



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
26 January 2011

Original: English

Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

Twentieth session

Vienna, 11-15 April 2010

Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

World crime trends and emerging issues and responses in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice

Improving the collection, reporting and analysis of data to enhance knowledge of trends in specific areas of crime

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2009/25, entitled “Improving the collection, reporting and analysis of data to enhance knowledge on trends in specific areas of crime”, the Economic and Social Council requested the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to establish an open-ended intergovernmental expert group, to be convened at least once between sessions of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, to prepare recommendations on the improvement of tools for the collection of relevant crime data, in particular the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, and of the collection, collation, analysis and reporting process, in support of the ongoing work of UNODC in that area.
2. Taking note of Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/25, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice further requested UNODC to strengthen the collection, analysis and reporting of accurate, reliable and comparable data on world crime trends and patterns, as well as to conduct studies on priority issues identified by Member States within the mandate of the Office.
3. Both the Council, in its resolution 2009/25, and the Commission, in its resolution 19/2, requested the Secretary-General to report to the Commission at its twentieth session on the implementation of those resolutions.

* E/CN.15/2011/1.



II. Activities of the expert group

4. The open-ended intergovernmental expert working group established by Council resolution 2009/25 was convened once prior to the nineteenth session of the Commission, at a meeting in Buenos Aires from 8 to 10 February 2010. In accordance with Council resolution 2009/25, the conclusions and recommendations of the expert group were reported in full to the Nineteenth session of the Commission.¹

5. The discussions, conclusions and recommendations of the expert group were informed by the structure and content of the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice systems, covering the years 2007 and 2008. The Survey for those years, sent to Member States in September 2009,² was developed by the Secretariat in electronic format on a pilot basis prior to the meeting of the expert group. It was made available, together with preliminary responses received from Member States, to the group at its meeting in February 2010.

6. Following consideration of the pilot Survey and the general principles that should guide the content and structure of a simplified and improved United Nations system for the collection of data on crime and criminal justice, the expert group recommended, in summary, that: (a) the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems should be disseminated annually in electronic format and that UNODC should prepare annual global crime trend analyses to be disseminated through the UNODC website; (b) the Survey should consist of a core and modular structure, including sections on police, prosecution, court and prison statistics, as well as two thematic modules, one of which should collect data on the topics of the prominent theme of the Commission; (c) Survey metadata and contextual information on crime should be expanded; (d) data on selected types of crime should be supplemented by the collection of relevant information from victimization surveys; (e) UNODC, in consultation with Member States, should develop a protocol for the identification of agencies responsible for responding to the Survey questionnaire, including the possible identification of a focal point; (f) efforts should be pursued towards joint data collection with relevant regional bodies; and (g) future rounds of the Survey could use a Web-based platform for questionnaire distribution and data entry.

7. The recommendations of the expert group were used by UNODC to guide and inform its subsequent work on the development of its data-collection system, including the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems covering 2009, sent to Member states in early October 2010,³ with a deadline for responses at the end of 2010. The improvements to the Survey and the data-collection system of UNODC, in line with the

¹ E/CN.15/2010/14. The report on the meeting of the expert group on improving the collection, reporting and analysis of crime data was made available to the Commission at its nineteenth session under the symbol UNODC/CCPCJ/EG.2/2010/2.

² The Survey sent in 2009 is available online at: www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/crime_survey_eleventh.html.

³ The Survey sent in 2010 is available online at: www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/crime_survey_twelfth.html.

recommendations of Council resolution 2009/25, the recommendations of the expert group and Commission resolution 19/2, are detailed in section III of this report.

III. Improving crime and criminal justice data collection, reporting and analysis

8. In accordance with the recommendations of the expert group, and with a view to developing a simple and efficient reporting system, the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems is now in electronic form (Excel format) and is conducted on an annual basis in order to ensure that data are as up to date as possible. Electronic replies received from Member States are transferred directly to the UNODC crime database system. Data are reviewed by the Secretariat and published online in a revised, simplified format on the UNODC website.⁴

9. The Survey questionnaire itself consists of the core and modular structure recommended by the expert group. The core questionnaire contains 10 groups of questions covering criminal offences reported to the police, persons brought into formal contact with the police, persons prosecuted, persons convicted and persons detained. The core questionnaire also includes questions on police, court and prison personnel. The modules in the most recent Survey included questions on the misuse of technology in the abuse and exploitation of children and requested additional information on offences constituting corruption and on data collected by Member States through the conduct of crime victimization surveys. In addition to questions related to the forthcoming prominent themes of the Commission, future modules will also cover forms of organized crime, counterfeiting, identity theft, money-laundering, crime involving armed violence and criminal activities related to acts of terrorism.

