



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
17 February 2012

Original: English

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### Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

Twenty-first session

Vienna, 23-27 April 2012

Item 6 of the provisional agenda\*

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

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

**Note by the Secretariat**

#### *Summary*

The present document was prepared in accordance with the practice established by Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/18. The document provides information on preliminary results from the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems covering the year 2010, on statistics on trends and patterns in intentional homicide and on the prominent theme of the twenty-first session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice: Violence against migrants, migrant workers and their families. The document also includes an overview of some of the methodological challenges in obtaining crime and criminal justice data and improving their quality.

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\* E/CN.15/2012/1.



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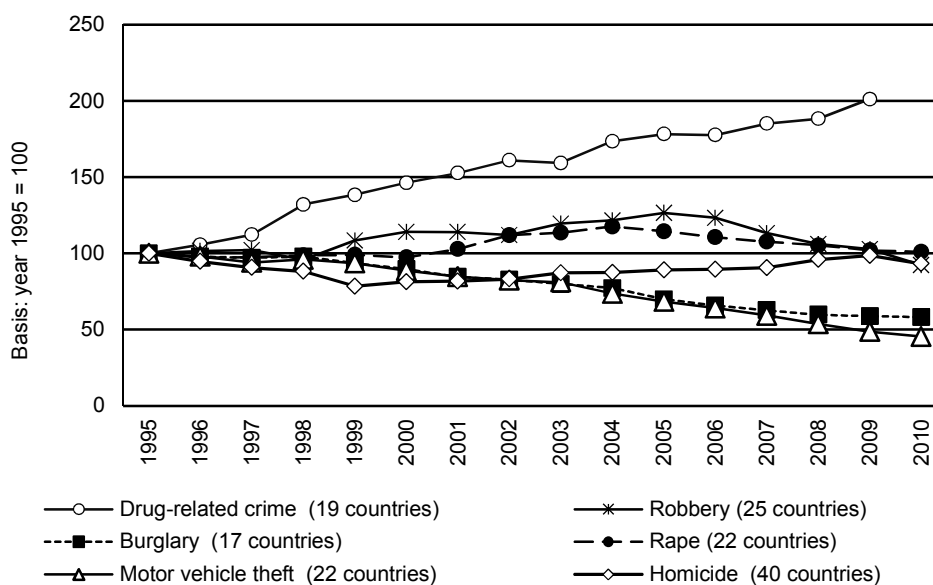
## I. Introduction

1. The present document, prepared in accordance with the practice established by Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/18, includes the most recent information available to the Secretary-General on world crime trends and the state of crime and criminal justice.
2. The present document focuses on levels of and trends in specific crime areas, including violence against migrants, migrant workers and their families, which is the prominent theme for the twenty-first session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. The document also presents an overview of some of the methodological challenges in obtaining crime and criminal justice data and improving their quality. Some information is provided on current work at the international level to address those challenges.
3. Understanding the global crime situation and crime trends still represents a major challenge because of the many methodological and operational difficulties that preclude a number of countries from collecting and disseminating good-quality statistical data. Different legislative frameworks, complex institutional arrangements, varying operational capacities in generating data and diverse statistical standards also hamper the comparability of data across countries and the possibility of generating regional and global estimates.

### **Long-term trends**

4. With respect to conventional crime, figure 1 shows the broad trends in property-related crime, violent crime and drug-related crime over the last 15 years in countries for which police-reported data have been available for a considerable period (predominantly countries in Central and Eastern Europe, North America, Asia and Oceania). On average, the level of property-related crime has slowly decreased while, in contrast, drug-related crime has continually increased. Trends in violent crime have been more irregular, also as a result of different patterns in the countries examined: in 2010, levels of intentional homicide, rape and robbery were close to those experienced 15 years earlier.

Figure 1  
Trends in conventional types of crime in countries for which long-term trend data are available, 1995-2010



Source: United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) homicide statistics.

5. The trends described above are not, however, the rule for all types of crime in all areas of the world. As shown below, different areas of the world have deviated from the average pattern, and trends in intentional homicide have seen significant changes in recent years, particularly in countries in the Americas.

## II. Recent trends in intentional homicide

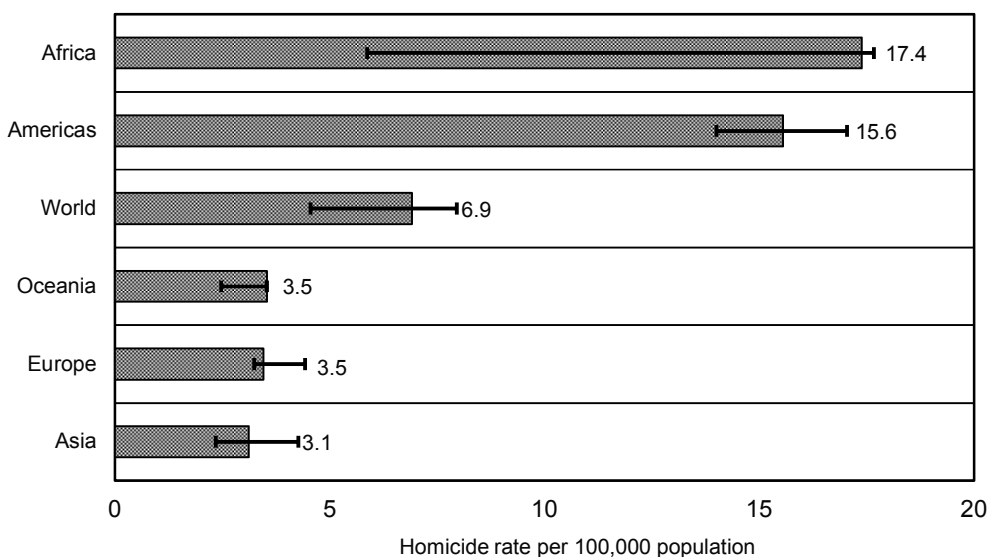
6. Because of its gravity, intentional homicide is constantly monitored by national authorities and, in general, offences are duly recorded by law enforcement agencies. Accordingly, statistical data on intentional killings are constantly generated at the country level, although different legislative frameworks, operational arrangements and methodological standards can hamper the availability and quality of data at the international level. Figure 2 shows homicide rates by region. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has led international efforts to collect, standardize, analyse and disseminate data on intentional homicides, while providing continuous support to countries in their capacity to generate such data.<sup>1</sup> Assessing homicide levels and, more importantly,

<sup>1</sup> In 2011, thanks to the commitment of States to producing and sharing data on intentional homicide, UNODC issued the *Global Study on Homicide*, an analytical report on global, regional and country trends on homicide. The report includes figures on intentional homicide for 208 countries and territories and provides analytical insights into various typologies of homicide, their contexts and on the link between homicide and development.

understanding the contexts conducive to homicide are the first step for effective law enforcement and for developing targeted prevention policies.

7. According to the most recent data available, the total number of intentional homicides in 2010 was estimated at 468,000, which corresponds to a global average homicide rate of 6.9 per 100,000 population. While taking into account that current estimates vary according to the source used, the highest homicide rates were recorded in Africa (17.4 per 100,000) and in the Americas (15.5 per 100,000), while the rates in other regions (Oceania, Europe and Asia) were consistently lower (see figure 2).<sup>2</sup>

Figure 2  
**Homicide rates by region, 2010 or latest available year**



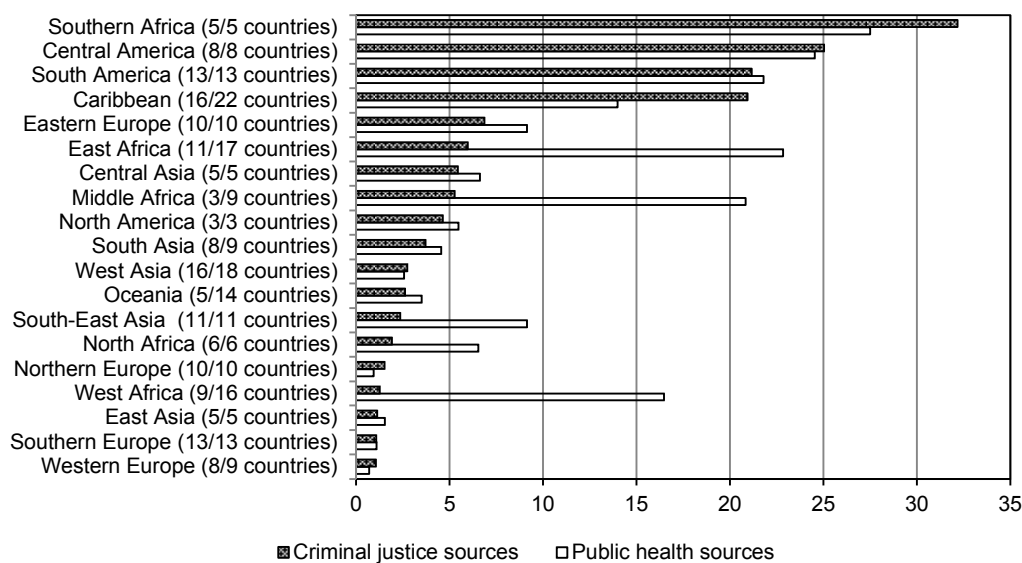
Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

Note: The bars represent the population-weighted average homicide rate, with high and low estimates.

8. As figure 3 shows, Southern Africa and Central America, South America and the Caribbean have considerably higher homicide rates than other subregions, while, at the opposite end of the scale, Western, Northern and Southern Europe and East Asia have the lowest homicide rates. Figure 3 also highlights the problems associated with data availability and quality that can hinder the understanding of patterns of violence. It shows that it is primarily in subregions with high homicide rates, such as the Caribbean and East, Central and West Africa, as well as South-East Asia, Eastern Europe and North Africa, that there continue to be large variations between data from criminal justice and public health sources. By contrast, almost all subregions with lower homicide levels (below 5 per 100,000 population) show consistency between criminal justice and public health figures.

<sup>2</sup> At the national level, homicide data are generally from two different sources: criminal justice and public health records. Differences in data from the two sources can be the result of different technical capacities and definitions.

