

THE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER'S TOOLKIT: OPTIMAL MEASURES OF DIRECT COERCION AND THE COMPETENCIES TO BE DEVELOPED THROUGH TRAINING

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Abstract: *This article explores the optimal set of direct coercive measures required by competent law enforcement agencies in Estonia and identifies the core competencies necessary for their lawful and effective application. The research is motivated by the evolving security landscape and the increasing need for non-police agencies to exercise direct coercion during crises. Employing document analysis of police security tactics reports (2012–2022), the study investigates which coercive measures are used most frequently, in what combinations, and under which circumstances. The findings reveal a shift from a linear to a situational model of coercion, where electroshock weapons are increasingly favoured due to their efficiency and lower risk of harm. The study highlights inconsistencies in the legal regulation of coercive measures across different agencies and calls for a more coherent and inclusive legal framework. A set of specific competencies – spanning physical force, special equipment, firearms, and de-escalation techniques – is proposed for integration into law enforcement training curricula.*

Keywords: *competent law enforcement agency, toolkit of direct coercive measures, competencies in the use of force.*

Introduction

In the context of the changed security environment and various crises, it is increasingly important that law enforcement agencies beyond the police are granted broader powers to apply direct coercion. To determine what constitutes an optimal toolkit of direct coercive measures for a competent law enforcement agency, and what competencies are required for their use, document analysis was conducted. Analysed were the summaries of the Police and Border Guard Board's use of direct coercion between 2012 and 2022. The results show that the police apply direct coercion in a wide range of situations – for example, to execute a law enforcement order (precept by LEA Section 28) save the life of a suicidal individual or neutralise an attack on an officer. This indicates that other law enforcement agencies should also be legally empowered to use a diverse array of direct coercive measures. To prevent the misuse of direct coercion, attention must be focused on training, as competencies in the use of direct coercion inform the design of training curricula.

Section 6(1) of the Law Enforcement Act (LEA) defines a **competent law enforcement agency** as an authority, body or person authorised by law or regulation to perform the function of state supervision.¹ These agencies may be authorised to apply **state supervision measures** specific to their field, and, where necessary, enforce them through **direct coercion**. For example, a competent law enforcement officer has the right to use physical force and handcuffs on an intoxicated individual who is endangering others in order to ensure their transport to a

¹ Only the police have the competence to intervene additionally as a law enforcement agency with general or urgent competence, under Section 6(2) and (3) of the LEA. For a more detailed explanation of the definition of law enforcement competence, see Roosve 2025, commentary on Section 6 of the LEA, pp. 53–63.

sobering-up facility (LEA, Sections 42(1) and 79(1) points (1) and (3)). Under current legislation, the Estonian legislature designates the police as the principal user of direct coercion. Other special law enforcement agencies either lack such powers entirely (e.g. the Data Protection Inspectorate), or their internal regulations are inconsistent (see below for examples from the sector).

In light of the deteriorated international security environment (the Estonian Parliament 2023, pp. 4, 9, 13) and other potential crises, it is essential to review and revise the provisions governing the use of direct coercion by law enforcement agencies. In the event of unexpected or unfamiliar incidents, the police may have insufficient time or capacity to respond to ordinary threats (Jäätma 2020, p. 78). Recent crises in Estonia that have demanded extensive police involvement and resources include the April 2007 riots, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and mass migration triggered by the war in Ukraine in 2022. Thus, the **relevance** of the current study is closely tied to the present security situation and Estonia's ability to manage crises. The Police and Border Guard Board needs other law enforcement agencies² to serve as capable, independent partners with their own **powers to apply direct coercion** (the Estonian Parliament 2021, p. 29). There may be circumstances in which the police, due to capacity constraints, are unable to provide support to other agencies, even though Section 6(6) of the LEA establishes an obligation for the police to assist with the use of direct coercion (Roosve 2025, pp. 53–63).

The **novelty** of this study lies in its methodology: by analysing ten years of police practice in the use of direct coercion, it identifies the optimal range of direct coercive measures for competent law enforcement agencies. Since the legal basis and practical skills for using direct coercive measures must be taught and practised, the study also defines a set of competencies that can inform training programme design.

The central **research problem** is as follows: What measures of direct coercion are needed by competent law enforcement agencies in the performance of state supervision, and what competencies must officers possess in order to use such measures? The **aim of the study** is thus to identify the necessary and appropriate direct coercive measures for competent law enforcement agencies, and to define the corresponding competencies, so that these can be systematically incorporated into training programmes on the use of direct coercion.

To achieve the aim and address the problem, the following **research questions** are posed:

1. Which measures of direct coercion are used to enforce various state supervision measures?
2. Which measures of direct coercion are used most frequently, and in what combinations?
3. What recommendations can be drawn from security tactics analyses to inform training and the definition of competencies in the use of direct coercion?

To answer these questions, the following **research tasks** (RT) are set:

1. Compile an overview of the state supervision measures set out in the LEA that allow for the use of direct coercion (RT1); Analyse the Police and Border Guard Board's security tactics manuals and prepare a summary showing:
 - a) which direct coercive measures are used to enforce which supervision measures (RT2);
 - b) which direct coercive measures are most commonly used and whether they are used individually or in combination (RT2);

²Under each of Estonia's eleven ministries, at least two law enforcement agencies operate with state supervision competence; these are agencies or inspectorates such as the Rescue Board and the Police and Border Guard Board under the Ministry of the Interior.

- c) what recommendations emerge for defining competencies in the use of direct coercion (RT3);
2. Formulate a set of competencies for the use of direct coercive measures (RT3).

The current state of the field of law enforcement

It is encouraging that, in recent years, various laws in the field of law enforcement – including those related to the use of direct coercion – have been modernised in Estonia. As a result, volunteers are increasingly able to contribute to maintaining public order. In addition to the roles of assistant police officer, assistant rescuer and Defence League member, the legal basis for involving assistant bomb disposal specialists and crisis-role bomb disposal assistants has now been established. **This includes their right to apply state supervision measures and to use direct coercion** (see Rescue Act, Sections 32¹, 38¹, 38², 42¹ and 42²). A draft law currently pending before the Government of the Republic proposes granting additional supervisory tasks and the right to use direct coercion to municipal law enforcement officers (Ministry of the Interior, 2023). The need for this is clear (see survey results on municipal law enforcement officers at the Tallinn Municipal Police Department, Vanaisak 2021, pp. 258–266). Amendments to the Security Activities Act, which came into force in 2024, clarify the rights of security guards to **use force, weapons and special equipment**, and **outline training requirements**, and should serve as a model for future legislation. These changes help to strengthen internal security and enhance public safety (The Estonian Parliament, SE 629, p. 63). Further revision of the Security Activities Act remains relevant, particularly to clarify the role of security staff in protecting public order more broadly – for example, whether and under what conditions they may provide services at public gatherings and admitted to apply direct coercive measures.

Several authors have examined the legal and practical issues associated with the use of direct coercion, including Silva Kirsimägi, Hannes Haav (in collaboration with Jaak Kiviste and Oliver Purik), and the author of the present article. Kirsimägi (2023) notes that **current law lacks clear and consistent regulation regarding the use of force** in situations where the Defence Forces or Defence League are involved in maintaining public order. Haav et al., (2023) analyse three years of police practice in the use of **electroshock weapons** and argue that **the conditions for their use should be aligned with those for pepper spray and telescopic batons**. Vanaisak (2019) highlights **inconsistencies** in the lists of permissible direct coercive measures governing the Environmental Board. These lists do not reflect practical needs or align with the Environmental Supervision Act, and the Environmental Board requires authority to use a broader range of special measures and direct coercive measures (Vanaisak 2019, see also Table 1). Leaders of bomb disposal operations have stressed that, in performing tasks involving the identification or neutralisation of a serious threat, they should be authorised to use more direct coercive measures than just physical force and firearms. The current restriction on the use of firearms in cases of self-defence should be extended to include law enforcement tasks (Vanaisak 2020, pp. 50, 55, 59; see also Rescue Act Section 26¹(1–2) and Explanatory Memorandum to Draft Act SE 128 UA, p. 9).

