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TECHNICAL REPORT

Development of a European Crime Report

Improving safety and justice with existing crime and criminal justice data

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Prepared for the European Commission Directorate-General Home Affairs

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RAND EUROPE

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Understanding crime in the European Union (EU) is a complex endeavour. National differences in how crime data are collected and reported are important, albeit partial, explanations for the complexity. To improve cross-national comparisons and benchmarking in the field of CCJ policy, former Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security (DG JLS) – now this project is within Directorate-General for Home Affairs (DG HOME) – commissioned RAND Europe to create a framework for developing a European Crime Report (ECR).

The inherent usefulness of the ECR will be manifold: by allowing a picture of trends over time and across countries it will be possible to map these onto other key variables such as inequality to get a more sophisticated understanding than we have to date of drivers of and associations between different types of crime.

The development of the ECR also presents an opportunity to forge a long-term strategy for thinking about the future of crime statistics in Europe, and propose possible ways of achieving this vision. The development of the ECR is a first step, albeit the most critical, in paving the way for future innovations.

Approach

RAND Europe has undertaken this study to scope data availability issues; identify the range of current projects and information that could feed into an ECR; collate views from a variety of stakeholders; analyse and synthesise insights; and provide guidance for the creation of an ECR. Specifically, we:

- reviewed existing literature on methods to analyse and synthesise CCJ data
- reviewed literature and other information sources to identify datasets on CCJ (with at least one Member State)
- reviewed national ministries' websites and linked institutions to identify a crime report supported by the relevant ministry in each Member State

- conducted a targeted review of annual or biannual reporting mechanisms in a range of contexts
- interviewed key stakeholders, including early career researchers, academics, policy analysts, crime statisticians and officials in ministries of justice or interior
- surveyed academics and officials in ministries of justice or interior
- solicited feedback in a session at the 2010 European Society of Criminology conference.

Based on these efforts as well as our own experiences conducting cross-national CCJ research, we offer the following findings and recommendations.

Key Findings

Research in this study reveals weaknesses that an ECR could address and aspects of its content that could increase its visibility and sustainability. We develop these in detail below.

No New Data Collection is Necessary to Begin Developing a European Crime Report

There are many people, groups and organisations across the EU and globally who are interested in drawing on CCJ information to compare crime-related phenomena across countries and over time. These interested parties include policymakers, journalists, scholars and even the wider public. The number of data sets is relatively large; however, there are few places where existing CCJ data is brought together in an informative and accessible way. Meanwhile, those collecting data already face serious recording and reporting burdens. The limited availability and accessibility of CCJ reporting is not surprising given the many well-established challenges of using CCJ data in an informed manner for the purpose of making cross-country comparisons and analysing trends. Therefore, there is a strong impetus for an ECR that would bring together existing data and reporting on CCJ matters in the EU to allow comparison over time and across Member States. There is also a case for establishing a website collecting data and reporting in one location and presenting them in a "smart" way that allows users to see and work with the data to undertake their own analyses.

"Smart Aggregation" Could Improve Comparative Analysis

Research finds the key report gaps on the contents of an ECR are i) a report pulling together various elements of CCJ to form a more complete picture, and ii) a report that explains plainly the problems with making comparisons over time and across countries. Given these two main needs, an ECR could contain contextual information that highlights definitional differences in a more intelligent way.

In this report we introduce the idea of "Smart Aggregation" for bringing together existing CCJ data and reporting in a manner that facilitates informed comparisons and discourages less useful comparisons and analysis.

The forms that this smart aggregation could take include:

- **Building in contextual factors**. There are social, economic and political factors that can lead to differences in CCJ situations across countries and over time. For example, research finds large gaps between the poor and rich tend to result in more elevated overall crime rates. Using indicators for poverty (e.g. at-risk-poverty rates) and income inequality (e.g. Gini coefficient) when describing overall crime rates and potentially offence types could improve understanding of crime trends; this could lead to improved policies in more than just the area of CCJ.
- **Introducing innovative ways of highlighting definitional differences**. A report and/or database in CCJ could be well served by not allowing for misleading comparisons and explaining why some comparisons may be misleading. For example, an ECR would explain why reporting of "per 100,000" rates of incarceration leads to an inaccurate comparison of countries because some countries include foreign nationals in their overall population numbers and some do not. Thus, comparing countries that differ in this recording of population figures leads to using different baselines across countries.
- **Producing smarter indicators**. Rather than developing new indicators, generating indicators with already available data would be a useful role of an ECR. For example, an indicator reported for police performance is "arrests for a specific offense as a proportion of offences known to the police". A smarter indicator to use in an ECR could be the number of arrests for a specific offence as a proportion of reported *victimisations* for that offence. By changing the denominator from offences known to the police – which is currently widely used – to offences reported in victimisation surveys, this smarter indicator would eliminate differences in victims' police reporting propensities across countries over time and provide more insight into how police are performing overall.