Figure 3  
**Homicide rates by subregion and data source, 2010 or latest available year**



Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

Note: The bars represent the population-weighted average homicide rate, with high and low estimates.

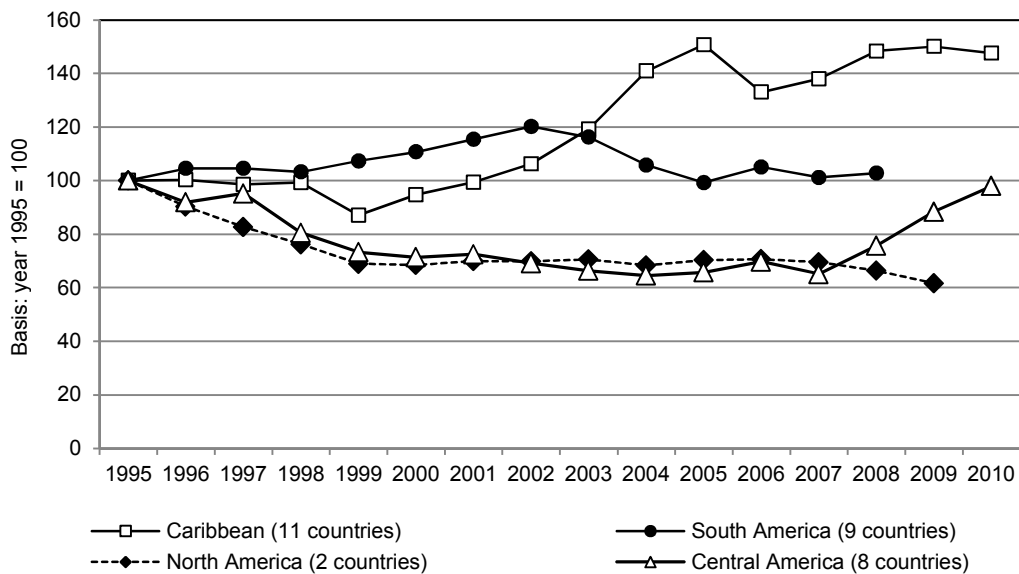
9. In regions where time series are available, it can be seen in figures 4-6 below that the homicide rate decreased in eight subregions between 1995 and 2009; Central America and the Caribbean were the only two subregions where the homicide rate increased. No data on regional or subregional trends are available for Africa and Oceania.

10. While the Caribbean has, with the exception of a temporary drop in 2006, experienced a steady increase in homicide rates over the past decade, the rates in Central America decreased between 1995 and 2005 and then experienced a sharp increase starting in 2007. The causes of such trends are multiple; they include income inequality, economic stagnation, legacy of political violence and gender roles. Against this background, increasing activity of organized criminal groups and increasing availability of firearms have often triggered increasing levels of homicide.

11. In most countries in Asia, available data indicate a downward trend in homicide levels, although there are no complete time-series data for a number of very populous Asian countries. At the same time, homicide trends are fairly unclear in post-conflict countries such as Afghanistan or Iraq as no time-series data for them are available.

12. Homicide rates have decreased in the vast majority of European countries since 1995. Several countries in Eastern Europe experienced rising levels of homicide until the end of the 1990s and a following steady decline after 2002. That trend was probably linked to an improvement in socio-economic conditions and an improvement in security measures and emergency health care. Most Western and Northern European countries have low and decreasing homicide rates.

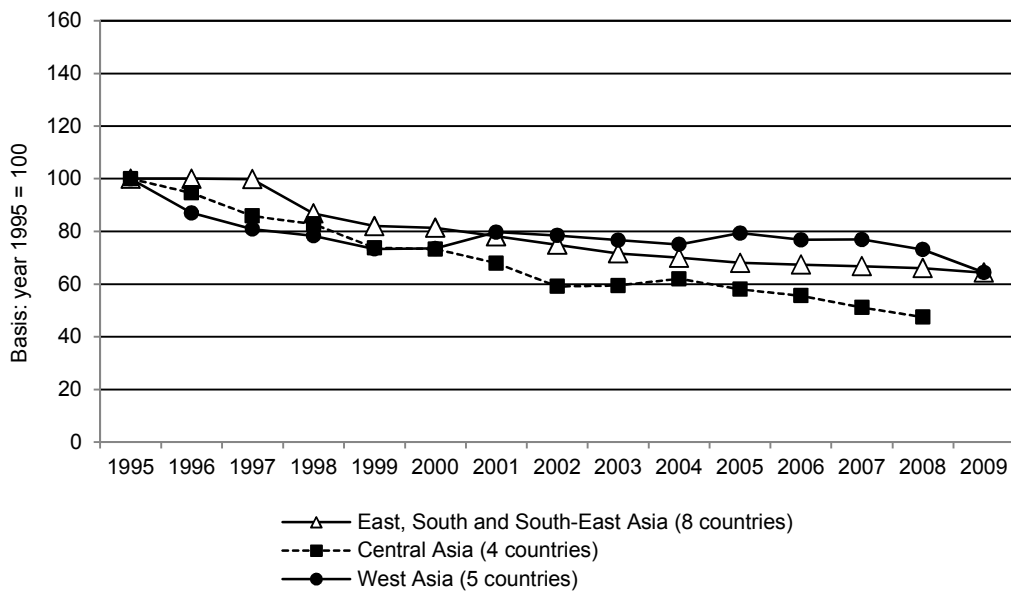
Figure 4  
Trends in homicide rates in the Americas, by subregion, 1995-2010



Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

Note: The lines represent percentage change in a population-weighted homicide rate based on the starting point of 1995.

Figure 5  
Trends in homicide rates in Asia, by subregion, 1995-2009

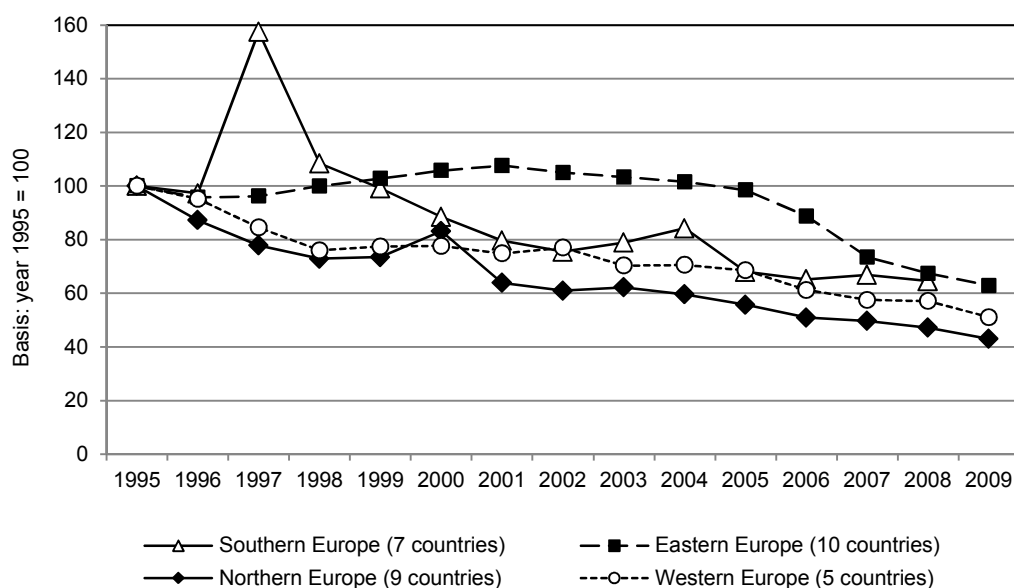


Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

Note: The lines represent percentage change in a population-weighted homicide rate based on the starting point of 1995.



Figure 6  
Trends in homicide rates in Europe, by subregion, 1995-2009



Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

Note: The lines represent percentage change in a population-weighted homicide rate based on the starting point of 1995.

### III. Factors associated with homicide trends and patterns

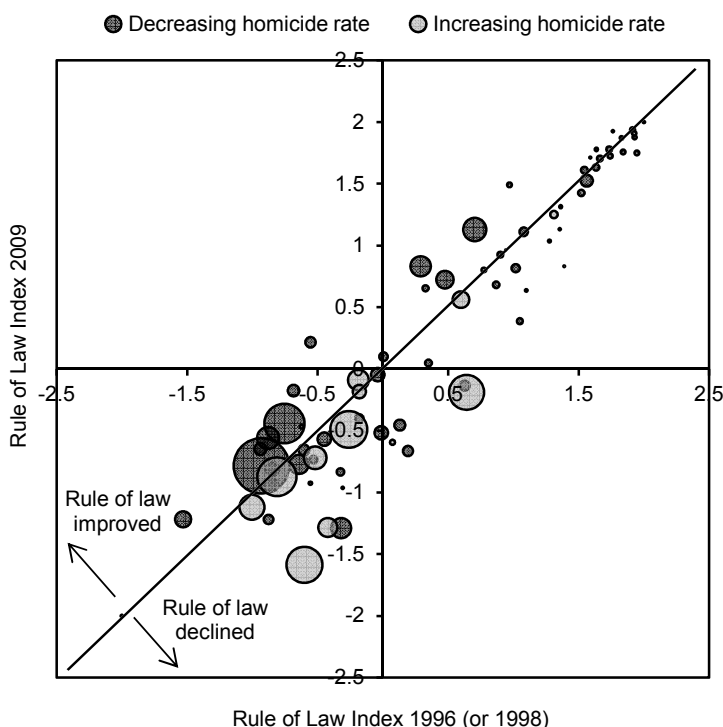
13. The variety of trends and patterns in homicide in the various regions are linked to very diverse situations: the reasons leading to higher levels of interpersonal violence can be very complex and can vary greatly within or between regions. Poverty, inequality and the capacity of States to enforce the rule of law can be considered as affecting the level of violence.

14. While a precise causal relationship between poverty or inequality and violent crime is difficult to establish, the experience of several countries and regions provides a consistent picture: higher levels of homicide are frequently associated with lower levels of economic and social development and sustained income inequality. The relationship is not necessarily linear or unidirectional (for example, high crime levels can have a detrimental effect on social and economic progress) but the relationship between crime and violence and development suggests that development policies should integrate crime-prevention strategies that are fully sustainable and equitable.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the report of the Secretary-General on promoting development through the reduction and prevention of armed violence (A/64/228); UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide*; World Bank, *World Development Report* (Washington, D.C., 2011); Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, *More Violence, Less Development: Examining the Relationship Between Armed Violence and MDG Achievement* (Geneva, 2011).

