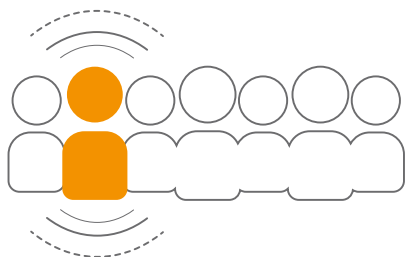# Local Security Audit

The case of Piraeus

Key Words:

#local security audit   #indicators   #feeling of security

Improving individual and collective security requires in-depth understanding of a given community. While crime statistics matter, understanding how different groups of population perceive the security situation is just as significant. Only by exploring subjective experiences of security, as well as socio-economic reality and levels of social cohesion, can security actors draw a nuanced local *security landscape*.
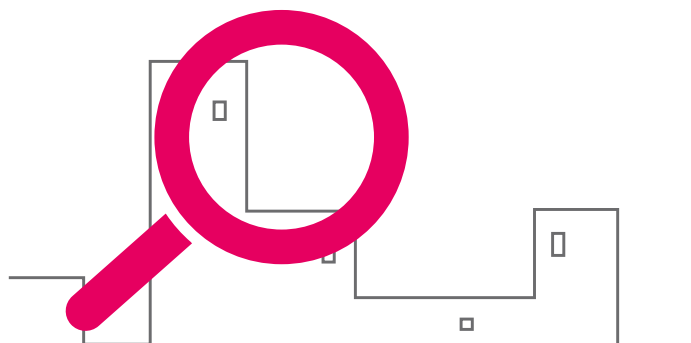
This is why the European Forum for Urban Security (Efus) has been consistently advocating the use of up-to-date qualitative data collected through complementary tools (e.g. victimisation surveys, interviews…) as a basis for security interventions. Such an approach is illustrated by the BeSecure-FeelSecure (BSFS) project implemented in the City of Piraeus, whose baseline assessment, a key axis of a strategic approach to urban security, can be replicated elsewhere.

The case of Piraeus

Dense commercial areas – like the City of Piraeus, one of the largest ports in Europe – are vulnerable to inbound and outbound smuggling, as well as street and organised crime. Citizens believe that urban insecurity is one of the city's main problems, which contributes to a sense of social and environmental degradation and low social cohesion.

● What is BeSecure-FeelSecure?

The BSFS project (2019-2023) is co-funded by the EU Urban Innovative Actions. It allows the City of Piraeus to develop a governance structure, innovative ICT tools, as well as social and spatial interventions such as awareness raising actions addressed to youth about bullying and cyber threats, training actions for civil servants, shop owners and other stakeholders. Also, image management and target hardening based on the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design model have the reinforcing of urban security in Piraeus as an objective.
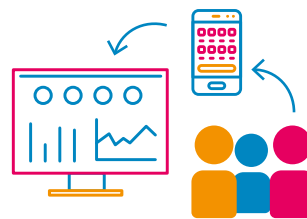
Thanks to the BSFS project, the City of Piraeus introduced the Local Council for Crime Prevention (LCCP) to help local urban security stakeholders to co-create and implement security strategies and preventive actions.

The project established an online Collaborative Urban Risk Management (CURiM) tool that allows to assess security threats, visualise risks and conduct geospatial mapping to facilitate more efficient decision-making.
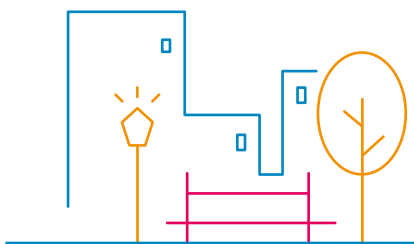
Furthermore, a Victim Support Unit was established in the City of Piraeus in order to provide holistic support services to victims of any type of crime.

Governance structure

Innovative ICT tools

Social and spatial interventions

Victim Support

● Understanding and improving the security situation

In order to elaborate concrete, targeted interventions within a holistic security strategy that enhances citizens' real and perceived security, the Laboratory of Urban Criminology of Panteion University, a scientific partner of the project, carried out a baseline assessment focusing on the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of crime, as well as different factors related to citizens' insecurity in Piraeus.

Why a baseline assessment?

