

2020 Asia–Pacific Statistics Week

A decade of action for the 2030 Agenda: Statistics that leaves no one and nowhere behind

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Investing in Statistical Frameworks - Prioritization of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics

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Abstract:

This paper describes the challenges faced by Asia and the Pacific region in the field of crime and criminal justice statistics. It explores initial progress made by some Member States and analyses best practice and international standards to confront regional data gaps and increase awareness of adequate statistics mechanisms, to address violence, crime and equal access to justice. The Centre of Excellence for Statistics on Crime and Criminal Justice in Asia and the Pacific (UNODC-KOSTAT CoE), established in 2019, supporting this process is also discussed.

Evidence-based policymaking and monitoring are essential components of governance. However, crime and criminal justice statistics, the backbone of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)16, are not prioritized in the Asia-Pacific, where only two of the six tier I SDG16 indicators have sufficient data to measure progress.

Furthermore, at the national level, designated statistical authorities do not prioritize crime and criminal justice statistics, resulting in an increasingly acute situation. During the Third Regional Meeting on Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics, October 2019, 40% of participants stated that their national system had de-prioritized crime and criminal justice statistics during the last 2-3 years.

International standards to help improve the quality and availability of crime and criminal justice statistics, such as the International Classification of Crimes for Statistical Purposes (ICCS), the Manuals on Corruption Surveys and Victimization Surveys, and the Multi-System Estimation methods for the total number of victims on trafficking in persons were developed. The UNODC-KOSTAT CoE supports national adoption of these mechanisms to enhance the production and use of crime and criminal justice statistics and raise awareness of their value for effective policymaking through high-level advocacy, training, and technical assistance.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the UNODC-KOSTAT CoE has already motivated domestic discussions and some Asia-Pacific countries are gaining political support to build a coordinated national approach to crime statistics.

For example, the Philippines has developed an inter-agency coordinated Institutional Framework by promoting the need for effective policymaking, development planning, government budgeting, and ensuring adherence to international commitments, such as UN agreements.

Kazakhstan has developed a Committee on Legal Statistics and Special Records under the Office of the Prosecutor General, for coordination and development of technological tools such as inter-agency databases for harmonization.

The paper discusses these examples in more detail.

Keywords: SDG 16, Evidence-based, Policy, Asia-Pacific, Data

1. Introduction:

Reliable and timely data on crime and criminal justice is a fundamental tool for developing evidence-based policies for preventing crime and monitoring relevant SDG targets in the areas of crime, violence, trafficking, access to justice and the rule of law in accordance with the 2030 Agenda at the national, regional and global levels.

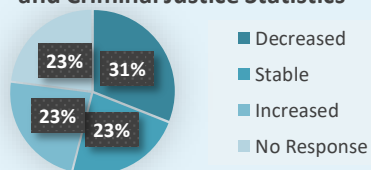
Accounting for over 60% of the global population (UNFPA, 2014), the Asia-Pacific region, faces significant challenges against organised crime and corruption leading to a high prevalence of drug and precursor production and trafficking, wildlife crime, trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants, counterfeit goods, falsified medicines, cybercrime and fraud (UNODC 2019).

However, crime and criminal justice statistics are not prioritized in the region. Only two of the twelve indicators of SDG 16 are anticipated to achieve the 2030 target, eight of them cannot be measured, two of them reverse the trend (UNESCAP 2020).

Many countries in the region lack the capacity and the coordinating responsibility to access relevant statistics. Limited data is produced due to limited human and physical resources and is rarely disaggregated as required for SDG indicators. Open data dissemination is inadequate, especially in crime and criminal justice statistics.

To maximise efficiency and effectiveness, countries need to invest in statistical systems to collect, analyse and disseminate data emerging from methodologically sound processes in a well-coordinated system, which shares information for effective policymaking. National investment in a system of crime and criminal justice statistics has numerous benefits, including: reliable data; improved resource and budget allocation; insight into crime patterns and trends; increased knowledge for further research, especially new and emerging crimes; enhanced public trust; the development of indicators to define success; and evidence-based policymaking (UNSD 2003).

Figure 1: Level of Priority of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics



The Third Regional Meeting on Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics provided insight into the prioritization of crime and criminal justice statistics in the region; 40% of participants felt that the priority of crime and criminal justice statistics had ‘decreased’ over the years (*Fig. 1*).

UNODC has developed international standards and distributed tools to help Member States to enhance statistical frameworks, improving the quality and

availability of crime and criminal justice data. UNODC tools include the International Classification of Crimes for Statistical Purposes (ICCS), the Manuals on Corruption Surveys and Victimization Surveys, and Multi-System Estimation methods to calculate victims of trafficking in persons. Regional Centres of Excellence were established to support implementing standards and tools. The UNODC-KOSTAT CoE, established in 2019, supports countries in the Asia-Pacific to invest in crime and criminal justice statistics, adopting these mechanisms, and has already motivated domestic discussions to gain political support for a coordinated national approach to crime statistics.

