

Modern IT tools used by the Police in the forensic investigation management system

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Abstract

This article presents the evolution of forensic science and the process of its digitization within the Polish Police, focusing on the transition to a „new era” supported by modern IT systems designed to enhance the functionality and efficiency of police operations during preliminary proceedings.

The authors describe the transition from paper-based methods of documenting procedural actions to advanced ICT systems, representing an evolution toward a fully integrated digital environment. This process is significant given the Police’s pivotal role in ensuring state security. The study examines the capabilities and effectiveness of the Electronic Register of Investigative Activities (ERCDŚ), implemented in 2015, which serves as a key tool supporting procedural operations. It also discusses the implementation of an innovative system for marking forensic evidence with IDSP codes (QR codes), which has revolutionized operations in evidence storage facilities by eliminating procedural errors and reducing the time required to manage and process evidence secured during procedural actions.

The article focuses on the e-Register of Forensic Examinations (e-RBK) module, scheduled for implementation between 2026 and 2028. This system is intended to mark a breakthrough in communication between investigative units and police forensic laboratories, offering full standardization of commissioning forensic examinations, automated selection of research facilities and real-time tracking of analysis status. The e-RBK program not only „closes the loop” on the electronic flow of information regarding evidence – from the scene of the incident to the obtainment of an expert opinion – but also lays the foundation for implementing artificial intelligence in investigative analysis. This implementation is presented as a milestone in the professionalization of the force, enhancing the transparency and efficiency of the investigative process.

Keywords: police digitization, e-RBK, ERCDŚ, investigative process, digital evidence, IDSP, artificial intelligence in forensics, automation, digitization, standardization, transparency.

What is the “Electronic Register of Forensic Investigations”? The question underpinning these considerations will help to shed light on current and future needs in the field of forensics, and enable identifying new trends in the development of Polish law enforcement agencies, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the Police work.

At this initial stage of the analysis, it is necessary to explain the term forensics itself. In order to avoid any errors when defining the term, one must first familiarise oneself with the structure of this discipline of science by examining its constituent parts, namely: its subject matter, method and purpose. (Kulicki 1994, p. 28). In the first issue of

"Archiv für Kryminalantropologie und Kryminalistik" in 1898, Hans Gross wrote that: "forensics is a branch of natural science within criminal law: what it knows, what it proves and what it seeks to uncover, what it teaches and what it presents, is based on a rigorous foundation of observation. The subjects of its study and services are the realities of criminal law in the broadest sense of the word" (Kulicki, 1994, p. 28). The foregoing is, in fact, the first definition of forensics made in the literature on the subject. Authors of forensic publications point out that it was Hans Gross who produced the first systematic treatise in which he coined the term in question. (Gutekunst, 1974, p. 19). Since then, both the science and definition of forensics have evolved considerably. This process is primarily the result of the rise and evolution of crime in the 19th century, and the need to take various actions arising from efforts to find ways to combat crime. The very development of the biological, chemical and physical sciences has contributed to discussions on the evaluation of the concept itself. When searching for a definition in contemporary literature, one can come across many well-developed theories concerning the matter in question. Tadeusz Hanusek (200 pp. 23–245), in his publication "Kryminalistyka. Zarys wykładu", provides a comprehensive definition of forensics, describing it as: "the study of tactical principles and methods, as well as technical methods and environments for the identification and detection of legally defined, negative social phenomena, in particular crimes and their perpetrators, and for proving the existence or absence of a link between individuals and events; as well as the prevention of crimes and other adverse but legally relevant phenomena. This field of study also deals with strategies for prediction, as well as identification of and fight against these phenomena in the future, in particular by preventing their emergence and development". Forensics relates to the identification of the perpetrator, in particular their *modus operandi*, and the mechanism by which traces are created, which forms part of the evidence in investigations conducted by law enforcement agencies.

