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**Report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on the International
Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes**

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Items for discussion and decision: crime statistics

Report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2014/219, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS). The report describes the process followed to develop ICCS and its main substantive features. The International Classification will constitute a major tool to improve consistency and international comparability of statistics on crime and will also provide a coherent analytical framework for better understanding crime patterns and trends. In addition, the report sets out the plan to implement ICCS and describes tools and activities that will support countries in their gradual adoption of ICCS for production and international reporting of crime statistics. The Statistical Commission is asked to endorse ICCS as the standard international classification for crime statistics, to endorse the related implementation plan, to appoint the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime as the custodian of ICCS and to discuss other tools that will support ICCS implementation.

* E/CN.3/2015/1.



Report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes

I. Need for an international classification of crime

1. Over the past decade remarkable progress has been made in the collection and analysis of statistics on crime. Owing to global and regional data collection mechanisms¹ and to numerous analytical products,² the knowledge of international data on crime has gradually improved.

2. With some exceptions, for example in respect of data on intentional homicide, statistics on crime are significantly affected by data quality challenges. In particular, lack of comparability, both within and between countries, and lack of consistency in the way crimes are recorded and counted are well-known challenges that affect crime data (see [E/CN.3/2012/3](#)). In addition, data based on administrative records suffer from issues of accuracy because of the high level of underreporting (the so-called “dark figure” of crime).

3. In that context, the adoption of the International Standard Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS) will have a positive impact on the comparability and consistency of crime statistics. The International Classification will provide a common classification framework for data from administrative sources and victimization surveys and will therefore facilitate the measurement of the gap between crimes reported to the police and those experienced by the victims. While ICCS by itself will not solve all data quality challenges, it will offer a standard reference for the way crime is defined and classified.

4. It is important to note that, while the ICCS will provide the statistical framework for international reporting on crime, it will first have a positive impact at the national level, if adopted. The International Classification provides a valuable analytical framework at the country level and can also serve as an essential tool for harmonizing the collection and dissemination of data across the different criminal justice institutions (police, prosecution, courts and prisons), across subnational entities, which may adopt different legal frameworks or organizing principles, and across different data sources (administrative records and statistical surveys). By

¹ At the global level, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) carries out an annual data collection on crime and criminal justice through the United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems. Results from the survey, by country, are available from www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime.html. Various crime data collections are carried out at the regional level, including by Eurostat for European countries and by the Inter-American Development Bank and the CISALVA Institute for countries in the Americas.

² Recent studies include: *Global Study on Homicide 2013: Trends, Contexts, Data* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.14.IV.1) World Health Organization, United Nations Development Programme and UNODC, *Global Status Report on Violence Prevention, 2014* (Geneva, World Health Organization, 2014); Stefan Harrendorf, Markku Heiskanen, Steven Malby, eds., *International Statistics on Crime and Justice*, European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, affiliated with the United Nations (HEUNI) Publication Series No. 64 (Helsinki, HEUNI and UNODC, 2010); Marcelo F. Aebi and others, *European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics, 2014*, HEUNI Publication Series, No. 80 (Helsinki, HEUNI, 2014).

offering a common classification scheme of crime and criminal justice data, ICCS will improve the consistency of national data.

II. Mandate and process

5. The development of an international crime classification for statistical purposes was mandated by the Statistical Commission and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. The International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes was first discussed by the Statistical Commission at its forty-third session (E/2013/24) and by the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at its twenty-first session (E/2012/30 and Corr. 1 and 2). At their forty-fourth and twenty-second sessions, respectively, both the Statistical Commission (E/2013/24) and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (E/2013/30 and Corr. 1) approved the plan to finalize the classification by 2015 and noted that such a classification would serve as a powerful methodological tool for harmonization and for improving international and regional comparability. The plan was presented to the two Commissions as part of the report on a road map to improve the quality and availability of crime statistics at the national and international level (see E/CN.3/2013/11 and E/CN.15/2013/12). Activities identified in the road map, which provides a comprehensive framework for the improvement of crime statistics, are grouped into three broad categories: developing new standards and methodology on crime statistics; improving the capacity to produce and disseminate crime data; and improving international data collection and analysis.

6. The development of ICCS started with the adoption of the principles and framework for an international classification of crimes for statistical purposes, prepared by a task force led by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Economic Commission for Europe and endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians at its sixtieth plenary session, held in June 2012.