This paper analyses best practice and international standards to confront regional data gaps and explores initial progress made by two countries.

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2. Methodology:

A road map to improve the quality and availability of crime statistics at the national and international level (Road map) was prepared in 2013, and an updated Road map was endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) and the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) in 2019. Significant progress has been made in the implementation of the Road Map and foundations have been laid to support countries in the production of high-quality data to monitor the 2030 Agenda, particularly in the context of SDG 16.

This paper explores international initiatives provided to increase awareness on the importance of the crime and criminal justice statistics, implement sound methodologies, and enhance capacity in producing and using the data effectively. It also discusses how these enterprises have motivated domestic discussions and investments in Asia-Pacific region in building a coordinated national approach to crime and criminal justice statistics and brings together the experience of two countries. Both the Philippines and Kazakhstan recently experienced investing in crime and criminal justice statistics. The two case studies examine the motivations behind the prioritization of crime and criminal justice statistics, the major challenges faced, how these challenges were overcome, and the remaining obstacles.

3. Result:

3.1. International Initiatives

A number of statistical standards and methodologies have been developed to support countries to produce national statistics on crime and criminal justice and to enhance the comparability of statistics at the international level. One of the early developments was the Manual for the Development of a System of Criminal Justice Statistics (2003)¹, which presents a general framework for the development of a national system of criminal justice statistics written in non-technical language for a broad audience.

The Manuals on Victimization Surveys (2010) and Corruption Surveys (2018) provide guidance for the entire processes from survey planning to analysis and dissemination of the results. The surveys enable the measurement of the dark figure of crime while gathering necessary data for the SDGs.

In addition, methodology to estimate victims of trafficking in persons (Multiple System Estimation: MSE), and a standardised survey module to collect statistics for monitoring progress on SDG 16 were developed by UNODC and other international partners.

The most significant development was the ICCS; the first common framework to categorize all criminal offences for the systematic production and comparison of statistical data across different time, criminal justice institutions and jurisdictions. This means that the ICCS is internationally comparable and applicable to all forms of crime data including data collected in surveys.

UNODC regularly collects and updates global statistical series on crime and criminal justice through the United Nations Surveys on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS), Illicit Arms Flow Questionnaire (IAFQ), Global data collection on Trafficking in Persons (GLOTIP), Global data repository of individual seizures on wildlife (WorldWISE). These data are available at the UNODC Data Portal.

¹ An updated version of the first edition Manual for the Development of Criminal Justice Statistics (1986), United Nations publication, Sales No. E.86.XVII.16

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In implementing the updated Road map to improve crime statistics at the national, regional and international level, building on the successful experience of the Centre of Excellence in Mexico, in 2019 a new Centre of Excellence is launched in Republic of Korea for Asia and the Pacific. The new Centre of Excellence supports countries in the region focusing on both institutional and technical levels to address major regional challenges while raising awareness to prioritize crime and criminal justice statistics.

3.2. Best Practice

In Asia and the Pacific, the first regional effort to implement the ‘Road map’ to improve crime and criminal justice statistics was the Regional Meeting on Crime Statistics and Victimization Surveys (Bangkok, 2014), which was followed by the second Regional Workshop on Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics (Seoul, 2016) and Regional Training Courses on Victimization Surveys (Pattaya, 2017) and Implementation of the ICCS (Daejeon, 2017). These regional activities identified political, methodological, operational and financial challenges, and discussed the needs to establish a regional resource hub to assist countries to combat these challenges.

Participants at the Third Regional Meeting on Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics (Chengdu, 2019), and Regional Advisory Group to the Centre commonly emphasized that awareness and the benefits of crime data among political and high-level decision makers needs to be raised.

In this regard, it is important to note that these contiguous engagements of the international organizations with national representatives motivated certain countries to invest in the crime and criminal statistics. For example, the Philippines and Kazakhstan recently reformed their statistical framework for better measurement of crime and criminal justice data.

Philippines

In the Philippines, many agencies such as the Department of Justice, National Police, Drug Enforcement Agency, National Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, Bureau of Corrections, Parole and Probation Administration, Courts, and Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), are responsible for various crime statistics. PSA plays a coordinating role, but with limited capacity for comprehensive coordination from providing standard to compiling data and analysing. Therefore, there were needs for addressing fragmented and inconsistent law enforcement and criminal justice data across different agencies, and devising common measurements and harmonized data for crime and criminal justice for policy, development planning, government budgeting, information sharing/access, and information systems interoperability.

These needs and international initiatives motivated them to develop a national institutional framework for crime and criminal justice statistics. Especially the endorsement of the ICCS and recommendation to implement it urged them to develop the Philippine Standard Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (PSCCS), which was issued in 2019.

