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**STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
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Fifty-third plenary session
(Geneva, 13-16 June 2005)

**REPORT OF THE NOVEMBER 2004 JOINT UNECE-UNODC MEETING
ON CRIME STATISTICS**

INTRODUCTION

1. The Joint UNECE-UNODC Meeting was held 3-5 November 2004 in Geneva. It was attended by participants from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom, and United States. The European Commission was represented by The Directorate General Justice and Home Affairs and Eurostat. UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control (HEUNI), Transcrime, John Jay College of Criminal Justice (USA), the European Sourcebook on Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics and University of Lausanne (Switzerland) were also represented.

2. Mr. Frits Huls (Netherlands) was elected as a Chairperson of the meeting.

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

Session 1: National and International Demands for Crime Statistics.

Chair: Mr. Frits Huls (Statistics Netherlands)

Discussant: Mr. Kauko Aromaa (Finland)

Presentations given by: Paul Smit (Ministry of Justice, Netherlands), Stan Lipinski (Department of Justice, Canada), Igor Bele (Ministry of Justice,Slovenia), Monika Olsson (European Commission)

Session 2: International activities in the collection and dissemination of statistics.

Chair: Mr. Jan van Dijk (UNICRI)

Discussant: Mr. Gordon Barclay (Office for National Statistics, UK)

Presentations given by: Marleen De Smedt (Eurostat), Anna Alvazzi del Frate (UNODC), Wolfgang Rhomberg (UNODC), Kauko Aromaa (HEUNI), Martin Killias (University of Lausanne).

Session 3: Examples of victim surveys implemented by national statistical offices in the region.

Chair: Mr. Steven Smith (USA)

Discussant: Mr. Paul Smit (Ministry of Justice, Netherlands)

Presentations given by: Maria Giuseppina Muratore (ISTAT, Italy), Tatjana Skrbec (Slovenia), Chris Libreri (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

Session 4: Victimization Surveys: An overview of methods used, methodological and implementation issues, areas where standards need to be developed.

Chair: Mr. Roy Jones (Canada)

Discussant: Ms. Linda Laura Sabbadini (Italy)

Presentations given by: Steven Smith (USA), Roy Jones (Statistics Canada), Jon Simmons (Home Office, UK), Britta Kyvsgaard (Ministry of Justice, Denmark).

Session 5: Development of an agenda for future work.

4. A summary of the discussions and the discussion of future work is provided below. A more detailed presentation of the main conclusions reached at the meeting is presented in the Annex (English only).

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS

5. The demand for crime statistics from both national and international perspectives was documented. Traditional crime and criminal justice statistics do not provide full information. The need to dig deeper below the surface to look at regional trends as opposed to focusing solely on the national level was expressed.

6. The need for improvement in the quality and content of crime data from the main administrative sources (prison, court, police, prosecutor records) was emphasized. Participants agreed that it is necessary to combine data from various sources to obtain a complete picture of crimes and victimization. Integration of statistics from various parts of the criminal and administrative system can lead toward evidence-based policy making and assist in planning purposes.

7. It was agreed that training in basic user skills is necessary. Sharing experience on how to get crime and criminal justice statistics and implement victimization surveys is also important.

One country's expertise in methodology can provide training to another country, which is in need. The role of international organizations to provide support and coordination in this direction was also discussed.

8. The discussion highlighted the importance of comparable sources of data presented, that included international collections (the UN Survey on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and the European Sourcebook) and special surveys (such as the International Crime Victim Survey, the International Crime Business Survey, the International Violence Against Women Survey). However, these exercises were undermined by lack of resources and subsequent risk of non-sustainability. There is currently no coordinated approach, that leaves a number of definitional and quality problems unsolved. The objective of a coordinated effort should include sharing of national outputs for secondary analysis and the regular collection of comparable data on selected offences at the national/regional level. The way to achieve these results is to proceed with a focused and coordinated approach with small but feasible objectives, building on what already exists (at the national and international levels) and allotting sufficient dedicated resources.

9. The important role of the ICVS in providing international comparable data was emphasized. However, the need to promote the carrying out of national victimization surveys within the framework of official statistics was also expressed.

10. 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. Thus, comparison may not always be possible. There is no single methodology that can best fit all countries. 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.

