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COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL WORK IN THE UNECE REGION

Rapporteur Report for justice and crime[1]

Submitted by ISTAT, Italy

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Crime statistics is a topic in which the harmonization process is still lagging behind. During recent years, the attention of countries and international organizations has been increasingly focused on this topic.

2. The consideration of the current state of national and international statistics on crime, justice and safety resulted in a constructive exchange of views and experiences through the activities of several Task Forces and the results of meetings at international level. Statistics on crime and justice need to be improved in areas such as data quality and international comparability, methods and techniques of combining data from different sources and the measurement of fear of crime in society.

3. It has long been recognized that a principal difficulty in assessing the situation concerning justice, freedom and security is the shortage of statistical information that can be compared among countries, due to different judicial systems. This problem is currently being addressed by

[1] This paper has been prepared at the invitation of the secretariat.

several international organizations operating within the domain of crime and justice statistics, and at the European level by Eurostat in collaboration with the Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security (DG JLS).

4. The harmonization of crime statistics through the alignment of administrative sources can only be a long-term objective, while the harmonization of victimization surveys can be attained in a shorter period. This is why international organizations are currently trying to improve the comparability of crime statistics by focusing on victimization surveys.

II. PROGRESS BEING MADE COLLECTIVELY BY ORGANIZATIONS IN A GIVEN FIELD OF STATISTICS - VICTIMIZATION SURVEY

5. In the past years, victimization surveys were carried out by international institutes (such as UNICRI, UNODOC and HEUNI) and by a very few countries using very small samples. The international surveys on crime victims (ICVS), on criminality against firms (CCBS) and on violence against women (IVAWS) are examples of the first case; while the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) in the United States, the British Crime Survey (BCS) in the UK, the General Household Survey (GHS) in Canada, and the General Social Survey (GSS) in Australia, Italy and the Netherlands are examples of the second case.

6. We are now in a new phase. More and more countries have been carrying out victimization surveys. International institutes are now trying to focus their activities on supporting and coordinating national surveys. UNECE, UNODC and Eurostat support the national ownership of the data and the building of national capacity as direct data producers (HEUNI also takes part in this harmonization process).

7. In order to disseminate and exchange experiences on crime statistics, Italy organized in 2003 an international conference on safety in which experts shared their experience from different perspectives but towards the common goal of crime prevention and the contribution to a safer society. The Siena Group also organized, in February 2005, a session on victimization surveys.

8. At their joint meeting in Geneva (November 2004), UNECE and UNODC defined a series of steps, the medium-term objective of which is the harmonization of victimization surveys; the long-term objective is the harmonization of data from administrative sources concerning criminality and justice, where UNECE and UNODC are focusing activities on comparison of homicide statistics. Eurostat has also started comparing car theft collected through police statistics. It is proposed as a first step to focus on developing guidelines for victimization surveys and methodologies to improve activities in existing key institutions or organizations and key variable or data collections.

9. In order to promote consistency and to develop methodological guidelines in the field of victimization surveys, a Task Force on Victim Surveys has been established by UNECE and UNODC. It aims to coordinate the activities in the preparation of the inventory of victimization surveys carried out in different countries in the UNECE region and to study methodological issues that can affect the data comparability.

10. The UNECE-UNODC Questionnaire on Victimization Surveys, designed by the Task Force, was sent to countries in July 2005 to collect information on surveys carried out in the last 10 years and surveys planned in the near future. The results of the inventory will be presented at the Vienna meeting on 25-27 January 2006, with the aim of analyzing communalities and differences of methods used in national and international victimization surveys, identifying areas where it would be useful to develop common recommendations and to develop standards and guidelines to be used by official statisticians in the field of victimization surveys for countries in the UNECE region.

11. A task force on crime statistics has been established by Eurostat. The Task Force, whose aim is to increase harmonization of European statistics on crime, has organised its activities on three different levels:

(a) to check statistics comparability as regards some crimes (violent crimes, robberies, flat thefts, car thefts, murders and murders in big cities). The aim is to publish EU countries' data and metadata;

(b) to design an ad-hoc module on victimisation. This module should be included in other surveys of every single country, using harmonized content and methodology to have comparable data. Particular attention will be focused on data reliability. This means that the module containing victimisation questions will be linked to large-scale surveys to overcome the limits of previous national surveys (such as, for example, ICVS, financed by European Community in 2004) carried out on small samples. Eurostat activity, testified by methodological grants on victimisation surveys carried out in 2003, considers UNECE and UNODC actions on the same area;

(c) in cooperation with DGJLS, knowledge of the state of the art of surveys on organized crime, with a particular attention to five kinds of crimes (corruption, fraud, illegal trade of cultural goods, forgery andsexual exploitation of children).

III. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

12. The topic on violence against women (VAW) was addressed by HEUNI and UNODC and, in 2001, a project was launched on the subject of the violence against women survey. Several countries have already carried out this survey.

13. Canada, Australia, Finland and Italy have started to conduct national VAW surveys based on large samples. UNECE organized a gender statistics meeting in October 2004, where a Task Force was created with the objective of better harmonizing statistics. Furthermore, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women organized an expert meeting on violence against women in collaboration with UNECE and WHO (Geneva, April 2005) to focus on the measurement of VAW and to discuss its harmonization. WHO also carried out a Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women and the relative results of some countries have been published. Now the Task Force is working on the possibility of collecting information on surveys carried out in the last 10 years and surveys planned in the near future.

14. The results of the inventory will be presented in Geneva in September 2006, under the auspices of the survey aimed at analyzing communalities and differences of methods used in national and international violence against women, identifying areas where it would be useful to

develop common recommendations and to develop standards and guidelines for use by official statisticians in the field of violence surveys for countries in the UNECE region.

IV. NON-CONVENTIONAL CRIME

15. In order to respond to increasing demand and to produce harmonized statistics, Eurostat proposed to develop data gathering on new types of crime (largely organised crime) and on EU-level criminal justice measures, so as to propose methods of data collection on money-laundering, trafficking in human beings, etc..

16. The European Commission has established a tender to collect available statistics and metadata on five crime types (corruption, fraud, illicit trafficking in cultural goods, including antiques and works of art, counterfeiting and piracy products, sexual exploitation of children and child pornography).

V. JUSTICE STATISTICS

17. The Council of Europe contributes to the harmonization of Europe's legal systems on the basis of standards which are laid down within the Organization and publishes the Penological Information Bulletin and annual penal statistics on the prison population (SPACE I) and community sanctions and measures (SPACE II) and, since 1999, the European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics as well. The second edition (2003) contains data for nearly all member states of the Council of Europe, and was financed by UK Home Office, the Dutch Ministry of Justice Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) and the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs (through the University of Lausanne).

18. The European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) has established a pilot-scheme for evaluating the judicial systems of its member States, comprising a comprehensive set of 108 quantitative and qualitative indicators concerning all relevant aspects of the good functioning of the judiciary in Europe, and accepted by all the member States. The results of this activity are reported in the European judicial systems 2002 - Facts and figures. Because it has become a real tool to improve public policies of justice and European citizens, the CEPEJ has decided to renew the exercise of evaluation for 2004 data, by revising the evaluation scheme in the light of difficulties encountered during the first exercise.

19. In order to improve, simplify and expedite effective judicial cooperation between the member states in civil and commercial matters, a European Judicial Network in civil and commercial matters was established by a Council Decision of 28 May 2001. The Network gives the opportunity to exchange information and experience and boost cooperation between the member states regarding civil and commercial law. The Network has also established its own website, managed by the European Commission and regularly updated in conjunction with the member states of the EU, which provides information about the member states, Community law, European law and various aspects of civil and commercial law.

VI. ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

A. Victimization surveys

20. There was general consensus on the importance of victim surveys in the collection and dissemination of crime statistics. However, it should be noted that victim surveys reflect experiences of victimization as perceived by the victims and this may vary across different cultural contexts and make comparison difficult between countries. There is no single methodology that can best fit all countries.

21. A number of general issues should be taken into account, including coverage (national, regional, city, living area), target population, how to deal with sensitive questions, relation with national criminal codes, victim/offender relationship, linking victim survey data with other data sources (such as police records and other victim surveys within the country), and how to measure incidence through the recording of the time when the incident occurred. Other key methodological issues that can affect victimization surveys are wording and ordering of questions, recall biases, mode of data collection, sample design and size, and interviewing methods.

22. The work on victimization surveys could focus on the exchange of experiences in countries and on the development of guidelines on how to design, carry out and use victimization surveys. The process toward these objectives would build on the experience of the ICVS and of NSOs that have a history in carrying out victimization surveys (such as United States, UK, Canada, The Netherlands, Australia, and Italy).