Table 1. Inconsistencies in the list of direct coercive measures permitted for the Environmental Board under the Environmental Supervision Act, Hunting Act, Fisheries Market Organisation Act, Fishing Act, General Part of the Environmental Code Act, Forest Act, Water Act and Animal Protection Act
(based on Vanaisak 2019, pp. 203–205).

LEGAL ACT	MEASURES OF DIRECT COERCION			
	PHYSICAL FORCE	HANDCUFFS	SERVICE ANIMAL (DOG)	SERVICE WEAPON
Environmental Supervision Act	?	*	*	*
Hunting Act	*	*	?	*
Fisheries Market Organisation Act				
Fishing Act	*	*		*
General Part of the Environmental Code Act	*			
Forest Act	*	*	?	*
Water Act	*			
Nature Conservation Act	*		?	

The study presented in this article focuses on different aspects of the use of direct coercion: which measures should be used to enforce which measures; whether any hierarchy or pattern exists in the selection of measures; what an appropriate toolkit of direct coercive measures should include for each competent law enforcement agency; what problems arise in practice; what recommendations exist for prevention; and where the focus of training in the use of force should lie.

Methodology

This study uses a combined research methodology. The **analysis of documents** reflecting the practical application of direct coercion includes police security tactics incidents from 2014–2022, police security tactics recommendations from 2013–2022 and police firearm use analyses from 2012–2013. These materials are treated as secondary data (Give, 2008, p. 803), allowing for the reuse and processing of data collected by another researcher for a different purpose.

As law must adapt to societal change, one of the legal scholar's responsibilities is to interpret developments in legal practice, identify points of friction, and devise general, comprehensible guidelines or principles to resolve a range of individual cases (Soo & Pormeister 2021, pp. 11, 19–20, 51). The study is not limited to doctrinal analysis; it also examines and analyses specific cases that may serve as the basis for developing broader legal-theoretical frameworks.

On 12 July 2023, the author submitted a request³ to the Police and Border Guard Board to analyse police firearm use, police security tactics recommendations and police security tactics incidents from 2012–2022. The Police and Border Guard Board granted permission to use the security tactics materials on 14 September 2023. The data are used in aggregate, without reference to personal information, and in compliance with the Public Information Act, which prohibits disclosure of information that could hinder the detection of offences or facilitate their commission (Public Information Act, Section 35(1)(5¹)).

³The application was submitted in accordance with the requirements for conducting research on the police organisation and for the provision, use and storage of information necessary for such research.

1. Overview of regulations on the use of direct coercion and areas for development

This chapter provides a brief overview of the legal framework governing direct coercion, highlighting both legal and practical issues. It addresses the need for listing direct coercive measures available to competent law enforcement agencies in special laws, relevant case law from the Chancellor of Justice and the courts, and a model along with the required competencies for the use of direct coercion. The chapter also examines the need to amend current legislation and offers a limited international comparison, particularly with legislation from the Federal Republic of Germany.

The list of direct coercive measures available to competent law enforcement agencies (other than the police) must be included in special laws

Direct coercion refers to influence exerted on a person, animal or object using physical force, special equipment or a weapon. If it is not possible to enforce compliance through substitutional performance or a fine, direct coercion may be used. This is always an administrative act exercised under discretionary powers (LEA, Section 74; Explanatory Memorandum to Draft Act 49 SE, p. 105; Supreme Court judgment 1-17-1219/39, para. 16). The LEA is a general law that lays down the overarching rules for all law enforcement agencies, including types of direct coercion (**physical force, special equipment, weapons and ammunition**) and the conditions for their use (Draft Act 49 SE, p. 101; see LEA, Chapter 5). In addition to the **police**, the right to use direct coercion is granted to **other law enforcement agencies**. The explanatory memorandum to the draft act mentions the Tax and Customs Board and the Environmental Inspectorate (now the Environmental Board). The legislature has deemed it necessary to expand the list of such authorities: if a law enforcement agency has the power to apply a measure that may warrant direct coercive enforcement, it must also be empowered to use direct coercion (Draft Act 424 SE, p. 25; Draft Act 49 SE, pp. 103, 105).

Where a **special law enforcement agency** is granted the right to use direct coercion, **the relevant special law must specify which types of direct coercive measures it is authorised to use** (Draft Act 424 SE, pp. 20, 25; Draft Act 49 SE, p. 105). To prevent the abuse of less-lethal weapons – which may cause serious injury or death – their use must also be strictly regulated by law (United Nations 2020, para. 1.1). The introduction of this article referred to inconsistencies in the regulation of direct coercion by the Environmental Board and the Rescue Board's bomb disposal units, but there are other examples. The Tax and Customs Board is authorised to use a range of direct coercive measures under Sections 67–68 of the Customs Act. These include handcuffs, service dogs, rubber and telescopic batons, gas weapons and firearms.⁴ However, equivalent lists should be included in all special laws granting the Tax and Customs Board supervisory powers (see inconsistencies in Table 2). For example, Section 33(4) of the Tobacco Act authorises the Tax and Customs Board to use direct coercion but does not specify the permitted measures, despite this having been deemed necessary during the drafting stage (see Draft Act SE 753: “The proposal was submitted by the Tax and Customs Board to enable its officers to use physical force, special equipment or weapons when apprehending illegal tobacco handlers and their goods, or in response to assaults during such operations.”) The Alcohol Act, meanwhile, does not grant the Tax and Customs Board powers of direct coercion, although such authority could be necessary when dealing with prohibited

⁴In the author's view, the list of direct coercive measures available to the Tax and Customs Board should also include physical force, without which the use of certain other measures is not possible.

alcohol handlers (see Alcohol Act, Section 7(1)(1–7) and Section 4(1)(1), which defines prohibited alcohol handling).

Table 2. Inconsistencies in the list of direct coercive measures in the special laws governing the Tax and Customs Board
(compiled by the author)

LEGAL ACT	Inconsistencies	MEASURES OF DIRECT COERCION						
		Physical force	Hand-cuffs	Baton	Service dog	Gas weapon	Fire-arm	Other special
Alcohol Act		-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Road Transport Act	Direct coercion allowed for examination of movables, but no measures listed in the special act	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Customs Act		?	*	*	*	*	*	*
Tobacco Act	Use of direct coercion allowed, but measures not listed in the special act	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Fiscal Marking of Liquid Fuel Act		-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Liquid Fuel Act	Direct coercion allowed for all supervisory measures, but no coercive measures listed in the special act	?	?	?	?	?	?	?

As of 7 February 2025, local government law enforcement officers do not have the legal authority to use direct coercion. The legislature intends to amend this in relation to the transport of intoxicated persons to sobering-up facilities and supervision under the Public Transport Act (Ministry of the Interior 2023, pp. 9 ff). In addition to granting the right to apply specific special measures, the proposed legislation would authorise local government law enforcement officers to use direct coercive measures such as physical force, handcuffs, gas weapons and telescopic batons. Based on the findings of Haav et al., (2023, p. 81), the list of direct coercive measures proposed in the draft legislation could also include the use of electroshock weapons. Compared to gas weapons or telescopic batons, electroshock weapons are associated with less pain and a lower risk of injury. Local government law enforcement officers should also be granted the right to use direct coercion under other legislation (e.g. the Tobacco Act; see also results from the MUPO survey in Vanaisak 2021, pp. 258–266).

Linear and situational models for the use of direct coercion

Research on the use of direct coercion generally focuses on a binary choice: whether to use it or not (Paoline & Terrill 2011, p. 160). In Estonian academic literature, the escalation of direct coercive measures is described in terms of increasing intensity, based on the principle of proportionality (Draft Act 49 SE, p. 102). In 2017, Kiviste developed a matrix for the use of direct coercive measures. In this model – a **linear model** of use of force – the choice of measure is guided by proportionality: the least intrusive measure is selected first, and more intense means are employed only if necessary to achieve the goal. This stepwise approach is used by 80% of police officers (Terrill & Paoline 2012, p. 38). According to the matrix, the least invasive intervention is the mere presence and visibility of the officer, while the most extreme is causing death. Between these extremes lie actions such as communication, movement restriction, deprivation of liberty, infliction of pain, bodily harm and life-threatening injury. Physical force, handcuffs and service dogs are used to restrict movement (low intensity); gas, bladed and electroshock weapons cause pain (moderate intensity); and firearms can result in injury, life-threatening harm or death (high intensity). However, strong use of physical force or bladed weapons may also cause death, and serious harm may result from dog bites or, in rare cases, gas or electroshock weapons (Laaring et al., 2017, p. 284; see also McEwen 1997, p. 49, and Adams & Jennison 2007, p. 450).

