

**AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE:
SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL, AND TECHNOLOGICAL
CHALLENGES IN CRIME PREVENTION**
Guest Editor's Introduction to the Special Issue

*INTRODUCTION:
WHY THIS SPECIAL ISSUE MATTERS — AND WHY NOW*

Setting the Stage

Preventing crime has always been one of society's most important challenges. But the world we live in today looks very different from even twenty years ago. The internet has opened new doors for criminals and new tools for law enforcement. Economic upheaval — from financial crises to shifts toward greener industries — has changed the circumstances under which people either follow the rules or break them. Even the basic concepts we use to make sense of crime — what makes someone a risk, what counts as fair treatment, who gets left behind, and who is held responsible — are being questioned and redefined in new ways in this digital age.

This special issue of *TEME – Journal for Social Sciences* brings together nineteen original research articles that take on these challenges from an intentionally global and cross-disciplinary perspective. The theme — “*Social, Educational and Technological Challenges in Crime Prevention*” — is not just a label. It reflects a core belief: that studying crime through a single lens, in a single country, is no longer enough. The problems are too interconnected, too global, and too complex for that.

The articles collected here draw on real-world evidence from Serbia, North Macedonia, Spain, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and other regions. They engage ideas from criminology, law, behavioural science, forensic accounting, media studies, and more.

As guest editor, I have three goals for this introduction: to explain what motivated this special issue; to map out its main themes — what questions the articles ask and where they agree or differ; and to highlight the big-picture insights that emerge when you read all the contributions together.

That big-picture argument, in plain terms, is this: effective crime prevention in the 21st century requires coordinated, multi-level responses — ones that are socially aware, rooted in education, and informed by technology, while always protecting human rights, democratic accountability, and scientific integrity.

WHAT THIS COLLECTION COVERS

The nineteen articles in this issue naturally fall into four broad themes.

Technology, Artificial Intelligence, and the Challenge of Governing Prevention

No issue runs more consistently through this collection than the relationship between new technology and crime prevention.

Three articles address this directly. One examines predictive policing — the use of algorithms and large datasets to try to forecast crimes before they happen. The authors put this practice under a legal and ethical microscope, revealing a tension between making policing more efficient and protecting basic legal rights, including the presumption of innocence and the right to privacy. Their conclusion is clear: predictive policing is only acceptable when it operates transparently, with human oversight and clear accountability.

A second article takes a wider view of artificial intelligence in cybersecurity, looking at AI's ability to detect unusual behaviour and respond to threats in real time. Crucially, the authors argue that cybersecurity is not just a technical problem — it is also a human one. Protecting our digital systems depends just as much on how people behave, how organisations are run, and how digitally literate the public is.

A third article examines social engineering — the manipulation tactics criminals use to trick people into handing over access or sensitive information. The authors find that vulnerability to these attacks is not simply about individual carelessness; it is shaped by workplace roles, habits, and emotional dynamics. Basic awareness training often doesn't stick unless it's tailored, regularly reinforced, and built into daily work routines. As AI makes scams more convincing — including realistic impersonation using deepfake technology — defenders are increasingly at a disadvantage.

Rounding out this theme, an empirical study from Spain explores how university students feel about artificial intelligence. It finds a notable gender gap: women tend to be more sceptical about whether AI will benefit their lives. This has real implications for education — building a generation of citizens who can engage critically and ethically with AI is itself a form of crime prevention.

Financial Crime, Organisational Integrity, and the Economy

A second group of articles focuses on crime in economic and business settings.

One article examines how works of art are used to launder money, with a spotlight on freeports — high-security storage facilities where art and other valuables can be held indefinitely, away from public scrutiny.

The authors show how the art market's opacity, combined with gaps in financial regulation, creates fertile ground for hiding illegally obtained wealth.

Another applies a well-known financial analysis tool — the Beneish M-score — to companies in Serbia that went bankrupt between 2017 and 2024, looking for patterns that might have signalled fraudulent financial reporting in advance. Their findings offer early warning signs useful for investors, regulators, and fraud prevention agencies.