23. Traditionally in victimisation surveys, room is given also to the subjective aspect of security, except for some specific cases, both in terms of perception and in terms of behaviour related to the need for safety. The consequences of criminality, in fact, are not only felt by its direct victims, but by a much larger range of social actors, in terms of worsening of the quality of life. The inquiry on the subjective aspect of security and the considerations in the field permit the insertion of ad-hoc modules, internationally harmonised, some indicators on the perception of safety (e.g. fear of walking alone on the road at night, fear of staying home alone at night), on the security systems of the houses and on the presence of incivility indicators that characterise the territory, as well as on relations with security and police forces.

24. Victimisation surveys should focus on those crimes that are traditionally more easily surveyed for their own nature (thefts – pick-pocketing, snatching, theft of personal belongings, burglary, car theft, theft of parts of vehicles or objects from vehicles -, unauthorised entrances into buildings, vandalisms, robbery, threat, assaults and battery, sexual harassment and rapes) and not on other crimes related to organised crime, corruption and usury.

25. The experiences of countries on the methodology applied to the victimization survey (part of the activities of the specific Task Force mentioned above) will be the basis for a harmonized concept and definitions to be developed, which in turn can be used by countries. Standards, recommendations and guidelines will be implemented so that countries can collect data through national surveys.

26. The development in this direction looks at the implementation of a specific survey on victimization or the introduction of an ad hoc module on victimization aspects in other surveys. There is a strong requirement for international organizations to coordinate and harmonise the developments towards countries' statistical capacity in the field of victimization.

27. Enhancing the autonomy of single countries in data production means that financial support of victimization surveys carried out on small samples would no longer be necessary. This would be a positive result, since small samples cannot assure data quality.

B. Violence against women

28. The main problems and gaps on the subject of violence concern the identification of proper methodologies, sampling design, the wording problems, the sequence of sections of the questionnaire, the way the topic of violence is introduced, and the number of questions on the topic of violence necessary in order to collect data on violence by different offenders.

29. At present, surveys on violence against women suffer from problems of comparison due to the effect of the relative socio-cultural framework in which the survey is carried out, differences in the sample size, different techniques to collect data, and number of questions devoted to the violence aspects. In this context, differences must be recognized and a method of drawing up international guidelines to conduct surveys must be examined.

C. Justice statistics

30. International comparisons on justice and crime statistics are very difficult to make due to differences in organization of police and court systems, legal concepts and methods of collection and presentation of statistics. The lack of uniform definitions, common measuring instruments and common methodology makes comparisons between countries hazardous. It is therefore crucial to define correct statistical criteria of harmonization and comparison among different data.

31. Finally, comparative research on judicial systems is still at an early stage of development, especially in civil matters where there are more limits due to the different contexts. However, this subject has received new impulse over recent years thanks to the initiatives of the Council of Europe and of the European Union.

32. Justice Reforms and the modernization of legal systems are essential for sustainable development and alleviation of poverty, defined not only as a lack of resources, but as a sense of powerlessness and the absence of basic security as well. The latter two dimensions of poverty in particular are exacerbated when a nation's legal institutions perform poorly and the rule of law is weak or non-existent; it is important to improve the collection of information on the judicial systems that addresses the needs of the poor and the most vulnerable. The World Bank has made several developments in this direction by creating a web database (Worldwide Legal and Judicial Indicators) that provides quantitative and qualitative information about judicial systems across the world.

VII. IMPORTANT ISSUES THAT SHOULD BE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE CONFERENCE

33. If, in the past, the ICVS filled the data gap existing at national and international level on victimization, more recently many countries in the region are acquiring their own experience in carrying out national victimization surveys within the framework of official statistics. International organizations should not replace the role of national institutions in carrying out victimization surveys. Instead, they should provide support, guidelines and coordination to strengthen national capacity to carry out victimization survey.

34. There is a lack of international guidelines on how to carry out national victimization surveys. In this respect, the role of the existing UNECE-UNODC task force, whose objectives are the development of regional guidelines to harmonize methodology in the field of victimization surveys, is crucial. However, it is important to strengthen the coordination between the work that Eurostat is carrying out towards the development of a common survey module and the work of the UNECE-UNODC task force.

35. The same approach to harmonize, guide and coordinate countries should be used to develop a survey on violence against women.

36. There is an increased demand by policy-makers at European level for data on non-conventional crime (on money-laundering, trafficking in human beings, etc.). However, there are no tools currently used in countries to address these needs within the framework of official statistics.

37. There is a need to develop a long-term process toward an integrated and balanced statistical system based on police, prosecution, court and corrections records in order to enhance international comparability of crime statistics, concepts, definitions and approaches of criminal justice systems.

38. The role of the UNECE Statistical Division in developing activities at international level towards harmonization of standards, concepts and methodologies on crime and justice should be enhanced.

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