



European  
Research Area

# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## Measurement of crime and evaluation of public policies of prevention and security

Policy implications of CRIMPREV - Assessing Deviance, Crime and Prevention in Europe, an EU-funded Research Project involving 30 institutions in 10 EU countries led by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, France

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### SUMMARY

#### Objectives of the research

This research focused on the measurement and evaluation of crime prevention and safety policies in a number of European countries. Its analysis of the measurement and evaluation methods used provides valuable insights on how they can contribute to increasing comparability of data provision and support evidence-based policy-making.

#### Scientific approach / methodology

The project was built around a series of seminars of researchers and key specialists supported by ongoing scientific work on significant experiences of the use of measurement and evaluation instruments in a number of European countries in order to contribute to a comparative reflection on how they can most effectively contribute to policy development.

#### New knowledge and/or European added value

The project provides a basis for supporting the systematic use of comparisons within the European Union when addressing issues of crime, criminalisation and perceptions of both. It provides useful scientific insights which will support policy and decision-makers at various government levels within EU Member States.

**Key messages for policy-makers, businesses, trade unions and civil society actors**

The key messages of the project focus on (a) supporting policy-makers to base methodological choices on accurate and up-to-date state of the art knowledge; (b) fostering comparability of data provision through harmonisation of research protocols; and (c) encouraging cooperation between academics and decision-makers.

**Objectives of the research**

This research was undertaken in order to provide an opportunity to review practice and experience on how crime prevention and safety policies are measured and evaluated in a number of European countries, with differing historical, social and legal traditions.

The research analysed policy practice and implementation experience relating to criminalisation, perceptions of crime, the informal economy and public policies of prevention, with a view to providing an overview of the state of the art on how the effectiveness of policies are measured and evaluated.

The main aim was to provide a clear view of the potential and limitations of the evaluation and prevention instruments used within a variety of policy-making contexts.

The research builds on the experience of 10 European countries and provides a number of important insights which will inform policy-making throughout the European Union.

**Scientific approach / methodology**

The conceptual and scientific framework for the project was established at a major European conference bringing together senior researchers and academics from the participating institutions. The substantive content areas addressed by the research were developed in a series of work packages which addressed the transversal issues of how crime prevention and security policies are measured and evaluated in the range of participating countries.

Each topic was explored in a series of three seminars bringing together key research actors from the countries involved in the workpackage. The seminars and the work undertaken in the interval focused on issues identified by the research which contributed to a comparative reflection on how to most usefully assess deviance, crime and prevention in Europe.

The methodology used in the research included:

- mapping the situation in a number of European countries
- identifying the good – as well as the bad – practices
- identifying areas of comparison within the European Union with a view to suggesting appropriate strategies for future development.

## **New knowledge and European added value**

The project has provided new and important insights which will contribute an added-value to legal and crime prevention systems' capacity to address issues of crime prevention and perceptions of security. This new knowledge is provided under four major headings:

### **(i) Surveys on victimisation and insecurity in Europe**

Although there is evidence of considerable progress in relation to the development of a relatively standardised list of victimisations studied, the same does not hold in relation to the study of perceptions of insecurity. In the latter case, the research instruments used are far from standardised, and in many cases are open to serious scientific criticism.

There are few countries in Europe where surveys on victimisation and insecurity are integrated into the decision-making and policy evaluation processes. In many cases they are seen as a minor adjunct to traditional police statistics. Many national, regional and local administrations experience difficulty in using the results of commissioned studies in their policy-making.

Appropriate institutionalised discussions within and between administrations are necessary in order to ensure that policy-makers at different levels of government are supported in maximising the results of such surveys.

The material produced in such surveys – when of sufficient quality – provides a context for the preparation of a large number of scientific studies capable of giving profound new insights into the knowledge of crime. Such research – beyond what is currently carried out even in well-resourced countries – is necessary in order to minimise the misuse of these surveys and to improve their quality.

If this level of scientific input is still largely absent, it is initially owing to the overly small number of researchers with a quantitative methodology orientation capable of mastering the relevant scientific literature and also working expertly on this type of data.

### **(ii) Self-reported delinquency (SRD) surveys in Europe**

SRD surveys have become a standard measure of delinquency in Europe. However, their validity cannot be determined in abstract terms. On the contrary, each survey should be analysed in contextual terms –paying particular attention to the sampling, the conditions of administration of the survey, and the construction of the questionnaire – in order to establish its degree of validity.