Forensics has become a multifaceted field that sets trends in the fight against broadly understood crime. It is practical in nature and its main purpose is to support the process of detecting crimes, identifying the perpetrators, and gathering and analysing evidence. Although forensics is largely based on the experience of practitioners, the field draws on many scientific disciplines, including physics, biology and chemistry, as well as engineering. In practice, this means that traces and evidence recovered from crime scenes can be subjected to thorough analysis, making it possible to reconstruct the sequence of events and even to precisely identify the individuals involved in the crime.

M. Kulicki (1994, p. 41) states that "the forensic examination method involves the integrated application of the achievements of a range of sciences, in particular: logic, chemistry, physics, biology, psychology, psychopathology, sociology, criminological aetiology and phenomenology, and victimology, as well as the development of its own original methods and techniques, which

in turn are sometimes used in non-legal disciplines, although they are intended for the judicial process". This allows us to take a much broader view of forensics, to define it analytically, and to rely on its origins, methodology and even its practical applications.

In light of the above considerations, it should be noted that "the term forensics is complex, as this discipline not only has numerous links with criminology – whose fields, such as aetiology, symptomatology and victimology shape and guide forensics – but also encompasses a wide variety of scientific disciplines, characterises its functions and defines the fundamental areas of its practical applications" (Hanusek, 2002, p. 36). Although it is said that criminology and forensics are sometimes mistakenly conflated, given the clear distinction between the two. "The fact is that both criminology and forensics are intended to serve the same purpose, namely to combat and prevent crime" (Czeczot, Tomaszewski, 1996, p. 18). It should be emphasised that forensics must draw on the achievements of many other sciences and disciplines of knowledge, including the legal, natural and technical sciences (Hołyst, 1993, p. 20).

The key functions of forensics include:

- the intelligence function,
- the detection function,
- the evidential function
- the preventive function (Hanusek, 2002, p. 36).

Thanks to forensic methods, it is possible to effectively identify perpetrators of crimes and reconstruct the course of events.

"The history of forensics is inextricably linked to the history of law enforcement agencies and the development of the criminal police. The state law enforcement agencies, which were initially organised in a rudimentary manner, employed measures such as surveillance, registration and even handwriting analysis" (Tuzimek, 2022, p. 56). However, it was only in the last decade of the 19th century, when the works of three researchers became widely known, forensics emerged as a fully independent discipline, distinct from other sciences. Each of those researchers is regarded as the "father of forensics" in various countries. They are: Alfons Bertillon, Francis Galton and Hans Gross (Hanusek, 2005, p. 16).

At present, the Police play a vital role in ensuring internal security and the safety of citizens. Security comprises the whole of actions, strategies and measures that affect the functioning of the state and its citizens. The Police are a body established to ensure public safety and order (the Police Act, 1990, Article 1(1)), and, above all, to pursue offenders and combat crime.

With regard to the history of the Police, it should be noted that as early as the 1920s the State Police (1919–1939) was an "executive body of the state and local authorities" established to maintain public safety and order (the State Police Act, 1919, Articles 1 and 2). At that time, its remit included maintaining public order and the broadly defined fight against criminal activity. A centralised formation subordinated to the Minister of the Interior, the State Police, as a body of local government and prosecution authorities, was obliged to

conduct investigations and pursue offenders. Following the introduction of the Code of Criminal Procedure into general use in 1928 (Oleś, 2024), the State Police played a significant role as a procedural authority. Under law, the Police's role was to carry out procedural actions at the direction of the court and prosecutor's office. As regards evidence, in cases of minor offences (heard by a magistrates' court), in particular those conducted in the form of investigations into offences punishable by imprisonment for up to two years or a fine (Oleś, 2024), after carrying out evidential activities, the Police was authorised to bring and support an indictment drawn up in respect of offences prosecuted *ex officio*. The Police at that time, acting on behalf of the public prosecutor, were the organisation authorised to carry out such activities. The structure of the State Police comprised several types of service, including:

- the investigation department of the State Police,
- the traffic police, responsible for ensuring safety and order on public roads (Jóźwiak, Kierski, Nowakowski, Zagził, 2019, p. 10);
- the political division that existed for just five years (1919–1926), which carried out a specific type of covert operations focusing on surveillance and “tracking down subversive individuals or organisations posing a threat to Polish statehood” (Jóźwiak et al., 2019, p. 10);
- the Police Air Service, established in 1939.

