate. Money laundering (+ 125 %) saw the largest increase (but not in absolute terms), followed by manslaughter (+ 111.1%), forgery or destruction of documents (+ 109.3%), murder (100%), sexual abuse of a vulnerable person (+ 60 %) and arson (52.2%). Illicit manufacture and trafficking in narcotic drugs, illicit substances in sports and illicit drug precursors increased by 50%, abduction of minors by 41.4%, and rape by 36%.

Table 5: Investigated criminal offences that increased compared to the previous year (source: Criminal Police Directorate, 2021)

Criminal offence	2019		2020		Increase in number of CO
	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	
Money laundering	8	11	18	43	125.0%
Manslaughter	9	100.0%	19	94.7%	111.1%
Forgery or destruction of business documents	225	98.7%	471	99.2%	109.3%
Murder	5	100.0%	10	100.0%	100.0%
Sexual abuse of a vulnerable person	10	80.0%	16	100.0%	60.0%
Arson	23	8.7%	35	34.3%	52.2%
Illicit manufacture and trade in narcotic drugs and illicit substances in sport	88	183	132	146	50.0%
Abduction of minors	277	84.8%	392	92.3%	41.5%
Rape	25	92.0%	34	94.1%	36.0%
Money laundering	39	89.7%	51	98.0%	30.8%
Endangering life by means of dangerous implements in a brawl or quarrel	36	100.0%	43	97.7%	19.4%
Use of counterfeit non-cash means of payment	471	16.1%	519	3.1%	10.2%
Non-payment of maintenance	139	100.0%	150	97.3%	7.9%

Criminal offence	2019		2020		Increase in number of CO
	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	
Sexual violence	30	83.3%	32	84.4%	6.7%
Extortion and blackmail	175	52.0%	181	39.8%	3.4%
Damaging another person's object	2,501	23.6%	2,558	25.1%	2.3%

Below we present data for the period of the first wave of COVID-19 in 2020 and for the same period in the previous year.

Crime in Slovenia in 2019–2020 (March–May)

In the same order, we present data on police criminal investigation work during the first wave of the COV-

ID-19 epidemic (March–May 2020). Table 6 shows that, in general, the number of criminal offences dealt with decreased by 25.9%. Criminal investigations decreased by 21.4%, the percentage of investigated criminal offences was approximately the same, while the percentage of offences detected by the police with their own activity increased by 6.12%. The estimated damage caused by criminal offences increased by 47.3%. The number of suspects (–19.9 %) and injured parties (–27.5%) decreased.

Table 6: Criminal offences committed in the March–May period in 2019 and 2020 (source: Criminal Police Directorate, 2021)

	2019	2020	
Number of criminal offences	11,977	8,872	–25.9%
Number of criminal offences investigated	6,007	4,722	–21.4%
Percentage of criminal offences investigated	50.2%	53.2%	3.1%
Number of criminal offences detected by police	1,734	1,831	5.6%
Percentage of criminal offences detected by police	14.5%	20.6%	6.2%
Estimated damage in EUR	EUR 32,501,027	EUR 47,862,266	47.3%
Number of suspects – statistical data	7,806	6,273	–19.6%
Number of injured persons – statistical data	12,234	8,866	–27.5%

Table 7 shows that the decrease in crime did not occur only in the area of the Celje Police Directorate, other

police directorates saw a decrease from 5.4% (Nova Gorica) to 42.6 % (Murska Sobota).

Table 7: Crime in the area of police directorates in the March–May period in 2019 and 2020 (source: Criminal Police Directorate, 2021)

Organisational unit	2019		2020		Increase/decrease of CO
	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	
Celje PD	1,286	61.3%	1,343	69.4%	4.4%
Koper PD	857	48.8%	557	49.6%	–35.0%
Kranj PD	723	45.9%	563	53.3%	–22.1%
Ljubljana PD	5,307	45.5%	3,570	42.8%	–32.7%
Maribor PD	1,702	51.6%	1,110	55.1%	–34.8%
Murska Sobota PD	488	63.9%	280	65.0%	–42.6%
Nova Gorica PD	499	55.1%	472	70.6%	–5.4%
Novo mesto PD	1,100	52.1%	966	56.9%	–12.2%
GPD	15	93.3%	11	90.9%	–26.7%
Total	11,977	50.2%	8,872	53.2%	–25.9%

Table 8 indicates a decrease in the number of investigated criminal offences in all months of the epidemic (14% in May, 27% in April and 39.9% in March).

