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Report of the Meeting of the Group of Experts on Crime Statistics,
held on 25-27 January 2006

Note by the secretariat

This meeting was organised jointly with United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

INTRODUCTION

1. The second joint UNECE-UNODC Meeting on Crime Statistics was held on 25-27 January 2006 in Vienna. It was attended by participants from Australia, Austria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States. The European Commission was represented by Eurostat. UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control (HEUNI), European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), TRANSCRIME were also represented.

2. Ms. Linda Laura Sabbadini (Italy) was elected as a Chairperson of the meeting.

3. The following substantive topics were discussed at the meeting:

- Session 1: Victim survey methodology: sample design and other aspects
- Session 2: Addressing telescoping effect and non-response
- Session 3: Core content of crime victim questionnaire
- Session 4: Dissemination of crime victim data: strategies and indicators

4. The following participants acted as Chairs of the different sessions: Session 1 – Cynthia Tavares (Home Office, UK); Session 2 – Linda Laura Sabbadini (ISTAT, Italy); Session 3 – Kauko Aromaa (HEUNI); Session 4 – Maria Joao Costa (Portugal).

5. The following participants acted as Discussants: Session 2 – Soula Macfarlane (ABS, Australia); Session 3 – Beata Gruszczynska (Institute of Justice, Poland); Session 4 – Frits Huls (Statistics Netherlands).

6. The discussion at the meeting was based on 11 invited and supporting papers. The papers are available on the UNECE website at the following address:
<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2006.01.crime.htm>

7. The participants adopted the report of the meeting at its closing session.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS

8. In the introductory remarks UNODC and UNECE reminded the participants that the objective of the meeting was to advance the work of developing regional guidelines on victimization surveys as suggested during the first UNECE-UNODC meeting in 2004 and approved by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians. Participants were informed that the Task Force appointed at the last meeting developed a questionnaire that was sent to countries to collect information on the methodology used in their victimization surveys. The results of the questionnaire were analyzed and presented during the meeting by some of the members of the task force.

9. UNICRI presented the preliminary results of the last wave of ICVS in Europe and discussed the role of the ICVS in providing data at both the national and international levels. During the discussion it was emphasized that the ICVS's formula does not intend to replace national victimization surveys, which have a larger scope and sample size. It was recognized that while national surveys will first and foremost cater to domestic needs, there is the need and the opportunity to work toward a common methodology to facilitate the international comparability of data.

10. Participants were informed about the activities of the Eurostat's Task Force on crime statistics, which includes three areas of work: reported crimes (collecting data and assessing comparability of administrative statistics), organized crime (developing definition and methodology), and victimization surveys (working toward harmonization). To move toward the development of a common survey module, the Eurostat's Task Force will:

- (a) analyze the information collected through the UNECE-UNODC questionnaires on

- victimization surveys and identify good practices;
 - (b) identify common methodologies which could be used;
 - (c) work towards the implementation of methodologies identified above in the EU-25.
11. The need was discussed to coordinate the new Eurostat data collection on reported crimes with other existing international data collections carried out by UNODC and the European Sourcebook.

Session 1 - Victim survey methodology: sample design and other aspects

12. Participants discussed methodologies used to carry out victimization surveys with respect to mode of data collection and sampling techniques. Analyzing the results of the UNECE-UNODC questionnaire in this context, face-to-face and Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) seem to be the most popular methods utilized. In carrying out face-to-face interviews, there is a trend in some countries to move away from paper and adopt Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI). There are also countries that use different approaches within the same survey.

13. From the experiences reported by countries, no clear indication about the single best method of collecting victimization data was apparent. Some countries found that CATI provides higher victimization rates suggesting a better performance of CATI compared with face-to-face interviews. Other countries obtained higher response rates with face-to-face interviews. It was also reported that the mode of data collection had different effects according to the types of crime. In some countries an increasing number of people do not have a fixed telephone line and only have mobile phones. This represents a new challenge in using CATI techniques.

14. It is also difficult to define what the most effective modes of data collection in terms of costs and quality of the results are, since this depends on the national circumstances and the availability of existing network of field operators.

15. In relation to sampling design, the meeting discussed the advantages and disadvantages of interviewing all members of the household compared to only one individual within the household. Once again, it was not possible to identify a single best approach. Interviewing all members of the households may help to cover more victimization episodes since family members tend to have similar crime experience. However, this can become a shortcoming since it may produce a clustering effect. The issue of who to select in the household is also a function of the mode of data collection and the use of a proxy. In relation to the target population, the different approaches of countries in identifying the minimum and maximum age were also discussed.