The investigation department deserves special mention, as it “was responsible for carrying out the most important function, namely combating crime” (Jóźwiak et al., 2019, p. 10). When the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure came into force in 1928, one of the tasks assigned to the State Police, in addition to executing the orders of the courts and the public prosecutor's office, was to conduct preparatory proceedings in the form of investigations (Oleś, 2024).

At present, the Police is the primary state body mandated by law (the Police Act, 1990) to protect the safety of citizens and to maintain public safety and order. The Police serve the public and the state by ensuring that law is upheld.

Through its preventive and prophylactic initiatives, the Police strengthen public safety and help to maintain national stability. In carrying out their duties, Police officers act within law, while respecting civil rights and freedoms. The Police's legal status is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland and in the Police Act, which sets out in detail the range of tasks, as well as the powers and duties of Police officers. In accordance with the aforementioned legislation, the fundamental tasks of the Police include, among others, the protection of citizens' lives, health and property; the maintenance of public safety and order; the prevention of crimes and offences; the prosecution of perpetrators of criminal acts; and the enforcement of the law within the scope specified by the legislator (the Police Act, 1990, Article 1(2) (1–10).

At the same time, pursuant to the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure (the Act on the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1997), the Police execute orders

from the courts and the public prosecutor's office and conduct investigations or inquiries under their supervision. The remit for these activities is set out in the Act, which makes the Police a key authority in the course of the preliminary proceedings. In practice, it is Police officers who bear the brunt of the fight against crime. Under Article 308 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, Police officers secure the scene of the incident and carry out the necessary procedural steps, including inspecting the scene and securing evidence, and, in the course of further proceedings, interview witnesses and undertake evidential measures aimed at identifying and apprehending the perpetrators of offences, for instance by commissioning forensic expert reports.

In the 21st century, combating crime is a tremendous challenge facing law enforcement agencies. Modern crime is not just about theft, robbery or burglary. Digitalisation and ever-evolving information technologies are bringing about changes not only in everyday life, but above all in the field of cybercrime. New technologies are redefining the reality by offering benefits to everyone, on the one hand, and posing a challenge to law enforcement agencies, on the other, owing to the specific nature of crimes committed using information technology. At the same time, digitalisation and computerisation are also elements that are extremely necessary, useful and indeed essential for the effective performance of the Police's tasks.

Technological advances have brought the Police many benefits, which have contributed to its broadly understood development, including in relation to the new model of data collection. Computers and database tools have contributed to the development of a range of digital tools which enable the collection and analysis of vast amounts of data relating to broadly understood crime, and which also help to improve the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies. Such databases include:

- a dataset in which information on crimes that have been committed is recorded, including detailed information on the *modus operandi*,
- a dataset containing information on the perpetrators of crimes,
- a dataset regarding missing persons,
- a dataset containing dactyloscopic images and data relating to deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) analysis, and many other datasets, which are currently making the Police work considerably more efficient.

Modern day law enforcement agencies face ever-greater challenges, not only in terms of threats posed by new methods of crime, but also in the context of carrying out tasks related to the dynamics of investigations, the need to collect and process vast amounts of data, and ensuring the security and availability of systems.

The ongoing digitalisation has significant impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of operations and the ability to carry out tasks, enhancing the effectiveness of operations, particularly within the criminal investigation department. It also has a major impact on the way in which official duties are carried out in terms control and supervision.

In the course of carrying out their statutory duties in relation to ongoing criminal investigations, Police officers perform numerous procedural tasks, including interviewing witnesses and suspects, inspecting locations, objects and individuals, securing evidence and carrying out registration and record-keeping tasks. Until relatively recently, a significant portion of the documentation was kept in paper form only, which involved

rewriting the same data and the time-consuming task of filling in documents by hand. The Electronic Register of Investigative Activities (Polish: *Elektroniczny Rejestr Czynności Dochodzeniowo-Śledczych*, ERCDS), introduced at the Police in 2015, provided a response to these challenges.