Table 8: Criminal offences by month (source: Criminal Police Directorate, 2021)

Month of detection	2019		2020		Increase/decrease of CO
	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	
March	3,266	53.0%	1,962	52.9%	-39.9%
April	4,286	49.9%	3,106	54.3%	-27.5%
May	4,425	48.3%	3,804	52.5%	-14.0%
Total	11,977	50.2%	8,872	53.2%	-25.9%

We found that there was a decrease in the number of investigated criminal offences in all types of various criminal offences (Table 9). The highest percentage decrease in the number of investigated criminal offences was in organised crime (-73.5%), followed by juvenile crime (55.3%), general crime (-28.8%) and economic crime (-6.5%).

Table 9: Criminal offences by type (source: Criminal Police Directorate, 2021)

Types of crime	2019		2020		Increase/decrease of CO
	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	
Organised crime	136	97.8%	36	75.0%	-73.5%
Economic crime	1,544	67.0%	1,444	78.2%	-6.5%
Juvenile crime	318	99.7%	142	99.3%	-55.3%
General crime	10,433	47.7%	7,428	48.4%	-28.8%

Table 10 shows data for criminal offences where there was an increase in the number of cases compared to the same period of the previous year. There was a significant increase in manslaughter from one⁵ criminal offence in 2019 to 10 criminal offences during the COVID-19 measures in spring 2020. There was also a significant increase in embezzlement (+314%), sexual abuse of a vulnerable person from one to four cases in 2020, arson from four to 15 offences, forgery or destruction of business documents (+248%), and abduction of minors (+92.9%). This was followed by tax evasion (from 22 to 38 cases), endangering life by means of dangerous instruments in a brawl or quarrel (from 12 to 18 cases), the use of counterfeit non-cash means of payment (+18.5%), threats (+14.3%), and rape (from 8 to 9 cases).

Table 10: Investigated criminal offences that increased compared to the previous year (source: Criminal Police Directorate, 2021)

Violation	2019		2020		Increase of CO
	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	
Manslaughter	1	100.0%	10	90.0%	900.0%
Embezzlement and unlawful use of another person's property	62	93.5%	257	99.6%	314.5%
Sexual abuse of a vulnerable person	1	0.0%	4	100.0%	300.0%
Arson	4	25.0%	15	46.7%	275.0%

5 At low frequencies of occurrence, we used absolute numbers rather than the percentage change.

Violation	2019		2020		Increase of CO
	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	Number of CO	Percentage of investigated CO	
Forgery or destruction of business documents	108	99.1%	376	99.5%	248.1%
Abduction of minors	85	92.9%	164	88.4%	92.9%
Tax evasion	22	100.0%	38	100.0%	72.7%
Endangering life by means of dangerous instruments in a brawl or quarrel	12	100.0%	18	94.4%	50.0%
Use of counterfeit non-cash means of payment	119	5.0%	141	0.0%	18.5%
Threats	329	314	376	375	14.3%
Rape	8	87.5%	9	77.8%	12.5%

In the following, we present the opinions of criminal investigators and heads of divisions at the Criminal Police Directorate regarding crime in 2020. The findings offer a quality complement to the observations and explanations of the data provided in the tables.

The investigation of crime in the pandemic from the chief investigators' point of view

We asked the heads of divisions at the Criminal Police Directorate for additional information to supplement the official statistical data on crime in Slovenia. The answers are presented below.

Regarding the detection of *organised crime*, they note that there was a drop in detected criminal offences of prohibited crossing of the state border or territory between March and June 2020 due to COVID-19 measures and the closure of state and municipal borders. After the relaxation of the measures in June 2020, these offences have again increased significantly.

Regarding *the use of illicit drugs*, an increase in sales of illicit drugs over the *dark web* was detected due to the restrictions on movement and other government measures to combat the COVID-19 epidemic. According to NGOs and the National Institute of Public Health, illicit drug prices on the black market remained stable and did not increase throughout 2020.

