

MARCH 2015

SERBIAN POLICE CRIME STATISTICS (UN)AVAILABLE

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Increasing the transparency and accountability of the police is not viable if the Serbian public are made aware of current crime rates and the effectiveness of the police only by the Minister of Internal Affairs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) should regularly report, annually at the very least, detailed statistics on crime rates as collected by regional police directorates across the country.
2. These MUP reports should include information on the following: the distribution of all types of crimes and other offences at national, regional and local levels; the rate of prosecution by regional police directorates (PU); the variation in crime rates by PU or by city, municipality and city municipality across Serbia; figures for reported, solved and dismissed crimes; the numbers of complaints filed against the police, broken down by PU or by city, municipality and city municipality.
3. All statistical data in the aforementioned reports must be gender sensitive.

INTRODUCTION

The publication of crime statistics contributes to increased police transparency and accountability. On the basis of these data the public are able to assess the effectiveness of the police in crime fighting and prevention as well as with regards to fighting corruption within its own ranks. In this

way the police can show that they have nothing to hide from the public, which in turn increases public trust in the police. This is why police services in many European Union countries – such as the UK, Sweden and Croatia – regularly publish statistical analyses of trends in crime, giving the public an insight into police effectiveness. Although there is debate among experts in the field regarding the reliability of statistical data published by police forces¹, it is important to emphasise that these data must first be made publically available.

LACK OF SYSTEMATIC DATA COLLECTION BY THE SERBIAN MUP

Most records collected by the MUP are labelled ‘classified’ and are not publically available². The Ministry makes use of its Unified Information System (Serbian: *Jedinstveni informacioni sistem*, JIS) with centralised databases³ containing information relating to various areas of public security (organised crime, corruption and money laundering, offences against life and limb, property crime and others).⁴

The system records are not uniform, however, because there are also hardcopy records (of reported crimes) that are not tracked by the system. There is also a separate database called “Criminal Acts and Perpetrators”, which records information on criminal cases conducted by the police across Serbia, as well as information on victims and perpetrators.⁵ Processed data from the JIS are used on a daily basis by the police but are also used for analytical purposes and to assess crime rates.⁶

Based on these data the MUP’s Analytics Directorate regularly publishes a “Statistical Overview of the State of Public Security”. This document is submitted to top officials in the Ministry and the heads of relevant departments all the way down to the regional police directorates (PU) but is not always made public.⁷ In order to improve the analytical processing of data and crime statistics the MUP has completed several projects supported by the European Union (through the CARDS and IPA funds) and bilateral donors. This is one more reason why the MUP should regularly publish data on crime rates in Serbia, based on information gathered for its own internal purposes (via “Criminal Acts and Perpetrators”). A *Law on Recordkeeping and Data Processing in Internal Affairs* was drafted in March 2015 – this will allow the processing of personal data gathered by the police in the course of their operations. No article of this draft law provides for the publication of crime statistics and it remains uncertain whether and in what way the MUP will make information on crime rates publically available.

- 1 There are a number of studies and opinions expressed by parliamentary committees (for example, in the UK) that call into question the accuracy of statistics published by police services. Apparently, police services tend to diminish the rate of reported crime in order to show an overall drop in crime rates and increased police effectiveness. For more on this, please see: Eterno, J. and Silverman, B. (2012) *The Crime Numbers Game. Management by Manipulation*. Boca Raton: CRC Press i House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee Caught red-handed: Why we can’t count on Police Recorded Crime Statistics, Thirteenth Report of Session 2013-14.
- 2 Mijalković, S. “The Methodology of Recordkeeping on Violent Crime by the Serbian MUP” (Serbian: *Metodologija evidentiranja nasilničkog kriminala u evidencijama MUP Srbije*). TEMIDA, September 2012, pp. 23-47
- 3 The database contains information on the following: criminal acts, victims, the modus operandi of the criminal acts, perpetrators, police activity, the results of operational reports and the state of the casework, requests by public prosecutors, the time and place of the committed act.
- 4 Technical Paper: “Assessment of the Current State Of Play With Regard to Statistics on Corruption and Economic Crime and Recommendations for Improvements in Measuring Progress in Tracking/ Handling These Cases”, June 2013, p. 9. Available at: <<http://goo.gl/z39j3h>>
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid. p. 10
- 7 Ibid.