16. The challenge of sampling minorities and collecting information on the victimization experience of minorities was presented by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUCM). The difficulties of defining minorities and designing an appropriately representative sample to produce reliable statistics were discussed. The EUCM informed participants of their plan to develop a dedicated victimization surveys for minorities. Some participants highlighted the advantage of collecting victimization data on minority through national victimization surveys instead of developing dedicated survey for specific population

groups. This would allow for an appropriate comparison between victimization experience of minorities and the general population. The importance of having a comprehensive reference population for the creation of samples that could be representative of all sub-population groups was also emphasized.

17. In the process of developing common survey modules to be used in different countries, the importance of appropriate translations of concepts and questions into the different languages was stressed. The EU has developed experience in this field.

18. Participants discussed the need to further analyze information included in the UNECE-UNODC questionnaires. In particular, it was suggested to follow-up with the non-reporting countries and to ask further information where relevant.

Session 2 - Addressing telescoping effect and non-response

19. The topics of reference periods, telescoping effect and non-responses were discussed in session 2.

20. The analysis of the countries' experience showed a variety of reference periods used, ranging from 6 months to 5 years and/or lifetime. However, in a majority of surveys a 1-year reference period is most common. In some countries, it was found that the reference period varies within the same survey according to the type of crimes. The reference to lifetime is mainly used for measuring violence against women.

21. The meeting agreed that it is important for countries to consider strategies on how to deal with telescoping effect. About half of the surveys reported in the UNECE-UNODC questionnaire included specific strategies to reduce the telescoping effect, such as reducing the reference period, and using funneling, bounding, and reference event dates. Some countries reported that no strategies were used to specifically reduce the telescoping effect. However, some of the methodology adopted in these surveys can indeed contribute to the reducing of the telescoping effect. The use of the bounding technique in the U.S.A. has been proven to be very effective. Issues of costs and value for money are also relevant.

22. During the discussion it was highlighted that different typologies of crimes may need different strategies to reduce telescoping effect and that it could be useful to utilize more than one approach in the same survey.

23. Wide variation in the non-response rates among the different surveys was reported. The analysis of the non-response rates with the methodology used shows that there are some tools that reduce the non-response rate such as the information letter introducing the survey and the selection and training of interviewers. Some participants suggested that the institution that carries out the survey also has an effect in the non-response rate. Further research is needed to better understand the effect of different modes of data collection on the response rates and the experience of countries in following up non-response.

Session 3 - Core content of crime victim questionnaire

24. The objective of the session was to understand what crime issues should be addressed in national victimization surveys, including type of crimes and definitions. In general victim surveys are used to complement administrative crime statistics via obtaining information on unrecorded crime (interest surveys) or gathering information on victimisation experiences of specific sectors of the population (knowledge). It is important to establish who mandates the survey and to assess the objectives of the survey. It may be difficult for the same survey to have too many different objectives. It might be necessary to develop a – short – set of questions, which are globally comparable. General surveys may include modules and/or boosters for important vulnerable parts of the population. The possibility to include a victimization module in the Census was also discussed.

25. HEUNI presented an analysis of the types of crime included in the various surveys, using the eleven types of crime included in the ICVS as a reference. A distinction between household and personal crimes was made; in many surveys several questions refer to crimes affecting the entire household, while others refer to personal experience of the respondent. However, the concept of household crimes may be controversial, since members of the household may or may not know about incidents that happened to others. There is a risk that these questions measure the cohesion of the household rather than actual victimization.

26. Some countries dealt with all types of theft in the same question, including theft of personal property, household items, parts of car, mobile phones, etc. In this respect, the burglary question may be confused with the general theft question. However, the concept of “break and enter” may help in clarify definitions of burglary and general theft. Several surveys included burglary in secondary or vacation houses, garages and basements, while others excluded them.

27. In some cases it would be necessary to improve definitions in order to clarify concepts which otherwise are too confused. Damage/vandalism questions should be limited to capture incidents oriented towards deliberate damaging of property. Clarifications may be needed to make a distinction between attempts and completed crimes (for example, burglaries and robberies). The same may apply to definitions of theft of personal property, pick pocketing and lost property, as well as to the concepts of stalking, harassment, assault and assault “for sexual reasons”.

28. The experience of Canada and Finland in collecting victimization data was presented and discussed. These two countries have a long history of carrying out victimization surveys within the framework of official statistics. The presentation of how the content and methodology of their surveys evolved over time stimulated a discussion on issues related to comparison of data across different types of surveys, the inclusion of emerging typologies of crimes, such as hate-motivated crime, and the importance of question wording.

29. The discussion focused also on whether or not general population surveys should include specific victimization issues, such as domestic/spousal violence. Surveys frequently asked for the value of the stolen/damaged property but rarely about the cost of victimization.