SRD surveys do not measure the most serious types of offences. However, they provide extremely useful information for minor and less-serious types of offences.

At a national level, the influence of SRD surveys on criminal policies is clearly related to the influence of the indicator of levels of juvenile delinquency in each country. In countries with a weak tradition of SRD studies, it seems that they do not play a major role in the development of criminal policies or may only have a relatively small level of influence at the local level (e.g. Italy).

On the other hand, when this crime measure becomes part of the criminological scene, it is often taken into account for such policies. This is the case mainly in the United Kingdom, where the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development has inspired some legal reforms.

In countries such as Finland, Germany and the Netherlands, SRD surveys also play an important role in the political debate on crime and crime prevention.

### **(iii) Comparison of survey data and police figures**

The comparisons between the level of crime as evidenced in police figures of recorded crime and the results of victimisation surveys in selected European countries have confirmed that police figures of recorded crime cover only a relatively small part of the types of victimisation experienced by the public. There are significant hidden numbers of crime victims which do not appear in official statistics in many countries.

Limited availability of resources for the police, and more broadly within their criminal justice systems, seems to be responsible for the substantially lower figures of levels of reported crimes available in official police statistics on crime rates in the newer EU Member States. Our analysis suggests that if resources for law enforcement and criminal justice in the new Member States catch up with that elsewhere in the Union, police figures for crime rates in these countries will rise steeply, even when the level of crime may in reality have remained stable or decreased as steeply as elsewhere.

The use of police figures of recorded crime for such comparative purposes will almost inevitably result in drawing erroneous conclusions, especially concerning trends in crime among some of the new Member States. In many countries a standardised survey will complement existing national surveys such as those in France, Italy, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and Switzerland. A standardised comparative survey should therefore be relatively modest in scope and sample size.

The questions on victimisation experiences should focus on those offences that surveys can measure best.

For a fuller picture of European crime problems survey results must be complemented as a minimum by statistics on police recorded homicides and more serious crimes. These core statistics should, where possible, be complemented by secondary statistics from health institutions on violence,

including sexual violence (death certificates and hospital or emergency units' admissions), data from self report studies on delinquency and drugs use and victimisation surveys among businesses. Added to these should be the assessments from other specialised state institutions and NGOs of large scale corruption, financial fraud, money-laundering and human trafficking.

#### **(iv) Evaluating crime prevention**

Evaluation is an ongoing and cumulative exercise within each policy development process. Successful evaluation requires the constructive engagement of both policy-makers and researchers based on mutual respect of the constraints they both work within.

A key related issue is to reflect on where particular crime prevention and safety programmes are located within a country. Means allocated to one particular place may be in short supply in another more needy area. In addition to evaluation it is therefore necessary to reflect on the distribution of crime prevention and safety programmes. Otherwise security measures will ultimately be the privilege of more advantaged groups within society.

Finally, crime prevention and safety policies are on the whole incapable of preventing the devastating effects of an accumulation of negative socio-economic conditions in certain social groups or poverty-ridden urban zones. Such policies should be seen as hiding the absence of effective social and economic policies or worse, the continued accumulation of segregative decisions and practices.



**Key messages for policy-makers, businesses, trade unions and civil society actors**

The research identifies a number of important messages for policy-makers which are relevant at both European and Member State levels.

These messages concern four major areas :

- (i) the approaches and methodologies used to collect and measure data on crime prevention and perceptions of security
- (ii) the interrelation between data collected on crime prevention and perceptions of security and data available in broader statistical systems within countries
- (iii) evaluation of policy effectiveness
- (iv) communication and dialogue between policy-makers and researchers

**(i) Approaches to data collection**

- More effort is required to develop surveys dealing with the incidences of victimisation and perceptions of insecurity across EU Member States.
- Greater consideration of practice at international level in terms of how such data is most appropriately gathered, and analysed is necessary. There are significant weaknesses with regards to the collection of data and primary information on crime prevention and perceptions of security in many EU Member States.
- Such instruments can only be fruitful if their results are serialised over time to allow for the observation and explanation of trends. This implies, in turn, that they should be managed in a way that ensures comparability across time.

**(ii) Interrelation with broader statistical systems**

- In addition to developing such surveys at national or regional levels where appropriate these results must be systematically compared against more traditional measures of crime available within national or regional systems (such as police or justice ministry statistics) and to other data, such as health statistics.
- Self Reported Delinquency (SRD) surveys should also be developed on a wider basis. These are important not only for the measurement of juvenile delinquency , but also, and more specifically, for the study of drug abuse and school violence.

