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## Crime and Justice Statistics in Ireland

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## I. Introduction

This paper describes the current status of Crime and Justice Statistics in Ireland, how these data are produced and perspectives on their further development. While many agencies are involved the view given is that of the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the statutory agency with the responsibility for the collection of statistics (including Crime and Justice statistics).

## II. Background

Ireland is a small country with a population of 4.2m, slightly bigger than Berlin and just over half the size of London. It has a centralised statistical system although there are examples of it broadening out to encompass other agencies and departments. The CSO has three offices, 2 in Dublin and the corporate HQ in Cork. It has just over a hundred statisticians.

The CSO is responsible for the official state Recorded Crime Statistics. It is also the primary source for government statistics relating to Crime and Criminal Justice. Other government agencies, including the Prison Service and the Courts Service release annual reports in relation to their areas of responsibility, which include statistical data. Under the Statistics Act the independence of the CSO is guaranteed so although most of the agencies that provide the data report to the Minister of Justice, the CSO, an independent, statutory Government Agency determines publication date and content. There is no privileged pre-release access other than a discretionary briefing of an hour or two prior to release.

Responsibility for Reported Crime Statistics moved from *An Garda Siochana* (Police) to the CSO. This transition was the result of a decision made by the Irish Government Task Force on Crime Statistics and was completed in 2006. Since then, the CSO has introduced a new classification scheme for Crime Statistics (April 2008). *An Garda Siochana* still has responsibility for recorded crime statistics prior to 2003.

Although the CSO is the main provider of Crime and Justice statistics, other agencies also provide data in response to requests from members of the public or from Parliament. In relation to queries involving data from multiple sources, the Central Statistics Office usually takes a coordinating role. The administrative data systems of the various government agencies have not yet been fully integrated.

There is strong interest among users in recorded crime since this is the most frequently produced series. There is interest in sub-national statistics even down to police station level.

### Classifications and counting rules

The CSO introduced a new Crime classification in April 2008. This is now used for all publications of recorded crime and has been backcast to 2003. Prior to this the classification since 1999 was of Headline/Non-Headline crimes and this still applies to pre 2003 series. Prior

to 1999 the classification was based on the legal definition of Indictable/Non-Indictable offences.

The Irish Crime Classification System introduced this year has three levels of coding which aggregate to 16 offence groups. The classification uses a social rather than a legal model of crime which has allowed a common sense approach to some crimes sensitive for historical or cultural reasons and has addressed some of the anomalies present in the previous classifications.

### **The ICCS Offence Groups**

There are over 200 criminal incident types (incident type is a grouping of similar offences in the PULSE system), classified under the following 16 groups:

- *Group 01: Homicide Offences*
  - Includes dangerous driving causing death
- *Group 02: Sexual Offences*
- *Group 03: Attempts/Threats to Murder, Assaults, Harassments and Related Offences*
- *Group 04: Dangerous or Negligent Acts*
  - Includes most serious road offences
- *Group 05: Kidnapping and Related Offences*
- *Group 06: Robbery, Extortion and Hijacking Offences*
- *Group 07: Burglary and Related Offences*
- *Group 08: Theft and Related Offences*
- *Group 09: Fraud, Deception and Related Offences*
- *Group 10: Controlled Drug Offences*
- *Group 11: Weapons and Explosives Offences*
- *Group 12: Damage to Property and to the Environment*
- *Group 13: Public Order and other Social Code Offences*
- *Group 14: Road and Traffic Offences, Not elsewhere classified (NEC).*
  - Covers most road offences, partially based on FCPS data. Included only in the Annual Report.
- *Group 15: Offences against Government, Justice Procedures and Organisation of Crime*
- *Group 16: Offences not elsewhere classified (NEC).*
  - Includes fisheries, animal and other miscellaneous offences. Included in Annual Report.

Similar to the Australian system, data can be provided at 2 levels (Group 01 – Homicide offences), or 3 levels (Group 011 – Murder/Manslaughter/Infanticide) or 4 levels (Group 0111 Murder). This allows the statistics to be as general or specific as the end-user requires.

### **Counting Rules**

Offences reported or which become known to members of *An Garda Síochána* are recorded when, on the balance of probability, a *Garda* determines that a criminal offence defined by law has taken place, and there is no credible evidence to the contrary. The counting rules used by the CSO are:

- **Primary Offence Rule:** Where two or more criminal offences are disclosed in a single episode, it is the primary criminal offence that is counted
- **One Offence Counts Per Victim:** One offence counts per victim involved with the exceptions of cheque/credit card fraud and burglary.

- **A continuous series of offences** against the same victim involving the same offender counts as one offence.

### **Quality Control for Administrative Data**

Data from PULSE (Police Using Leading Systems Effectively) is fed to the CSO on a quarterly basis through a secure channel. As PULSE is a dynamic system individual records change from one quarter to the next as the case progresses. For example an offence of assault may change to one of murder if the victim subsequently dies. One of the main tasks for the CSO on receipt of the PULSE data is to ensure that the primary flags in the PULSE data, which are used for counting primary offences have been applied correctly, as per the counting rules. This data cleaning involves a dialogue between the CSO and the *Gardai* and quality issues are fed back to the *Gardai* PULSE team.

## **III. Data Sources**

**CSO:** Produces Recorded Crime Statistics quarterly and annually based on administrative data provided by the police PULSE system. The PULSE was introduced in 1999. It is an Oracle relational database system used to link all the police stations in the Republic of Ireland. It is controlled from a central facility in Castlebar, County Mayo. PULSE is an all-round police intelligence system, with the facility to generate reports and tables. In addition to the PULSE system *An Garda Siochana* also provide some data to the Central Statistics Office from the Fixed Charge and Penalty System (FCPS) for the purpose of producing minor road-and-traffic related offence statistics.