Three Key Decision Areas to Address in Considering the Sustainability of a European Crime Report

Sustainability of an ECR depends on a number of factors. Three deserving special consideration include:

- **Funding streams**. As discussed earlier, producing a report over time, even if

periodically, would be an advantage to an ECR. For example, despite the usefulness and high-quality data generated in the European Sourcebook, its limited funding security threatens its sustainability into the future. Having a report that is sustained over an extended period and produced with some regularity is desirable for deepening an evidence base in comparative CCJ.

- **Model of implementation**. The model of implementation is important because it is the vehicle for reaching a larger audience. For example, research indicates that expert working groups and independent, rigorous and quick peer review results in greater use of particular datasets, thus leading to greater likelihood of sustainability.
- **Dissemination and communication strategy**. If few are aware of the ECR's merits, policymakers and researchers will be less likely to use the information to improve policy and approaches to addressing CCJ challenges. As CCJ information can be very easily misinterpreted and often controversial, the way in which the objectives and findings of an ECR are communicated becomes an important facet of sustainability.

Recommendations

The European Commission (EC) has a number of options for collecting crime-related information from existing sources and presenting it in a way that facilitates meaningful comparisons. Based on the evidence gathered and insights discovered in this study, we offer four main recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Address Challenges of Cross-national Comparability Through "Smart Aggregation"

We propose a framework termed smart aggregation, for allowing CCJ comparisons and therefore learning across the EU in the context of a wide variation in legal systems, definitions, reporting practices and social, economic and policy contexts. We have developed this framework for facilitating meaningful comparisons and highlighting challenges to comparability building on the framework outlined by Von Hofer (2000) and European Sourcebook. The framework we propose for smart aggregation would facilitate comparison of countries that share similar legal systems and definitions of particular crimes, highlight data collection issues that otherwise undermine comparability, and draw attention to wider contextual factors associated with CCJ practices within countries. Much of this could be presented visually to provide a rapid overview of cross-national comparisons that are and are not possible or recommended with existing CCJ information.

In addition to facilitating useful comparisons and highlighting challenges to comparability this smart aggregation framework proposes the creation of whole new indicators (and suggests a few examples) that informatively draw together CCJ reporting.

Recommendation 2: Develop a European Crime Portal on the Internet

The European crime portal (ECP) would be a new website that would collect and organize links to several EU crime resources on the web. As noted in the EC solicitation for this project, "Within Member States there are various crime reports originating from various public and private sources, carried out on a regular or once-off basis, addressing general and/or specific aspects of crime and criminality." Thus, there is a need for one source where policymakers, practitioners and researchers can go to get CCJ reports, statistics and microdata for multiple Member States. Figure S.1 presents a sample screenshot of what the ECP could look like.

Figure S.1: Sample Screenshot for the European Crime Portal

Recommendation 3: The Inaugural Print Edition of the European Crime Report should Focus on Violent Crime

Given the numerous crime types and challenges with definitions, a first edition could focus on core crimes where the definitions are less controversial. This is because research suggests there are many difficulties in building an ECR and an approach that could facilitate its launch and subsequent sustainability could be to start with straightforward core crimes and

allow learning over time. In particular, the first iteration of an ECR could focus on violent crime because literature and interviews indicate there is more consistency intentionally over homicide and robbery than over property damage and larceny. Also, violent crime imposes larger social costs per crime (see Heaton, 2010).

Recommendation 4: Develop a Web-based Interactive European Crime Report based on Data from Printed Edition and Other Sources

By developing a website or web portal that includes datasets and reports, there is an opportunity to permit users to create bespoke reports that would promote insightful comparison and smart aggregation. In addition to serving as digital clearinghouse for European CCJ reports and datasets, the ECP could also host a web-based interactive European Crime Report (*i*ECR). An *i*ECR could include all of the data from the print version as well as data from other sources. To facilitate visualisation and allow for mapping capabilities, those developing the *i*ECR should consider using the same technology used for the dynamic and visually stunning Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) eXplorer.

This is a possible timeline for implementing these recommendations:

➔ 2011
- EC produces tender for ECP.
- EC produces tender for the 2013 ECR focused on violent crime.

➔ 2012
- Contractor launches *beta* version of ECP, solicits feedback.
- 2013 ECR draft final starts peer review process.
- EC puts out tender for next ECR.

➔ 2013
- Inaugural 2013 ECR published.
- Add *i*ECR capabilities to the ECP.
- Launch official version of ECP.