It is a constantly updated digital tool which supports criminal investigation officers in their day-to-day work.

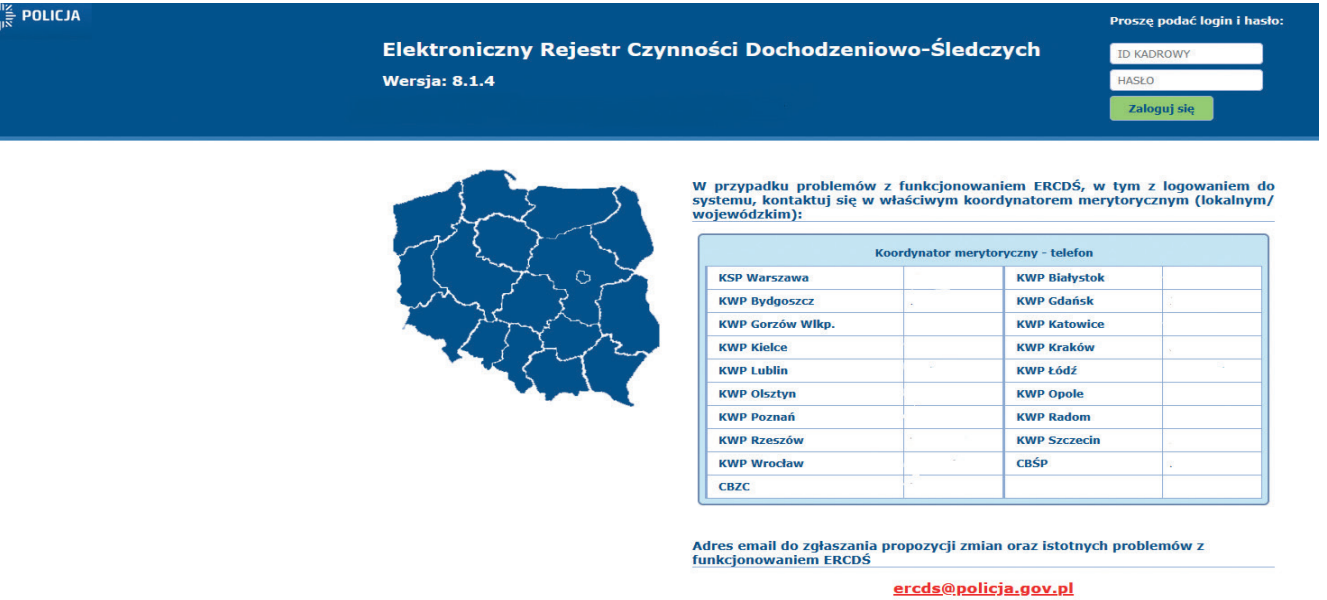


Fig. 1. A screenshot of the ERCDS home and login screen. Own elaboration

ERCDS is operated within the Police's ICT systems designed for automatic processing of information, including personal data collected in recording systems in the course of criminal proceedings, fiscal criminal proceedings and cases involving offences committed by minors.

In accordance with § 3(2) of Ordinance No. 31 of the Commander-in-Chief of Police of 6 October 2020 on the operation of the Electronic Register of Investigative Activities, ERCDS has, amongst others, the following recording systems:

1. the register of investigations (e-RSD);
2. the register of tasks assigned to Police units or oth-

er agencies authorised to conduct preparatory proceedings (e-RPP);

3. the register of physical evidence (e-KDRz);
4. the register of decisions issued on the admissibility of evidence from an expert opinion and of specialist examinations carried out (e-RPB);
5. the register of technical and forensic activities (e-RCTK);
6. the register of positive match results obtained from national or foreign biological or dactyloscopic databases (e-RPWS).