Relatively speaking, the slightest decline in crime during the epidemic measures is recorded in *economic crime*, which is a consequence of limited police activity during the declared pandemic. Given the specific nature of investigating economic crime, which is closely

linked to the work of legal persons, other state authorities and bearers of public authority, the operability of units investigating such crime was severely impeded and reduced during this period.

From the first reports of alleged irregularities in the supply of protective equipment, to which the media and other sources drew attention to, the police monitored and prioritised such cases and cooperated with other relevant competent authorities. Within the scope of their powers, they investigated both alleged irregularities in the *purchase of equipment* by officials exercising public authority and other individual cases of alleged irregularities practiced by suppliers of protective equipment. In this period, police saw *a major increase in criminal offences of fraud connected to the online sale of goods*, which can be partly related to general restrictions on movement and the increased online activity of the population.

Taking into account the circumstances and measures put in place due to the COVID-19 epidemic, it appears that *property crime* between 12 March 2020 and 31 May 2020 declined compared to the same period in 2019. During the period of measures, the largest number of burglaries were carried out in residential houses in urban areas, parking lots, holiday homes and other facilities in apartment buildings (cellars and garages). While the first few months of 2020 saw an increase in burglaries compared to the same period in 2019, operational monitoring of the problem and the statistics of the number of criminal offences show that the number of burglaries and other property offences decreased during the measures. Restriction on movement during the measures was an overriding reason for the decline in property crimes.

A decline in criminal offences *committed against life and body* was detected in the period studied. It should be noted that criminal offences against life and body were fewer compared to other criminal offences. One reason for the decline in such criminal offences was again the restriction on movement during the period of implementing measures and fewer interactions in places that facilitate conflicts and inebriation.

Criminal offences *against marriage, family and youth* also decreased during the measures imposed to combat the epidemic. In this period, the police dealt with fewer domestic violence offences. The police responded appropriately in all cases; in most cases a restraining order was issued to the suspect. The number of criminal offences of neglect and maltreatment of minors also fell during the epidemic. The same applies to criminal offences against the sexual integrity of children. Measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic have also forced people to spend more time at home, surrounded by their closest family, which can cause tensions between family members. We should keep in mind that schools, jobs and shops were closed, while all other services were limited. This means that violence might have occurred but no one noticed or reported it. In such circumstances, it is hard for the victim to break the cycle of violence and seek help. Therefore, both during and after the epidemic, the police carried out a number of activities aimed at raising awareness of these types of criminal offences and issued precautionary guidelines and guidelines for victims of violence.

Regarding the activities of organised crime groups in connection with the measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, criminal investigators estimate that illegal activities did not cease as a result of these measures, but *organised crime groups adapted* to the measures with the aim of committing criminal offences and obtaining illegal proceeds, particularly in human trafficking, drugs and weapons. Particular attention should be paid to events associated with *radicalism, terrorism and the spread of intolerance*, which is already reflected in recent developments in some EU countries, e.g. terrorist attacks in France and the case of shooting at a police officer in Croatia. Although the situation regarding the investigated criminal offences has improved since the epidemic, the general restrictions on the operation of all services led to limited possibilities of investigating economic crime and thus fewer completed investigations. The latter, i.e. the complexity of investigating

criminal offences during the epidemic, will be addressed in the discussion.

Within the framework of European and international police cooperation, the Slovenian police cooperate in investigating cross-border serious and organised crime. Some related activities are presented below.

International criminal activity

Criminal investigators estimate that organised crime groups quickly adapted their activities to the new circumstances and took advantage of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 epidemic. During the first wave of the epidemiological crisis and immediately afterwards, EU security authorities detected changes in existing security threats and the emergence of new criminal activities. The criminal activities most affected by the epidemiological crisis include cybercrime, illegal distribution of counterfeit and substandard goods, and various types of fraud and schemes involving deception, often linked to organised forms of property crime (Europol, 2020; Djordjević & Dobovšek, 2020).

The economic situation during the crisis offered new opportunities for criminal organisations, which focused on the supply of high-demand goods, taking advantage of the widespread presence of uncertainty and fears caused by the epidemiological crisis. EU security authorities note that during the pandemic, one of the key criminal activities in the EU was the distribution of counterfeit and substandard goods of poor quality, fuelled by a significant increase in demand for health and sanitary products (e.g. masks, gloves, cleaners and hand disinfectants) and personal protective equipment. Illegal sales of such products particularly increased online, both through various online platforms and through traditional selling methods. These kinds of fraud targeted individuals, businesses and health institutions.