In studying the practice of direct coercion, it is emphasised that force should always be guided by proportionality: the most effective means of achieving the objective should be chosen, with the least possible harm to the subject and the officer. This is known as the **situational model of direct coercion** (Terrill & Paoline 2012, p. 40). Haav et al., (2023, p. 81; see also Bulman, 2011, pp. 6–7) found that the use of electroshock weapons is safer than telescopic batons, as it does not cause long-lasting pain or injury. An analysis of four years of Estonian police security tactics materials showed that among moderate-intensity equipment, pepper spray and telescopic batons cause the most injuries and prolonged pain. Compared to electroshock weapons, the injury rate is 33% versus 9%. Notably, pepper spray alone is effective in only 23% of cases and is usually followed by the use of other coercive measures. These findings align with results from other countries (Haav et al., 2023, p. 81; see also Ministry of Justice 2024, LEA draft, Annexes 1 and 2). It is well established that the longer a conflict persists, the more likely it is that force will be applied repeatedly or that equipment will be changed; this in turn increases the risk of injury to both the subject and the officer (Mesloh, Henych & Wolf, 2008, p. 67; Mesloh, Heych & Wolf, 2009, p. 3; Alpert et al., 2011). The force used by police officers must be objectively reasonable and take all circumstances of the specific incident into account. There is growing support for situational models in which the choice of coercive measure is based on the subject's level of resistance (Terrill & Paoline 2012, p. 41).

Several authors also highlight the need to enhance training, particularly by focusing more on the use of non-linear force models, where measures are selected based on the situation (Staller & Zaiser 2015; see also Roberts 2012). Naturally, the range of measures entrusted to law enforcement officers must enable such an approach.

Estonian case law shows that when assessing the legality of coercion, attention is paid to **whether the choice and intensity of the coercive tool are linked to the officer's knowledge and training** (Supreme Court judgment of 1 July 2021, No 1-18-10214, para. 34; see also Soo & Sootak 2023, pp. 760–761).

It is often assumed that increasing the duration of training ensures the lawful and effective use of force (Staller & Zaiser 2015). Current academic literature recommends placing greater emphasis not only on tactical repetition of standard scenarios but also on understanding the

consequences of excessive force. Training methods should encourage learners to analyse the impact of disproportionate force and to propose alternative responses based on their own insights (Staller & Zaiser 2015; see also Atherley & Hickman 2014; Smith & Holmes 2014).

The use of direct coercive measures in the context of state supervision

The author attempted to derive the potential applicability of direct coercive measures from the threat criteria outlined for each state supervision measure (see LEA, Sections 26, 28 and 30–53, which set out the grounds for the application of general and special state supervision measures). Although more intense coercive measures, such as firearms or electroshock weapons, may only be used in response to an imminent, serious threat,⁵ this comparison yielded little substantive result. For example, the requirement of a serious threat also appears in the definition of a movement restriction order under LEA, Section 44(1)(3), but applying this measure does not necessarily require the use of an electroshock weapon or firearm.⁶ In practice, however, situations can escalate rapidly, and the use of firearms may become necessary and justified even in enforcing a standard enforcement order (or “precept” under LEA, Section 28) where this was not initially anticipated⁷ (see e.g. Tallinn Circuit Court judgment 3-18-1515/29).

The application of direct coercion in case law and in the practice of the Chancellor of Justice

Law enforcement officers are routinely faced with situations in which they must quickly and lawfully decide whether and how to use direct coercion. According to case law and the Chancellor of Justice, three interlinked elements are key when assessing the use of force: **the context of the situation, the appropriateness of the method and respect for human dignity**. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has repeatedly emphasised that physical force may only be used when absolutely necessary and never excessively (ECtHR, 21 December 2015, *Sakir Kazmac v. Turkey*, No 8077/08; ECtHR, 15 July 2022, *Kursish and others v. Russia*, No 62003/08). If the use of force is not objectively necessary, it undermines a person’s dignity and constitutes a violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECtHR judgement of 28 September 2015, *Bouyid v. Belgium*, No 23380/09). Physical force includes a range of actions, from restraining a person to more severe measures such as hand-to-hand combat (Draft Act 49 SE, p. 103). The intensity of force is classified as light, moderate or severe (Supreme Court Criminal Chamber, 8 June 2016, 3-1-1-55-16, paras 11.3, 11.3.1). **Light** physical force covers passive or guiding contact, such as standing in the person’s path or holding their shoulder. **Moderate** physical force involves specific techniques for apprehending an individual, where physical contact must be perceptible to ensure that the law enforcement officer maintains control of the situation. **Severe** physical force, including punches, kicks and chokeholds, is only justified in life-threatening situations (Vanaisak 2025, p. 388). The ECtHR has underlined that striking a person who is already under full control is deeply degrading and incompatible with the duties of an officer. Blows to the face are especially serious, as the face is a key feature of personal identity and communication, and striking it humiliates the person even in the absence of witnesses. However, the use of **deceptive strikes** may be permitted in certain circumstances (ECtHR judgment of 28 September 2015, *Bouyid v. Belgium*,

⁵ See Roosse 2025, pp. 44–55.

⁶ The requirement of a serious threat is also included in LEA Sections 46–51.

⁷ See LEA Section 28: a precondition for imposing an enforcement order (or “precept”) is the existence of an ordinary threat or disturbance of public order.

No 23380/09). Handcuffing is also considered a form of physical coercion and forms an integral part of the process (Chancellor of Justice 2014, para. 29).

LEA Sections 79–81 establish detailed requirements for the use of handcuffs and other restraints, ammunition, water cannon, electroshock weapons and firearms. The legislature notes that the need to specify the use of other measures – such as service animals, vehicle-stopping devices, and bladed or gas weapons – should be derived from law enforcement practice (Draft Act 49 SE, p. 109). So far, no such need has been identified. Rather, it is emphasised that the use of any means of direct coercion should be guided by the general requirement of proportionality, and that specifying exceptions in legal provisions is necessary only in the case of firearms and munitions.

Special means are intended primarily to enhance and direct the effect of physical force (Draft Act 49 SE, p. 103). Case law and opinions from the Chancellor of Justice emphasise that the use of force must comply with the principles of proportionality, necessity and appropriateness (Administrative Procedure Act, Section 3(2)). The use of **handcuffs** is governed by LEA Section 79, which sets out specific grounds for their use, including preventing escape and self-harm (Draft Act 49 SE, pp. 109–110). The Supreme Court has held that handcuffing without a legal basis always violates human dignity and may entitle the individual to compensation for non-material harm (Supreme Court Criminal Chamber judgment of 9 June 2023, No 1-22-5272, para. 44). The court has also previously deemed a 15-year-old prison escape attempt as a valid escape risk, even when the person was handcuffed (Supreme Court, 3-3-1-56-15, para. 9). The Chancellor of Justice has clarified that in addition to handcuffs, alternative and more restrictive restraints such as shackles, restraint jackets or restraint chairs may also be used (see also LEA, Section 78¹(2–5)). These measures are intended to secure a dangerous person in a fixed body position and restrict their movement to prevent escape or attack (Chancellor of Justice opinion No 7-4/140766/1404170, para. 40). Such restraints must be applied without causing unnecessary pain or degrading the individual’s dignity (Supreme Court, 1-17-1219, para. 14).