THE SERBIAN PUBLIC ARE DENIED INFORMATION RELATING TO THEIR SAFETY

Members of the public in Serbia can learn about crime rates and the effectiveness of the police only from the Minister of Internal Affairs⁸. The citizens of the UK can, for example, find out how many crimes have been committed in their street with a simple click on an online map. Should the citizens of Serbia wish to find out more about crime in their town, or read a report on the MUP, they will find they cannot access this information. For instance, the website of the MUP does not contain any information on crime rates in Serbia in 2014. There are only two tangentially related reports: *The MUP of the Republic of Serbia: Most Significant Achievements*⁹, but only for 2011 and 2012. Statements made by the Minister regarding crime rates in Serbia remain the only source of information – detailed information on crime in towns, municipalities and streets is even less available.

The aforementioned reports contain information on the operations of the MUP covering various areas of security (organised crime, corruption, murders, theft and so forth). Each category is presented as either rising or falling by a percentage rate compared with the previous year and by a total number of crimes committed. The information is very sparse and the reports suffer from a number of shortcomings. One cannot, for example, glean from them how the crimes are distributed between regional police directorates so regional differences in crime rates cannot be surmised. The reports also do not show conviction rates for various types of crimes so there are no objective indicators on the basis of which the public can assess the effectiveness of the police. In one of the reports there are also discrepancies in the number of recorded crimes.¹⁰ All this leads to the conclusion that the police do not keep accurate records and that the principles of transparency and accountability in reporting to the public have been neglected. Therefore, due to the fact that members of the public can learn very little about crime in their local area from the above information, the right of the public to be well informed about the activities of the police is effectively treated as a mere formality.

The public are also denied information on the most frequently reported and solved types of crime. Recorded complaints against the police and information on police use of force are also not made public. This information would be the most direct way of informing the public on how effective police measures are and how well police officers adhere to rules and regulations in performing their duty. This type of information should also be published via an annual report on the MUP, which is currently not available to the public. This is particularly pertinent as in mid-2014 the replacement of several heads of regional police directorates (Novi Sad, Sremska Mitrovica, Vranje, Novi Pazar, Kikinda and Prokuplje) was announced (and subsequently partially carried out)¹¹. A publically available annual MUP report that contained such information would remove all suspicion that these were politically motivated personnel changes and would make the public aware of the results of their work.

8 According to information provided by the Minister, “during the first seven months of 2014 crime fell by 9.4% compared with the same period in 2013”. From the Minister’s announcement we learned that the police were better at fighting drug crime and that overall police effectiveness increased.

9 Official website of the MUP: <<http://goo.gl/TauWGX>>

10 Comparing the 2011 and 2012 reports the first thing we notice is that there is a discrepancy relating to the total number of criminal acts committed in 2011. The 2011 report states that a total of 99,627 criminal acts were committed during that year, while the 2012 report states that a total of 100,934 criminal acts were committed in 2011. Further investigation shows that this discrepancy of 1,667 criminal acts comes from a failure to account for the categories of property crime (668 criminal acts) and general criminality (1,131 criminal acts).

11 Blic, “Police chiefs purged” (Serbian: “Čistka šefova u policiji”), <<http://goo.gl/t4pxlh>>

the practice in croatia

The Croatian Ministry of Internal Affairs, for example, releases regular annual reports containing detailed statistical crime indicators¹². These reports contain, amongst other things, information on: regional crime rates; conviction rates; criminal acts committed by calendar month; the percentage of crimes committed by region; the figures for reported, solved and dismissed crimes and so forth. Such comprehensive reports enable detailed tracking of crime rates and police activity throughout the country and contribute to increases in transparency and public trust in the police.

WHY SHOULD CRIME STATISTICS BE PUBLIC?

