

ROUND TABLE TO PRESENT THE CHAPTERS OF THE EUROPEAN SOURCEBOOK*

CHAPTER 1 OF THE EUROPEAN SOURCEBOOK: POLICE STATISTICS

Rannveig Þórisdóttir and Tara Khan (Icelandic Metropolitan Police)

Rannveig Þórisdóttir: Tara and I oversaw the chapter on police statistics. The object of this chapter is to look into police statistics as a measure of crime. As Marcelo Aebi mentioned earlier, this is not a presentation of the total number of offences since we recognise the dark figure of crime. Still, this is an indicator of what is being stated at any given time as reported offences.

We asked for data on total offences and on 24 additional crime categories, including data on offences committed with firearms such as homicide and robbery. In the book, we are providing longitudinal data from 2011 to 2016, giving information on the number of cases per 100,000 population. We also provide information on changes in the number of reported offences within the period, with a measure of percentage change between 2011 and 2016. In total, four to five countries were not able to provide any information.

There are huge variations in how many countries were able to provide data in some categories. For example, regarding homicide and categories related to theft, most countries were able to provide data. But within other, perhaps newer or more complicated categories, fewer countries were able to provide data. There are also large variations in how well the countries were able to follow the definitions provided in the questionnaire. Therefore, it is very important to look carefully into how the data is defined by the country, not just the information regarding the number of reports.

It is also very important to consider when in the data process the data is being recorded. In total, seventeen of the countries reported that they recorded the data as soon as the police had registered the case, and an additional thirteen countries said that they recorded the information subsequently. This indicates that the data is predominantly labelled by the police and is referred to as input data, which is important because then it is not being changed so much as it is processed through the system.

* Additional material: the authors' visual presentation is available here: <https://rm.coe.int/presentation-roundtable-22-march-2021/1680a1e435>.

There are also differences between countries on how offences are counted. Most countries report that the offence was used as the counting unit, meaning, for example, that incidents with more than one offender accounted for one offence. There are also variations between countries if the principal offence rule is applied or not. Here, 36 countries provided information. Twenty countries report that they do not use the principal offence, and sixteen say that they do make use of the principle. The principal offence rule means that when there is a combination of events such as drug offence and violence, only the most severe one is counted.

We also asked how multiple offences are counted, and again, large variations appear between countries. In total, twenty countries reported that multiple offences are being counted as two or more, while fifteen countries reported that they count them as one. This can have huge effects on the number of reported cases, for example, in categories where multiple offences are common, such as in domestic violence and sexual offences against children. So, this needs to be taken into account when looking into the number of cases.

In the police chapter, we also provide data on the number of offenders from 2011 to 2016, as well as information on the percentage of women, minors, and foreigners in 2015. In total, 38 countries provided information regarding one or more offences. Not all countries that provided data offered information on how they are defined. But of those who were able to provide information, twelve said that the data was collected at the same time as data on the offence, which indicates that the labelling of the offence is also done by the police.

Information on police density is also provided in the chapter. That is how many police officers there are per population. While many countries answered the question regarding the number of police officers and civilians working with the police, few were able to meet the standard definitions, making comparison very difficult.

To sum up, overall, there are indications that the number of reported offences in the categories we collected data on are declining. This applies, for example, to theft of motor vehicles, where we see that 84% of the countries providing information reported that they are experiencing more than a 10% decline between the years 2011 and 2016. But despite these indications of general decline in number of reported offences, especially traditional offences, there are also indications of incline in number of reports in a number of categories, such as money laundering and fraud, especially cyber fraud. In total, 79% of countries report more than a 10% incline between 2011 and 2016. Of course, both may indicate real growth, but also changes in data collection and better awareness or better registration of these cases.

CHAPTER 2 OF THE EUROPEAN SOURCEBOOK: PROSECUTION STATISTICS

Jörg-Martin Jehle (Göttingen University, Germany)

Jörg-Martin Jehle: The prosecution chapter deals with the prosecution stage as the intermediate level between police and courts. This stage starts when the police hand over the criminal case to the public prosecution authorities or when the public prosecutor starts his own investigation, and the stage ends when the prosecutor makes his final decision, either bringing the case to a court, usually in the form of an indictment, or making a case-ending decision by himself. Of course, statistics cannot reflect the complex field of activities of the prosecutor. So, the focus is on the most important issues, the final decisions of the prosecutors, and data recorded refer to the output of procedures at the prosecutorial stage.

What have we collected? We have a longitudinal recording from 2011 to 2016; there we can demonstrate the output cases total and besides the cases brought before a court. This proportion of cases brought before a court is at the same time a measure for the attrition going on between the level of police and the courts. Here, luckily, most countries could provide data. Only for 2015, we have data for minors, women and foreigners and for different types of disposals; unfortunately, such a breakdown could be provided only by a minority of countries. And for 2015 as well, we have a breakdown by offence groups; there, a majority of countries could provide data.

