

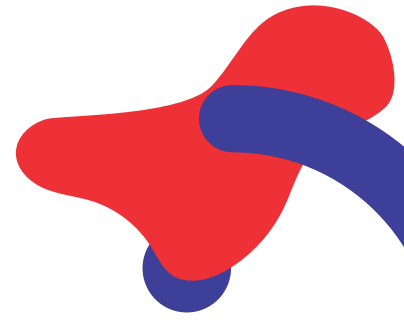


**CCI**  
CUTTING CRIME  
IMPACT

## Factsheet

# Measuring & Mitigating feelings of insecurity

This factsheet is based on research conducted for the state-of-the-art report on measuring and mitigating citizens' feelings of insecurity (CCI deliverable D2.6).



## Cutting Crime Impact (CCI)

CCI is an EU-funded project that aims to support law enforcement agencies (LEAs) as well as relevant local and national authorities (i.e. security policymakers) in reducing the impact of crime and, where possible, preventing crime in the first place. The CCI project supports preventative, evidence-based and sustainable approaches to tackling high-impact petty crime.

CCI will design, develop and demonstrate toolkits relating to four focus areas:



**Predictive Policing**



**Community Policing**



**Crime Prevention through Urban Design and Planning (CP-UDP)**



**Measuring and mitigating citizens' feelings of insecurity**

### Why do policymakers want to measure citizens' feelings of insecurity?

*“Policy-makers need benchmarks because it is important to know where we stand now in comparison to twenty years ago, or why we are worse or better off than others. Policymakers, at least if they are interested in the wider picture, also want to have these differences explained”<sup>1</sup>*

### How have feelings of insecurity been measured?

**Survey methods are not only being used to understand crime by measuring citizens' experiences of victimisation, but also to explore a range of other issues, including citizens' feelings of insecurity.**

<sup>1</sup> Martin Killias, University of Zurich, chair of the “European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics” Project.

## 1.

### National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) in the US

- The first survey-based measure of crime victimisation was launched in 1973 in the United States. The survey is designed to obtain information about citizens' experiences of crime. The NCVS covers (i) personal crimes: rape and sexual assault; robbery; aggravated and simple assault; and personal larceny, as well as (ii) household property crimes: burglary; motor vehicle theft; and other theft.
- Prior to the launch of the victimisation survey, the only information available on crime was from police records<sup>2</sup>. The NCVS asks respondents for information about their experiences of victimisation, whether reported to the police or not.
- For each victimisation incident, the NCVS collects information about: (i) the offender – e.g. age, race, sex and victim-offender relationship; (ii) characteristics of the crime – e.g. time and place of occurrence, use of weapons, nature of injury, and economic consequences; (iii) whether the crime was reported to police, reasons the crime was or was not reported; and (iv) victim experiences with the criminal justice system.
- The NCVS also asks about citizens' feelings and perceptions: feelings of safety at home or in the neighbourhood in which they live; fear of being the victim of a crime; assessment of personal risk of being a victim of crime; worry about criminality in general; personal wellbeing; and opinions on the effectiveness of the police and the criminal justice system.

**The resulting data helps understand why victims do not report to the police, why certain victims seek and receive services when others do not and whether victims receive support in preventing repeat victimisation. Data is used to: prevent crime; measure the performance of public sector organisations (evaluation of the satisfaction with police response and with victim services); obtain reliable information on the consequences or harm associated with the crime incident; gather information to help track community wellbeing; and track the level of residents' trust in their communities<sup>3</sup>.**

## 2.

### International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS)

- Initiated in 1987 by a group of European criminologists with expertise in national crime surveys (Van Dijk, Mayhew, Killias, 1990), the ICVS<sup>4</sup> asks participants about their experience of ten prevalent crimes over the past twelve months (crimes broadly defined as vehicle related, burglary, theft of personal property and contact crime).
- Surveys have traditionally been conducted by telephone, but recently online methodologies have been piloted.
- The number of households surveyed is relatively small (only 2,000 in each country) but thanks to the sampling process and standard methodology quite representative. Using data from victimisation surveys allows researchers and policymakers to draw comparisons between countries, in terms of crime victimisation levels and trends.
- The measures of feelings of insecurity covered within the ICVS relate to: (i) the environment (the neighbourhood, time of day etc.); (ii) the experience of the respondent (iii) and the profile of the respondent.
- The ICVS provides valuable data on victimisation relevant to LEAs and policymakers. However, one of the problems is obtaining regular funding for surveys. Financial costs have regularly delayed their administration.
- The results reveal important differences between the citizens' feeling of insecurity and the actual level of crime.

<sup>2</sup> Those data was reported to and recorded by law enforcement agencies.

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation by the 21st Century Policing Task Force Report.

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation by the 21st Century Policing Task Force Report.

<sup>4</sup> Covering 80 different countries.

The need to improve survey measures of insecurity has been highlighted. The formulation of questions has often been raised as an issue. Indeed, some questions invite a negative answer that can bias the measuring of feeling of insecurity. Some researchers question whether fear of crime can be measured through standardised, fixed-choice questions. Furthermore, in seeking to objectively quantify the fear of crime, victimisation surveys suggest that such feelings are absolute and unchanging. However, research shows that people's attitudes and beliefs are 'extraordinarily unstable' and may vary considerably within a short space of time. More crucially, it is questionable whether results gained from an artificial situation (i.e. a survey) can be used to gain insight into everyday life or experiences.