According to estimates by EU security authorities (Europol, 2020), cybercrime was at the forefront of taking advantage of the opportunities of the epidemiological crisis. Cybercriminals have exploited individuals' increased anxiety, the demand for information, the demand for supply of certain goods, and the reliance on digital solutions and remote communication while working from home to increase the circle of their potential victims in order to obtain sensitive data and/or blackmail and gain access to potential juvenile victims.

EU security authorities (Europol, 2020) estimate that the outbreak of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic had no significant immediate impact on the wholesale trafficking of drugs. They also assess that the effects of the pandemic have been limited to supply and distribution networks based in the EU. The decline in exports of basic chemicals and precursors, typically imported from Asia and used in the production of synthetic drugs, has slowed down but not halted the production of such drugs.

Criminally active individuals and criminal organisations engaged in fraud at the EU level have quickly adapted the already established fraud schemes to take advantage of the general distress of individuals, businesses and public organisations. These schemes have been thematically adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic and measures taken to contain the spread of the virus. EU security authorities report on a range of schemes involving deception carried out both by telephone and in person, with the perpetrators focusing on more vulnerable groups of people, such as the elderly.

They also report (Europol, 2020) that after the introduction of the first restrictive measures there was a drop in the number of burglaries and thefts in private homes followed by a new surge after the lifting of the measures. Health institutions and pharmacies are being increasingly targeted by property crime, specifically when it comes to the misappropriation of medical equipment, sanitary products and medicines for which there is high demand across the EU. They also report that the number of robberies in stores selling essential goods has been increasing.

Despite severe travel restrictions and stricter border controls, migrant smuggling into the EU has continued, albeit at a reduced rate. Curfews, restrictions on movement and border closures constrained the possibilities for smuggling networks to carry out their illegal activities at a normal level. Smuggling networks have changed their *modi operandi* and routes. Stricter controls have forced facilitators to find riskier routes, often endangering the lives of migrants. European security authorities have also seen an increase in the prices of facilitating illegal migration, which is a consequence of increased risks for criminal organisations, increased travel difficulties and high demand.

The impact of the pandemic on the terrorist threat in the EU has been limited. During the COVID-19 pan-

dem, the digital world has further strengthened its importance as a platform for spreading anti-systemic narratives. Before May 2020, Member States and Europol witnessed an increase in propaganda posted on terrorist and extremist scenes. All extremist scenes have interpreted the epidemiological crisis in line with their own ideological goals.

Most of this propaganda disseminated conspiracy theories regarding the alleged sources of COVID-19 and reports of alleged hidden government programmes. Jihadist terrorists have tried to portray the pandemic as a punishment from God that will weaken Islamic enemies and encourage their followers to take advantage of the situation and carry out attacks, while right-wing extremists blamed foreigners and minorities for the emergence and spread of the pandemic.

EU security authorities (Europol, 2020) have also detected more anti-government sentiments and propaganda, not only on the extreme left and right wings, but also among a population that is ideologically hard to define. They have also noted that different ideas and topics seem to blend together, which makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish ideological backgrounds.

Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this article was to determine what police statistics tell us about the investigated crimes in Slovenia. The aim was to find out whether the number of detected crimes increased or decreased during the studied period, especially during the COVID-19 measures. A review of preliminary studies of crime before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenia (Kokoravec & Meško, 2020) suggested that media had reported an increase in crime, while the statistics we verified for the purpose of this article showed that there had been a decline in the number of reports for most criminal offences in this period.