A third article reviews three decades of global research on auditing and fraud detection in banks, identifying significant growth in the field but also persistent blind spots — including a shortage of studies from developing economies and limited research on how auditing can actually *prevent* fraud, rather than just detect it after the fact.

Another article examines the real estate sector in Serbia as a high-risk area for fraud, money laundering, and illegal construction, calling for stronger institutional coordination and better use of technology to address these vulnerabilities.

Finally, an article linking green employment and crime rates across EU countries finds — through statistical analysis — that higher crime rates are consistently associated with lower levels of green employment. This is a striking result that connects labour market policy, environmental economics, and criminology in a single frame, suggesting that sustainable economic development is itself a crime prevention strategy.

Social Structures, Vulnerability, and How Institutions Respond

A third cluster of articles looks at the deeper social conditions that leave people vulnerable to crime — and at how institutions can respond more effectively.

One article examines social exclusion and crime, pushing back against the common assumption that exclusion is simply the same as poverty. Drawing on World Bank, Eurostat, and United Nations data, the authors find that roughly 32% of the world's population faces some form of exclusion — and that this significantly increases the risk of criminal behaviour.

Another traces how human trafficking and migrant smuggling along the Western Balkan route have evolved between 2015 and 2024, showing how criminal networks have adapted to border closures and stricter enforcement — not by disappearing, but by becoming more organised, technology-enabled, and diversified in their activities. Paradoxically, more restrictive migration policies have made the situation more dangerous, not less.

A related article focuses specifically on child trafficking prevention in Serbia, finding that while the indicators used by the social welfare system to identify at-risk children are generally well-grounded, significant

gaps remain — especially around children’s mental health and their exploitation through online platforms.

An empirical study of recidivism among convicted rapists in Serbia examines which factors — from personality disorders and substance abuse to work and education engagement during imprisonment — are most strongly associated with reoffending. The findings have direct implications for how prisons design rehabilitation programs and how authorities manage risk after release.

Finally, an article on police performance measurement in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland argues that traditional metrics — like arrest rates and response times — are not enough. Public trust in police depends significantly on perceived fairness in how officers treat people, not just on outcomes. The Northern Ireland case illustrates especially vividly why measuring legitimacy matters in divided communities.

Knowledge, Education, and What It Takes to Prevent Crime Effectively

The fourth theme is perhaps the most foundational, and it concerns how we *know* what we know about crime prevention, and how we build the educational and civic foundations that make prevention possible.

One article addresses the core methodological challenges of researching crime prevention, including the difficulty of studying crimes that never happened, unreported crime, and the limits of conducting controlled experiments in real-world settings. It makes the case that working across disciplines is essential — but only when done with real theoretical rigor.

Another argues that education is central to building a culture of security, and that school and professional curricula must be regularly updated to reflect emerging threats — from cybercrime to terrorism to natural disasters.

A third article, drawing on the Theory of Planned Behaviour, examines how people prepare — or fail to prepare — for natural disasters like earthquakes, highlighting the interplay of attitudes, social norms, personal confidence, and environmental factors.

An article on media coverage of crime in Serbia finds that sensationalist journalism — particularly during political crises — generates public fear, distorts perceptions of safety, and erodes confidence in state institutions. This suggests that media literacy should be considered part of crime prevention education.

Finally, a philosophical contribution examines terrorism through the lens of Jean Baudrillard’s theory of symbolic violence, reminding us that some of the most important tools for understanding contemporary crime come not from empirical research, but from theory.

WHAT RUNS THROUGH ALL OF IT

Reading across all these articles, five big themes emerge.

First: no single explanation is enough. Whether we're looking at repeat offending, cybercrime, financial fraud, or human trafficking, the research consistently shows that what looks like an individual problem is always shaped by larger forces — organisational culture, institutional design, social structures. Prevention efforts that only target one level will always fall short.