7. The International Classification was developed as a result of the active collaboration and valuable inputs of national experts from national statistical offices and criminal justice institutions representing all regions of the world; experts from regional and international organizations; and academics. The ICCS development process relied upon the continuous and valuable support of the Centre of Excellence for Statistical Information on Governance, Public Security, Victimization and Justice jointly established by UNODC and the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (INEGI). Three consultation meetings were held between 2012 and 2014 and, during the same period, two large-scale testing exercises of successive versions of ICCS were undertaken.³ Following the third consultation meeting, a final draft version of ICCS was sent by UNODC (which targeted national criminal justice institutions) and the Statistics Division (which targeted national statistical offices) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to Member States in August 2014 for their review. Comments on the final draft were provided by 44 Member States and six international organizations and were addressed in the

³ In the second testing exercise, which was held in 2014, a total of 41 volunteer countries participated, of which 19 were from Europe, 7 from Asia, 7 from the Americas, 6 from Africa and 2 from Oceania. Complete documentation of the process followed to develop ICCS is available from www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/statistics/iccs.html.

final version. During that same time, UNODC consulted with all members of the Committee on Coordination for Statistical Activities. Later, it sought approval from the Expert Group on International Statistical Classifications in respect of the ICCS. The final version of ICCS is thus the result of extensive consultations and testing exercises that have confirmed the validity of the approach, suggesting the feasibility of a gradual application of the classification to crime and criminal justice statistics produced at the national level.

III. Main features of the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes

8. National statistics on crime refer to criminal offences as defined by each country's legal system. Since penal legislation is extremely complex and varies considerably from country to country, differences in the legal definition of offences are inevitable and hamper international comparison. Thus, harmonizing crime statistics based on legal provisions would be extremely challenging, if not impossible.

9. In order to overcome such challenges, ICCS is based on behavioural descriptions rather than legal specifications derived from criminal laws. Crimes as defined in criminal law are typically associated with actions or behavioural and contextual attributes that are typically considered to be an offence (for example, wounding or injuring, or taking property without consent). The International Classification systematically groups all offences defined as "criminal offences" into discrete and hierarchical categories by labelling them with commonly used terminology (such as "burglary", "robbery" or "kidnapping") and by clearly defining them according to the behaviours constituting the respective criminal acts. The base that the classification describes is the universe of criminal acts which may appear in some or all national laws. The wide disparities of what countries consider to be "criminal acts" make it impossible to create a comprehensive definition of crime in the abstract, in other words, unrelated to the criminal laws establishing them. The common denominator for what constitutes a crime is that it consists of a range of events that are defined as such and are punishable by law.

10. By following a behavioural rather than a legalistic approach, ICCS is able to provide a common definitional framework for the systematic production and comparison of statistical data across different criminal justice institutions and jurisdictions as well as across methods of data production. This allows ICCS to be applicable to all forms of data on crime that are collected at different stages of the criminal justice process (police, prosecutions, courts and prisons) and across different data sources (administrative records and statistical surveys) (see [E/CN.3/2013/11](#)). Similarly, ICCS can be a framework to consolidate data from subnational entities that may have different statistical systems or legal frameworks (as may be needed, for example, in federal states).

11. The universally applicable standards provided in ICCS enhance data consistency and their application will contribute to the improvement of the quality, comparability and relevance of crime and criminal justice statistics. Offences are grouped in a meaningful and systematic way and, as a result, the application of ICCS facilitates the capability to accurately produce, disseminate and analyse crime data that will serve to inform public policies and programmes in the areas of crime prevention, rule of law and criminal justice reform.

12. The International Classification is based on statistical practices and principles and meets the established standards for international standard classifications.⁴ It is exhaustive — all events that are known to constitute criminal offences in at least one country can be placed into an existing category of ICCS. The categories are mutually exclusive, which means that all criminal offences fit into one, and only one, category. The description of each category clearly defines the respective event/behaviour and avoids overlaps with other categories. All the categories of the classification are described in objective and detailed terms. Each offence has an act- or event-based description, which is the core set of actions, behavioural and contextual attributes that define the offence. The classification is also statistically feasible, as tested on the basis of existing data collections of the significant number of countries that volunteered to participate in the testing.