11. The meeting agreed that both registered data and victimization surveys are necessary to provide more accurate picture of crime. Victimization surveys can be used to obtain information for underreported and unreported crimes and can provide more details about the surrounding aspects of individual crimes and identify groups at risk. On the other hand, victimization surveys measure only those crimes that are perceived as such by the respondents, and perception of seriousness may vary depending on individual circumstances.

12. It was stressed that there are key methodological issues that can affect victimization surveys, wording and ordering of questions, recall biases, mode of data collection, sample design and size, and interviewing methods. The meeting agreed on the need to further study these issues to promote consistency and better implement victimization surveys (for example, a literature review).

FUTURE WORK

13. It is proposed that the joint ECE-UNODC work on Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics takes account of the work carried out by various agencies and organizations, such as the work within the European Statistical System and other systems, working in the field and be focused on:

- a. further development of an integrated framework of official criminal justice statistics and on the strengthening of the existing systems of data collection taken account of the UN Manual and the role of national statistical offices and agencies responsible for the production of criminal justice statistics to supply information
- b. further promotion of actions towards common terminology and common definitions within the region
- c. promotion of the role of victimization surveys within the framework of official statistics and development of guidelines for victim surveys either as modules within multi-purpose surveys or standalone

14. The meeting recognized the importance of developing a long-term process toward a) integration and balanced development of a system of police, prosecution, court and corrections statistics and victim collections and b) international comparability of crime statistics, concepts, definitions, and approaches of criminal justice systems. It is proposed as a first step to focus on developing guidelines for victimization surveys and methodologies to improve existing key institutions or organizations and key variable or data collections.

15. The work on victimization surveys could focus on the exchange of experiences emerged in countries where there are experiences of victimization surveys 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 an history in carrying out victimization surveys (such as USA, UK, Canada, The Netherlands, Australia, and Italy).

16. The meeting agreed to give more time (one week) to the Steering Group to review and comments the plans for future work.

17. The Steering Group is composed of Albania, Canada, the Netherlands, Slovenia, United States of America, UNECE and UNODC.

18. It is proposed that:

- ◆ The Steering Group on Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics continue to coordinate the work in order to achieve the objectives as described above. The European Union asked to be excluded by the Group for lack of resources.
- ◆ A “regional network” of focal points on crime and criminal justice statistics (National Statistical Offices or Agencies responsible for the production of criminal justice statistics) be established;

- ◆ A task force on victim surveys be established with the composition of countries, supra-national and international organizations with the following terms of reference:
 - i. To survey the countries that have undertaken victimization surveys or are planning such surveys and to collect the methods used
 - ii. To analyse the communalities and differences of methods used in countries and the ICVS and to identify areas where it would be useful to develop common recommendations.
 - iii. To share experiences on the testing of methodologies and if necessary to launch the testing of new methods
 - iv. To develop methodological guidelines to address questions such as: What are the minimum requirements for a victim survey? How frequently victim surveys shall be repeated? How to organize a survey? What types of crime should be included? What period of time should be covered? What is the best sampling design? Are interviewing methods affecting the comparability of the results? How to select and train the interviewers? How to monitor quality?
19. The Task Force consists of representatives from Australia, Canada, Italy, Poland, the United Kingdom, United States of America, HEUNI, UNECE, and UNODC.
20. A review meeting take place in one-year time (late 2005) to discuss progress made.
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ANNEX

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS REACHED BY THE PARTICIPANTS DURING THE DISCUSSIONS

Session 1: National and International Demands for Crime Statistics.

Chair: Mr. Frits Huls (Netherlands – Statistics Netherlands)

Documentation: Invited papers by Netherlands, Canada, Slovenia, European Commission

Discussant: Mr. Kauko Aromaa (European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, Finland)

1. The meeting agreed that crime statistics may be produced for different purposes, in particular for the measurement of crime, for the assessment of the efficiency of the criminal justice system and for monitoring the success of crime prevention polices. Traditionally crime and criminal justice statistics were meant for measuring workload (and performance) of the bureaucracy rather than measuring crime. Over time, beyond their long-established role of efficiency indicators, crime and criminal justice statistics started being used as a tool to assess citizens' risks and to develop crime prevention programmes. Nevertheless, assessing the crime problem requires looking at the entire system, supplementing the information with victim surveys while taking into account that even victim surveys cannot capture everything.
2. The meeting noted that traditional crime and criminal justice statistics from the main administrative sources (prison, court, police, prosecutor records) are often difficult to read and hardly comparable, especially for non-experts. The development of victim surveys over the past three decades has contributed to obtaining supplementary information on the context in which crime occurs and experiences of victimisation.
3. The meeting agreed that it has become necessary to identify new and diversified data sources to answer multi-dimensional and complex questions. Furthermore, more analysis of existing data would help make them more useful for the community.
4. The meeting agreed that, in order to reach an integrated approach it is essential to a) improve the quality and content of crime and criminal justice administrative data, b) combine data from various sources to obtain a complete picture of crimes and victimization and c) bear in mind the need to look at regional/international trends as opposed to focusing solely on the national level.