The use of **service animals** is regulated through internal guidelines, such as the Police and Border Guard Board’s service dog deployment procedure (Police and Border Guard Board 2020). Although legislation does not explicitly limit the contexts in which service dogs may be used, their deployment must still comply with the principles governing the use of force (Draft Act 49 SE, p. 104). The LEA expressly permits the use of service animals for security checks and searches of movable property (Sections 47(2) and 49(1)), but this does not exclude their use in enforcing other measures, provided that a legal basis for direct coercion exists. The choice of direct coercive measures rests with the law enforcement officer and must be guided by purposefulness and proportionality. Whether a dog is more effective in neutralising a threat than physical force, gas, an electroshock device, a firearm or a bladed weapon depends on the situation and the measures available to the officer at the time. Based on the study, the use of police dogs is an effective deterrent and a quick conflict resolution option, as their presence increases the likelihood of ending confrontations (Mesloh et al., 2008, p. 91). In practice, the use of dogs is categorised into three levels based on impact and proportionality: **visual presence, targeted apprehension and free attack** (Kiviste 2025, commentary to LEA, Section 78¹(2)).

Case law reflects a range of vehicle-stopping measures, including the use of tyre spike strips, physical barriers and emergency vehicles (Tallinn Circuit Court, 3-18-154/18, paras 9–11). In all such cases, the requirement of proportionality must be met: the danger posed by the stop itself must not exceed the threat it is intended to prevent (Laaring et al., 2017, p. 236).

Ministry of Justice analysis and legislative amendments regarding the permissibility of direct coercion

The Ministry of Justice has conducted an analysis of the Law Enforcement Act and drawn up proposals for amendments. Regarding the use of direct coercion, the proposal suggests **removing separate references** to the right to use direct coercion under individual measures, as Section 76 of the LEA already establishes general grounds for the use of direct coercion, applicable to all measures (Ministry of Justice 2023, analysis of the LEA, pp. 11–12). the analysis also highlights the need to relax the rules **governing the use of electroshock weapons, less-lethal ammunition** (Ministry of Justice 2023, analysis of the LEA, pp. 17–18; LEA draft 8-3/5025-1, pp. 37–40, 43–44) and water cannon, in order to ensure their effective and proportionate use in law enforcement (draft LEA, p. 41). Since 2014, the use of electroshock weapons has been equated with that of firearms, significantly limiting their deployment – even in situations where officers are under attack (LEA, Section 80). The aim of easing this regulation is to reduce escalation and the risk of injury, by lowering the classification of electroshock weapons within the hierarchy of coercion measures. In Europe, their impact is considered comparable to pepper spray and lower than that of cold weapons, such as telescopic batons (Petersen, Koper, Taylor, Liu & Sheridan-Johnson, 2024, pp. 389). The use of less-lethal ammunition, such as rubber bullets, is also proposed for regulation, as current law does not differentiate it from standard lethal ammunition (LEA, Sections 79–81). The change would allow rubber bullets to be used where proportionate, helping to prevent more serious injury. The use of water cannon is currently restricted to situations involving a serious threat (LEA, Section 79¹). Relaxing this regulation would enable their deployment earlier in an incident, avoiding escalation to the point where firearms are required (Ministry of Justice 2023, analysis of the LEA).

The analysis further suggests keeping the **list of special equipment** under the Law Enforcement Act **open-ended**: “It is not reasonable for a law enforcement agency to be barred from using effective yet less harmful special equipment simply because the legislature has not yet included it in the statutory list” (Ministry of Justice 2023, analysis of the LEA, p. 19).

List of enforcement officers authorised to use direct coercion under German law

The development of Estonian law enforcement legislation has been influenced by the German concept of threat prevention law (Laaring 2015, p. 13). In Germany, authorisation to use direct coercion is generally provided under federal administrative law and police law, notably the Administrative Procedures Act (Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz, VwVfG), the Administrative Enforcement Act (Verwaltungsvollstreckungsgesetz, VwVG) and the Police Act (Polizeigesetz). Each of Germany’s 16 federal states has its own legislation, such as the Bavarian Administrative Enforcement Act (Bayerisches Verwaltungszwangsgesetz) or the Administrative Enforcement Act of North Rhine-Westphalia (Verwaltungsvollstreckungsgesetz für das Land Nordrhein-Westfalen), which define the legal grounds for intervention in more detail. The provisions on direct coercion in these state-level regulations are broadly similar to those found in Chapter 5 of the Estonian Law Enforcement Act. For example, under **the Administrative Enforcement Act of North Rhine-Westphalia**, direct coercion may be used only if other enforcement measures are unsuitable or ineffective (Sections 58(3) and 62(1)). Enforcement officers may exercise coercive powers when performing public duties, to the extent permitted by law (Section 67(1)). The measures available for influencing people and objects include physical force and measures that enhance its effect, such as restraints, service

dogs, patrol vehicles, irritants. The weapons used a batons, a pistol, and a revolver (Section 67(2–4)). However, Estonia differs significantly in that, in addition to the police, there are approximately 40 competent law enforcement bodies that follow the general rules on direct coercion laid out in the LEA. Under LEA, Section 75(1–2), the police hold general competence to use direct coercion, while other law enforcement agencies may only do so if explicitly authorised in their sector-specific laws. In Germany, it is more common for **general laws** to include a broad list of enforcement officers permitted to use direct coercion. These may include fisheries and hunting inspectors, forest protection officers (Section 68(1) points 13–15), food safety inspectors (Section 68(1) point 6), and individuals involved in disaster response, explosions or similar emergencies (Section 68(1) point 8).

As Estonian law enforcement legislation has moved towards strengthening the powers of special law enforcement agencies, directly replicating elements of the German legal model is no longer appropriate. The author therefore agrees with Luts-Sootak's (2023, pp. 441–442) view that mixing two different legal systems does not necessarily produce the desired results; instead, Estonia should adopt solutions tailored to its own needs. And these needs should emerge as a result of research focused on the study of practice.

Competencies in the use of direct coercion

The term *competency* refers to a skill applied in a specific life or work situation, while competence denotes the knowledge, skills, experience and attitudes required for successful professional activity (Raun et al., 2023, p. 3). The description of core skills necessary for a task forms the basis for defining the objectives and learning outcomes of curriculum modules. A professional standard is a document approved by a professional council which outlines professional activities, competence requirements and assessment criteria (Professions Act 2018, Sections 5(1–2) and 15(1)). In Estonia, the occupational qualifications process is coordinated by the Estonian Qualifications Authority (see www.kutsekoda.ee). In the author's view, holding a professional qualification should be mandatory for all law enforcement officers who use direct coercion in their duties. This position is supported by the Ministry of the Interior, which plans to amend the Local Government Organisation Act to require that municipal law enforcement officers hold a relevant qualification (Ministry of the Interior 2023, Section 3, p. 1). To prevent the abuse of direct coercive powers, the draft legislation introduces mandatory requirements for officers, including prohibitions on appointing certain individuals, health examination obligations, administrative supervision of law enforcement bodies and officers, and requirements for degree-level education and in-service training (Ministry of the Interior 2023, pp. 17, 21, 35). Researchers have also stressed the need for impartial and objective oversight mechanisms. The objectivity and transparency of investigations into excessive force complaints are significantly enhanced when complaints are assessed not only by police management but also by an external civilian oversight body (Terrill & Ingram 2016, pp. 173–174).

Defining competencies in the use of direct coercion is essential to ensure that law enforcement officers act professionally, proportionately and purposefully in situations that require physical force or other direct coercive measures. These competencies identify the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for the lawful use of direct coercion and enable officers to respond quickly and appropriately in volatile and high-pressure scenarios.

At the **Estonian Academy of Security Sciences**, future police officers acquire core skills in the use of direct coercion and security tactics under national curricula for either Vocational Police Officer Training or Higher Education in Police Service. These courses include 234 academic hours of instruction (Academy Council Decision No 1.1-5/107 of 3 May 2024;

Rector's Decision No 6.1-5/505 of 4 September 2024). The curricula define the expected learning outcome regarding the use of force as follows: upon completion, the learner will be able to **handle police service weapons and special equipment lawfully, safely and effectively, apply self-defence and restraint techniques, and administer emergency first aid.**

Ideally, all law enforcement officers authorised to use direct coercion should undergo similar training. The Ministry of the Interior intends to establish concrete requirements for degree-level and in-service training, as well as health standards for officers (Ministry of the Interior 2023, pp. 2–4). High-quality training and clear admission and health requirements support the recruitment of competent officers. Citizens tend to file more complaints against inadequately trained officers with limited experience, particularly for impolite behaviour and excessive use of force⁸ (Terrill & Ingram 2016, p. 171).

