

Good afternoon!

It's an honour to welcome you all here today.

We have a lot to do, so let's dive in.

I'd like you to imagine a teenager, around 16 years old.

We'll call him Jason.

Jason is no longer a little boy, but he certainly isn't an adult yet.

Jason lives in a neighbourhood where a lot of people are poor and in debt.

Where opportunities are scarce.

His parents work hard, but they have a tough time making ends meet.

At school Jason feels lonely.

He always seems to do everything wrong.

And he struggles with schoolwork.

One day a guy in the neighbourhood stops to talk to him.

It's someone with street cred.

He offers Jason a way to make easy money fast.
All Jason has to do is go to the port in Rotterdam and retrieve a package from a container.
For the first time in his life, Jason feels worthy.
So he says 'yes'.
What Jason doesn't know is that he's just been recruited as a 'collector'
He now is a pawn in a criminal network that earns millions of euros trafficking drugs.
And just like that, Jason's put his entire future at risk.
He thought this was a way out of a dead-end situation, but now he's trapped.
Caught in a web of intimidation, threats and violence.
He hasn't gained freedom.
He has lost it.

This story isn't unusual.
The last five years the police picked up between 260 and 450 collectors a year.
And they're getting younger and younger.

It's up to us to offer these young people decent future prospects, before organised crime gets to them.

For all of us it starts with the local community.

Because that's where the solution lies.

In neighbourhoods, schools and homes and in the online world, where teenagers spend a lot of their time.

With our national Prevention With Authority programme, we're investing in resilience among young people and their parents, families and communities.

Our professionals will be telling you more about this programme later.

But a local approach is not enough.

Crime doesn't stop at our borders, so our approach shouldn't either.

Drugs that arrive here, may be destined for other countries.

Profits made here are laundered via international structures.

And the criminal networks that recruit young people, operate in the online world, where national borders are meaningless.

The Netherlands is working with a coalition of seven European countries and with the European Commission, Eurojust and Europol.

Together we try to prevent criminals from using each other's ports.

We're investing heavily in the network of liaison prosecutors, within, and outside the EU.

The goal is to foster strong cooperation at operational level with countries that, like us, struggle with drug crime and illicit financial flows.

It's also significant that the European Commission has included prevention in the new internal security strategy ProtectEU.

This will help the Commission promote evidence-based prevention, which can of course be adapted to the local context.

Prevention is a crucial part of fighting crime.

Along with Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and, in particular, Sweden, we're supporting the Commission's plans with respect to prevention.

The Netherlands already has a number of tried and tested prevention policies to counter the recruitment of young people by organised crime.

We want to use them as input for the Commission's new guidelines.

These aim at protecting young people online with an holistic approach to protect children from crime..

I'd like to stress how important it is to involve researchers in this and to evaluate the steps we take.

There's definitely a risk of making the wrong decisions when it comes to tackling youth crime.

The science of prevention and expertise in this area are developing rapidly, so it's important to keep learning together.

The European Crime Prevention Network has a key role in this regard, especially when we all head home.

We'll be focusing a lot of attention on this during this field visit.

Working together also means learning together.

So in the days ahead, let's share our knowledge and best practices.

Let's enhance cooperation among our national experts.

Let's use this time to develop joint recommendations and identify needs for future EU policy and partnerships.

I wish you an inspiring field visit, full of useful conversations and new insights.

And I hope that this will help us give young people like Jason the prospect of a safer and brighter future.

Thank you.