Detailed crime statistics should be made available online on the official MUP website. This would improve transparency and better inform the public about the police but would also, in the light of public scrutiny of their work, encourage the police to be more effective¹³. Regular publication of such reports would also reduce the volume of information requests under the Law on Freedom of Information of Public Importance and would, hence, reduce the workload of the MUP's Bureau for Information of Public Importance.

what is important?

It is worth noting that crime statistics recorded by the police are based solely on reported crime. This is important as many types of crime (rape, domestic violence) go unreported, whether due to fear of humiliation on behalf of the victim or because of a lack of trust in the police. It is, therefore, hard to say whether the instance of such crimes is on the rise or is decreasing and it is only possible to discuss trends in the reporting of these cases.

Standards relating to the generation of statistics for the judiciary and internal affairs departments are still very much in their infancy even in the EU¹⁴. Legislation relating to the keeping of statistics consists predominantly of legislation that pertains to member states¹⁵. Many standards can, however, be found in various reports and expert technical missions of the EU and UN, as well as the documents of the EU Statistical Office (EuroStat). One of the negotiating chapters in the EU accession process relates to statistics (Chapter 18), so it is expected that recordkeeping of judicial and crime statistics will be better consolidated in the near future.

12 The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, "Statistical Overview of Fundamental Security Indicators and the Results of Police Work for 2013" (Croatian: "Statistički pregled temeljnih sigurnosnih pokazatelja i rezultata rada u 2013. godini"):

13 Information pertaining to police operations and ongoing cases, as well personal information on perpetrators and victims should, of course, be withheld.

14 EU and CARDS Technical Assessment Report for Serbia, "Development of Monitoring Instruments for Judicial and Law Enforcement Institutions in the Western Balkans 2009-2011", available at: < <http://goo.gl/hudLcB>>

15 <<http://goo.gl/QJRSfV>>

gender sensitive crime statistics

Statistical information generated by the MUP is not currently gender sensitive even though data on perpetrators and victims is separated by sex. Gender sensitive statistical data, however, entails much more than merely separating the information out by sex. Generating such statistics requires the data to be cross-referenced so that information becomes available on which crimes affect women; who the perpetrators are; where women are at greatest threat of violence (physical attack, rape and similar). This would facilitate the implementation of concrete preventative measures aimed at specific threats to women's security, thereby contributing to their reduction. The existing system of recordkeeping with regards to complaints against the police is also not gender sensitive and we have no insight into whether women or men file a greater number of complaints and for which kind of cases.

CONCLUSION

Despite these shortcomings, it is nonetheless praiseworthy that the MUP has thus far published two reports on its activities and crime rates in Serbia. This represents a step towards greater transparency and accountability of the police. The fact that this practice has now been discontinued and the public deprived of important information concerning their own security, is unhelpful at best. The Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs should, therefore, regularly (annually, at the very least) publish online reports regarding its activities and detailed statistical data on crime in Serbia, by regional police directorates. These reports should contain information on the distribution of all kinds of criminal acts and offences at national, regional and local levels; conviction rates by regional police directorates; the percentage of crimes committed broken down by regional directorates or by city, municipality and city municipality; the figures for reported, solved and dismissed crimes; complaints filed against the police by regional police directorates, town, municipality or urban municipality. All statistical data contained within these reports must be gender sensitive. Prior to the compilation of these reports the MUP must unify all of the various records it collects via the regional police directorates. Only then can we be sure that the information on crime rates we hear about from police officials is accurate and reliable. Publishing such reports would contribute to greater police transparency and accountability and would improve public trust in the police.

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Acquis Communautaire, "Chapter 18: Statistics", detailed description and key documents (in Serbian) available at: <<http://goo.gl/QJRSfV>>

Publisher

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Design and layout

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Belgrade, March 2015



This publication is made possible by the support of the European Union under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) programme "Civil Society Facility", within the project "Western Balkans Pulse for Police Integrity and Trust (POINTPULSE)". The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

POINT PULSE



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POINTPULSE is a network of five CSOs, established with the aim to serve as a civilian oversight network in the Western Balkans for monitoring police integrity and advocating for relevant policy changes in the region.

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