2. Study

Overview of the study methodology

The study uses **document analysis** and **focus group interviews** as research methods.

Document analysis is based on the Police and Border Guard Board's security tactics summaries from 2012–2022. Data analysis is conducted through coding and categorisation. In the coding process, significant passages, sentences and keywords are identified and assigned a label or code (Ezzy, 2002, pp. 84–94). These codes are then grouped into categories based on similarity. To gain an initial overview, a combination of **inductive and deductive coding** was used: the full set of analysis documents was reviewed, and preliminary codes were developed (Kalmus et al., 2015). These results were then refined using **directed coding**, adjusting the codes in accordance with the study's themes and research questions (Kalmus et al., 2015). Although theoretical saturation (Laherand 2008, p. 288) was partially already achieved during the review of 2014 and 2015 documents, the entire dataset was analysed in depth to ensure a comprehensive picture. For example, the use of physical force is addressed both in the analysis for the second half of 2015 and in the 2020 security tactics recommendations. Across these analyses, the main methods of applying physical force and the related best practices are reiterated and reinforced (see Police Security Tactics Incidents 2015 H2, p. 39; Police Security Tactics Recommendations 2020, pp. 39–42). Reviewing the full sample revealed long-term trends in the use of direct coercion and highlighted recurring recommendations, such as repeated calls for the introduction of electroshock weapons starting with the 2017 analyses, although a patrol officer did not use one for the first time until 11 September 2018.

Results and discussion of the document analysis

This subsection summarises the research findings from which the necessary and optimal list of direct coercive measures can be derived for each competent law enforcement agency. Given the article's length constraints, the findings are presented briefly and concisely, with most examples and recommendations compiled into summary tables.

⁸ The same has been observed in the case of officers with a military background who have been hired into the service (Terrill & Ingram 2016, p. 171).

Results of the Police and Border Guard Board security tactics summary analysis

The document analysis revealed three⁹ categories related to the use of direct coercion: **the use of various direct coercive measures, incidents involving firearms and assaults on officers carrying out their duties**. Each category included four to eight separate codes (see Tables 3–11).

Table 3. Categories and codes of direct coercion use based on ten years of Police and Border Guard Board security tactics summaries
(compiled by the author).

Category 1: Codes for direct coercive measure use	Category 2: Firearm use codes
Physical force	Warning shot
Handcuffs	Signal shot
Service animal (dog)	Forced stopping of a vehicle
Vehicle stopping device	Repelling or neutralising an animal
Cold weapon (telescopic baton)	Countering an attack
Gas weapon	During an escape attempt
Electroshock weapon	Attempt to seize a firearm
Category 3: Codes for assaults against officers performing duties	
Assailant unrelated to the incident	
Procedural actions in a police vehicle or facility	
Eliminating a public order disturbance	
Apprehending a person	
How?	

Physical force

The primary codes under the category “Use of various direct coercive measures” were based on the most frequently used measures mentioned in the Police and Border Guard Board’s security tactics summaries.¹⁰

The analysis showed that “physical force” and “use of handcuffs” were the two most frequently occurring codes, with **52** and **70** instances respectively (see Tables 4 and 5). Physical force was used on its own in only two cases, and analysts suggested it could have been avoided in both (PolTR 2012, pp. 48, 98, 101). In most instances, physical force was used in combination with handcuffs (31 cases), typically to enforce a precept, repel an attack or detain a person, but also in situations where handcuffs or a charged Taser were not available. In 15 cases, force was applied in the combination FORCE–GAS–BATON–CUFFS. In one case, physical force followed the firing of rubber bullets, in the sequence BATON–GAS–FORCE–FIREARM. Examples and recommendations concerning the use of physical force are summarised in Table 4.

⁹ Although a total of twelve categories were identified, only three are discussed in the article.

¹⁰ Coercive measures that are used infrequently – such as water cannons, special-purpose light and sound devices – as well as ammunition added to the list of direct coercive measures in 2023, have been excluded.

Table 4. Use of physical force
(compiled by the author)

Category 1: Use of direct coercive measures	
Code: Physical force	Frequency: 52, used individually on two occasions
Examples and recommendations: <i>Opening doors, forcibly taking a blood sample, applying an arm lock to restrain a detainee, pushing away a non-compliant person (disobeying an order), escorting a person to sobering-up.</i>	
<i>Avoid physical contact – better to push the person away with force (PolSTI 2020, p. 36); instead of physical force, use a cold weapon (PolSTI 2014, H1, p. 40); if physical contact is unavoidable, the offender must be quickly brought under control (PolSTI 2014, H1, p. 24); pre-emptive strikes are permitted (PolSTI 2018 H1, p. 12; PTTI 2019, pp. 82–83, 108; PolFA 2020, p. 41); choosing the right intensity level (mild, moderate, severe) and duration of force application is critical (PolFA 2020, p. 40).</i>	

Handcuffs

The code “handcuffs” appeared in **70** instances. Handcuffs were used for detaining individuals, conducting security checks and searches, escorting persons to sobering facilities, and restraining aggressive detainees. They were used against individuals attacking or threatening others, or resisting or threatening to resist police officers. Often, handcuffs were used together with physical force (31 cases). For example, wrestling holds and arm locks were used to subdue a dangerous individual on the ground, followed by handcuffing (PolSTI 2016 H1, p. 22). Handcuffs were frequently used in combinations such as FORCE–TASER–CUFFS (14 cases), with warnings about firearms or Taser use proving effective in six cases before handcuffing. The analysis also revealed unjustified use of handcuffs, in violation of LEA Section 79(1) points 1–3 – for example, using direct coercion during breath testing procedures, where the law does not allow it. Transporting an individual to a breathalyser test using direct coercion (including handcuffs) is unlawful.¹¹ The use of handcuffs is permitted only under specific conditions defined by law and must not be applied as a “precaution” without proper legal grounds.

Table 5. Use of handcuffs
(compiled by the author)

Category 1: Use of direct coercive measures	
Code: Handcuffs	Frequency: 70, used individually on two occasions
Examples and recommendations:	
<i>Aggressive person; suicidal individual; violent person in a holding cell; subject resisting arrest; aggressive and dangerous violent offender (intimate partner violence, IPV); apprehending a suspect.</i>	
<i>Do not cuff the offender to the officer's arm (PolSTI 2020, p. 35); to prevent escape or attack, place the cuffs behind the back with palms facing outward (PolSTI 2019, p. 10); in watercraft, ensure that a cuffed person wears a life vest that will position them safely if they fall overboard.</i>	

Gas weapon

The code “gas” appeared in **28** instances. Gas weapons are intended for stopping immediate assaults (PolSTI 2017, H1, p. 36). They may be used until the objective is achieved – for example, the crowd disperses or the aggressor ceases resistance. The harm caused by gas may be less than the consequences of physical force (PolSTI 2021, p. 125). The purpose of gas is to temporarily disable an offender’s ability to resist; typically, the person is then handcuffed. After the gas takes effect, the individual should be brought to fresh air and restrained (PolSTI

¹¹ Under LEA Section 40(2), the use of direct coercion in the context of determining alcohol intoxication is only permitted to ensure that a blood sample can be taken from a person who is legally required to provide one.

2015, H1, pp. 33–34). It was emphasised that if the person is already under control, warning them about gas use is inappropriate, as no legal basis for its use exists (PolSTI 2018 H1, p. 5).

