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Session 2 – Invited paper

**ONGOING WORK ON DEVELOPING EU-WIDE COMPARABLE STATISTICS ON CRIME,
CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND VICTIMIZATION**

Submitted by Eurostat*

I. Introduction

1. This paper describes a general approach as well as key elements for an action plan currently being developed by the European Commission in the area of crime, criminal justice and victimisation statistics. This plan is based upon a close co-operation between the Directorate-General responsible for Justice and Home Affairs (DG JAI) and the Directorate-General responsible for providing statistical services (Eurostat).
2. The need for crime statistics at EU level has been described in the preceding session by DGJAI's representative Mr. Soenke Schmidt. The action plan takes close account of the political background as outlined in that paper and also of the increasing demand for information in this area, both in the policy-making organs of the European Union and among the general public, eg feeling of insecurity and being victims of different forms of violence and crime.
3. It seeks to involve all the actors in this process, many of whom are represented at this conference, and is based upon a close collaboration between the Commission and the twenty-five Member States of the European Union. In particular, the considerable amount of work already achieved

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in this area in the Member States and at international level will be fully utilised and serve as a basis for future progress.

II. The European Statistical System

4. To meet the statistical needs of the European Union, an organisational structure has been built up over a number of years, which is usually referred to as the European Statistical System. This system depends upon a close collaboration between its constituent elements. The Member States of the European Union are represented in this system by their national statistical authorities, which are the statistical offices and all other national bodies (i.e. Ministries, institutes, governmental organisations) involved in the establishment of official statistics. The overall co-ordinating function in the system is ensured by Eurostat, on behalf of the European Commission.

5. The strategic development of EU statistics is the responsibility of the Statistical Programme Committee (SPC), consisting of the Directors-General of the national statistical offices under the chairmanship of the Director-General of Eurostat. This committee also examines proposals for EU legislation in the statistical field, which will later be submitted to the Commission, European Council and European Parliament. Reporting to the SPC are a number of committees concerned with different statistical fields, which are similarly composed of directors responsible for these statistics in the national statistical offices, chaired by the appropriate director at Eurostat. Statistics on crime, criminal justice and victimisation fall under the responsibility of the Directors of Social Statistics (DSS). The DSS meets regularly but also communicates on an ongoing basis through email and a dedicated internet site.

6. The co-ordination of the various types of social statistics is the responsibility of a number of working groups with clearly-defined areas of responsibility, each again composed of representatives of all the national statistical authorities. As the size of these groups has increased with successive enlargements of the European Union, there has been a rising tendency to create smaller groups (task forces) consisting of a sub-set of Member States, particularly for the examination of more technical issues in which they report to the main group.

7. As has already been mentioned, much of the collection of statistics at EU level is based upon Community legislation. Usually this may consist of a Regulation of the European Council and Parliament authorising the collection of data in a specific area, supported by a Commission Regulation which lays down implementing procedures governing the exact data variables, sampling methods, etc. In the absence of a legal framework, Member States and the Eurostat agree for the statistics to be collected under so-called 'gentlemen's agreements'. However in the interests of clarity and efficiency, the development of a legal basis is increasingly considered as the long-term objective in most areas of statistics.

III. Crime, criminal justice and victimisation in the statistical system

8. The collection of data on crime, criminal justice and victimisation has not traditionally formed part of the activities of the European Statistical System. Work in this area was included in the Statistical Work Programme of the Commission for the first time in 2004, and consequently the subject was examined by the Directors of Social Statistics at their meeting on 29-30 September 2004.

9. The discussion revealed that there was considerable interest among the Member States in the development at EU level of a system of crime statistics. It became clear that in many countries crime figures were generally the responsibility of police authorities or government ministries, but there were also some signals that statistical offices were increasingly becoming involved in this area. Some national

statistical offices have experience of carrying out victimisation surveys (usually as modules of household surveys), which is agreed to be a promising method of collecting information. International surveys of this type have hitherto been conducted by private organisations with relatively small sample sizes. To obtain a clearer impression of the role of the national statistical offices, it will probably be necessary to examine through a task force the way in which crime statistics are organised in each country and how an approach for crime statistics at EU level could be implemented.