15. The capacity of States to enforce the rule of law can also have an impact on the level of violence: figure 7 shows changes in homicide levels and rule of law over the last 15 years in countries for which data are available. The chart indicates that virtually all countries in which there has been a strengthening of the rule of law (those above the diagonal line) have also experienced a decline in the homicide rate (dark grey bubbles) while, conversely, almost all countries in which homicide rates have increased (light grey bubbles) have also experienced a weakening in the rule of law (below the line). At the same time, most countries with increasing homicide rates are associated with a relatively weak rule of law (lower left quarter of the chart), while countries with relatively strong rule of law (top-right quarter) have not generally experienced increasing homicide rates.

Figure 7  
**Position of countries according to changes in the Rule of Law Index and homicide rate, mid-1990s to 2009**



Source: World Bank Rule of Law and UNODC homicide statistics.

Note: The colour of the bubbles represents the trend in homicide rates (decreasing or increasing between 1995 and 2009). The bubble size is proportional to the change in homicide rate (between 1995 and 2009).

16. These findings suggest that countries with weak processes with regard to promulgating laws, enforcing them equally or adjudicating them independently, are also associated with higher homicide rates. The relationship between the rule of law and homicide levels is not necessarily of a direct nature: while an effective and fair rule of law regime can heavily deter criminal activities, the capacity of States to enforce the rule of law can have a wide-ranging impact on a number of domains,

including social and economic development, and they, in turn, can influence violent crime and homicide rates.

17. Another factor impacting on levels of homicide is represented by the killing “mechanism”. The level of use of firearms has an impact on homicide levels. On the basis of the data available, it can be estimated that, of the 468,000 homicides committed in 2010, 203,000 (or 43 per cent) involved firearms.

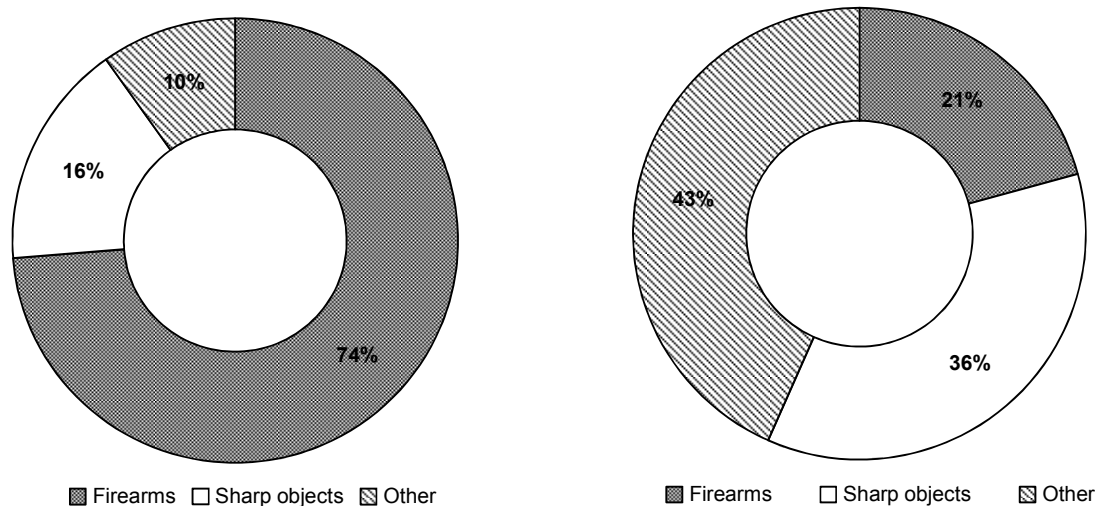
18. The percentage of firearms use in homicides varies considerably from region to region: 74 per cent of homicides in the Americas are committed by firearms, compared with 21 per cent in Europe. In contrast, sharp objects such as knives account for a greater proportion of violent deaths in European countries (36 per cent) than in the Americas (16 per cent) (see figure 8). The pattern is likely to be closely tied to the different distribution of homicide typologies in the Americas and Europe — a larger proportion of homicides in the Americas are linked to organized crime and gangs, whereas a large proportion of homicides in Europe are linked to partner- or family-related causes and other forms of crime.

Figure 8

**Homicide mechanism, the Americas and Europe, 2008 or latest available year**

Homicide mechanism — Americas (30 countries)

Homicide mechanism — Europe (32 countries)



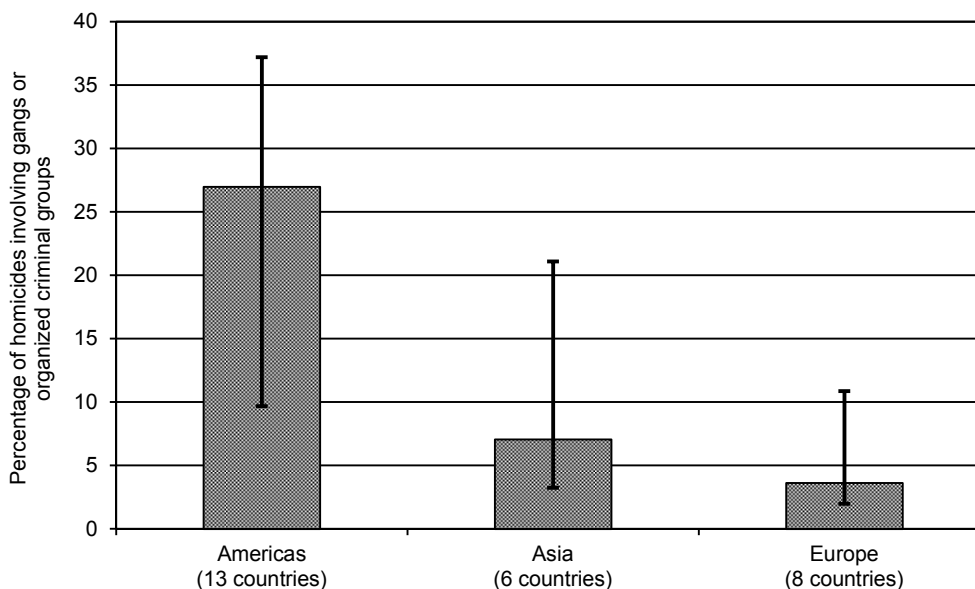
Source: Global Burden of Injuries, Injury Mortality Data Collection.

19. Figure 9 shows the average proportion of homicides related to gangs or organized criminal groups as recorded in national police statistics for a number of countries in the Americas, Asia and Europe. In spite of the limited number of countries for which data are available, the pattern is comparatively clear: the average proportion of such homicides is significantly higher (greater than 25 per cent) in the Americas than in Asia or Europe. The surge of homicide levels, especially in Central America and the Caribbean, is a result of the violent activities of organized criminal groups, especially in relation to conflicts over the control of drug trafficking routes and turf wars among different groups. However, the results should not be interpreted as an indication that organized crime is more prevalent in

the Americas than in Asia or Europe. Organized criminal groups may be equally or even more active in those two regions but may have reached a level of stability that does not produce visible violent crime.

Figure 9

**Proportion of homicides involving gangs or organized criminal groups, by region, 2010 or latest available year**



Source: National police data.

Note: The bars represent the median, first and third percentage quartiles of homicides involving gangs or organized criminal groups.

20. Conflicts within families and couples can also contribute to shaping patterns of homicide. While, in principle, such violence can be directed at both men and women, the victims of violence at the hands of partners or family members are usually women, and the offender is usually her current or former male partner. In many such cases, there have been previous incidents of domestic violence in the relationship. In most countries, partner- or family-related violence is a major cause of female homicides, and homicide trends affecting women are much more likely to be driven by the level of such violence than violence involving firearms, organized criminal groups or gangs. Available data on some European countries make apparent the different patterns of lethal violence affecting women and men: half of female victims were murdered by family members (35 per cent by spouses or ex-spouses and 15 per cent by relatives), while only 5 per cent of all male victims were killed by spouses or ex-spouses and some 10 per cent by other family members (see figure 10).

Figure 10  
**Distribution of homicide perpetrators by sex of victim, selected European countries, 2008 or latest available year**  
 (Percentage)

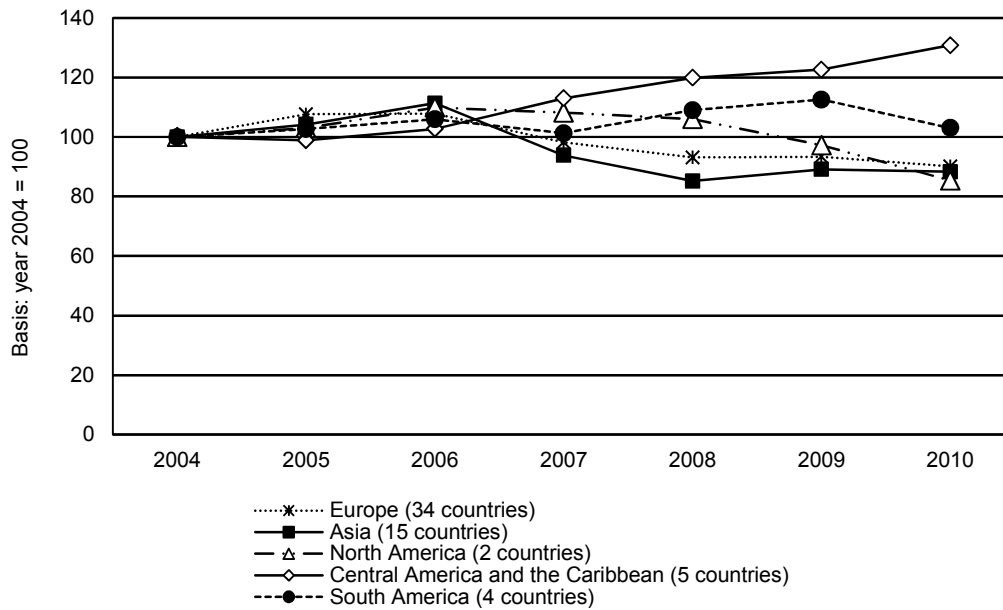


Source: Economic Commission for Europe Statistical Division Database.