Thanks to its intuitive interface and implemented functionalities, ERCDS enables recording of Police in-

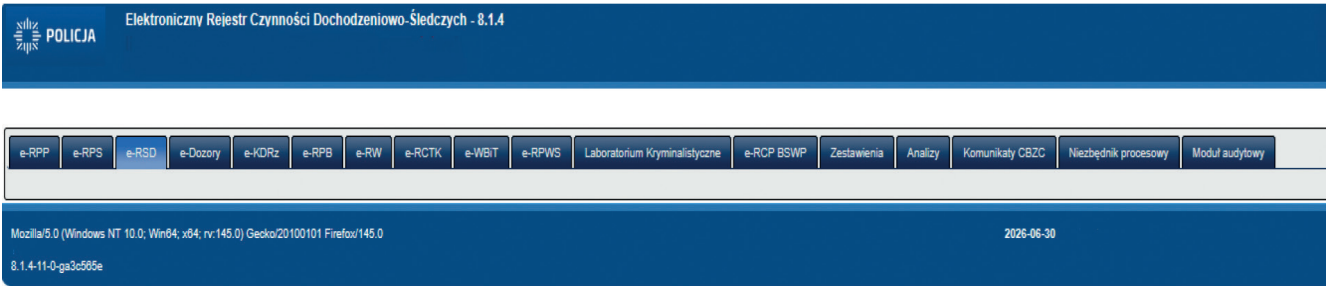


Fig. 2. A view of the respective recording systems of the Electronic Register of Investigative Activities. Own elaboration

vestigations and the actions carried out as part of them, monitoring of their progress, fast and convenient retrieval of data, and generating forms and reports, thereby bringing a new quality to the work of Police officers. ERCDS forms part of a wider process of digitisation of law enforcement agencies. It is a tool that not only

makes Police officers' day-to-day work easier by meeting their expectations, but also sets new standards in terms of the effectiveness and speed of preparatory proceedings.

From a forensic perspective, the tool has significantly improved the recording of forensic procedures,

which rely heavily on forensic techniques. Thanks to its automated data collection system, ERCDS enables quick and simple recording of technical and forensic activities carried out as part of procedural tasks, and

also facilitates the retrieval of such data, which translates into the speed and efficiency of investigations. In order to illustrate the significant importance of launching the Electronic Register of Investigative Ac-