13. In ICCS, criminal offences are assigned to categories on the basis of a number of criteria, including the target of the crime, the impact on victims, the way the crime is perpetrated (*modus operandi*), the motivation of the perpetrator(s) and the seriousness of the crime. In developing ICCS, priority was given to criteria of particular relevance to policies on crime prevention and criminal justice. For example, data organized according to ICCS can provide answers to questions on trends and comparisons regarding various types of acquisitive crime, crime of a sexual nature or environmental crime.

14. The hierarchical structure of ICCS comprises four levels. The first level has 11 categories (sections), which are further divided into divisions, groups and classes, as follows:

1. Acts leading to death or intending to cause death
2. Acts leading to harm or intending to cause harm to the person
3. Injurious acts of a sexual nature
4. Acts against property involving violence or threat against a person
5. Acts against property only
6. Acts involving controlled psycho-active substances or other drugs
7. Acts involving fraud, deception or corruption
8. Acts against public order, authority, and provisions of the State
9. Acts against public safety and state security
10. Acts against the natural environment
11. Other criminal acts not elsewhere classified

15. The classification goes beyond the purpose of counting crime and provides a framework to describe the nature of crime for the purpose of producing more policy-relevant information. Such a framework can be built around the list of characteristics of crime events, victims or perpetrators as described by the

⁴ Andrew Hancock, “Best practice guidelines for developing international statistical classifications”: paper prepared for the Expert Group Meeting on International Statistical Classifications, held in New York from 13 to 15 May 2013. Available from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/class/intercop/expertgroup/2013/AC267-5.PDF>.

disaggregating variables (also called “tags”), which enable the coding of additional information for relevant offences, thereby enriching the analysis of such characteristics related to particular crimes. For example, the use of the tag on “situational context” allows for the identification of all crimes committed in the context of organized crime. Such crimes would normally be classified only under their original type of offence (such as homicide, extortion, kidnapping, etc.) and, as a result, there would be no appreciation of the role that organized crime might play in committing all forms of crime (see box below).

16. There are an almost infinite number of characteristics of crime events, victims or perpetrators that could theoretically be of interest in different parts of the world. For analytical and comparative purposes it is clearly beneficial to apply a harmonized minimum set of basic policy-relevant characteristics to crime data. That minimum set includes variables for descriptions of crime events, victims and perpetrators, as shown in the figure below.⁵

Level 1 categories of the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes — minimum set of basic policy-relevant characteristics to crime data⁶

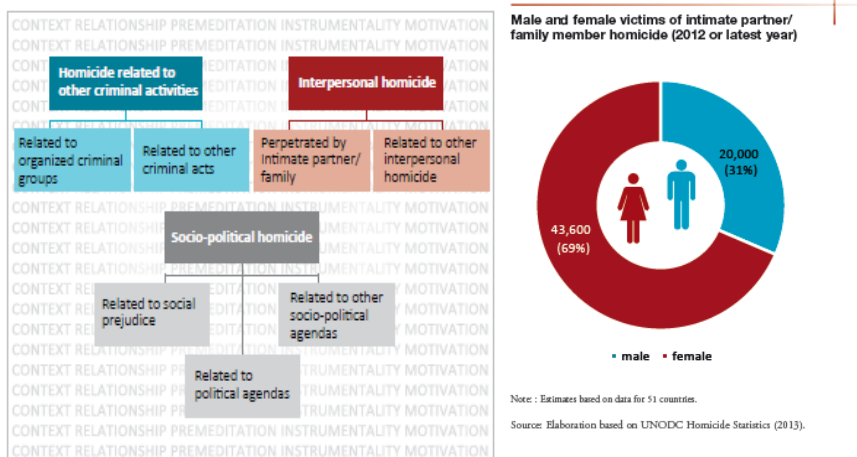
<i>Event disaggregations</i>	<i>Victim disaggregations</i>	<i>Perpetrator disaggregations</i>
At: attempted/completed	SV: sex of victim	SP: sex of perpetrator
We: type of weapon used	AV: age of victim	AP: age of perpetrator
SiC: situational context	STV: age status of victim (minor/adult)	STP: age status of perpetrator (minor/adult)
Geo: geographic location		ViP: victim-perpetrator relationship
Lo: type of location	Cit: citizenship	Cit: citizenship
Mot: motivation	LS: legal status of victim (natural/legal person)	LS: legal status of perpetrator (natural/legal person)
Cy: cybercrime related	Int: intoxication status of victim	Int: intoxication status of perpetrator
Rep: reported by	ES: economic sector of business victim	ES: economic sector of business perpetrator
		Rec: recidivist status of perpetrator
		ES: economic activity status of perpetrator

⁵ Using the disaggregating variable system, for example, allows the identification of particular policy-relevant crime types. Kidnappings perpetrated by organized criminal groups in a certain region with the use of firearms, for example, can be identified as kidnappings with the following disaggregations: “Situational context” (“organized-crime related”); “Type of weapon used” (“firearm”); and “Geographical location of the crime” (“geographical division”). Similarly, femicides can be identified as intentional homicides with the disaggregations “Sex of victim” (“female”) and “Motivation” (“gender-based”).