**(iii) Evaluation**

- The evaluation of public policy must not be reduced to an internal audit which compares inputs and outputs.

Evaluation should commence with an analysis of outcomes, including unexpected and pernicious ones, or displacement effects.

- Successful evaluations require that the following conditions are met: (a) the evaluation must be part of the overall project plan and have been planned from the outset; (b) evaluators must be scientifically competent (c) Evaluators should enjoy complete independence in their work.

**(iv) Dialogue and communication**

The different levels of government must facilitate research on incidents of victimisation and perceptions of insecurity – where the state of knowledge changes rapidly - if European research is to reach and maintain itself at world-class level. Real-time availability of survey data (when produced by government agencies), in order to allow for secondary analysis, is an essential condition of success.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

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1.1 million €

**EC Contribution**

1.1 million €

**Website**[www.crimprev.eu](http://www.crimprev.eu)  
[www.gern-cnrs.com](http://www.gern-cnrs.com)

## Further reading

### 1. books:

Zauberman R., Ed., 2008, *Victimisation and Insecurity in Europe; A Review of Surveys and their Use*, Brussels, VUBPress.

Zauberman R., Dir., 2008, *Victimisation et insécurité en Europe; un bilan des enquêtes et de leurs usages*, Paris, L'Harmattan

Zauberman R., Ed., 2009, *Self Reported Crime and Deviance Studies in Europe; Current State of Knowledge and Review of Use*, Brussels, VUBPress.

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Robert Ph., Ed., 2009, *Evaluating Safety and Crime Prevention Policies in Europe*, Brussels, VUBPress

Robert Ph., Dir., 2009, *L'évaluation des politiques de sécurité et de prévention en Europe*, Paris, L'Harmattan

Robert Ph., Ed., 2009, *Comparing Crime Data in Europe; Official Crime Statistics and Survey Based Data*, Brussels, VUBPress.

Robert Ph., Dir., 2009, *Mesurer la délinquance en Europe: comparer statistiques officielles et enquêtes*, Paris, L'Harmattan.

### 2. brochures :

Zauberman R., 2008, *Surveys on Victimisation and Insecurity in Europe/Les enquêtes sur la victimation et l'insécurité en Europe*, Paris, Forum européen pour la sécurité urbaine.

Aebi M.F., 2009, *Self-Reported Delinquency surveys in Europe/Enquêtes de délinquance autoreportée en Europe*, Paris, Forum européen pour la sécurité urbaine.

Robert Ph., 2009, *Evaluation of Safety and Crime Prevention Policies in Europe/L'évaluation des politiques de sécurité et de prévention en Europe*, Paris, Forum européen pour la sécurité urbaine.

Van Dijk J., 2009, *Approximating the Truth about Crime; Comparing crime data based on general population surveys with police figures of recorded crimes/Approcher la vérité sur la délinquance: comparer les données d'enquêtes aux statistiques policières*, Paris, Forum européen pour la sécurité urbaine.

### 3. CRIMPREV info :

Robert Ph., Zauberman R., Recasens i Brunet A., Rodriguez Basanta A., 2007, *Les enquêtes sur la victimation et l'insécurité en Europe*, n°5

Robert Ph., Zauberman R., Recasens i Brunet A., Rodriguez Basanta A., 2008, *Surveys on Victimisation and Insecurity in Europe*, n°5bis

Aebi M.F., 2008, *Aperçu de la situation des enquêtes de délinquance autoreportée en Europe*, n°9

Aebi M.F., *An Overview of Self Reported Delinquency Surveys in Europe*, n°9bis

Van Dijk J., 2008, *Confrontation des données d'enquêtes sur la criminalité en population générale avec les statistiques de police sur les délits enregistrés*, n°17

Van Dijk J., 2008, *Comparing Crime Data Based on General Population Surveys with Police Figures of Recorded Crimes*, n°17bis

Robert Ph., *L'évaluation des politiques de prévention et de sécurité en Europe*

Robert Ph., 2009, *Evaluating Safety and Crime Prevention Policies*

**Related websites**

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<http://www.h-net.org>

<http://www.cesdip.fr/>

<http://www.eucpn.org/>

<http://www.crime-prevention-intl.org>

<http://www.msh-paris.fr>

<http://www.esc-eurocrim.org>

<http://www.transnationalterrorism.eu>

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