The results of this analysis are similar to the results of the study that analysed crime in Ljubljana (Kokoravec & Meško, 2020) in slightly different time periods during the epidemic as part of the international comparative study on statistics of reported crime in major and capital cities of countries around the world. The study was conducted by multiple universities and police departments at a global level (Eisner, 2020). Similar to the previous two analyses, the investigated crimes in Ljubljana in the first

eight months of 2020 decreased in number compared to the same period in the previous year. This analysis showed that during the first eight months and during the first wave of COVID-19 in spring 2020, the police in Ljubljana dealt with fewer criminal offences compared to the same period of the previous year (2019). The analysis was based on a review of the daily crime records and not on the communicated overview of criminal offences in certain periods of time.⁶ There is a thin and often blurred line between the classification of a minor offence and a criminal offence of domestic violence, so we are including findings of a statistical review of these offences according to the Protection of Public Order Act (ZJRM-1, 2006), which indicates a decrease in the number of investigated offences in the family environment in the Ljubljana area in both periods of 2020 (during the first wave of COVID-19 in the spring and in the first eight months of 2020). The analysis of data for the whole of Slovenia during the first nine months and during the COVID-19 outbreak in spring 2020 paints a slightly different picture. In the first nine months of 2020, an increase of 5% was detected (from 1,257 in 2019 to 1,324 in 2020). We also detected an increase of 34.1% during the first wave of the COVID-19 epidemic compared to the same period in the previous year.

The study conducted by Plesničar, Drobnjak and Filipičič (2020) paints a slightly different picture; it is based on police crime statistics but focuses more on the total number of criminal offences according to the chapters of the Criminal Code rather than on criminal offences in specific terms. As a result, the criminal offences against the family show an increase in crimes against the family for the entire chapter of the Criminal Code because of one criminal offence – abduction of minors.

All previous papers, including this one, that paint a picture of crime during the COVID-19 epidemic contribute to the gradual clarification and understanding of the phenomenon of crime. Last, but not least, the data on the investigated crime give evidence of police work on crime rather than of the actual extent of crime in society. At this point, we can unequivocally assess that police officers and criminal investigators did a huge amount of work during the epidemic despite the fact that, statistically speaking, they dealt with fewer criminal offences (taking into consideration that during the first wave of COVID-19 police management ensured

continuous police operations when a higher number of police officers and criminal investigators got infected and a certain number of them worked from home). The effectiveness of the investigation of criminal offences should be further examined in the context of carrying out other tasks or tasks first encountered by the police during the epidemic and in light of sick leave taken by criminal investigators and police officers, bearing in mind the absences from work due to COVID-19 infections.

In order to obtain a more relevant portrayal of crime, delinquent behaviour and the harm suffered by victims of criminal offences during the epidemic, it would be useful to carry out a victimisation study and a study on self-reporting of delinquent behaviour. It would also be useful to determine the level of fear of crime and identify the relationship between the level of fear of crime and the level of crime.

The data presented in this article should be interpreted with great caution, because the characteristics of certain specific criminal offences and their contents should be further examined. From the point of view of criminological interpretations of delinquent behaviour and crime, a decrease in the majority of criminal offences could be attributed to the fact that the daily routine has changed, that people have stayed at home, that they have worked from home and communicated online, that they have exercised caution at work, and so on. Moreover, the opportunities have changed due to informal control and formal control regarding movement restrictions in specific areas at specific times. Moving a large part of the population online has contributed to increased vulnerability to online fraud and other risks. Last but not least, numerous government measures also reduced hardship, whereas informal help, social cohesion and solidarity made it easier for people to overcome this difficult period. Slovenia, similarly to other countries around the world, found itself at a crossroads of uncertainty, ignorance, limited information and the search for better solutions.

We would like to conclude this article with Europol's findings regarding crime during COVID-19 that is specific to the European area, because there are some distinctive features of the second wave of COVID-19 (that have not been studied) that warrant further investigation in the future, specifically after the second wave. These

⁶ The timeframe was set by the Violence Research Centre, Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge Institute of Criminology, led by Manuel Eisner (Violence Research Centre, n.d.). The part of the analysis that includes the Ljubljana data was presented at the World Health Organisation meeting (Eisner, 2020).

are the impact of COVID-19 on the quality and effectiveness of police work, exploiting isolation for various abuses (from online sexual abuse to the abuse of older persons), drug markets, the transformation and adaptation of organised crime and COVID-19 as an opportunity for trafficking, online sales and online fraud, tackling COVID-19 misinformation and the profitable activities of criminal organisations, and falsified medicines for coronavirus on the black market (Europol, 2020).

The analytics department at the Criminal Police Directorate is seeing similar problems in Slovenia. An overview of the reports of investigated criminal offences in the Slovenian environment will be available in the annual report on crime for 2020, which will also include the analysis of the second wave of the COVID-19 epidemic in autumn 2020.

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