Second: rights matter — and not just morally. Across topics ranging from predictive policing to child protection to AI governance, a consistent finding appears: prevention measures that violate fundamental rights or deepen inequality tend to *fail*, not just because they're wrong in principle, but because they destroy the trust and legitimacy that effective prevention depends on. Upholding the rule of law is not an obstacle to preventing crime — it is one of its essential foundations.

Third: trust is both the goal and the tool. Multiple articles converge on the finding that people are more likely to cooperate with, comply with, and support institutions they perceive as fair and transparent. Public trust isn't just a nice outcome — it is a prerequisite for making prevention work.

Fourth: technology is racing ahead of governance. From AI-generated deepfakes to art market opacity to real estate fraud, the ability to exploit new technologies is outpacing society's ability to regulate them. Several articles can be read as urgent calls to close that gap through investment in oversight, institutional capacity, and professional skills.

Fifth: education is not a supplement — it is a foundation. From digital literacy and cybersecurity awareness to disaster preparedness and media criticism, education shapes the human capacity on which everything else rests. Investing in education, broadly understood, is investing in prevention.

THE VALUE OF AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The global reach of this collection deserves to be highlighted. The contributions draw on evidence from Serbia, North Macedonia, Spain, the United Kingdom, EU member states collectively, Argentina, the United States, and beyond. This diversity reflects the belief that crime prevention involves both universal dynamics and important local realities — and that progress requires ongoing exchange across national and cultural boundaries.

At the same time, several articles address contexts where institutional transparency, data availability, and regulatory capacity face real constraints — and they demonstrate both the importance of adapting internationally developed approaches to specific national conditions, and the genuine contribution that locally focused research can make to global knowledge. The fraud detection analysis in Serbia's bankruptcy context, the child welfare system review, and the Western Balkan trafficking study all show how local scholarship can address pressing national challenges while contributing meaningfully to broader conversations.

The collection also reflects a healthy pluralism of research methods — from statistical clustering and psychometric validation to legal analysis, literature reviews, and philosophical interpretation. This diversity is a strength. Complex problems require multiple approaches, and the richness of this volume reflects that.

*CONCLUSION:
PREVENTION THAT IS INTEGRATED,
RIGHTS-RESPECTING, AND EVIDENCE-BASED*

The twenty articles assembled here collectively make the case for a particular vision of crime prevention: one that works across sectors and levels of society; that is grounded in rigorous evidence; that takes seriously the structural conditions of inequality, exclusion, and vulnerability; that upholds fundamental rights and democratic values; and that is committed to continuous learning through research, evaluation, and international collaboration.

This vision is ambitious. It asks criminologists to engage with economists, legal scholars with computer scientists, practitioners with researchers, and national experts with international ones. It requires institutions to honestly evaluate whether their prevention programs actually work — including asking hard questions about unintended harms. And it requires sustained investment in research, education, regulatory systems, and professional capacity — treating prevention not as a cost to be minimised, but as a social good worth building.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: I owe particular thanks to the Editor-in-Chief of TEME – Journal for Social Sciences, Prof. Vinko Lepojević, whose leadership, commitment to international scholarship, and unwavering editorial care made this special issue possible. His vision for the journal provided the foundation on which this collection was built. I am deeply grateful to Prof. Darko Dimovski, whose coordination and sustained support throughout this process — particularly in facilitating communication between contributors, editors, and the journal — kept everything moving. This issue would not have come together without his generosity of time and effort. This issue also benefited greatly from the dedication of two outstanding assistant guest editors: Prof. Myunghoon Roh of Salve Regina University, USA, and Prof. Roberto L. Gonzalez of the National University of Villa Maria, Argentina. Their intellectual contributions, careful review of manuscripts, and collaborative spirit were indispensable at every stage of the editorial process. Finally, my sincere thanks go to the contributing authors, peer reviewers, and institutional partners from around the world whose scholarship and commitment to the field are the heart of this volume. It is my hope that the conversations it opens will contribute — however modestly — to the ongoing work of building safer, more just, and more resilient societies.

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