#### IV. Regional trends in other forms of crime

21. Different driving factors behind violent and property crimes may explain differences in the trends of various forms of crime over the last few years. Since 2004, levels of robbery have fluctuated throughout the world: they have declined in Europe, Asia and North America, remained constant in South America and increased substantially in Central America and the Caribbean. Those tendencies have some similarities with homicide trends, with some notable exceptions such as the temporary increase of robberies in some countries in Europe and Asia in 2005-2006 (see figure 11).

Figure 11  
Regional trends in robbery rates, 2004-2010



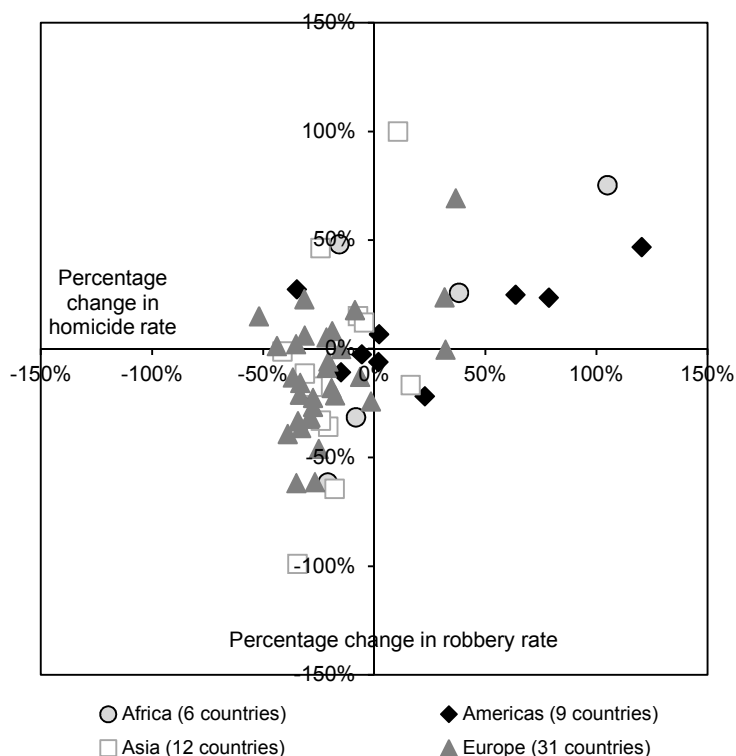
Source: United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems.

22. Figure 12 shows that some correlation exists between homicide and robbery trends. In most countries (those in the upper-right and lower-left quarters) the two offences have moved in the same direction during the last five years: decreasing levels of homicides were observed in conjunction with declining robbery rates and rising homicide rates with increased levels of robbery.

23. Some countries are an exception to this pattern (those in the upper-left quarter). Among them there are a number of Northern and Western European countries, where a decrease in already low homicide rates was accompanied by an increase in robberies, a finding confirmed by other studies, which explained the trend by the increased activities of criminal groups or youth gangs.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Marcelo Aebi and Antonia Linde, "Is there a crime drop in Western Europe?", *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, vol. 16, No. 4 (December 2010), pp. 251-277.

Figure 12  
**Position of selected countries according to changes in the homicide rate and the robbery rate between 2003-2004 and 2008-2009**

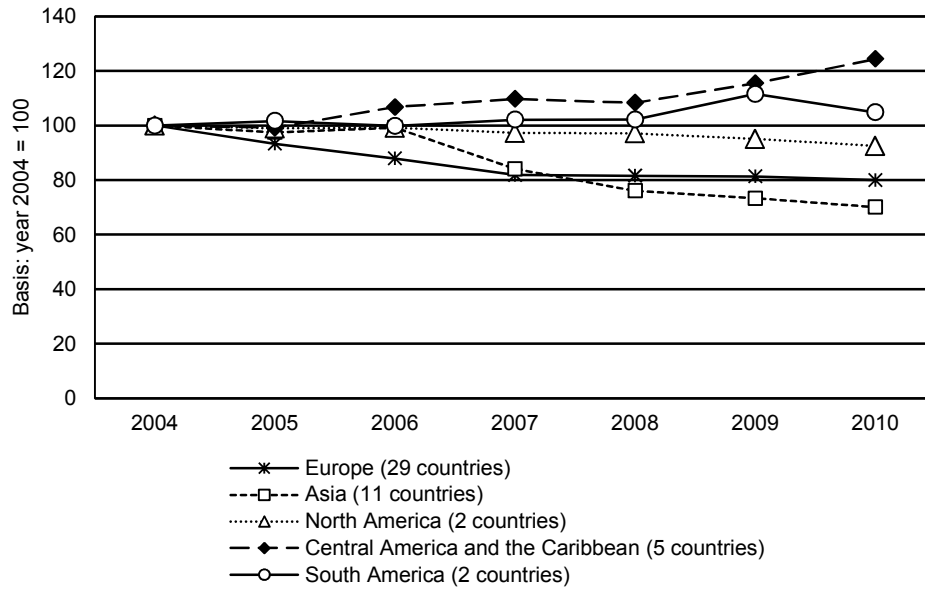


*Source:* United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems.

24. The trends in burglary and motor vehicle theft followed patterns similar to those of robbery. They decreased in Europe, North America and Asia, and steadily increased in Central America and the Caribbean.

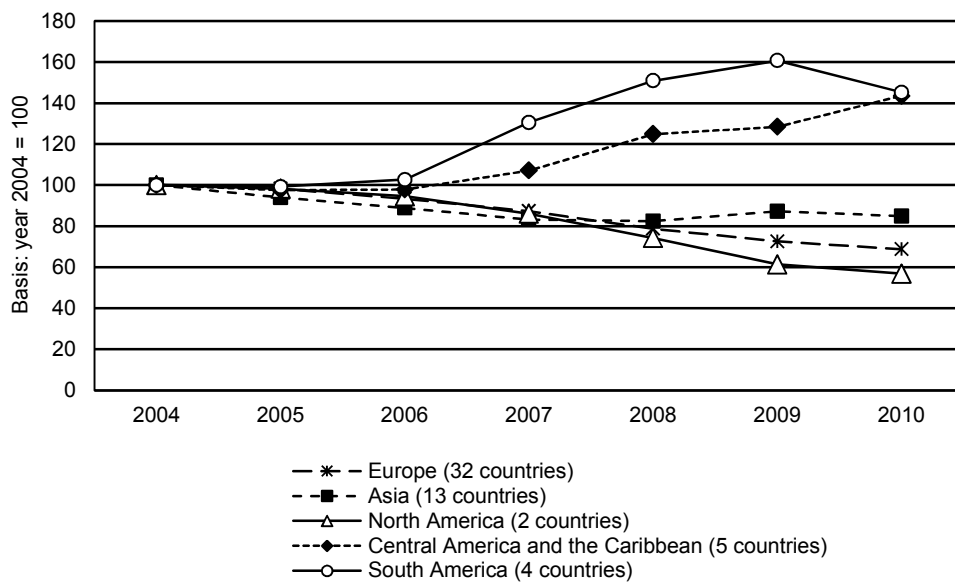
25. In Central America and the Caribbean, burglary and motor vehicle theft increased in parallel with violent crimes such as intentional homicide and robbery (see figures 13 and 14). Whether directly related or not with the increased activities of organized criminal groups, such increases are an indication that all forms of crime, not only those related to violent crime, have increased in the region. In contrast to decreasing trends in violent crime, some countries in South America have experienced increased levels of property-related crime, a tendency that shows the complexity of criminal behaviour and the importance of local factors.

Figure 13  
**Regional trends in burglary rates, 2004-2010**



Source: United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems.

Figure 14  
**Regional trends in motor vehicle theft rates, 2004-2010**



Source: United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems.



26. Macroeconomic conditions have proved to be one of the factors affecting property crime. While taking into account the complex interplay among different factors, especially at the local level, a recent UNODC study on the impact of the economic crisis of 2008 and 2009 on crime<sup>5</sup> indicated that crime can increase in situations of economic depression and social tension. This is in line with the general strain theory, according to which “each type of strain may create a predisposition for delinquency or function as a situational event that instigates a particular delinquent act”.<sup>6</sup>

27. Using police-recorded data on three crimes (homicide, burglary and car theft) from 15 countries throughout the world, the study found that in 8 of the 11 countries in which there were substantial changes in economic factors, there was evidence of a relationship between economic factors and crime, both during and outside periods of economic crisis. More specifically, a deterioration in the economic situation was associated with increasing levels of robbery in six countries, motor vehicle theft in four countries and homicides in three countries. While the analysis did not yield a consistent relationship between specific crimes and specific economic factors, it does provide evidence that a relationship exists between crime and the economy.

## V. Criminal justice response

28. Information on offences recorded by the police can shed light on overall crime levels and trends, and data on the operation of criminal justice systems are also important for assessing State response to crime. To be evaluated properly, data on criminal justice activities need to be considered against the background of crime levels and patterns: for example, higher rates of criminal justice activities are expected with an elevated intensity of crime.

29. Figure 15 describes the process that starts when a crime is committed. It shows the different steps and the State institutions that may be involved (police, prosecutors, courts and prison administrations). In order to study the efficiency of the entire criminal justice chain, data on individual offences and alleged offenders should be collected at each stage<sup>7</sup> so that each case is followed through the system and performance indicators, such as “attrition rates”, can be calculated by collating all the information related to individual cases. In practice, very few countries have a recording system in place that can consistently collect and store individual information throughout the entire process. At the global level, only aggregated data for single years are available for four of the steps in the process: number of offences; number of persons brought into formal contact with the police (persons arrested, suspected or cautioned); persons convicted;<sup>8</sup> and people in prison. While the number of persons convicted in a year will also include convictions for people

<sup>5</sup> UNODC, *Monitoring the Impact of Economic Crisis on Crime* (Vienna, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Agnew, “Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency”, *Criminology*, vol. 30, No. 1 (February 1992), p. 60. One type of strain is the one caused by the gap between individual expectations and achievements, which tend to widen in periods of economic crisis.