Table 6. Use of gas weapons
(compiled by the author)

Category 1: Use of direct coercive measures	
Code: Gas weapon	Frequency: 28
Examples and recommendations:	
<i>Apprehending a suicidal person in a flat; removing an intoxicated person from a vehicle; against an aggressive person in outdoor conditions; detaining a mentally ill person; repelling a knife attack by a seven-year-old child.</i>	
<i>Gas has little or no effect on intoxicated individuals or animals; attention must be paid to the officer's own safety and provision of first aid (PolSTI 2016, p. 23; PolSTI 2014, H1, p. 17; PolSTI 2017, H1, p. 47); slower effect on people wearing glasses; effective at approx. 1–4 m range; outdoors, use downwind (PolSTI 2015, H1, p. 31).</i>	

Cold weapon

The code “baton” appeared in **17** instances. As a **cold weapon**, a baton is designed to cause harm to a target through the application of physical force in direct contact. Police officers primarily use telescopic or rubber batons for self-defence and to repel assaults, but also to enhance the effectiveness of physical force during detentions. For example, a baton can help retrieve arms fixed under the body or assist in applying arm locks (Weapons Act, Sections 11 and 15; PolSTI 2020, p. 23; PolSTI 2021, p. 69). A telescopic baton can also be used to force open doors or break windows (PolSTI 2014, H1, p. 9).

Table 7. Use of cold weapons
(compiled by the author).

Category 1: Use of direct coercive measures	
Code: Telescopic baton	Frequency: 17
Examples and recommendations:	
<i>Breaking house or vehicle windows, forcing doors open; countering a knife attack; repelling a dog attack; countering an attack on an officer; enhancing the effect of physical force.</i>	
<i>Effective strikes are impossible in confined spaces. When breaking glass, strike the lower edge or corner with the handle end using a strong and decisive blow. Wear protective goggles, gloves and long-sleeved outerwear (PolSTI 2016, H1, p. 9; PolSTI 2021, p. 97). If someone is behind the glass, they should be warned if possible and advised to cover their eyes and face or turn away (PolSTI 2021, p. 97).</i>	

Service animal

The code “service dog” appeared in **13** instances. Service dogs are used when a detainee refuses to comply with orders and cannot be apprehended using other means such as physical force or special equipment (PolSTI 2014, H1, p. 24). Even the presence of the dog and a warning about its use can have a deterrent effect. Service dog deployment is categorised by intensity and proportionality. Starting with the least severe, the forms of use are as follows: demonstration of readiness to attack (the dog is directed towards the offender); directed use (the dog is directed at a visible subject under coercion, bites a reachable part of the body and releases on the handler’s command); free use (the dog is sent to search for a hidden or concealed person, bites a reachable part of the body upon finding them, and releases the bite upon the handler’s arrival and command) (PolSTI 2014, H1, pp. 30–31). Tactics vary between crowd control and routine situations. When dealing with individuals, barking is typically avoided (Radala, email 2024).

Table 8. Use of service animals
(compiled by the author)

Category 1: Use of direct coercive measures	
Code: Service dog	Frequency: 13
Examples and recommendations:	
<i>Apprehending a fugitive by a special unit; detaining an individual attacking an officer; apprehending an offender who has fled into a forested area.</i>	
<i>When service dogs are present during duty, handlers/owners should restrain them, remove them or secure the room (PolSTI 2014, H1, p. 32); barking dogs are only displayed by police during crowd control (Radala 2024).</i>	

Taser

The code “Taser” appeared in **24** instances. The effects of a Taser are generally less severe than those of a firearm. Although painful, the electroshock does not pose a significant threat to life or health and becomes dangerous only under particularly unfortunate circumstances (PolSTR 2020, p. 77). To protect the person’s health and comply with the prohibition of torture, it is prohibited to use more than three discharges or apply the device for longer than five seconds at a time (PolSTI 2021, pp. 56, 83). The purposes of Taser use include neutralising an individual’s capacity to attack, resist or flee.

Table 9. Use of electroshock weapons
(compiled by the author)

Category 1: Use of direct coercive measures	
Code: Electric shock weapon	Frequency: 24 (approx. 10 incidents per year since 2018)
Examples and recommendations:	
<i>Attacking dog; rescuing victims in intimate partner violence (IPV) incidents; preventing suicides; assaults against officers.</i>	
Fire and explosion hazard; firing distance 2–4.5 m ; aim at the abdomen and legs, preferably shoot from behind. <i>Avoid targeting the face and genitals (PolSTI 2020, pp. 26–27); in the case of ineffective or missed shots, be ready to use other weapons.</i>	

Forced vehicle stop

The code “forced vehicle stop” appeared in **47** instances. In two cases, a police emergency vehicle, roadblock or spike strip was used; in seven cases, ramming was applied. In 2019, physical force was used exceptionally to stop an ATV. Firearms were used to stop vehicles in 33 instances, including 10 warning shots. Although firearms may be lawfully used to stop a vehicle under certain conditions, the associated risk is high, as accurately hitting a fast-moving and erratically driving vehicle is difficult and may endanger bystanders (PolTR 2012, H2, p. 33; PolSTR 2020, p. 49). Firearms are increasingly used with greater caution, and in 2022 were not used at all for this purpose (PolSTI 2022, p. 119).

Table 10. Forced vehicle stops
(compiled by the author)

Category 1: Use of direct coercive measures	
Code: Forced stopping of a vehicle	Frequency: 47
Examples and recommendations:	
<i>The driver fled by accelerating, endangering themselves, passengers, and other road users through dangerous manoeuvres, such as driving on the wrong side or in the middle of the road at high speed.</i>	

Ensure that stop signals were **understandable and visible**, and repeat them; remain calm and resort to forced stopping only when absolutely necessary – avoid pursuit instincts; avoid risky manoeuvres (PolFA 2013 (Dec), p. 23); the firearm is used not by the emergency driver but by the front-seat **passenger**; the police vehicle should align with the rear tyre of the target vehicle; the police driver should keep the vehicle as stable as possible alongside the pursued car, prepared to accelerate, decelerate and maintain a safe side distance (2–3 m); the shot must be aimed so as not to cause **further danger** (ricochet, stray bullet); it is advisable to aim from the side at the lower part of the tyre (PolFA 2013 (Dec), p. 25).

Firearm-related incidents

The category “firearm-related incidents” included seven codes: warning and signal shots, forced stopping of a vehicle, deterring or neutralising an animal, stopping an attack, detaining a fleeing individual, and stopping attempted seizure of a service weapon (see Table 11). Additional codes under this category, such as “accidental discharge”, “service weapon malfunction during discharge” and “suicide”, are not addressed separately in this article.

Firearms are used to forcibly stop vehicles, to repel attacking animals or against individuals.

Before using any form of direct coercion, including a firearm, the subject must be warned – verbally, with a gesture or by firing a warning shot. Pointing a weapon or aiming it (e.g. using a laser sight) can also serve as a perceived warning (PolSTI 2020, p. 39). The officer must ensure the person understands they have been warned about the use of coercion; if this is unclear, the requirement is not met (PolSTI 2020, p. 39). A warning shot is only permitted when the legal basis for using the firearm is present. It must not be used to warn a person against whom firearm use is not lawful, as this would constitute an unlawful threat of force. Violations most commonly occur when attempting to stop a fleeing suspect – when there is no immediate serious threat to life or physical inviolability, or when the offence is not a first-degree violent crime or one punishable by life imprisonment (LEA, Section 81) – or after a vehicle stop, when firearm use is permitted against the vehicle but not its occupants (PolSTI 2020, p. 14).

Table 11. Incidents involving firearms
(compiled by the author)

Category 2: Incidents involving firearms	
Codes, frequency	Examples
Warning shot (57):	<i>Detaining a dangerous person; forced stopping of a vehicle, knife-wielding attacker; attempts to seize a firearm when the officer is surrounded by an aggressive group; an aggressive individual attacking officers.</i>
Signal shot (1)	
Forced stopping of a vehicle (23)	
Repelling or neutralising an animal (6)	
Countering an attack (9)	
During an escape attempt (2)	
Attempt to seize firearm (3)	
Recommendations: <i>A warning shot is permitted</i> only if there is a legal basis to use a firearm (PolSTI 2020, p. 15); <i>ensure the warning was perceived as such by the individual</i> (PolSTI 2015, H1, p. 42); <i>instead of multiple warning shots, aim directly at the person if necessary</i> ; <i>for forced stops, use loudspeaker warnings</i> (PolSTI 2015, H1, p. 8); <i>prefer using stopping tools (e.g. spike strips or roadblocks) over firearms</i> (PolFA 2020, p. 45); <i>avoid developing tunnel vision</i> (PolSTI 2015, H1, p. 20). Avoid using warning shots indoors or near the state border.	