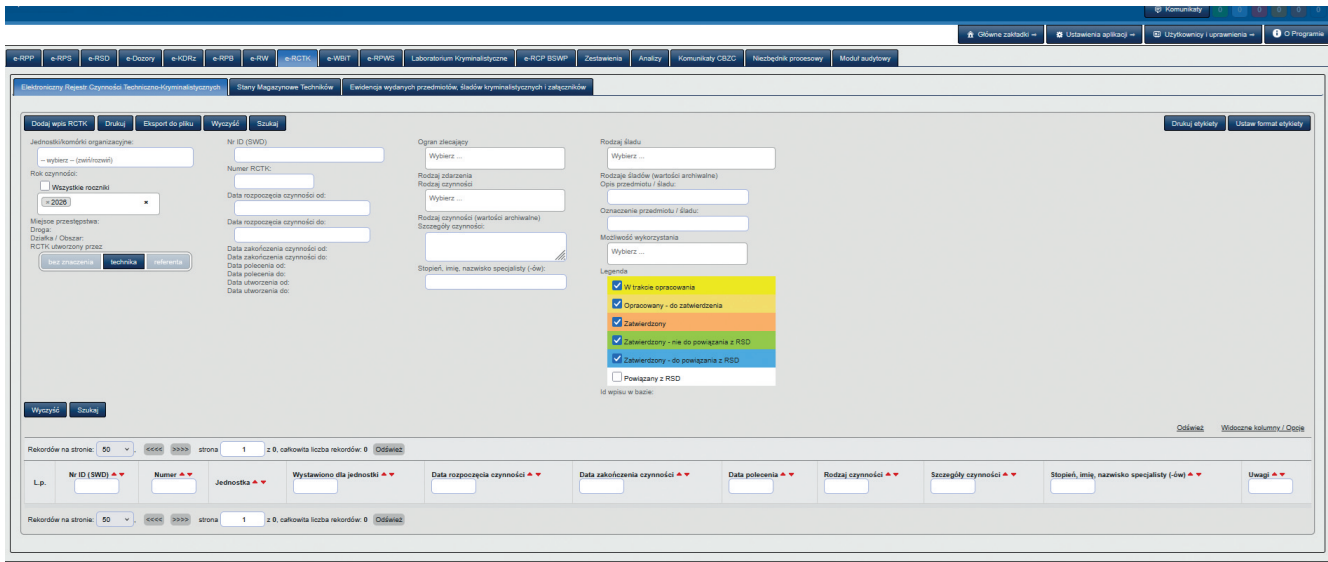


Fig. 3. A view of the e-RCTK tab in ERCDS. Own elaboration

tivities and the implementation of electronic recording of technical and forensic activities, the statistics below have been provided, compiled from the e-KDRz and e-RSD recording systems as at 1 September 2026 relating to forensic traces, physical evidence and preparatory proceedings in the years 2023–2025.

In 2025, Police officers recovered and recorded 142,066 forensic traces and 657,464 items of physical evidence and registered 717,988 preparatory pro-

ceedings in the ERCDS systems. In the corresponding period of 2024, the figures were as follows: 130,614 forensic traces, 651,887 items of physical evidence and 741,387 preparatory proceedings, while in 2023 the figures were, respectively: 135,144 forensic traces, 616,552 items of physical evidence and 759,337 preparatory proceedings.

In 2017– 2023, the Criminal Bureau of the National Police Headquarters, the specialist unit responsible for