<sup>7</sup> To understand at what stage each case exits the process (because for example no one can be identified as perpetrator, there is not enough evidence to prosecute the suspect, or the prosecution ends up without a conviction).

<sup>8</sup> Persons convicted means persons found guilty by any legal body authorized to pronounce a conviction under national criminal law, whether or not the conviction was later upheld.

who were arrested in previous years, the relationship between those aggregated data can still provide a broad overview of the efficiency of the system. Ideally, the data should be analysed for each type of crime as, for example, violent crime may have higher conviction rates than other forms of crime. However, global and regional data on specific crimes can be calculated only for intentional homicide. A more complete overview of the extent to which the criminal justice system operates in conformity with the rule of law or the quality of justice delivered should also be considered against the relevant legislative and regulatory context.<sup>9</sup> In practice, there is not enough information available to perform such analysis at the international level.

Figure 15

#### Successive steps in the criminal justice procedure



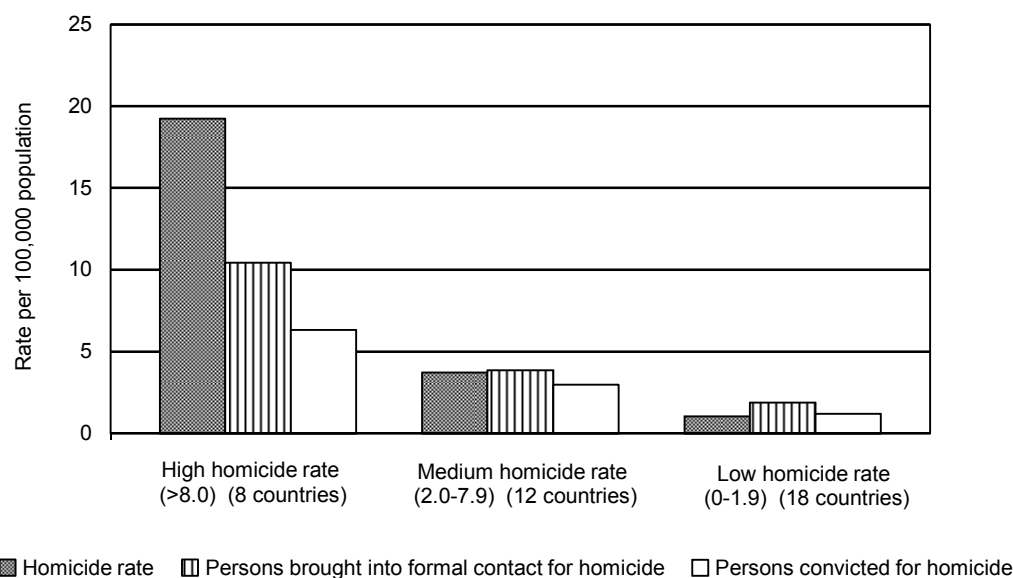
*Note:* This is a generic and simplified scheme and it should be accompanied, for example, by multiple exit routes from the system, such as diversion in the case of children who are in conflict with the law or probation on condition of non-reoffending.

<sup>9</sup> For example, low levels of convictions could reflect the effective use of alternate sanctions administered prior to the court stage.

30. Using data available for the period 2003-2009 from 38 countries around the world, it is possible to see how homicide cases go through the criminal justice system and to compare the total number of homicides with the number of persons arrested or suspected and the number of persons convicted for homicide. As figure 16 shows, criminal justice systems that manage lower rates of homicide are more efficient than systems that manage higher rates. While, on average, countries with higher rates of homicide have higher rates of arrests, suspects and convictions, those countries have fewer arrests and convictions in proportion to the number of homicides.

Figure 16

**Homicide rate, persons brought into formal contact with the police for homicide and persons convicted of homicide, by level of homicide (high, medium or low), per 100,000 population, 2003-2009**

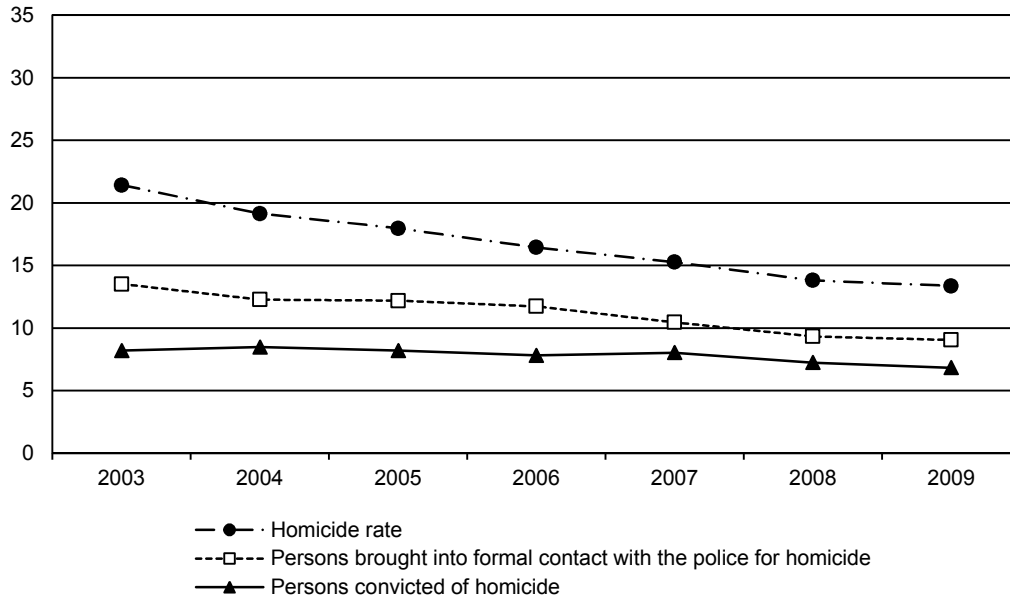


Source: United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems.

31. Analysing the eight countries with the higher homicide levels over time (figure 17 (a) and (b)), it can be noted that, where there was a decreasing trend, the system adapted to the changing trend and showed a consequent decrease in arrests, suspects and convictions. Where the homicide levels increased, the level of arrests and investigations did not change, suggesting that law enforcement and criminal justice systems were not able to react promptly to the surge in homicide rates.

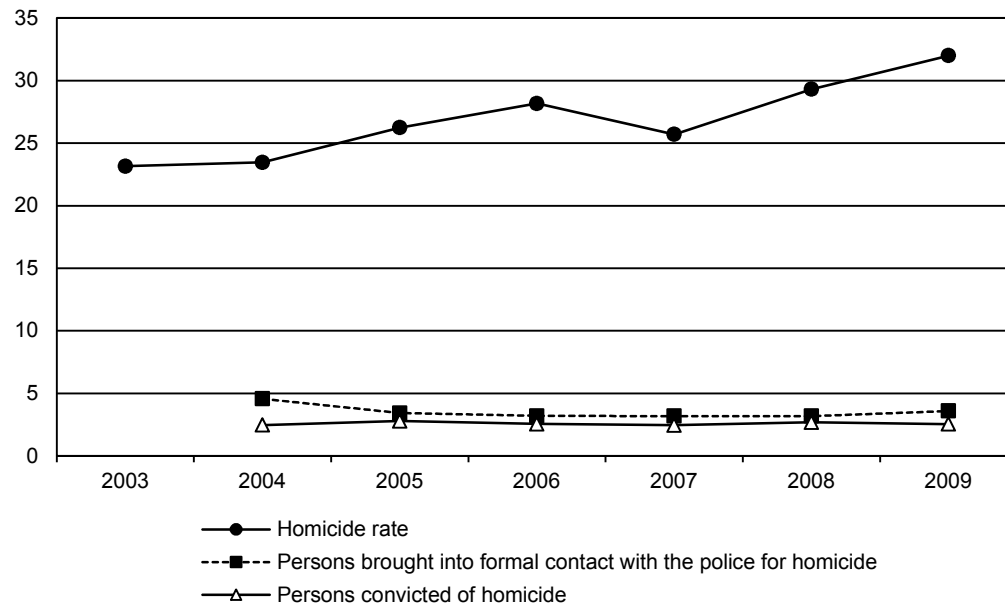
Figure 17  
**Trends in the homicide rate, persons brought into formal contact with the police for homicide and persons convicted of homicide in selected countries with a high level of homicide, per 100,000 population, 2003-2009**

**A. High level of homicide that is decreasing**



Source: United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems.

**B. High level of homicide that is increasing**

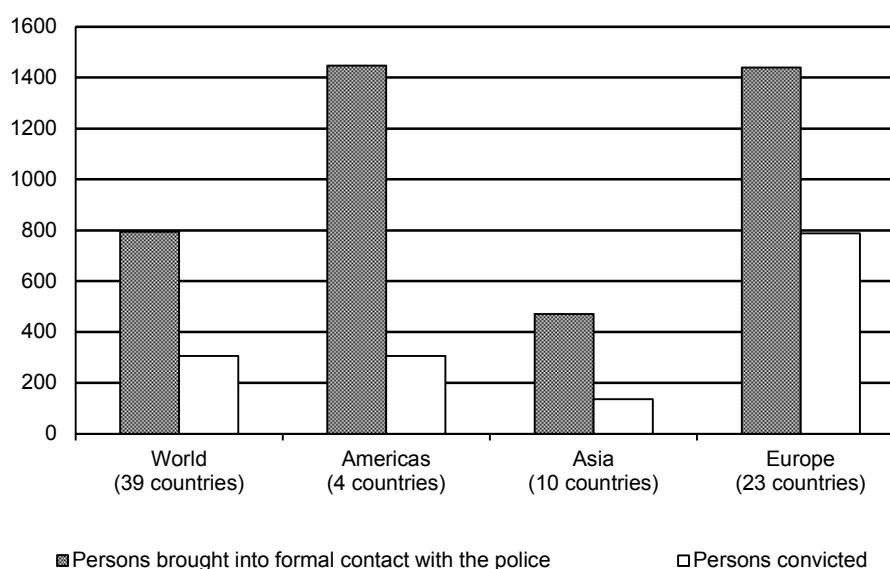


Source: United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems.