Assaults against officers performing duties

The category “assaults against officers performing duties” included six codes: attacks by unrelated individuals, incidents during procedural acts in a police vehicle or facility, during public order enforcement (i.e. eliminating a disturbance), during arrests, and during off-duty police interventions. For the methods used, see Table 12.

Police officers are assaulted on average **48** times per year. According to the document analysis, officers were attacked 62 times in 2014, 61 in 2015, 53 in 2016, 49 in 2017, 37 in 2018, 44 in 2019 and 38 in 2020. Analysts believe official statistics capture only about 25% of such incidents. About 80% of assailants are intoxicated adult males, although women and minors are also represented, and a notable share of attacks are committed by individuals with mental disorders. Officers are shoved, punched, kicked, headbutted, strangled, spat on, bitten and scratched. Weapons used include screwdrivers, knives, axes and gas weapons. Some assailants set dogs on officers. Perpetrators vary and include intoxicated drivers, individuals accompanied by dogs while lying or loitering in public spaces, minors, persons causing noise disturbances, participants in domestic disputes, and patrons of bars or nightclubs. In some cases, bystanders intervene, such as attempting to protect a female detainee, mistakenly believing police were the aggressors (PolSTI 2014–2020).

Table 12. Assaults against officers performing duties
(compiled by the author)

Category 3: Assaults against officers performing duties	
Codes/frequency: (37)	Examples
1. <i>Assailant unrelated to the incident (3):</i>	<i>Intoxicated neighbour attacked officers with a knife; a bystander in a group fight; partner of a drunk driver.</i>
2. <i>During procedural acts in a police vehicle or facility (12):</i>	<i>Person in the back seat punched the officer in the neck and attempted to strangle them; interviewee threatened to harm with a pen; person taken for sobering attempted to escape from the vehicle.</i>
3. <i>While resolving public order disturbances (16):</i>	<i>Escorting someone to sobering-up; IPV offender.</i>
4. <i>During arrest (6):</i>	<i>Suspects, persons being forcibly brought in.</i>
5. <i>How?</i>	<i>Kick to the groin (3), spitting in the face (2), punch to the face (4), headbutt, blow to the chest (4), punch to the eye, pepper spray to the face (3), stabbed with a syringe, scuffle, kick to the knee (3), kick to the buttocks, pushed and fell, slap to the face (3), strike to the neck, dog attack incited (2), headbutt to lower lip, bite to hand or hip (5), strangled from behind, knife strike to neck in a dark apartment (1), attacked with a broken glass bottle (1), sprayed with pepper spray; dog attacked or was incited to attack the officer (6); assistant police officer blocked keyhole with hand to prevent gas cloud spread and was stabbed; detention centre staff attacked (2); handcuffed offender jerked violently and injured officer's wrist.</i>
Recommendations: <i>When placing individuals in a police vehicle, follow security tactics to prevent attacks (PolSTI 2015, H1, p. 33); intoxicated persons may behave unpredictably (PolSTI 2015, H1, pp. 33, 35); when dealing with intoxicated groups, be prepared for serious threats (PolSTI 2015, H1, p. 32).</i>	

Discussions

Although the incidents requiring intervention may appear similar, each is unique, which is why different direct coercive measures are used to enforce the same special measures. For example, in order to enforce a precept (LEA, Section 28), impose a prohibition on presence (LEA, Section 44) or escort a person for sobering up (LEA, Section 42), a verbal order or the use of physical force alone may suffice. However, there are cases where a sequence of measures – including handcuffs, a service dog, pepper spray, an electroshock weapon or even a firearm – may be justified. The security tactics reports indicate that incidents initially appearing peaceful often require the use of increasingly intense means. This makes it impossible to specify which direct coercive measure is suitable for enforcing a particular supervisory measure, since the decision depends entirely on the **specific nature** and **dynamics of the situation**. This underlines the need for a diverse toolkit of direct coercive measures for law enforcement

officers. Without such a range, some incidents may go unresolved, potentially fostering a sense of impunity in the offender.

Among coercive measures, **handcuffs** were the most frequently used, with **70 instances**, followed by **physical force (52)**, **forced vehicle stoppage (47)**, **gas (28)**, **electroshock weapons (24)**, permitted since 2018), **telescopic batons (17)** and **service dogs (13)**. Firearms were used in **23** instances to stop vehicles, in **9** instances to counter an attack, and in **6** instances to deter or neutralise an animal. Coercive measures are **rarely used in isolation; rather, they are applied in combination**. Thus, it is not sufficient for a competent law enforcement agency to be authorised to use only physical force as a direct coercive measure; this limitation is highlighted by research (see Environmental Board, p. 4, Table 1). Physical force alone may provoke or escalate aggression. In such cases, officers must have the option to counter such aggression with other special equipment or weapons. Physical force is most often used in combination with other direct coercive measures, particularly handcuffs. The most common combination is physical force with handcuffs. Increasingly, measures are used in graded intensity sequences such as **FORCE–GAS–BATON–FIREARM–CUFFS**. Analysis of security tactics shows that in more recent practice, combinations such as **FORCE–TASER–CUFFS** or **TASER–CUFFS** are becoming more common. This indicates a shift away from previously established principles, with officers increasingly applying the most effective tool immediately, based on the intensity of the assault and the aggressor's level of aggression. The sequential use of lighter measures may cause greater pain and injury – both to the officer and to the person responsible for the public order offence. As a result, the traditional **linear model** of police use of force has been receding since the introduction of the electroshock weapon in 2018, with a trend towards a **situational use-of-force model**. It is also noted that officers are using telescopic batons less frequently, citing limited space and the risks these weapons pose in dynamic situations. Batons are primarily used to target pressure points, inducing pain to enhance the effectiveness of physical force. This supports the view that electroshock weapons are more humane than gas or cold weapons and should be available to every officer authorised to use direct coercion.

The analysis of security tactics indicate that regulating direct coercive measures at varying levels of detail is not justified. For example, while the use of handcuffs and electroshock weapons is strictly regulated, the use of more dangerous measures, such as gas and cold weapons, is inadequately addressed. The author concurs that changing this would enhance legal clarity. This position is also supported by Kool in the Ministry of Justice's analysis of the Law Enforcement Act (Ministry of Justice 2023, pp. 11–12), which proposes removing references to the right to use direct coercion from the provisions on specific measures.

The right to use direct coercion should be enshrined in the LEA for all law enforcement agencies, as is the case for the police. If an agency has the right to apply measures that presuppose direct coercion, it should also have the right to use suitable measures from a comprehensive range. A definitive solution is difficult to specify, however, since the LEA is a general act that requires the coercive powers of a special law enforcement agency to be further regulated in a special act (LEA, Section 75(1)), where the agency's supervisory competence is also established. As the legislation applicable to special law enforcement agencies contains significant inconsistencies (Tables 1–2), these should be resolved under the current legal framework by ensuring that the list of coercive measures is consistent and, as noted earlier, sufficiently diverse. By comparison, in Germany, the general legislation of the Länder regulating the use of direct coercion includes a list of enforcement officers, such as those responsible for forestry, fishing or hunting supervision. Similar provisions could be included in the Estonian Law Enforcement Act. The author proposes that the LEA include a list of Estonia's

main agencies authorised to use direct coercion, such as the Rescue Board, the Tax and Customs Board, the Environmental Board, and municipal or city law enforcement units.

In general, there is broad agreement that the toolkit of direct coercive measures available to a law enforcement agency must be diverse: it is not enough to rely on one or two measures, such as physical force and a firearm. The selection should include electroshock weapons, which are considered more humane than pepper spray or batons.

