

Preface

The International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) began development in 1987 to further international comparative research. The first survey in 1989 was restricted to fifteen industrialised countries and the cities of Surabaya (Indonesia) and Warsaw (Poland). With the second round of the ICVS, in 1992, its scope expanded through the involvement of UNICRI (the United Nations Interregional Criminal Justice Research Institute), which has developed the survey into a global project covering all continents.

The ICVS has two main features. First, it is a formidable instrument for monitoring crime and perceptions of crime and criminal justice across the world in a standardised way, independently of information from official sources. The results of the ICVS have in many instances provided balance to what has sometimes been ideologically slanted national discourse on crime and criminal justice. The unique value of the ICVS is reflected in the growing interest that key international organisations take in it – for instance the World Health Organisation, the World Bank, the European Commission and the World Society of Victimology. From its first charting of crime in industrialised countries, it moved into Eastern Europe countries in transition from centrally guided to free market economies. Here, it provided crucial research-based information on changes in crime and perceptions of it in a transitional period. In several countries, including Poland, ICVS participation evolved into fully-fledged national crime surveys. The ICVS has had a similar influence in Africa, Asia and Latin America – and its potential here is likely to grow more. The second main feature of the ICVS is that it provides a wealth of data for researchers interested in the patterns, contours and effects of victimisation in both the developed countries and the rest of the world – which had previously gained less attention. The ICVS has unquestionably both deepened and broadened the empirical of victimology.

This is the first of a number of reports on the 2000 ICVS. A report will follow from UNICRI focussing on Central and Eastern European countries and how they compare with Western Europe. After this, UNICRI will report on Southern Africa.

The ICVS Working Group

The Working Group has changed composition somewhat over time as the survey has developed. Jan van Dijk was the key member of the original ICVS Working Group and

has been closely involved in all three previous sweeps of the survey. He also led the work on getting the latest, 2000 ICVS, off the ground. With his appointment as head of the United Nations' Centre for International Crime Prevention in Vienna, he continued his support for the 2000 ICVS in an advisory role.

We are pleased that NSCR (Netherlands Institute for the Study of Criminality and Law Enforcement) in Leiden recently joined the Working Group. NSCR was willing to take responsibility for the co-ordination of the surveys in 2000 in industrialised countries, and the current management of the complete ICVS database. We hope their involvement will ensure continuity of the ICVS project.

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