32. With the exception of intentional homicide, data collected at the international level on persons brought into formal contact with the police and persons convicted are only available for all types of crimes in aggregated form. Important differences exist between regions in terms of the number of persons arrested, suspected or cautioned by the police every year, ranging from levels close to 1.5 per cent of the population in the Americas and Europe to less than 0.5 per cent in Asia (see figure 18). It should be taken into account that such differences may be partly the result of different methodological frameworks and operational capacity in reporting data;<sup>10</sup> such differences may also indicate that the operational practices of police forces differ considerably across regions, primarily because of different crime levels. Globally, the number of persons arrested and suspected has remained constant over the last few years. However, trends diverged slightly at the regional level, showing an increase of 10 per cent in Asia and a 2 per cent decrease in the Americas.

Figure 18

**All types of crime: persons brought into formal contact with the police and persons convicted per 100,000 population, 2009-2010**



*Source:* United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems.

*Note:* The global average includes data for two countries from Africa and Oceania.

33. The level of convictions also varies considerably in the different regions. At the global level, the number of persons convicted by a court was quite stable over the last few years, with some decreases in Asia and increases in the Americas and in Europe.

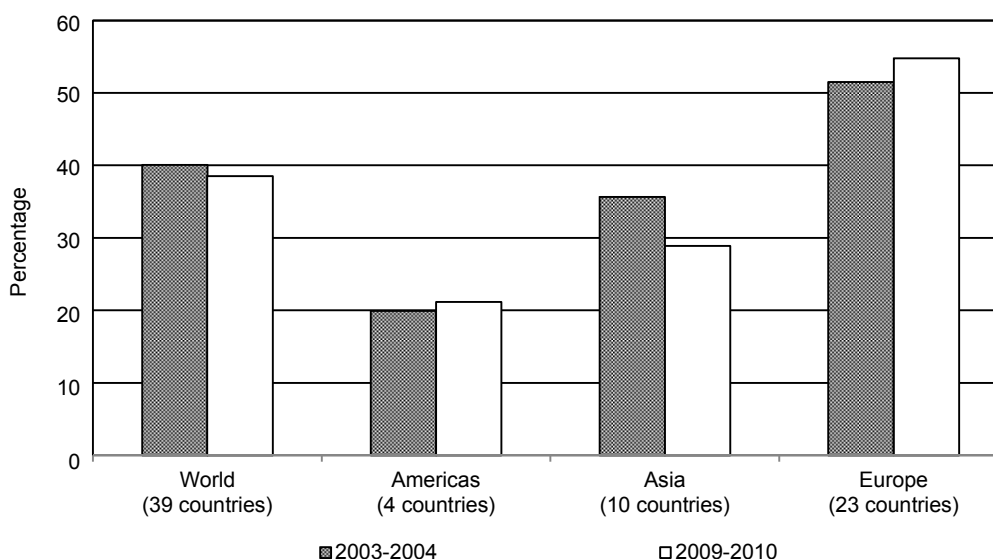
<sup>10</sup> Factors that hamper comparability of data include: (a) some countries refer to people arrested, some countries to people suspected and others to people cautioned; (b) different practices exist for including minor offences (for example, traffic violations) in the data; and (c) different practices exist for including juvenile offenders in the figures.

34. The conviction rate<sup>11</sup> can provide a broad indication of how frequently persons who are arrested or suspected are actually convicted. The most recent data show (see figure 19) that, globally, 39 per cent of persons arrested or suspected were convicted, on average, at the court stage. But this percentage was as high as 55 per cent in Europe in 2009-2010 (up from 52 per cent in 2003-2004), while being significantly lower in Asia (29 per cent in 2009-2010, down from 36 per cent in 2003-2004)<sup>12</sup> and in the Americas (21 per cent in 2009-2010, up from 20 per cent in 2003-2004). These differences can be explained by factors ranging from “different practices used by police forces in their approach to alleged offenders” to “the capacity of systems to conduct effective investigations”.

Figure 19

**Persons convicted as a share of persons brought into formal contact with the police, 2003-2004 and 2009-2010**

(Percentage)



*Source:* United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice

Systems.

*Note:* The global average also includes data for two countries from Africa and Oceania.

35. Looking at the last stage of the criminal justice system, it can be estimated that, in 2010, more than 9.5 million persons were detained in prison in 170 countries for which data are available, which corresponds to 150 persons detained per 100,000 population. In the Americas, the population-weighted detention rate in 2010 was significantly higher than in all other regions: it was 67 per cent higher than the detention rate in Europe, more than three times as high as the detention rate in Oceania and Africa, and more than four times higher than in Asia (see figure 20).

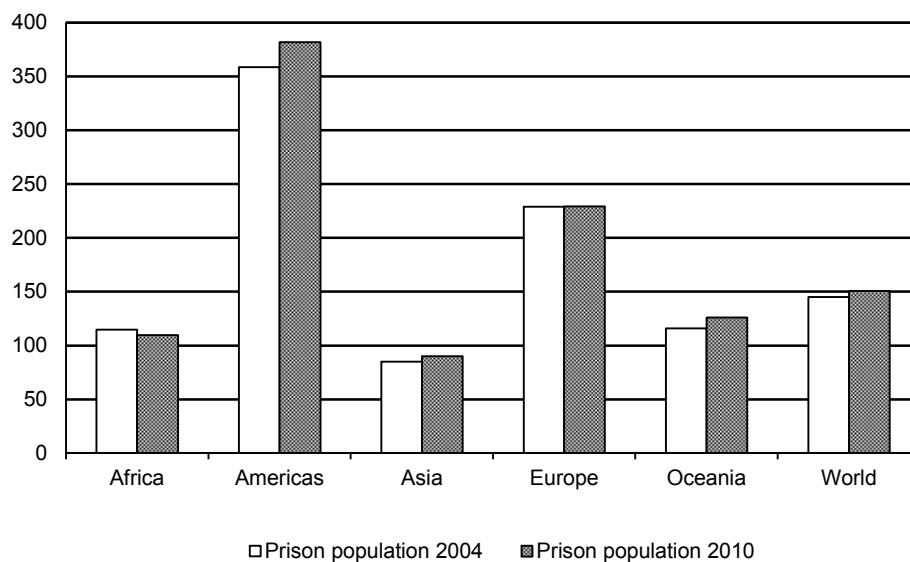
<sup>11</sup> The ratio of persons convicted to persons brought into formal contact with the police (i.e. persons arrested, suspected or cautioned) within one year.

<sup>12</sup> In Asia, the number of convictions declined while the number of persons brought into formal contact with the police increased significantly.

Differences in detention rates should be assessed against crime types and levels in the various regions.

Figure 20

**Total prison population per 100,000 population, 2004 and 2010**

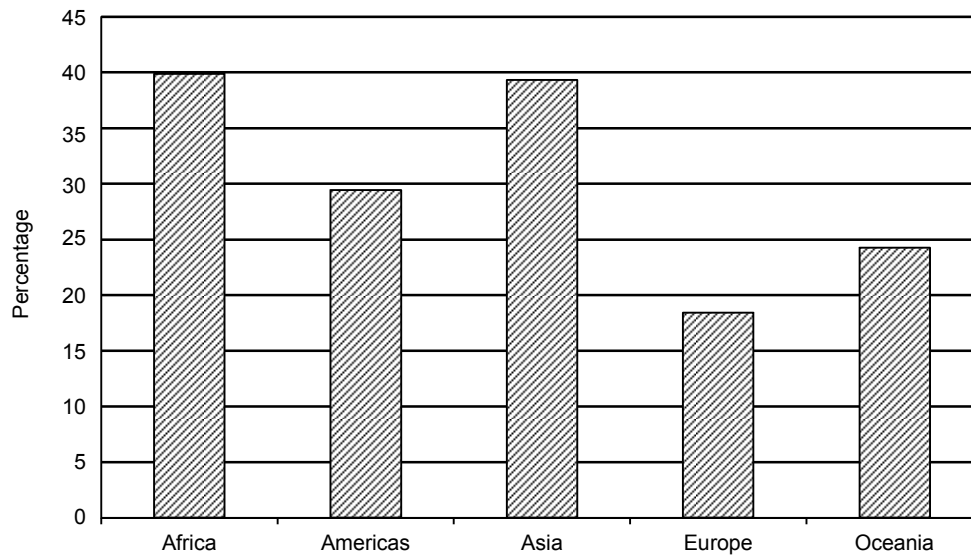


*Source:* United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems; and International Centre for Prison Studies.

36. The regions with the highest detention rates (the Americas and Europe) are those with the lowest level of non-sentenced detainees. As figures 21 and 22 indicate, the highest share of pretrial prisoners (about 40 per cent of the prison population) was recorded in Asia and Africa.

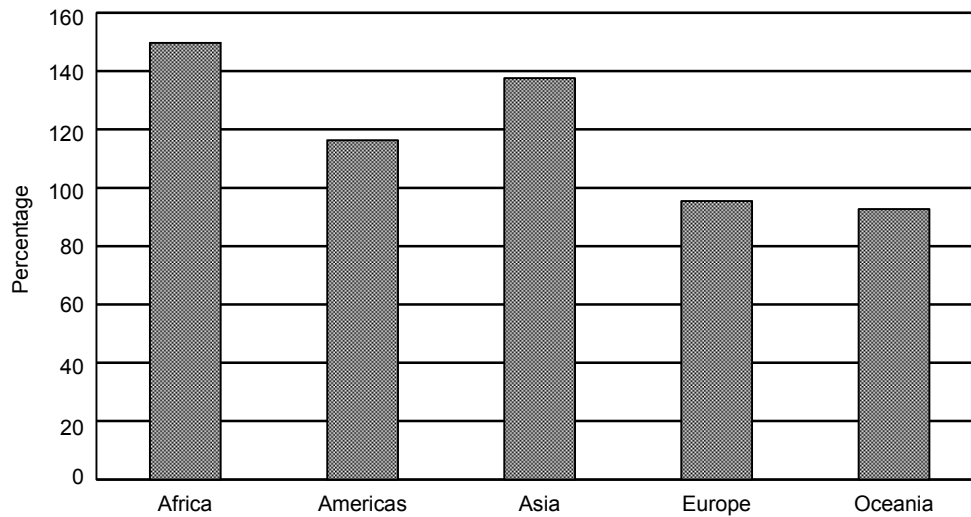
37. Prison overcrowding is of particular concern in Africa and Asia, where the prison populations exceed the official capacity of jails by some 40 per cent. Overcrowding of prisons is also a concern in some countries in the Americas (with on average some 20 per cent more prisoners than the official capacity), while prison populations in Europe and Oceania are, on average, within the capacities of prison facilities.