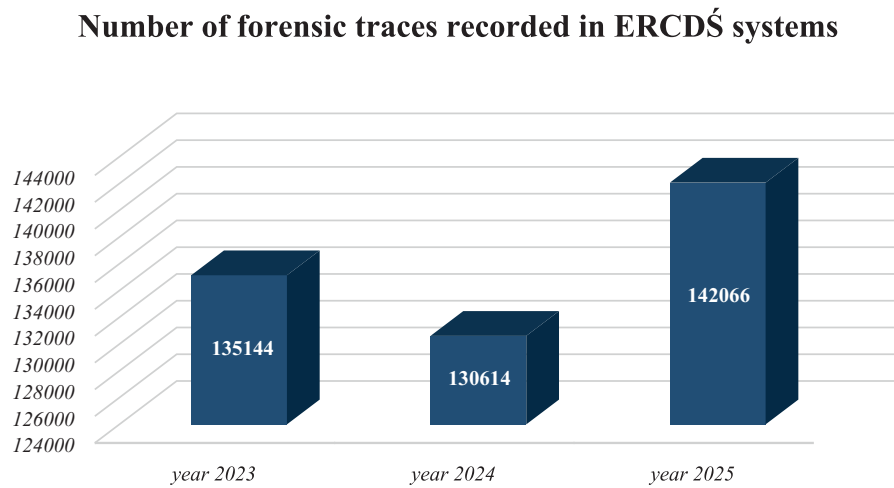


Fig. 4. Number of forensic traces recorded in ERCDS systems in 2023–2025

Number of items of evidence recorded in ERCDS systems

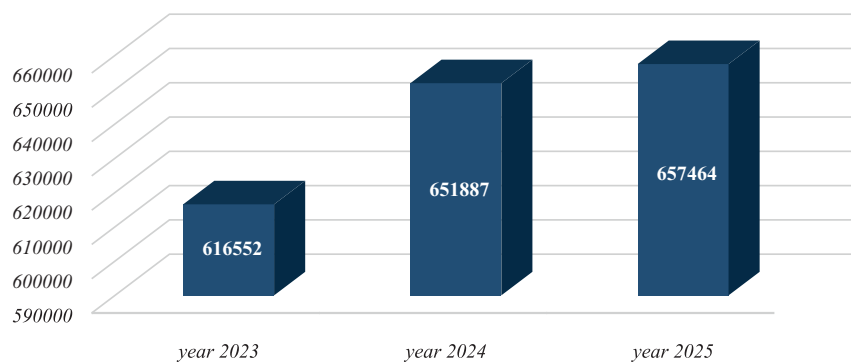


Fig. 5. Number of items of evidence recorded in ERCDS systems in 2023–2025

Number of preliminary investigations recorded in ERCDS systems

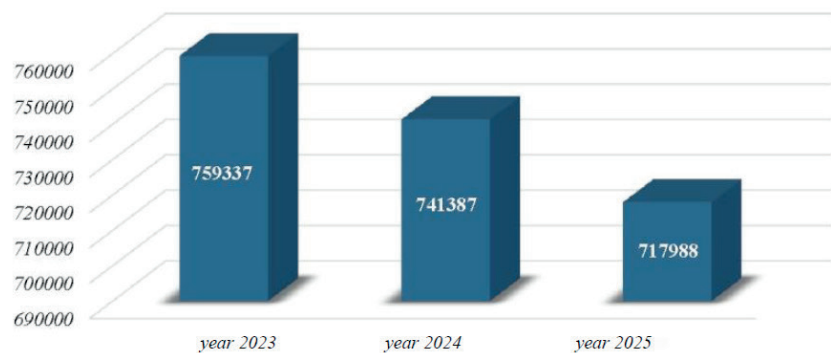


Fig. 6. Number of investigations recorded in ERCDS systems in 2023–2025

maintaining and developing ERCDS, carried out a system optimisation project named “Introduction of electronic recording of traces and items within the Police”, , which received a recommendation from the Ministry of the Interior and Administration (MSWiA) and EU funding for its implementation. The aim of the project was to improve the quality of the recording of physical evi-

dence and forensic traces, including at Police evidence stores. Thanks to the design specifications, IT solutions have been implemented in ERCDS registers whereby the descriptions of traces and items recovered by Police officers were replaced by a QR code (IDSP).

Generated using ERCDS system, the IDSP code is printed on the list of physical evidence and on a special

No.	Identifier – rank, first name and surname of the specialist ▲▼	Type / Description	Marking	IDSP code / Possibility of use and Notes	Przekaza miejs
1	001001 - Warr. FC Jan KOWALSKI	Trace: biological sweat and sebum mixture recovered from the steering wheel of a car with reg. no. PP..... per swab stick	1	 PQ2022S00000001 Wyszukaj biological trace examination	
2	001001 - Warr. FC Jan KOWALSKI	Item: Off-side headlamp from a VW Passat passenger car with reg. no. PP... recovered in full in a cardboard packaging	2	 PQ2022P00000001 Wyszukaj mechanoscopic examination	

Fig. 7. The format of the QR CODE (IDSP). Own elaboration

self-adhesive label, and is then affixed to the packaging containing the traces/items. The use of IDSP coding enables rapid and smooth identification of a secured trace or item, linking it to a particular case.

Furthermore, every forensic technician and other Police officers can generate and print a barcode identifying a Police officer. This code can be affixed to the label or packaging with the trace or item secured. Printed on a special self-adhesive label, the code has replaced wax or silicone previously used by Police officers to stamp their IDs on. The improved format has resulted in a reduction in the time needed for custodians to record and receive/issue secured physical evidence and forensic traces. It also contributed to an increase in the efficiency of inventories of physical evidence and forensic traces kept in evidence stores, as well as to the elimination of procedural and substantive errors and other shortcomings.

Driven by the need to continuously improve the system, and in close cooperation with the Central Forensic Laboratory of the Police and the laboratories operating within the provincial police headquarters and the Warsaw Police Headquarters, a new solution has been proposed – the development of an IT module designed to streamline and enhance the effectiveness of forensic and investigative processes. The work as part of a joint project named “The development of the e-Register of Forensic Examinations (e-RBK) within the Electronic Register of Investigative Activities”, scheduled for the years 2026–2028, is focused on adapting to the growing challenges relating to the management of information and evidence, and on consolidating activities at the level of organisational units and departments, as well as at the Police's forensic laboratories.