⁶ The variables described in the table can be used as disaggregating variables when sets of data are considered and as “tags” when single events are recorded.

Box**How International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes tags can improve the policy relevance of crime data: the case of homicide**

Counting the number of killings that are to be classified as intentional homicide, provides some information on the level of violence that a country may experience, but alone can't explain the type of violence experienced and how it can be prevented. Using the two International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes tags on "situational context" and "relationship between victim and perpetrator", homicide can be characterized as following:



With such characterization, it is possible to identify the nature of different forms of homicidal violence which require different types of intervention. Risk factors change for each of the homicide typology. Using this classification at the global level, it can be noted, for example, that while the great majority of all homicide victims in the world are male, the great majority of homicide perpetrated by family members or intimate partners are female (UNODC 2014, *Global Study on Homicide*).

17. The full structure of the classification and its disaggregating variables is contained in the information document entitled "International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes: Principles — Structure — Application" issued as a conference room paper for the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission. The document contains two parts and an annex. Part one provides an introduction on the history, nature and purpose of ICCS and the principles and criteria applied in its development. Part two sets out the full structure of the classification. The annex contains an alphabetical index to facilitate usage, sections on a proposed system for coding crimes along the structure of ICCS and more detailed instructions on the classification of specific forms of crimes.

IV. Implementation plan

18. After its adoption at the international level, the implementation of ICCS will require a number of coordinated activities to support countries in its gradual use for both national purposes and international reporting. The plan includes four main components: an information campaign to alert national authorities to the existence

of the classification and its benefits; the development of methodological tools to provide guidance to data producers and users; technical assistance programmes targeting national data producers; and the establishment of an appropriate organizational and institutional framework at the international level to foster implementation of ICCS. The implementation of the plan will require additional resources whose availability will determine the pace of completion.

Information campaign

19. At the outset, UNODC will widely disseminate ICCS, both in hard copy and electronic format. To facilitate implementation in the global context and subject to funding availability, UNODC will translate ICCS into the six official languages of the United Nations.

20. Dissemination will take place through formal and informal channels, targeting all relevant national authorities that are involved in the production of statistics on crime, including police, prosecution, court, prison administration and national statistical offices.

21. Dissemination will also target users of crime statistics, including researchers and academia, policymakers, non-governmental organizations and the media, which should be made aware of the advantages stemming from a widespread adoption of ICCS.

Methodological support

22. Countries will need methodological guidance to fully implement ICCS and, subject to funding availability, UNODC, in cooperation with the Centre of Excellence, international, regional and national organizations, will produce a manual to assist countries in gradually making crime statistics compliant with the International Classification. The implementation manual will comprise a series of volumes, each of them addressing specific implementation challenges:

- **Volume I: Mapping national administrative crime statistics systems into ICCS.** In most countries, administrative crime statistics are already produced by law enforcement and criminal justice institutions on the basis of the national penal code and other legislations. Volume I will provide practical guidance on how to map national statistical frameworks into the conceptual and definitional framework of ICCS.
- **Volume II: Mapping victimization surveys data into ICCS.** Volume II will provide practical guidance on how to translate the data collected through victimization surveys into the framework of the Classification.
- **Volume III: Counting rules.** Countries can use different criteria to record and count crime on the basis of the very nature of criminal offences, the constraints of existing recording systems and the diversity of information needs. Several counting units are currently used at the national level, for example, offences, cases, victims or perpetrators. Different criteria are also used to count crimes, for example, when there are multiple offences by one perpetrator. Volume III will address such issues by developing a comprehensive statistical framework for counting crime in a consistent and accurate manner in the context of ICCS.

- **Volume IV: ICCS codebook.** In order to facilitate ICCS implementation, volume IV will describe a comprehensive coding system to be used to codify single offences. It is likely that ICCS will initially be used to aggregate statistics that have been classified according to existing national practice. Once ICCS becomes more widely used, national systems will be able to begin to adopt it in order to codify each single event recorded for the first time (as occurs with the International Classification of Diseases).

