

# Statistics on Crime & Criminal Justice

## Methodological Notes

### Developing EU Statistics on crime and criminal justice

Eurostat received a mandate under the 2004 *Hague Programme*<sup>(1)</sup>: *strengthening freedom, security and justice in the European Union* to develop comparable statistics on crime and criminal justice, and a series of measures towards this end were undertaken under the 2006-10 *Action Plan on Developing a comprehensive and coherent EU strategy to measure crime and criminal justice*<sup>(2)</sup>.

Following the conclusion of the Action Plan, the system is being enhanced and extended as part of the implementation of the 2009 *Stockholm Programme*<sup>(3)</sup>: *An open and secure Europe serving and protecting citizens*.

### Data collection

The methodology used in this publication draws upon that developed by the European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics<sup>(4)</sup>, in particular the definition and measurement of criminal offences, and upon the Surveys on Crime Trends conducted by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime<sup>(5)</sup>. Countries were asked to adhere to a standard definition when assembling the figures and to provide details of any divergences.

Figures for the United Kingdom are reported separately (as UK: England & Wales, UK: Scotland and UK: Northern Ireland), owing to the existence of three separate jurisdictions.

### Comparisons

The data are taken from information recorded or reported by the police. Comparisons of crime levels based on the absolute figures would be misleading, since they are affected by many factors, including:

- different legal and criminal justice systems
- rates at which crimes are reported to the police and recorded by them
- differences in the point at which crime is measured (for example, when reported to the police, on identification of suspects, etc.)
- differences in the rules by which multiple offences are counted
- differences in the list of offences that are included in the overall crime figures

Figures for the prison population may also be affected by many factors, including:

- number of cases dealt with by the courts
- the percentage receiving a custodial sentence
- the length of the sentences imposed
- the size of the population on remand
- the date of the survey, especially where amnesties apply

For these reasons, direct comparisons of crime levels in different countries should be avoided. Rates per head of population (which might imply that such comparisons could be made) are therefore not presented in this publication, except in the case of homicide and the prison population, where the figures may be more readily comparable. In these cases, rates per 100 000 head of population averaged over 3 years have been calculated. Caution should also be exercised when considering low numbers for some crimes. For example, for homicide, the rate may vary considerably from year to year. This is especially true for small countries or cities where there may be no homicides recorded in one year and two or more the following year.

As a general rule, comparisons should be based upon trends rather than upon levels, on the assumption that the characteristics of the recording system within a country remain fairly constant over time. Even here, however, there are many exceptions as methods change, causing breaks in the series, indicated using the symbol '|'. The symbol ':' is used for some countries to indicate that definitional changes make such a comparison impossible. Fuller information on these changes is given on the Eurostat website.

Where national series without definitional changes are available, indices have been calculated in order to make it easier to follow the trends:

$$\text{Crime index } I_i = (C_i/C_{\text{base}}) * 100$$

$I_i$  = index number for year  $i$

$C_i$  = number of offences recorded by the police for year  $i$

$C_{\text{base}}$  = number of offences recorded by the police for the base year

### Eurostat website

The website allows users access to the data and the metadata. There are tables on total crime from 1950 onwards and from 1993 for some specific offences, from 1993 for the number of police officers and from 1987 for the prison population. As already noted above, comparability of the figures between countries is difficult to achieve and **users are strongly advised to consult the metadata files when referring to the figures**. The metadata files contain additional information on the precise definition of the offence used by each country.

<sup>(1)</sup> The Hague Programme Official Journal C 53 of 3.3.2005, p.11 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/>

<sup>(2)</sup> Commission communication COM/2006/437 final <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/>

<sup>(3)</sup> Stockholm Programme Official Journal C115 of 4.5.2010, p.1 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/>

<sup>(4)</sup> European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics <http://www.europeansourcebook.org/index.html>

<sup>(5)</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/index.html>

17 January 2012

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