Like its predecessor, the project under development has also received a recommendation from the Ministry of the Interior and Administration, as a result of which funding has been secured from the Internal Security Fund. The Ministry's favourable opinion paved the way for the next stage of technological development, namely the creation of a unified and centralised system enabling the electronic recording of requests and the course and results of forensic examinations carried out as part of criminal proceedings conducted by the Police. The centralised e-RBK will introduce a new standard of oversight over the internal and external circulation of documentation and examined items, and will ensure their full accountability in relation to the status of a case/examination. The allocated funds will be used, amongst other things, to finance programming work and to upgrade the IT equipment at all the Police's forensic laboratories.

The main aim of e-RBK is to standardise and digitise the process of custody of evidence and documenting forensic examinations carried out at Police laboratories. To date, most of the information has been held only in paper form or is stored in dispersed databases, which significantly restricts access to it and the ability to analyse and share it between Police units. The proposed module is designed to enable the electronic commissioning and management of forensic examinations

across the entire formation. The new functionalities implemented in ERCDS as regards the electronic flow of information on forensic items and traces, secured by forensic technicians and case officers alike, to Police forensic laboratories regarding constitute the first stage and pave the way for the launch of the e-RBK module. The tool under development will enable digital transmission of a decision on admitting expert evidence, the new format of which permits the automatic selection, from a predefined catalogue, of the type of specialism, the scope of the examination, sample questions for experts, as well as attaching the physical evidence and comparative materials that have been electronically recorded in ERCDS. In addition to the ability to commission forensic examinations electronically and register evidence samples, a key feature will involve the option to track the progress of analyses and monitor the status of examinations in real time, thereby streamlining communication between the investigating officer and the forensic expert. Case officers will be able to obtain the findings of forensic expert reports and opinions more quickly and efficiently. In the context of the system optimisation, in order to rationalise the resources of investigative units, the Police's forensic laboratories will be fully integrated. Data on turnaround times will be helpful in determining which laboratory will have the shortest turnaround time for an opinion. In addition, e-RBK provides for the automation of the qualitative assessment of the work of forensic technicians, based on positive matches from searches in DNA and dactyloscopic databases (so-called DNA/AFIS HITS).

The introduction of e-RBK is crucial to the effectiveness of the detection process. Thanks to the digitisation of documentation, the time of waiting for examination results will be significantly reduced, which will have a direct impact on the pace of criminal proceedings. The data stored in the system will help to avoid recording errors or the loss of documentation. In addition, it will be possible to quickly compare new traces with previous analyses, which may lead to revealing links between seemingly unrelated events. The system's new functionalities will also ensure better control over the chain of custody of evidence and examination items, high-quality expert reports and opinions, and will enhance the transparency of the entire examination process.

Thanks to its modular design, E-RBK will be a key driver of the Police's criminal investigation service's ongoing digital transformation. This undoubtedly represents a genuine qualitative leap and an opportunity to develop artificial intelligence in forensic analysis, as well as to respond more swiftly to criminal threats and prevent crime. Another important aspect is also to increase public confidence in the Police through transparency and integrity in evidential procedures.

Given its complex modular structure, the implementation of e-RBK is scheduled to take place in stages, including the procurement of IT equipment for Police forensic laboratories, as well as training for Police officers and laboratory staff – the system's end users.

Thanks to information technology and technical capabilities, the implementation of the e-RBK module will

also enable the Police to make progress in the area of digitising data obtained during procedural activities. "Working with" the electronic version of case files will enable the collected evidence to be utilised more fully in the context of forensic examinations.

The implementation of ERCDS has had a positive impact on the Police's investigation capacity. The move away from paper-based registers and the transfer of registration activities to an electronic register is one of the positive aspects of the implementation of the aforementioned system, which streamlines the work of Police officers in carrying out procedural tasks. It is also an essential tool for monitoring and supervising the performance of official duties in the course of ongoing investigations.

According to the project's objectives, the implementation of e-RBK will be a milestone in professionalising the Police's operations and improving efficiency in the evidence-gathering and detection process. This new component of ERCDS will "complete" the process of the electronic flow of information regarding forensic traces or items secured during proceedings, starting from the point at which it was recovered, through the record keeping at the level of the forensic technician or case officer, up to the appointed expert preparing a specialist report. Enhanced with new features, the system will become an even more professional tool, essential to the work of every criminal investigation officer.

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