10. In accordance with the recommendations of the expert group, the contextual and metadata questions in the Survey questionnaire have been expanded in order to request greater detail on statistical counting rules and definitions applied. The responses on metadata are facilitated by the use of drop-down menus in the electronic questionnaire format. In addition, in line with international good practice, all questions concerning persons, whether crime victims or persons brought into formal contact with the police or law enforcement institutions, prosecuted, convicted or detained, are sex-disaggregated. The data questions themselves have also been extended to cover the five years preceding the most recent year for which data are requested. Historical data already reported by Member States for previous years are provided in the questionnaire in order to allow for corrections or updating as necessary. Preliminary analysis of responses to the latest Survey questionnaire, covering the period 2004-2009, suggests that such improvements allow the collection of more information on crime trends, as well as better understanding of underlying national data-recording systems, with a view to enhanced reliability and comparability of data on world crime trends and patterns.

11. In the area of crime definitions, in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Europe, UNODC is supporting a task force established by the

⁴ See www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/crimedata.html.

Conference of European Statisticians in the identification of principles for the classification of criminal offences for statistical purposes.⁵ The eventual development of an international crime classification system would not solve all challenges related to the cross-national comparability of crime statistics. It would, however, offer a common basis for coding and recording data on criminal acts or events. As this work progresses, the results will be used to inform the development, design and wording of questions for the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems.

12. The move to an electronic Excel format for the Survey questionnaire has produced gains in terms of simplified data entry and dissemination. Experience from the data-collection mechanisms established in respect of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto and the United Nations Convention against Corruption suggests, however, that a computer-based or online application allows respondents to further benefit from the efficiency and user-friendliness offered by modern information and communications technologies.⁶ With a view to extending this experience, UNODC is currently examining possibilities for the development of an online application for the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems. An online Survey portal would allow Member States to view and update at any time country data to be reported at the international level. It could also offer functionality for the exchange of data between Member States related to efforts, achievements and challenges in the area of crime prevention, as well as information on the nature, extent and evolution of national crime situations.

13. With respect to the procedure for sending the Survey questionnaire, both the expert group and the Salvador Declaration on Comprehensive Strategies for Global Challenges: Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Systems and Their Development in a Changing World, endorsed by the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at its nineteenth session, called on Member States to consider designating focal points to support the gathering and analysis of information on world crime and victimization trends and patterns.⁷ In response, the Secretariat invited Member States to appoint a focal point qualified to coordinate a response to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems.⁸ To date, 42 countries have formally appointed a focal point for the Survey. The appointment of focal points has led to enhanced coordination and administration of the Survey in those countries.

14. In response to the need to avoid duplication of efforts in crime data collection, UNODC has strengthened working relationships with the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat) and the Organization of American States (OAS). UNODC is examining possibilities for joint data collection with Eurostat for countries in the European region, and is coordinating crime and criminal justice data collection for countries in the Americas with the Department of Public Security of OAS. Over the next reporting cycles of the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, it is expected that this will eliminate

⁵ See ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/12.

⁶ See CAC/COSP/2009/CRP.3.

⁷ E/2010/30.

⁸ CU 2010/83.

duplication of data-collection initiatives, leading to a reduced reporting burden for countries in those regions. For countries in Africa, Asia and Oceania, the Secretariat is examining options for collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. During the reporting period, UNODC worked to improve coordination with the United Nations Statistical Commission, including through the submission to the Statistical Commission of a note by the Secretary-General on statistics on drugs, drug use and crime.⁹ The note presented suggestions on how to improve the tools used by UNODC in the collection of drug and crime statistics and called for a more active involvement of national statistical offices, particularly in relation to crime statistics and the implementation of victimization surveys.

15. Together with data from sources such as crime victimization surveys, analyses of crime and criminal justice data collected through the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems are presented to the Commission in the note by the Secretariat on world crime trends and emerging issues and responses in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice.¹⁰ During the reporting period, in-depth analysis of crime and criminal justice data was also carried out by UNODC in cooperation with the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control and published in 2010 in a report on international statistics on crime and justice. As stated in the report of the Executive Director on world crime trends, UNODC is further collaborating with the United Nations Global Pulse initiative to provide timely data and analysis on the impact of economic crisis on crime. Analysis of crime data in the context of development and crime prevention approaches will also be included in a UNODC report on intentional homicide, scheduled for publication in mid-2011.