Figure 21  
**Prison population in pretrial detention as a share of total prison population, 2010**  
 (Percentage)



Source: United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems; and International Centre for Prison Studies.

Figure 22  
**Prison population as a percentage of prison capacity, 2010**  
 (Percentage)



Source: United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems; and International Centre for Prison Studies.



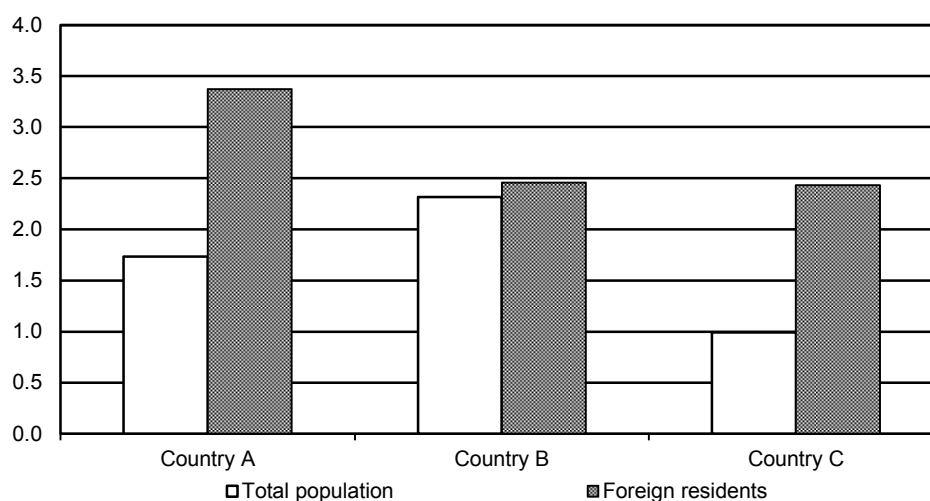
## VI. Violence against migrants, migrant workers and their families

38. Statistical analysis of the prominent theme of the twenty-first session of the Commission, “Violence against migrants, migrant workers and their families”, is made difficult by many gaps in the available data. In the great majority of countries worldwide, police-recorded data on crime and violence do not include information on victims. Even where such data are collected, specific information on the status of victims who are migrants is not included. Moreover, police-recorded data on violence against persons are often a poor indicator of actual levels of victimization, as incidents of violence often go unreported. This is particularly so in the case of marginalized groups in society to which certain migrant communities often belong.

39. While accounting for these limitations, a special module on violence and crime against migrants was included in the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems covering the year 2010 to collect police-recorded data on crimes against migrants. According to preliminary results from the survey, out of 55 responding countries, 12 were able to supply at least partial data on foreigners (non-nationals) who had been victims of violent crime in the reporting period. Of these, only three reporting countries (which were all in Europe) were able to supply data on victims of crime who were foreign residents on their territory.<sup>13</sup> According to data provided by those three European countries (see figure 23), foreign residents face a higher risk of being victims of homicides than nationals.

Figure 23

### Police-recorded victims of homicide per 100,000 population in three European countries



<sup>13</sup> The distinction between “foreign residents” and “foreigners” in data on victims of crime is important, because only the former concept relates directly to foreign migrants, while the latter category includes all non-nationals who have been recorded as victims of crime in the reporting country, including tourists, business travellers and persons in transit.

*Source:* United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems covering the year 2010, based on national police data.

40. To overcome the problems of non-availability of data and underreporting of actual incidents of violence and crime, many countries have conducted crime victimization surveys to gain insight into the structure and level of and trends in criminal victimization and violence. Such surveys collect information directly from victims through a population-based sample of individuals and households. By using standard questions, such surveys offer the further advantage of enhanced comparability between different national surveys. However, only a few have focused specifically on the victimization experiences of immigrant populations.

41. A comprehensive and comparable survey providing insight into patterns of violence directed against migrant and minority populations was carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2008, which surveyed over 23,500 persons from various immigrant and ethnic minority groups in the 27 member States of the European Union. The results indicated that, on average and for those countries where comparable data were available, migrants and members of minority groups experienced assault or threat more frequently than other members of the population.

42. In particular, in the 18 countries for which comparisons with data on the general population (from the 2005 European Crime and Safety Survey) could be drawn, a higher rate of victimization involving assault or threat was recorded for 21 of the 34 minority groups interviewed. Some migrant and minority groups surveyed had comparable or even lower victimization rates than the rest of the population, they included migrants from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey in Austria, Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg. Some of the migrant and minority groups surveyed experienced extremely high rates of victimization involving assault or threat against their person, which indicated specific vulnerabilities and risks of violence. Among the groups and countries surveyed, immigrant groups that reported significantly higher prevalence rates for assault and threat than the rest of the population included Somalis in Denmark and Finland; North Africans in Belgium, France, Italy and Spain; and sub-Saharan Africans in Ireland. In addition, other immigrant groups reported significantly higher level of incidents involving assault or threat than the general population, indicating that certain subgroups within the minority population are particularly vulnerable to assault or threat.

43. The survey also indicated that some migrant groups experienced assault or threat in association with serious harassment and racially motivated assault or threat. For example, 70 per cent of victims of assault or threat who were of sub-Saharan African origin considered that they had been targeted because of their immigrant or ethnic minority background.

44. Between 57 and 74 per cent of incidents of assault or threat experienced by migrants were not reported to the police. An even higher percentage of persons (between 56 and 92 per cent) who were victims of personal crimes (assault, threat and serious harassment) that they considered racially motivated did not report the incidents to the police. That confirms the assumption that police and criminal justice statistics on recorded incidents of violence against migrants represent only “the tip of the iceberg”, as a significant number of violent incidents never come to the attention of the police. The main reason given by respondents for not reporting

victimization was because they were not confident that the police would be able to do anything.

45. High levels of non-reporting to the police are related to low levels of confidence in the police as stated by migrants and minorities in the survey. In that context, it is significant that many migrants reported being stopped by the police significantly more often than the general population. For example, in Spain, 42 per cent of respondents of North African origin had been stopped by the police in the 12 months preceding the survey, compared with 12 per cent of respondents of Spanish origin. In France, those figures were 42 per cent of respondents of North African origin compared with 22 per cent of respondents of French origin. In addition, 32 per cent of persons of North African origin and 20 per cent of persons of sub-Saharan African origin indicated that when police officers had last stopped them, the police officers had been disrespectful of them.

46. Apart from European countries, few countries have conducted victimization surveys with a particular focus on migrants. In both Australia and Canada, data from victimization surveys<sup>14</sup> indicate that migrants do not experience a higher level of victimization: for example, rates of physical assault suffered by migrants in Australia (2 per cent) were substantially lower than those for persons born in the country (3.3 per cent). Similarly, data from a recent survey conducted in Canada indicate that immigrants face a lower prevalence rate than non-immigrants when it comes to a number of crimes, including physical assault (1.6 per cent for immigrants compared with 3.9 per cent for those born in Canada) and sexual assault (0.6 per cent compared with 1.6 per cent). However, it should be noted that those studies did not specifically target minority or migrant groups and they may have excluded the experiences of the most marginalized migrants, who are often in an irregular situation and may be more likely to experience a higher rate of victimization.

47. For other regions, representative data on crime and violence against migrants derived from sample surveys are generally not available. There are descriptive reports with anecdotal evidence that violence and human rights abuses against specific groups of migrants are rampant, but statistical data are typically confined to specific migrant groups and their local conditions. The lack of data is even more pronounced for migrants without legal residence status or for migrants without a stable and well-defined place of residence. However, there is recurrent evidence that those particularly vulnerable groups of migrants often experience high levels of crime and violence.

48. The scarce evidence available indicates that migrant communities are often particularly vulnerable to crime. There is a need to adjust existing data collection, both police-recorded data and victimization surveys, to produce more accurate and comprehensive figures on migrant communities. In particular, sample surveys on the levels and patterns of violence directed against migrant and minority populations are an important tool for informing evidence-based policy decisions for reducing the vulnerability of such populations to crime and violence.

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<sup>14</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Crime Victimization, Australia* (Sydney, 2011); and Statistics Canada, *General Social Survey: Victimization* (Ottawa, 2010).

## VII. Work towards better data

49. Crime data have certainly improved over the last few decades, but they are not yet at the same level as data in other statistical fields (such as labour, poverty, education and health) in terms of the range and quality of statistics available at the national and international levels. While there is increasing demand to provide statistical evidence on complex crimes such as organized crime, corruption or money-laundering, national agencies are still experiencing difficulties in generating accurate and timely data on conventional crimes. As a consequence, data made available to the international community often suffer in terms of availability and comparability. In order to discuss some of the existing challenges and identify possible remedies, the topic of crime statistics was considered by the Statistical Commission at its forty-third session, held in New York from 28 February to 2 March 2012, which represents an important step in underlining the importance of improving the quality and availability of crime data.

50. Developing more and better data on crime and criminal justice involves the following steps:

- (a) Strengthening the capacity of national authorities to generate statistics;
- (b) Enhancing coordination mechanisms at the national level;
- (c) Improving the process for reporting national data to UNODC;
- (d) Defining strategies to ensure data quality;
- (e) Improving international comparability.