Training considerations

The findings confirm that police officers frequently face assaults in the course of their duties, which emphasises the need for effective self-defence skills and **the proficient use of direct coercive measures**.¹² The risks of improper or excessive use of direct coercion can be mitigated through both theoretical and practical training, along with officer selection criteria and oversight mechanisms established by law (Ministry of Justice, 2024). The volume and duration of both degree-level and in-service training must be regulated by law.

Based on police security tactical case reports regarding the use of direct coercion, the **competencies** for applying direct coercive measures can and should be **formulated in detail**. Separate descriptions should be provided for the use of **physical force, handcuffs, gas weapons, cold weapons, service dogs, electroshock weapons, firearms and vehicle stopping tools**. The analysis highlights the need for training in **communication psychology**: police officers must be able to prevent escalation and understand de-escalation techniques. More attention should also be given to the **safe handling of firearms**, especially in light of the number of accidental discharges and suicides. Where injuries occur as a result of direct coercive measures, officers are obliged to call for assistance and provide first aid; accordingly, the relevant **first aid** competencies must also be defined.

The **competencies** required for officers authorised to use direct coercion are **summarised** by type of coercive measure in **Table 13**.

Table 13. Competency descriptions for the use of direct coercive measures
(compiled by the author)

PHYSICAL FORCE	HANDCUFFS	TELESCOPIC BATON
Develops communication skills and prevents escalation.	Understands the (additional) legal bases for the use of handcuffs and masters various application techniques.	When using the baton on a person, masters various self-defence, repelling and restraint techniques, and applies the baton effectively according to the situation.
Knows the effects of using physical force at different levels and applies it with the appropriate intensity and duration.	Uses handcuffs lawfully, effectively and safely in different situations.	Masters techniques for using the baton to effectively manipulate objects.
Applies a model of physical force suitable to the situation, thereby avoiding excessive pain and injury (or death) to either party.		

¹² Statistics indicate that police officers are attacked an average of 48 times per year (see Table 12), including during the resolution of public order disturbances (16) and during procedural acts (12). Notably, some attackers have been persons unrelated to the incident, such as bystanders or neighbours. Approximately 80% of attackers were intoxicated, and attacks by individuals with mental disorders have increased significantly.

GAS	SERVICE DOG	ELECTROSHOCK WEAPON
Uses a gas weapon and considers its potential effects in indoor and outdoor conditions, as well as its impact on the aggressor and the officer.	Knows the categories for using service dogs and selects an effective and safe method to resolve the incident.	<p>Uses the electroshock weapon with intent and control.</p> <p>Understands the effects and associated risks of the electroshock weapon and takes them into account when using it.</p> <p>Assesses the person's physical condition after using the electroshock weapon, checks skin and injuries, monitors heart and respiratory condition, and calls an ambulance if necessary.</p>
FIREARM	VEHICLE FORCED STOPPING DEVICE	FIRST AID AFTER DIRECT COERCION
<p>Knows the legal bases for using firearms to stop vehicles, deter attacking animals and respond to threats posed by individuals.</p> <p>Can assess and apply firearm warnings, ensuring they are appropriate, visible and understandable.</p> <p>Can use a firearm safely and responsibly.</p>	<p>Knows the legal bases for the forced stopping of a vehicle.</p> <p>Knows the tools and tactics for the forced stopping of vehicles and understands their suitability in different situations and for different vehicle types.</p> <p>Can select a safe, suitable location and effective method for stopping a vehicle, considering the situation and associated risks.</p>	<p>Reports the nature and extent of injuries accurately to the emergency centre.</p> <p>Masters resuscitation techniques, including knowledge of specific considerations for children, adults, pregnant individuals and those affected by electric trauma.</p> <p>Provides first aid for wounds, bleeding, fractures and concussions.</p> <p>Alleviates the effects of chemical irritants on eyes, skin and respiratory tract.</p>

Conclusions

Under the Estonian Law Enforcement Act, the police have general authority to use direct coercion. The legislature has also authorised approximately 40 special law enforcement agencies to carry out supervisory functions within their respective areas of responsibility under around 170 special laws. To fulfil their tasks, these bodies are permitted to apply both general and special measures of state supervision, the enforcement of which may include the use of direct coercion as a last resort. However, the regulations governing direct coercion by these special law enforcement agencies contain deficiencies and inconsistencies. The research underlying this article **aims to determine which direct coercive measures are necessary and appropriate for competent law enforcement agencies and to develop related competencies that could be integrated into training curricula on the use of direct coercion. Free research questions** were formulated for this article.

To answer these questions, legal literature was reviewed, ten years' worth of police security tactical summaries 2012–2022) were analysed (**document analysis**).

The first research question – Which direct coercive measures are used to enforce various measures of state supervision? – cannot be answered in a single, definitive manner. The description of special measures in the Law Enforcement Act does not allow for a direct link

between each measure and a specific direct coercive measure. Nor does the practice-based analysis yield one clear answer: the choice of coercive measure depends on the nature of the case and the dynamics of the situation. This underscores the need for law enforcement officers to have access to a diverse range of direct coercive measures. It is not reasonable to assume that an officer can rely solely on physical force as the only available measure of direct coercion.

The answer to the **second research question** – Which direct coercive measures are most frequently used and in what combinations? – was derived from the document analysis. The most commonly used measures were: handcuffs (70 cases), physical force (52), vehicle stopping measures (47), gas weapons (28), electroshock weapons (24, available since 2018), telescopic batons (17) and service dogs (13). Firearms were used in 23 instances to stop vehicles, in 9 instances to counter attacks, and in 6 instances to deter or neutralise animals. Direct coercive measures are rarely used in isolation but rather in combination. Since the introduction of the electroshock weapon in 2018, there has been a shift away from a linear model of direct coercion (sequential use of multiple measures, e.g. physical force, cold weapon, gas weapon, firearm, handcuffs) towards a situational model in which the most effective measure – such as an electroshock weapon – is deployed immediately, followed by handcuffs.

The third research question – What are the recommendations from security tactical analyses for training and the formulation of competencies in the use of direct coercion? – produced the following responses: degree-level and in-service training must be regulated by law. The results highlight the need for competencies to be described in detail, as this is the only way they can be meaningfully integrated into curricula. Specific competencies were defined for the use of physical force, handcuffs, service dogs, vehicle stopping measures, cold weapons, gas weapons, electroshock weapons and firearms, as well as for first aid and communication psychology (see Table 13).

The results of studies – a **document analysis** – are significant and contribute to existing knowledge. Since current legislation does not clearly stipulate which coercive measures should or may be used in specific situations, the findings highlight the need for competent agencies to have a diverse and context-appropriate toolkit of coercive measures.

The document analysis confirmed that direct coercive measures are rarely used individually, but rather in combination, and that the situational model – whereby the intensity of direct coercion is adapted to the severity of the situation – is becoming increasingly dominant. The study also identified the need to clarify how the general principle of proportionality should be applied in practice (except in the case of firearms), which would enable agencies to use less harmful alternatives, such as electroshock weapons.

These results make a valuable contribution to existing knowledge by offering data-driven insight into current practices and gaps in the use of direct coercion. Based on the findings, concrete competencies have been developed that can be used in the design of training programmes (see Table 13).

The author **proposes** adopting the general principle of proportionality as the basis for using direct coercive measures, eliminating the specific requirements for handcuff use, easing the conditions for deploying electroshock weapons and water cannons, and regulating the use of rubber bullets.

In all cases, the toolkit of direct coercive measures should be as diverse as possible (not limited to physical force) and include less harmful alternatives such as electroshock weapons.

This study opens up new avenues for further exploration. For example, Section 6(6) of the LEA stipulates that the police must provide assistance to other agencies in which the use of direct coercion is involved. Although Pilving (2015) and Roosve (2022) have examined the issue of inter-agency assistance, legal uncertainty persists regarding the scope of police

obligations: specifically, whether police assistance must be provided solely to agencies that lack powers of direct coercion or also to those with limited powers, such as the Health Board, which is authorised to use only physical force.

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