16. Despite recent improvements to the UNODC data-collection system, country response rates to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems remain comparatively low. Some 82 countries responded to the Survey sent to Member States in 2009 (see figure), compared with 86 responses in 2007. As of January 2011, 44 responses have been received to the Survey, sent at the beginning of October 2010, the deadline for responses being the end of 2010.

17. On 30 July 2010, the General Assembly adopted resolution 64/293, entitled “United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons”. In paragraph 60 of the annex to that resolution the Assembly requested the Secretary-General, as a matter of priority, to strengthen the capacity of UNODC to collect information and report biennially, starting in 2012, on patterns and flows of trafficking in persons at the national, regional and international levels. Only 21 countries provided answers to the questions on trafficking in persons contained in the 2009 United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems. In comparison, official data had been obtained from 155 countries through the dedicated data-collection exercise undertaken by UNODC for the preparation of its 2009 *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*.¹¹ UNODC is

⁹ E/CN.3/2010/19.

¹⁰ E/CN.15/2011/10.

¹¹ Available from www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/publications.html.

therefore planning to launch, in cooperation with Member States, a dedicated and supplementary data-gathering exercise on trafficking in persons, with a view to supporting the production of the report on patterns and flows requested by Member States.

Countries responding to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems sent in 2009



Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

18. High-quality statistics reported at the international level are dependent upon the capacity of underlying data-collection systems at the national level. With a view to strengthening national data-collection tools and systems, UNODC continued to support countries in the conduct of crime victimization surveys during the reporting period, including in Kenya in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Planning is currently under way for a combined crime-victimization and drug-use survey in Ethiopia. Future technical assistance for victimization surveys in countries in South and South-East Asia is also planned with the support of the United Nations Development Account. During 2010, UNODC assisted the seven countries and territories of the Western Balkans with technical support for the conduct of household surveys on the nature and extent of corruption. Support continues to be provided for surveys on the integrity of civil servants in Afghanistan and Iraq.

19. Through the European Union-funded project “Development of monitoring instruments for judicial and law enforcement institutions in the Western Balkans”, UNODC continued to support countries and territories in the Western Balkans in 2010 with the delivery of training on the strengthening of police, prosecution and court information systems. In particular, activities under this project have succeeded in supporting the countries and territories of the subregion in the review and improvement of national data-collection tools. In cooperation with OAS, UNODC delivered training activities on completing the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems for countries of the Americas. UNODC has also recently concluded an agreement with the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics of Mexico for the establishment of a centre of excellence in crime statistics. The centre will focus on building knowledge and

methodology on crime and criminal statistics through both population-based surveys and administrative data.

20. In the area of monitoring serious crime involving armed violence and the use of firearms, UNODC collaborated with UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office for Disarmament Affairs of the Secretariat, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and the World Health Organization in the United Nations inter-agency Armed Violence Prevention Programme. A range of activities was undertaken in collaboration with those agencies, including inter-agency assessment missions, joint data collection and research.

21. UNODC prepared a global report on transnational organized crime threats, released in June 2010. UNODC has also been asked to provide support for the development and implementation of the regional programmes in the field office network.¹² In this regard, UNODC is supporting the development of regional assessments of transnational organized crime issues, in the framework of some of the regional programmes and through the regional offices concerned.

IV. Recommendations

22. With a view to improving the response rate to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and the coordination of its administration, it is recommended that the Commission encourage Member States to appoint a focal point qualified to coordinate the responses to future Survey questionnaires.

23. With a view to meeting the need for accurate information about global crime trends and patterns, and to improving the quality, scope and completeness of crime data, it is recommended that the Commission invite Member States to provide complete and timely responses to the latest and future waves of the Survey. The Commission may also wish to encourage Member States and other donors to provide extrabudgetary resources to sustain technical assistance activities of UNODC in the area of strengthening capacity for the collection and analysis of crime and criminal justice data at the national and regional levels.

24. With a view to collecting the necessary information for the preparation of the new UNODC biennial global report on trafficking in persons requested by Member States, to be issued for the first time in 2012, it is recommended that the Commission encourage Member States to support and to provide timely responses to the dedicated data-gathering exercise that UNODC will organize in close cooperation with them.

¹² See ECOSOC resolution 2009/23.