In addition, we gathered data on persons whose freedom of movement was restricted by police custody and/or by pre-trial detention. Concerning pre-trial detention, there is data in the chapter on prisons as well. Finally, we can show the development concerning the number of staff of the prosecuting authorities, employees and prosecutors.

Altogether, our data collection demonstrates a mixed result. We can offer basic data for almost all countries available, but only poor data are available concerning the type of those disposals.

CHAPTER 3 OF THE EUROPEAN SOURCEBOOK: CONVICTION STATISTICS

Paul Smit (The Netherlands)

Paul Smit: The *Sourcebook* is a very heavy project, by which I mean the number of pages in the printed edition, because it is about 500 pages. The heaviest part of the book is the third chapter on convictions and sanctions. What we are presenting here in this chapter are not really the convictions, instead the counting unit in general is the person convicted. So, the statistics are on persons convicted and also persons receiving sanctions, basically the main sanction within any conviction. There are some exceptions, because some countries did it differently.

In this chapter, we have all persons convicted and the sanctions for the whole period, 2011 to 2016, and for all crime types. For women, minors, foreigners and EU citizens, we also have the percentages for the year 2015.

What is new in this edition, is that we also ask for legal persons convicted. There can be some legal persons convicted, mainly for fraud. Indeed, although not many countries could provide data for this either, because they do not have the data or because the concept of a legal person does not exist, ten countries could provide some data on legal persons.

For the sanctions, we have basically two tables for all 22 crime types. The first one is the kind of sanction: is it a non-custodial sentence sanction or a custodial sanction, either suspended or not suspended. That is one set of tables. The other set of tables focuses on the unsuspended custodial sanction and tells us something about the length of the custodial sanction. About half the countries were able to provide figures for this last set of tables. Also, for the kinds of sanctions tables we do have minors receiving sanctions.

Next, there is a table on persons held in pre-trial detention among the persons convicted, but only eight countries could provide information on that. What is also new in this edition, is that we have a table of the number of criminal court judges. Again, here, only a eight countries could provide data. The main problem probably is that in many countries there is no clear distinction, at least not an administrative one, between judges in a civil court and judges in a criminal court.

CHAPTER 4 OF THE EUROPEAN SOURCEBOOK: PRISON STATISTICS

Mélanie M. Tiago and Marcelo F. Aebi (University of Lausanne, Switzerland)

Marcelo F. Aebi: To shake things up a bit in this session, rather than just walking you through the available data in the chapter on prison statistics, we have decided together with Mélanie Tiago to highlight some trends. The backbone of Chapter 4 in the *Sourcebook* are the Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics on Prison populations, better known as SPACE I, that we produce for the Council of Europe at the University of Lausanne. We avoid duplicating efforts, in the sense that we do not collect the same data twice. Instead, we have the *Sourcebook* national correspondents check the SPACE data provided by their countries, fill in any gaps, and gather a bit of extra data on a few additional items.

The period covered by the sixth edition of the *European Sourcebook* coincides with a period of increasing response rates for SPACE, as more countries answered the SPACE questionnaire. This seems to be related to the fact that, since 2013, the SPACE annual reports are presented in a press conference that attracts significant media attention. In the European Sourcebook Group, we have always been concerned about the way in which the media deals with crime data, and consequently we have been reluctant to encourage contacts with journalists which could have helped in promoting our work. Nevertheless, the experience with the SPACE press conferences shows that we were wrong and that, under some circumstances, media attention can even help improve future data collections.

Let us explain this paradox. First, you must keep in mind that contemporary media tend to prefer “negative” to “positive” news. Almost every year the team of Jaime Rodríguez-Murphy at the Council of Europe produces a media coverage report that summarises the press articles about the SPACE I report. These show that the media of most countries seem to go through the report seeking the indicator in which their country scores “worst” to elaborate their headlines.¹ For instance, “Belgian cells in top three most overcrowded prisons in Europe”, “Is France among the five European countries with the harshest sentences?”, “Hungarian prisons are still more crowded than the European average”, “Italian jails most overcrowded in Europe says Council of Europe”, “Spain is among the European countries with more suicides in the prisons”, “England and Wales spend more on prisons than all of Europe except Russia” are some of the headlines from Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom respectively.

¹ These media coverage reports are available on the SPACE website in the section dedicated to each annual report. For example, the one covering the publication of the 2020 report can be found here: <https://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2021/10/2020-SPACE-I-survey-on-prison-statistic-media-coverage-report.pdf>.