Session 2: International activities in the collection and dissemination of statistics.

Chair: Mr. Jan van Dijk, UNICRI

Documentation: Invited papers by Eurostat, UNODC (2 papers), HEUNI, University of Lausanne

Discussant: Mr. Gordon Barclay (Home Office, UK)

5. The meeting noted that the demand for comparable data has increased over the past few years. The web pages containing publications on international crime statistics are among the most visited pages in the websites hosting them. The process towards comparable information may be facilitated by the development of comparable surveys.

6. In this respect, the meeting noted that the European Statistical System (ESS) for the first time included crime statistics in its 2004 work programme. This was due to considerable interest expressed by EU Members in developing crime statistics. This will lead to the establishment of a task force and the finalisation of an Action Plan to respond to needs and demands in this area, define the need for crime statistics, combine information on organized and volume crime, and establish co-ordination within and outside the EU. A series of further steps will include the development of indicators and utilization of data from other datasets.

7. The meeting noted the main international collections of crime and criminal justice statistics, namely the United Nations Surveys on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, regularly conducted by UNODC¹, and the European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics², as well as a number of international victim surveys, including the International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS)³, the International Crime Business Survey (ICBS)⁴, and the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)⁵.

8. The meeting noted that the objective of international statistics should be sharing of national outputs for secondary analysis in view of obtaining regular comparable data on selected offences at the national/regional level.

9. The meeting also agreed that comparable sources of data, such as international collections and special surveys, often suffer because of lack of resources, sustainability and co-ordinated approach. Such initial shortcomings may generate further problems in the analysis and understanding of data.

Session 3: Examples of victim surveys implemented by national statistical offices in the region.

Chair: Mr. Steven Smith, Bureau of Justice Statistics, USA

Documentation: Invited papers from Italy, Slovenia, Australia

Discussant: Mr. Paul Smit (Ministry of Justice, The Netherlands)

10. Victim surveys are an indispensable component of the system of crime and criminal justice statistics. Nevertheless, they should not be expected to provide a perfect measure of crime since they can only capture what victims perceive as crime.

11. The meeting noted that in several countries in the region victim surveys are regularly conducted within the programme of work of National Statistical Offices. Examples were presented from Italy, Slovenia and Australia.

12. The meeting noted that there was no one methodology that could serve all. Victim surveys may differ on a number of general issues, that include their coverage (national, regional, city, living area), the size of the sample and the method used to check the exact time when the incident occurred (depending on use of calendar year, time period, "dear dates", or asking about the actual date of the incident). Such differences may also determine a different relationship of victim surveys result with administrative statistics.

13. Quality issues should apply to both administrative and survey data. The meeting noted that recent initiatives towards improving data collection and analysis have developed within the framework of social research rather than in NSOs. Since crime has not been a priority in social statistics so far, the role of the National Statistical Offices has remained very limited. A more active involvement of NSOs may contribute to the development of a system of crime and criminal justice statistics, which may be based on further use of the UN Manual for the Development of a System of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics.

14. In each country a number of different agencies may be involved in the collection of crime and criminal justice statistics, thus generating problems with coordination. The meeting noted an example presented from Australia, where the National Centre of Crime and Justice Statistics counts 27 different contributing agencies. Nevertheless, the problems of internal coordination among different agencies in one country may be similar to problems of international comparability. Therefore, the priority should reside in the development of clear definitions and comparable information within and across countries.

Session 4: Victimization Surveys: An overview of methods used, methodological and implementation issues, areas where standards need to be developed.

Chair: Mr. Roy Jones (Statistics Canada).

Documentation: Invited papers by USA, Canada, UK, Denmark

Discussant: Ms. Linda Laura Sabbadini (ISTAT, Italy).