Session 4 - Dissemination of crime victim data: strategies and indicators

30. The session discussed issues relevant to dissemination of the results, including comparability of data from victimization surveys and administrative statistics. Several countries attempted to compare victimization prevalence from surveys with data on crimes reported to the police. Nevertheless, the outcome of such comparison was controversial. Problems included the different periods of reference, the basis used to calculate rates (for example population, households, and owners). Further work in this direction was deemed necessary.

31. The margin of error used in presentation of the results varied in the different surveys, with a preference for the 95% level of confidence, which was adopted by 14 surveys. The ICVS used a 90% margin of error based on the sample size and the percentage of victimization observed.

32. Sixteen countries mentioned that survey results were available to public through microdata files, while twenty-five countries had made such results available on Internet. The time at which data were released to the public (immediately after the survey or after publication of analysis of the results) was not mentioned in the questionnaire. Examples of different patterns of dealing with publication of the results were presented, including the discussion of problems related to presenting the results to the media while keeping the independence of the statistical institute.

33. The majority of countries published reports with results of the surveys, thus generating a considerable wealth of information.

34. The comparability of results among different surveys carried out in the same country was also discussed. The example from Australia was mentioned, with seven different surveys being carried out at more or less regular intervals. However, it was noted that every survey has its own objectives, thus results may not be directly comparable.

35. There is a great demand for crime and safety survey data. The issue of how to best identify priorities of different users and create deeper awareness among users of the importance of using statistics for policy-making was discussed. It is necessary to ensure a greater integration of data generated by surveys, in order to produce clearer information for policy makers and the public. In most countries victim surveys are still in the phase of raising awareness towards evidence-based policy making.

36. Participants discussed the value of producing more information on the context within which a crime occurs, such as demographics of victims and high-risk population groups. One possible solution could be a victimization survey based on a large sample that may cover different aspects.

37. The frequency of surveys should be adequate to provide regular indicators of the crime situation. Indicators may include a small set of household and personal crimes as well as indicators of safety, fear of crime, and police performance.

38. Victim surveys should be integrated into a comprehensive social statistics programme

which has adequate resources allocated.

FUTURE WORK

39. The meeting reinforced the objective of the joint UNECE-UNODC work toward the development of guidelines in the field of victimization surveys and agreed to initiate work toward the production of a Manual on victimization surveys with the objectives of:

- (a) helping countries to design their own national victimization surveys considering the accumulated experience in the implementation of victimization surveys in the region;
- (b) providing a short-core module that could be included in national surveys to assure international comparability for a limited set of victimization experiences.

40. It was suggested that the Manual cover all the key aspects in the implementation of victimization surveys, presenting different possible approaches to address the different needs of the countries (including aspects related to data quality). The reasons why national victimization surveys should be carried out should also be covered. Taking stock of the information collected on national surveys and the experience accumulated by countries, the Manual should describe the advantages and disadvantages of different methodologies so that countries can be guided in selecting the best methodology for their own national circumstances. The Manual should focus on the implementation of victimization surveys with some reference to modules included in ongoing surveys, and focus on the dissemination of survey results. It should not cover victimization surveys focused on a special group of the population (such as women, VAW surveys) or specialized environment (such as surveys about the work place).

41. In order to advance the work toward this objective the Task Force was asked to:

- (a) produce the first draft of the Manual to be presented at the next joint UNECE-UNODC meeting on crime statistics;
- (b) continue the collection of material such as questionnaires, manuals and reports, related to national victimization surveys or victimization modules with the objective of making it available in the internet;
- (c) continue the analysis of the information collected by UNECE and UNODC on the national victimization surveys distinguishing specialized victimization surveys and modules included in on-going surveys. The information already collected on violence against women surveys and non-national surveys could be excluded from further analysis in this context;
- (d) identify national contact points for collecting further information on victimization surveys in National Statistical Office or other relevant national institution;
- (e) follow-up with the countries that have not yet replied to the UNECE-UNODC questionnaire and make an effort to assure the best coverage of national surveys carried out in the region;
- (f) follow-up the information collected by UNECE and UNODC on specialized victimization surveys with the collection of additional information that are thought to be relevant for the drafting of the Manual;
- (g) continue to coordinate its activity with the Eurostat Task Force on crime statistics.

42. The meeting agreed that Australia chair the work of the Task Force.

43. The following timetable was also agreed:

Activity	Time
Conducting of further analysis of the information collected by UNECE and UNODC on national victimization surveys	March-May 2006
Preparation of draft annotated outline of the Manual on victimization surveys	April 2006
Feedback from countries on the draft annotated outline of the Manual	May 2006
Finalization of the annotated outline of the Manual on victimization surveys	June 2006
Meeting of the Task Force to review the contributions to the Manual	November 2006
Finalization of the first draft of the Manual	April 2007
Joint UNECE-UNODC Meeting	October 2007