51. Strengthening the capacity of national authorities to generate statistical figures on crime is a priority for UNODC and support has been provided to Member States for the development of crime and criminal justice statistics and the implementation of household surveys on crime and corruption. In that regard, the recently established Centre of Excellence for Statistical Information on Governance, Victims of Crime, Public Security and Justice will provide additional and qualified resources. The Centre, based in Mexico City, is the result of a joint initiative of UNODC and the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (INEGI). In collaboration with other international and regional organizations, the Centre promotes technical expertise, conveys resources to develop institutional capacities for statistical production, supports countries in the development of victimization surveys and provides training and technical assistance.

52. Enhancing coordination mechanisms at the country level is a crucial step towards improving statistics on crime. Several institutions are involved in producing data on crime and criminal justice systems (police, prosecution services, courts, prison administration, national statistical authorities and health services): the development of common methodological standards and the strengthening of systems of data communication are important tools for improving the availability and consistency of crime data.

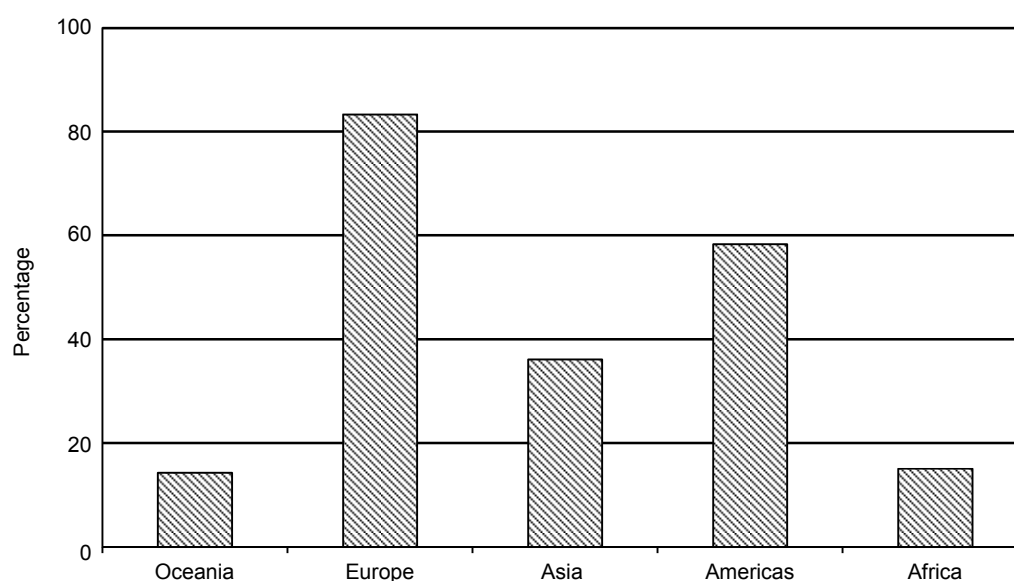
53. The availability of data at the international level is crucial to understanding regional and global patterns, and it represents an essential tool for States to use in benchmarking their experiences in respect of crime trends and criminal justice operations. Moreover, the long-term process of data standardization at the

international level provides guidance to States on improving the relevance and accuracy of national data. Among the data collection mechanisms managed by UNODC, the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems is the principal tool for collecting data on crime at the international level, and the country response rate has remained fairly constant over the last few years (with about 45 per cent of countries replying to the survey questionnaire), although very diverse patterns between regions can be seen (see figure 24).

Figure 24

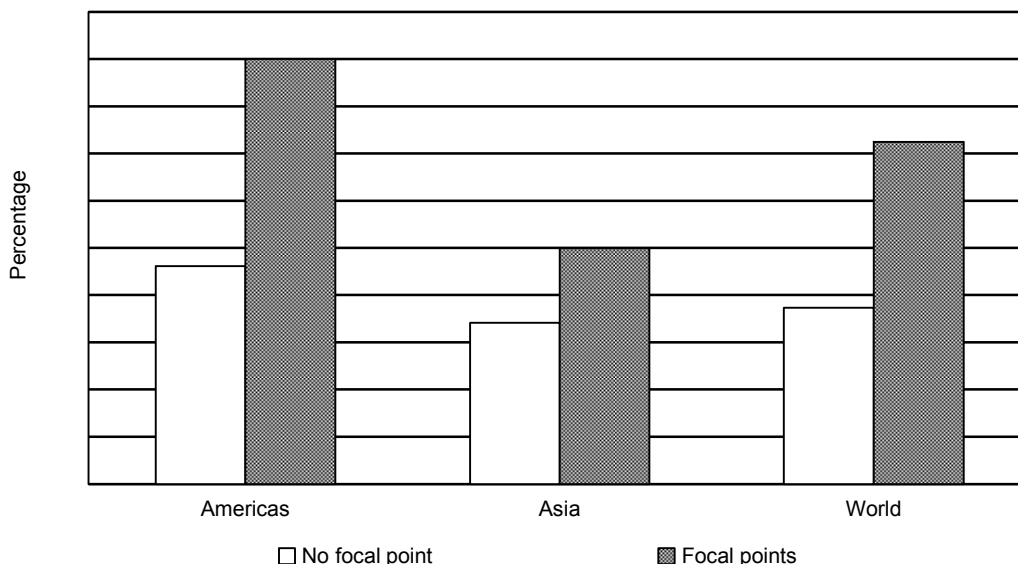
**Countries responding to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, by region, 2010**

(Percentage)



54. To streamline the data-collection process for the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, UNODC is promoting the appointment of a national focal point in each Member State to facilitate the completion and delivery of the survey questionnaire. As figure 25 shows, the appointment of focal points has proved to be an effective way to raise the response rate of countries and it can be further promoted. Furthermore, partnerships are being established with regional organizations, such as the Organization of American States and Eurostat, to sustain the data collection process.

Figure 25  
**Proportion of countries responding to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, with or without national focal points, selected areas, 2010**  
 (Percentage)



55. The ultimate goal of statistics is to produce evidence-based analyses. In 2011, UNODC released the *Global Study on Homicide*, which provided a better understanding of the extent and patterns of homicide at the global, regional, national and subnational levels. Another study, *Monitoring the Impact of Economic Crisis on Crime*, contains an investigation into the complex relationship between economic downturns and crime levels. When data are used and disseminated for analytical purposes, they undergo scrutiny of their accuracy by a broad range of users; feedback on their relevance to information needs are essential to improving the quality and availability of statistical data.

56. Sustained efforts are needed not only to provide the figures for statistical tables but also to ensure that such figures are valid and accurate. In order to enhance the transparency of the data-processing procedures implemented by UNODC, a process has been launched to develop a data quality framework at the Office. The processing of statistical data involves a number of steps to ensure that the data provided by countries are accurate and respond to international standards (for example in terms of concepts and definitions). Several international organizations, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Eurostat and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, as well as an increasing number of national statistical offices, have developed quality frameworks that aim to set common rules and procedures to ensure that quality is implemented during all steps of the process. The development of clear and transparent procedures for data processing will benefit countries and all other users of UNODC statistics.

57. International comparability is important in producing accurate regional and international data. It is also a fundamental requisite for countries wishing to place their own experiences in a broader context. For certain offences (such as intentional homicide), there is a sufficient degree of comparability at the international level, while in other cases the comparability is low.<sup>15</sup>

58. National data often do not comply with international standards due to different national legal definitions and different counting and reporting practices. Improvements in that area will be achieved in the long term but recent work conducted by the Conference of European Statisticians to develop an international framework classification on crime is a step towards achieving that goal. At its meeting held in Geneva on 2 and 3 November 2011, the Bureau of the Conference decided that the principles and framework for an international classification of crimes for statistical purposes produced by a task force of members of the Conference and facilitated by UNODC and the Economic Commission for Europe would be sent for consultation to all Conference members with a view to being submitted for endorsement by the plenary session of the Conference, to be held in Geneva from 6 to 8 June 2012.

## VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

### A. Conclusions

59. Recent crime trends across and within regions of the world have diversified. In Asia, Europe and North America, levels of homicide, robbery, burglary and motor vehicle theft have generally declined over the last few years, but the levels of those crimes have generally increased in Central America and the Caribbean. In South America, trends differ depending on the type of crime, while recent crime trends in Africa and Oceania cannot be assessed owing to a lack of data.

60. From the analysis of trends and patterns of selected forms of crime in various regions, a number of driving factors have emerged, such as the level of economic and social development, the capacity of the State to enforce the rule of law, the presence of organized criminal groups, the use of firearms and the level of gender equality. While those factors can interplay in a different way at the country and local levels, violent crimes, in particular homicide, have a significant relationship with them. There is evidence suggesting that economic trends have a close link with acquisitive crimes, whose levels can increase in situations of economic stress.

61. The efficiency of criminal justice systems varies depending on the region and the form and level of crime. In particular, conviction rates and detention patterns vary significantly, one reason being the different crime contexts that criminal justice systems have to address. The proportion of prisoners in pretrial detention and indicators of prison overcrowding reflect areas of concern in the administration of justice.

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<sup>15</sup> The case of data on assaults is illustrative: for example, the large differences in assault rates reported by European countries — owing to different definitions and processing practices — hinder any regional or comparative analysis on this serious offence.

62. Better and deeper analyses of the crime situation and the operation of criminal justice systems require better data at the national and international levels. In compliance with its mandate, UNODC continues to further enhance statistical standards on crime, to improve mechanisms for collecting and disseminating data on crime, to develop analytical products to improve knowledge of regional and global trends involving certain types of crime and to support countries' efforts to improve their capacity to produce and use statistical data according to international quality standards.

## **B. Recommendations**

63. **It is recommended that the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice:**

**(a) Encourage Member States to continue to participate in the annual collection of data on crime conducted by UNODC (the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems); and encourage those States that have not yet done so to appoint a national focal point to streamline operations of the Survey;**

**(b) Encourage UNODC, within available resources, to continue to regularly provide the international community with evidence-based analyses on crime by making use, in a transparent and consultative process, of high-quality statistical information;**

**(c) Strengthen collaboration with the Statistical Commission to support the capacity of States to produce statistics on crime and to further improve the quality and availability of statistics on crime disseminated at the international level;**

**(d) Acknowledge the establishment of the Centre of Excellence for Statistical Information on Governance, Victims of Crime, Public Security and Justice as a valuable experience to support the efforts of Member States to improve the quality and availability of crime statistics.**