- It takes into account local specificities

- It provides relevant local stakeholders with up-to-date knowledge of the local reality concerning crime and insecurity

- It enables evidence-based interventions

- It allows us to adequately evaluate the success of these interventions (e.g. their efficacy)

- It complements and nuances official, quantitative data, such as crime statistics

- It allows us to grasp subjective dimensions of security from different social groups

Indicators

PERCEPTION OF SAFETY

It assesses the social and physical elements of the area of residence. Satisfaction is measured based on the perception of the residents of the reputation and the social and physical elements of the area.

FEAR OF CRIME

This indicator is captured by (a) the level of insecurity in the neighbourhood of permanent residence of the respondents, (b) the occurrences in the most insecure areas (c) the factors that contribute to feelings of insecurity.

INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION in community-based crime policy

Number of citizens participating in the organisation, planning and implementation of crime prevention measures.

INTENTION TO PARTICIPATE in community-based crime policy

Citizens' willingness to participate in the organisation, planning and implementation of crime prevention measures.

CITIZENS' TRUST in local authorities regarding urban security matters

Citizens' level of trust in local authorities and their aim of ensuring a safer urban environment.

Tools

These indicators formed the basis of two surveys: (a) a household-level survey (based on a 35 point questionnaire) addressed to residents of two areas of the city and (b) a survey (based on a 14 point questionnaire) addressed to shop owners and employees.

Both surveys were built around the following thematic sections:

- Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics
- Insecurity and fear of crime
- Experience of direct victimisation
- Citizens' attitudes towards formal social control of crime and their perception of the dimensions of criminality

Target groups of the survey

RESIDENTS

(539 filled questionnaires)

LOCAL SHOP OWNERS AND EMPLOYEES

(100 filled questionnaires) - This target group was identified as they are present and represent an important commercial character of one of the city's intervention areas

The respondents were surveyed by a private company – trained by Panteion University – (I) using 'Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing' (CATI) for the 1st target group and (II) 'Paper Assisted Personal Interviewing' (PAPI) for the 2nd target group.

The research results offered valuable input for the Piraeus LCCP, as well as for setting up and running a Victim Support Unit in the city.

● Evaluation

These indicators formed the basis of two surveys: (a) a household-level survey (based on a 35 points questionnaire) addressed to residents of two municipal areas of the city and (b) a survey (based on a 14 points questionnaire) addressed to shop owners and employees.

Both surveys were built around the following thematic sections:

● Strong points

The baseline assessment questionnaire is a comprehensive tool tailored to the local context, whose results provide a solid basis for evidence-based policies aimed at reducing feelings of insecurity among citizens. Yet, citizens' perceptions and security context evolve and, thus, have to be revisited.

● Difficulties

Conducting a baseline assessment requires different local resources (e.g. human resources, knowledge and expertise, financial resources). Ethical and legal requirements are to be strictly respected and monitored.

The unprecedented pandemic situation of Covid-19 can make the implementation of the in-person interviews particularly difficult. Therefore, the interviews carried out by phone or online could serve as an alternative.

● Key attention points and recommendations

The assessment shall be based on a representative sample of the population in order to produce valid data. Therefore, the design and execution of the assessment should be led and / or supported by an experienced research partner.
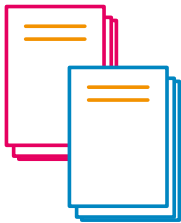
Respondents should be informed about the aim of the exercise and their role in the assessment process.

● Tailor the assessment to the municipality's local context and needs

Suggested questions to ask before conducting a baseline assessment:

- What is our target audience?

- Do we have the necessary local resources, such as human resources, expertise, and financial means?

- Are they adequate and sufficient for different assessment phases, such as design, implementation, and analysis?

- Do we comply with the ethical and legal requirements of data collection?

- Have we envisaged alternative data collection scenarios, such as conducting phone instead of in-person interviews, as happened with Covid-19?

- Have we chosen a representative and context-specific sample of the population?

- Are our respondents transparently and fully informed about their participation?

- Have we chosen the most appropriate means of data collection, such as survey, focus groups, explorative walks, visioning, or social media applications?

- How will our indicators contribute to better understanding the security situation?

Further read: European Forum for Urban Security (Efus), *Methods and Tools for a Strategic Approach to Urban Security*, Efus, 2016