### 3. -----

## European Opinion survey – Eurobarometer

- European institutions have been regularly conducting public opinion surveys across all member states, using the Eurobarometer, since 1973. Standard Eurobarometer results are published twice yearly. Each survey consists of approximately 1,000 face-to-face interviews, per country.
- Flash Eurobarometers are ad hoc thematic telephone interviews conducted at the request of any European Commission service. Flash surveys enable the Commission to obtain results relatively quickly and to focus on specific target groups, as and when required.

**Questions about crime victimisation and feelings of insecurity have been asked using the Eurobarometer—but only occasionally. The results show that feelings of insecurity have increased slowly but steadily across the EU as a whole, between 1996 and 2002; while, at the same time, the crime rate was falling. The only Member State to experience a consistent decrease in citizens' feelings of insecurity over this period was Germany.**

### 4. -----

## Measuring victimisation and insecurity – Catalonia, Spain

- In the first survey conducted by Barcelona, 1984, there were ten working groups covering a broad range of topics—from schools, through policing and justice to shops—as well as an analysis group. The aim was “to uphold a constant line of analysis on crime in the city”.
- While the first survey sampled citizens in Barcelona (n=4,550), the survey was extended in 1990 to other metropolitan areas lying beyond the administrative boundary—the victimisation survey of Barcelona and Metropolitan areas (SVBMA).
- Specific surveys have been used to measure security problems faced by school pupils (starting in 2000), women (starting in 2010) and more recently seniors<sup>5</sup>. The results of these surveys is particularly interesting for understanding the feelings of insecurity among specific groups.

**Survey research with an extensive territorial scope suggests homogeneity in terms of perceived or actual crime risk—but this does not correspond exactly to the reality. Over the longer term, the LEA in Catalonia needs tools to identify the perception of security in small areas. Consequently, the LEA is following algorithm research<sup>6</sup> in order to estimate the insecurity feelings in areas with a low density of population (and insufficient sample). Such a tool might enable the LEA to draft concrete policies to address feelings of insecurity at a particular level. Through the CCI project, the LEA in Catalonia is exploring new ideas for measuring and mitigating feelings of insecurity tailored to the needs of users.**

<sup>5</sup> School violence surveys (4), violence against women (90% of respondents were female and 10% male, 2 editions), senior (1, and only with those living at home).

<sup>6</sup> Led by David Buil Gil at the University of Manchester.

## 5.

### Security Index in Rotterdam, Netherlands: The Security Audit

- The AUDITS project identified a number of interesting methods for measuring insecurity, including the Security Index in Rotterdam. The City of Rotterdam, comprising 14 districts and 71 neighbourhoods, has developed a tool that combines official police records with survey data. It monitors three elements: (i) Safety Index; (ii) Social Index; and (iii) Physical Index. In order to identify which neighbourhoods need increased level of safety, it is necessary to use a monitor (conducted twice per year). The municipality of Rotterdam works with its partners, residents and businesses to maintain a general level of safety and increase it where necessary<sup>7</sup>.
- At the national level, safety is measured by a large-scale survey distributed by each police region and city. The results can be benchmarked against other cities. To monitor safety at the local level, the municipality of Rotterdam uses a large-scale safety survey distributed to residents (15,000 respondents online and by phone). The results are processed into the Safety Index.
- The neighbourhood profile does not use a scoring system between 1 and 10, but rather gives a score below or above the Rotterdam average (average = 100).

## 6.

### Measuring victimisation and insecurity in Germany

- In the years 2010 to 2015, the BaSiD Security Barometer was created in Germany. An interdisciplinary network was involved in the study. Three survey instruments were used to cover different topics: (i) the dark field study "The German Victimisation Survey" (2012) was created with the help of surveys; (ii) a representative survey "Security and Quality of Life in Germany" (2012) was conducted; and (iii) qualitative interviews were used to generate findings on security, perceptions, conditions and expectations.
- From 2020, a new nationwide victim survey on "Security and Crime in Germany" (SKiD) is to be conducted in a 2-year cycle.
- In Lower Saxony, three waves of a Survey on Safety and Crime were conducted in 2013, 2015 and 2017. For this purpose, a representative sample of residents of Lower Saxony (aged 16 and over) is asked regularly about four aspects—including a specific spatial view: (i) sociodemographic data; (ii) questions on various aspects of the fear of crime; (iii) a block of questions on experiences of being the victim of crime; and (iv) perceptions of the police and their work. Each survey also includes a special 5th module. So far: (v) intimate partner violence, cybercrime and hate crime.

## Key message from CCI

- It is important to consider the limitations associated with the survey methodology for measuring feelings of insecurity. The survey questions may engender feelings of insecurity in the respondent by highlighting risks and dangers. Indeed, the wording of a question can influence respondents in their choice of answer. Serious concerns have been raised about the measures of so-called “fear of crime” used in national surveys, such as the Crime Survey in England and Wales (CSEW). Farrell, Gray, and Jackson (2006, 2007) note that standard methods of measuring feelings of insecurity may actually be constructing fear of crime as a significant social problem for a large proportion of the population—rather than accurately measuring a real quality-of-life issue.
- Surveys hardly measure the exact reasons why respondents may feel insecure. Interesting research by Farrell et al. (2007) into

methods of measuring so-called fear of crime suggests that the standard question “Are you worried about crime?” is not really measuring “fear of crime” as we might commonly understand the term. Rather, the question relates to a range of different feelings and views about crime. Qualitative interviews show that a respondent may answer in the affirmative to the question about “worry” for a variety of reasons. He or she has: personally experienced fears or anxieties generated by actual experiences of crime; feels angry about having been a victim or the prospect of becoming a victim; considers the prospect of being a victim frightening; believes that crime is an important social issue that should be addressed; or takes steps to improve his or her own personal security.

If you would like further information about Cutting Crime Impact, please contact:

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