The CSO conducts Crime and Victimization (C+V) surveys of the general population resident in private households. C+ V surveys were conducted in 1998, 2003 and 2006. The C+V surveys have been conducted as an ad-hoc module on the Labour Force - the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS). The interviewing period is the three-month period from September to November and the questions are asked of all those aged 18 and over. The reference period for the C+V module is the previous 12 months. The module contained over fifty questions on crime-related topics, divided into two main sections: Household level and Individual level

Household questions included the following topics:

- Security of premises Burglary - theft without violence
- Theft of and from vehicles
- Physical assault

Individual questions included the following topics:

- Theft with violence
- Theft without violence
- Physical assault

The use of the QNHS as the survey vehicle for the Crime and Victimization survey imposes limitations on how much information can be collected and on what topics. The QNHS is a panel survey of households and is not set up for Computer Assisted Self-Interviewing (CASI) so questions on sensitive topics such as sexual assaults and domestic violence are not included. Questions are asked on the seriousness of crimes, and whether the crimes are reported to *An Garda Siochana*.

All the statistics produced by the CSO are available at <http://www.cso.ie/statistics/CrimeandJustice.htm>

**Irish Courts Service:** Produces annual reports, including statistics relating to the courts system based on administrative data. The Courts Service currently uses a relational database system called Court Case Tracking System (CCTS). This can be used for generating statistics on court cases.

**Irish Prison Service:** Produces annual report, including statistics relating to the prison system based on administrative data. The Prisons Service currently uses a relational database PRIS. This can be used to generate statistics relating to prisoners

**Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions:** Produces annual report, including statistics relating to the prosecutorial system based on administrative data.

**An Garda Siochana:** Traditionally produced Recorded Crime statistics based on the headline/non-headline crime classification. They are responsible for the recording of data on the PULSE system, which is then supplied to the Central Statistics Office. *An Garda Siochana* also produces data on minor road and traffic offences, based on the FCPS (Fixed Charge Penalty system). *An Garda Siochana* is responsible for the PULSE system, and for the FCPS system. FCPS is a relational database system used for the recording of “Penalty Points” for minor road and traffic offences. This data is supplied to the CSO when annual recorded crime statistics are being produced. *An Garda Siochana* is also responsible for the production of crime statistics prior to 2003.

PULSE links all the police stations in the country and classifies to different levels of geography. The main levels are

1. **National (highest)**
2. **Regional** : **6 Regions, covering the Republic**
3. **Divisional** : **26 Divisions, each assigned to a region**
4. **District** : **~110 Districts, each assigned to a division**
5. **Station (lowest)** : **500+ stations, each assigned to a district.**

Due to the structural changes in the police administration it needs to be able to cope with boundary changes. New boundaries were introduced in July this year, with new regional/division structures and the creation of new divisions. All data back to 2003 has to be recoded to the new structure of the PULSE system (all offences are recorded in the police station covering the area where the offences are believed to have occurred, the same depth of data is available at the station level as at the highest. For confidentiality reasons, statistics at the station or district (second-lowest level in PULSE, a grouping of police stations) may have certain groups (such as Group 02 – Sexual Offences) suppressed before being issued. Statistics at Divisional level or higher tends not to be affected by confidentiality issues.

**Other Government and Non-Government agencies:** Non-governmental Organisations occasionally produce crime and justice statistics and related research findings, for example the National Crime Council and the Rape Crisis Centres.

## **Crime Rates**

Based on the CSO’s population projections the CSO provides data on populations per *Garda* Division. As well as allowing for calculations per 1,000 and 100,000, this also allows for

detailed population figures on Garda Regions and Districts, such as the following examples from the CSO Recorded Crime Statistics (Annual Report) for 2006:

### **Other Crime Statistics available from the CSO**

The CSO also provides statistical data based on data produced by other sources in particular for publications on the profile of Ireland such as the CSO Annual Report, the Statistical Yearbook and compendia on North and South.

- Drug type information: seizures by type and quantity from *An Garda Siochana's* laboratories.
- "Penalty points" data from the FCPS
- Juvenile Liaison Office activities
- Fraud Investigations statistics, produced by the Garda Bureau for Fraud Investigations (GBFI).

## **IV. Future Developments**

The following are possible future developments in the Crime and Justice Statistics:

### **Administrative Data**

One of the main areas that would improve the statistical capability is the issue of multiple administrative data systems that are independent of each other. A key element of the National Statistics Board strategy is the Statistical Potential of Administrative Sources (SPAR). There is good potential for example to integrate the PULSE data system with the CCTS and the PRIS systems. This would be efficient and increase the analytical potential of the data. The CSO currently has statisticians seconded to the Ministry of Justice and there is interest from other agencies in strengthening their statistical infrastructure. *An Garda Siochana* has recently established an internal analytical capacity with the appointment of about 14 dedicated analysts earlier this year. The impact of this new service should show through in improved quality of administrative data and increase the potential to maximise the use of data with the service.

There is user interest and demand for data on traffic offences. The CSO is currently expanding statistics for minor traffic offences, based on the FCPS penalty points data.

Although the issue of crime hotspots is currently receiving media attention in the UK the CSO currently has no plans to introduce crime mapping at any detailed level.

### **Crime and Victimization Survey**

The current design of the Crime and Victimization Survey as a module within the QNHS means that there are severe limitations on the number of questions that can be included. A dedicated C+V survey would allow the scope of the survey to be broadened out, the sample to be increased to support further disaggregation and the inclusion of sensitive topics not currently included. The British Crime Survey is the model which is being considered but as part of an integrated household survey design. This development is subject to resourcing centrally.