This year, the Philippines government set to work on the statistical framework regarding criminal justice as a collaborative effort among different agencies including the Judiciary, law enforcement, prosecution and corrections agencies. The PSA, with strong mandate² and assisted by the national development agency and a justice sector coordinating body, initiated a permanent inter-agency committee.

² Republic Act 10625 mandates the PSA to develop standard frameworks and methodologies for the collection, processing, analysis, and dissemination of data

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Associated challenges in the framework development derived from the absence of high level political initiatives to create a dedicated government body for crime and criminal justice statistics. It was because each law enforcement and criminal justice agency had different statistical systems and capacity and also because of low prioritization compared to other social and economic services. Frequent changes in political leadership was another challenging factor as it hampered sustained coordination, which subsequently reset ongoing dialogues impacting the progress of framework building.

Updating the framework is still slow and delayed due to bureaucracy and coordination constraints, as well as limited capacity. Fragmented institutional and legal framework causes some inter-agency competition and limits the level of cooperation.

However, it is expected that the Philippines will reach the goals to establish statistical a framework for crime and criminal justice through constant efforts to raise awareness and capacity among stakeholders on the use of harmonized data for development, planning and evaluation of relevant policies, with supports from international partners. The Department of Justice will play a role to improve inter-agency coordination and dialogue within the law enforcement and the justice sector, engaging with oversight agencies to cooperate for harmonized crime and criminal justice statistics.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan also used to face challenges associated with a lack of data due to the fragmented decentralized statistical system, which hindered a reliable reflection of the criminal situation and the status of crime control.

To improve the coordination of law enforcement agencies, enhance the effectiveness of the fight against crime and corruption, and ensure rapid identification of causes of crime and the necessary responses, Kazakhstan reformed its crime and criminal justice statistical system to a non-departmental centralized system, led by the Centre for Legal Statistics and Information, under the Office of the Prosecutor General, as an oversight body.

In 2003, a further reform was issued by Presidential Decree to improve the system of legal statistics and special records, replacing the Centre for Legal Statistics and Information with the Committee on Legal Statistics and Special Records (Committee) to address remaining data gaps and form a single continuous mechanism throughout the system of crime and criminal justice statistics. The Committee maintains and develops crime and criminal justice statistics within the state legal information statistical system, and supervises all state authorities as the coordinating body, and accumulates entire volume of information available in the country on offenders, wanted criminals, missing persons and unidentified bodies. The Committee provides the Presidential Administration, Security Council, Government, law enforcement, judiciary and other national authorities with statistics and information-analytical materials on the patterns, trends and threats to counter crime, corruption and drug addiction to maintain rule of law in the country.

A key component that has significantly improved the Committee effectiveness was the transition from a paper-based registry to an online registry. This effort has resulted in the development of the Unified Register of Pre-Trial Investigations, a database for law enforcement officers to enter information about all incoming reports on criminal cases, ensuring that criminal statistics are generated from the moment of filing a complaint and reporting a criminal offence up to the results of court proceedings.

Kazakhstan still faces challenges but aims to overcome them by enhancing: international comparability of crime statistics; statistical analytical capacities; methods for conducting statistical observations on the state of law and order with involvement of subjects and users of legal statistical

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information; and introducing new methods to produce and analyse data based on the extensive use of sample surveys and expert assessments.

4. Discussion and Conclusion:

As discussed, accurate, accessible, transparent, comparable and methodologically sound statistical data are needed to understand trends and patterns of crime and violence, illicit trafficking, access to justice, rule of law and corruption. It is also needed to monitor relevant targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However investment on these topics is not the top priority in many countries, especially in Asia and the Pacific region. The best way to overcome this challenge is to keep exposing decision makers to the discussion on the value of strengthening their crime and criminal justice statistics systems, sharing comparable data, and enhancing analytical capacities for crime prevention.

This paper represents two examples of the investment results motivated by such exposure. Kazakhstan took a top down approach directed by the President, whereas in the Philippines, pressure to reform emerged from the condition of the statistical system and crime; seemingly a bottom-up approach. However, both countries invested in crime and criminal justice statistics realizing the value and the obstacles in their statistical systems. Both countries shared that their reforms were lengthy processes, requiring multiple modifications as part of an ongoing effort to improve crime and criminal justice statistics quality and effectiveness.

Both countries still fight with remaining challenges, and require support from international partners to continue raising awareness, provide technical assistance. The challenges faced in these two examples represent some of the most frequent and biggest challenges for countries in the region but the insights provided hope to serve as a reminder that crime and criminal justice statistics are an integral component in the fight against crime to motivate other countries to invest in the crime and criminal justice statistics. The UNODC-KOSTAT CoE, as a regional resource hub, is ready to provide support for countries who are willing to invest in crime and criminal justice statistics.

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