23. The timing for finalizing the production of the four volumes of ICCS will be subject to the availability of resources. Depending upon existing resources, it is expected that volume 1 will be finalized by 2016.

24. Besides developing the implementation manual, a consultation mechanism will be established with the assistance of a technical advisory group of ICCS. The consultation mechanism will act as resource for queries related to the content and implementation of the ICCS and provide advice to interested countries.

Technical assistance

25. Technical assistance will be crucial to the successful implementation of the ICCS, and UNODC will promote a number of initiatives, including the production of e-learning packages, face-to-face training workshops, the exchange of practical experiences, expert consultations and targeted in-country assistance.

26. Priority will be given to activities at the regional level to optimize the use of resources and facilitate the exchange of expertise, and UNODC will seek to develop partnerships with regional organizations such as the Statistical Office of the European Union, Eurostat, the regional commissions and regional development banks. The Centre of Excellence will also develop a programme to assist countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in the implementation of ICCS.

Organizational and institutional framework

27. In order to ensure that ICCS remains a vital and useful tool, it is necessary to identify its custodian, as recommended by the Expert Group on International Statistical Classification of the Statistical Commission. It is proposed that UNODC takes up the role, considering that it is the focal point for statistics on crime and criminal justice in the United Nations system and that it has successfully led its development. In order to best fulfil the role, UNODC will need expert advice. It is therefore proposed that a Technical Advisory Group be established. The group would comprise substantive experts from national statistical offices and other national institutions responsible for the production and dissemination of statistics on crime, as well as representatives of academia and international and regional organizations. The group will be a valuable instrument for providing guidance to UNODC in the various steps of ICCS implementation. In particular, it will provide technical advice in the development of methodological tools and training programmes and on the application of ICCS on the regular collection of crime and criminal justice statistics from Member States. The working method of the group will mainly be via electronic communication, although its meetings will be convened regularly, at least once every two years.

28. The United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems serves to collect global data on crime and criminal justice and is managed by UNODC. The data collection exercise was initiated in the 1970s and since then has been supported by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in a number of resolutions.⁷ With the finalization of ICCS, the Survey will need to be adjusted to the new classification and its definitional framework. The Survey will then become an instrument to promote the implementation of ICCS. Through the revised Survey, countries will receive additional guidance on the implementation of ICCS, and through the annual data collection exercise it will be possible to monitor to what extent countries can comply with ICCS, while at the same time identifying implementation challenges.

29. The revision of the United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems will be conducted in close consultation with the ICCS advisory group and national technical experts. It is envisaged that the revised survey will be finalized in time for the data collection round of 2016.

30. Several of the activities highlighted in the implementation plan will require additional resources. While the Centre of Excellence will continue to be an important partner in that respect, UNODC will actively seek extrabudgetary funds, in particular to support technical assistance activities, and will seek to develop international or regional partnerships to accelerate the implementation of ICCS.

V. Maintenance of the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes

31. As with any other international classification, ICCS will need to be maintained and reviewed. A number of factors will have an impact on the maintenance schedule, such as the emergence of new criminal offences, the changing nature of policy information needs on crime and the overall quality of the current version of ICCS. The decision to undertake revisions of ICCS will depend upon a number of indicators derived from lessons learned during the implementation phase, such as results of the United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems in terms of the capacities of countries to provide data complying with ICCS, the technical advice provided by the Expert Group on International Statistical Classifications and the feedback received from national representatives. The technical advisory group will decide if and when a revision of ICCS is needed and will also provide guidance on the contents and modalities of the revision.

VI. Points for discussion

32. The Commission is invited to:

(a) Endorse the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes as the standard international classification for the production of statistics on crime and criminal justice;

⁷ General Assembly resolutions 65/232 and 66/181; Economic and Social Council resolutions 2009/25 and 2012/18.

(b) Endorse the plan, which will facilitate the implementation of the classification at the national, regional and international levels;

(c) Invite regional organizations to partner with UNODC to develop regional programmes on the implementation of ICCS;

(d) Appoint UNODC as the custodian of ICCS and support the creation of a technical advisory group to provide substantive advice on all aspects related to the implementation of ICCS;

(e) Invite Member States and donors to provide the necessary resources to allow for successful implementation of ICCS.