IV. Key issues for the development of crime statistics at EU level

10. Statistics must respond to a real need and demand; that the demand for crime statistics exists at EU level is clearly expressed by my colleague of DG JAI. Our focus and EU action plan should constantly be guided by these user needs. In general the statistics should describe on the one hand the type and occurrence of crime and its structure – in its different forms, volume and organised crime - in the EU context of demographic, social and economic realities. On the other hand statistics are needed on how the criminal justice systems in the different countries respond to it.

11. In order to arrive at a regular and timely data collection, it is essential to effectively plan and co-operate with data suppliers. At EU level this could be done via existing channels and maybe via new structures to be established. Where the need should arise to collect individually identifiable data, it should be noted that within the European Statistical System there are operating procedures in place to allow, where needed for secure transmission of confidential data.

12. As in many other field of statistics, there are in the EU countries different data sources for crime statistics, of which police records and victimisation surveys are the most important ones. Each source has its advantages and limitations, both are necessary and complementary. EU-wide comparability of data from police records is seriously hampered by the way the different national systems are operating. It will therefore be essential to collect the necessary meta information on these systems.

13. A survey on the other hand uses its own standardised methodology that could be agreed across borders, such as the International Crime Victim Survey and ways should be explored for a common EU effort in the field of victimisation surveys.

14. Crime statistics are to be embedded into a larger system of social statistics. They are the most useful if they can be linked to statistics that describe the social and economic context within which the crime occurs and the criminal justice system operates.

V. The action plan

15. An action plan for the development of crime statistics at EU level was discussed at a forum of national experts convened by the Commission at Brussels on 9 July 2004 and subsequently by the Directors of Social Statistics at the meeting mentioned above. It is intended to further refine this plan through contacts with the relevant actors in this process, and in this context the present gathering offers an ideal opportunity to profit from the experience and comments of international experts who it is hoped will be prepared to make a positive contribution to the development of comparable statistics on crime.

16. The contribution of Soenke Schmidt has highlighted the existence of a considerable amount of existing information on crime in a variety of sources, such as for example the European Sourcebook on Crime and Criminal Justice, the Survey on Crime Trends and the International Crime Victimization Survey. Compilations of national statistics by the UK Home Office and by HEUNI (affiliated to the UN) give considerable information on reported crime and on criminal justice, and a valuable study of trends

concentrating on three types of crime has been published by the European Crime Prevention Network. The amount of work going on at national level is evident from the agenda of this conference.

17. The main challenge which will need to be addressed in evaluating the available information is comparability, once an agreement on a conceptual framework has been reached. This covers several issues. Complete comparability between statistics from different countries may prove an extremely difficult if not impossible task, in view of the differences between the respective national systems of reporting and recording crimes. Following crime trends is a slightly less ambitious objective, but this still requires a full understanding of the sources being used. To achieve this will require a considerable amount of methodological and analytical preparation.

18. The work already achieved by existing groups such as the European Sourcebook will be an invaluable basis for further progress, and it is hoped that a fruitful co-operation with this group can be established. In particular, a core set of definitions of crimes and statistics for collection needs to be developed, which should be the result of an integrated effort making use of the existing resources and expertise. Experiences in conducting international surveys, particularly those of the United Nations, will be taken into account. The statistics produced should meet the requirements of international crime monitoring (for example, the Europol Organised Crime Situation report).

19. To avoid duplication of work and create synergies, one single and coherent approach is necessary, combining information on both organised and volume crime, and ensuring that the infrastructure developed will be able to hold information that concerns reported crimes, cases of victimisation, information on organised crime and measures taken within the criminal justice system.

20. So summarising, the major steps in the action plan are:

- to establish co-ordination at EU level, within the Commission, with other EU agencies operating in the field (Europol), with Member States;
- to establish co-operation with non EU organisations (European Sourcebook Group, UN)
- to establish the necessary consulting structures (expert committee, task force)
- stocktaking, within the context of a conceptual framework: to establish the basis for developing definitions for comparable statistics (inventory of definitions of crime types and of law enforcement measures)
- to develop indicators (use of existing data, for new indicators: development of precise definitions and establishment of a common methodology for data collection)
- to use data and information from research projects and studies (EUSTOC..)
- to take steps for the establishment of a legal basis.

21. These activities – some of which have started already - will, wherever possible, build on work already done, improving and extending the statistics currently available at EU level on crime, criminal justice and victimisation and developing a new system of statistics in these areas, with the maximum achievable degree of comparability.