15. The meeting noted examples of different victim surveys methods and integrated systems of crime statistics. For example, the British Crime Survey is conducted with the face-to-face method in England and Wales with a sample between 10,000 and 20,000 respondents every two years since 1982. In 2001 a continuous survey was introduced with a sample of 40,000, which is expected to increase to 50,000 in 2004-05. In the United States, the National Crime Victim Survey (NCVS) is conducted with a sample of 40,000 households interviewed by telephone twice a year. Only the first meeting is face-to-face, thereafter, all contact is via the telephone.

16. The meeting noted that, even with very large samples, victim surveys can hardly provide details at the local level.

17. The meeting noted an example of software to conduct victim surveys, based on the NCVS, developed with the support of the Office of Victims of Crime of the USA. The software, a replica of NCVS which is downloadable from Internet, allows surveys to be conducted by using the same methodology as the NCVS.

18. The issue of developing guidelines and setting minimum standards for publication of victim surveys results was also discussed: it was suggested that a 5% confidence level be internationally adopted as the threshold for data presentation in publications.

19. Integration of statistics from various parts of the criminal and administrative system can lead toward evidence-based policy making and assist in planning purposes. The meeting noted that several countries, including the USA, Canada and the United Kingdom already produce integrated publications on victim surveys and police statistics.

Session 5: Development of an agenda for future work.

Chair: Fritz Huls, The Netherlands

Panelists: Mr. Kauko Aromaa, Finland (Discussant session 1), Mr. Gordon Barclay, UK (Discussant session 2), Ms. Linda Laura Sabbadini, Italy (Discussant session 3), Mr. Paul Smit, The Netherlands (Discussant session 4), Mr. Soenke Schmidt, European Commission, Ms. Anna Alvazzi del Frate, UNODC, Ms. Angela Me, UNECE

20. The meeting agreed that victim surveys might represent a first feasible step to be undertaken. Nevertheless, there is an interest in criminal justice operations, thus the need for a broader policy on crime and criminal justice statistics not only limited to surveys.

21. The objective of comparability is a very important one, however international comparability may be reached through different methods. The meeting noted that international standards should be approved by the Statistical Commission as general purpose indications.

22. The need for common definitions was expressed as one of the possible objectives. The meeting agreed that a small steps policy was the most appropriate for the follow-up phase of the process.

23. The meeting also discussed the need to produce metadata in order to increase the comparability of administrative data, which at the moment represent the core and the most extensively available source of information on crime in most countries.

¹ The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1984/48 of 25 May 1984, requested that the Secretary-General maintain and develop a United Nations crime-related database by continuing to conduct surveys of crime trends and

operations of criminal justice systems. The major goal of the United Nations Survey is to collect data on the incidence of reported crime and the operations of criminal justice systems with a view to improving the analysis and dissemination of that information globally. The survey results provide an overview of trends and interrelationships between various parts of the criminal justice system to promote informed decision-making in administration, nationally and internationally. The survey is now in its eighth wave.

² The European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics is a survey of 39 European countries comparing statistical information available on crime and criminal justice statistics and, in particular, how this information was collected and defined. The Sourcebook, supported by the Home Office of the United Kingdom, the Dutch Government and the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs (through the University of Lausanne), has been published twice (in 1999 and 2003) and a third edition is in preparation.

³ The ICVS provides information on crime and victimization through a questionnaire, originally developed in English, translated into the languages of all participating countries, with the aim of obtaining internationally comparable information. To ensure this, all aspects of the methodology have been standardized to the maximum possible extent. The ICVS is coordinated by a Working Group composed by the Home Office of the United Kingdom, the Dutch Ministry of Justice, the Canadian Department of Justice, UNICRI and UNODC and has so far involved more than 70 participating countries.

⁴ The ICBS was conducted in nine Central-Eastern European capital cities in the year 2000. The project, promoted by UNICRI, follows the structure and organizational arrangements of the ICVS and is aimed at capturing the victimisation experiences of businesses, as well as their attitudes towards crime and crime prevention. The questionnaire has an emphasis on experiences of fraud, corruption, extortion and intimidation.

⁵ The International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS) is specifically designed to target violence against women and to make international comparisons. It utilizes the centralised method, standardisation and network of contacts developed for the International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) combined with a specific sensitive survey tool for measuring violence against women at the international level. The project is co-ordinated by the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, affiliated with the United Nations (HEUNI) with inputs from an International Project Team representing the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Statistics Canada and the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC). It has already been conducted in several countries including six in Europe.
