Swedish statistics and international comparisons

Comparisons between countries that are based on official crime statistics require caution since such statistics are produced differently in different countries. Crime statistics do not provide a simple reflection of the level of crime in a given country. They are influenced by both legal and statistical factors, and by the extent to which crime is reported and registered. These factors can vary from one country to another. There are no international standards for how crime statistics should be produced and presented and this makes international comparisons difficult.

The legal factors that influence crime statistics include the way offences are defined in the relevant legislation as well as the rules and guiding principles that obtain for the work of the police and prosecutors.

The statistical factors that exert an influence include the principles that determine when a crime is recorded in the statistics. In some countries an event is only recorded in the crime statistics if, after investigation, it can legitimately be considered a crime or where there is sufficient evidence that a crime has been committed. Swedish statistics, on the other hand, record all reported incidents as crimes even if some of them are later found not to have constituted criminal offences.

Every country has its own principles about what is to be recorded as a criminal act. In some countries, if several offences are committed on the same occasion, only the most serious of these will be recorded. In Sweden, the principle that is applied involves recording all the offences committed on a given occasion.

Methods of counting crime also vary from one country to another. Several offences of the same kind against a single victim will be counted in some countries as a single crime. By contrast, in Swedish crime statistics, every offence occurring under these circumstances is counted separately.

The statistical classification of different types of incidents also varies. This is true of attempted offences, for example, which are in Sweden counted together with completed crimes. In a number of other countries, attempted offences are either recorded separately or ignored for statistical purposes.

Crime statistics are also influenced by the public’s willingness to report crime, the efforts made by the police to deal with reported crime and the police’s prioritization of different types of offences. These factors may also vary from country to country, making international comparisons more difficult.

The International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) constitutes an alternative source of statistics for international comparisons of criminality. The data are from surveys conducted amongst the general public and therefore not influenced by the same factors as the official crime statistics. The ICVS was first carried out in 1989 and then repeated in 1992, 1996, 2000 and in 2004/2005.

Reported offences

The reported offence statistics include offences reported to and registered by the police, the prosecution authority and the customs authority in Sweden during the recording period. The number recorded is the total number of reported offences, meaning that it includes events which, following investigation, are shown not to have been criminal offences or for which a criminal act cannot be proven.

In 2013, 1.4 million offences were reported, which is basically the same level as in 2012 (a marginal decrease
of 606 crimes or ±0 percent). Looking at individual categories of crime, reductions can be noted in the number of reported crimes in 2013 compared with the previous year in the categories of vandalism, theft and offences against the person. During the same period, there was an increase in the number of reported road traffic offenses, fraud offences and narcotics offences.

Since 1975, there is a continuous increase in all reported offences. However, the average growth rate, i.e., the percentage change from year to year, has declined somewhat after the 1990s.

### Cleared offences

The number of cleared offences is a measure of the efforts by crime-investigating authorities to “deal with and clarify” the reports of crime they receive. The term “cleared offence” means either that a suspect has been tied to the offence or that the offence has been cleared up in some other way. The first type of clearance is referred to as a person-based clearance and means that prosecution has been commenced, a summary sanction order (involving a fine or suspended sentence) or a waiver of prosecution has been pronounced. It is a rough measure of the crime-investigating authorities’ ability to tie perpetrators to the reported crimes. The second type of clearance is referred to as technical clearance and means that another type of clarification has been decided on, for example, (through the grounds for clearance) that it cannot be proven that a crime has been committed or that the suspect is a minor (under 15 years of age). The remaining offences are uncleared or under investigation. This includes those offenses not considered possible to clear up, such as offences where no search results have been achieved or where the investigation has revealed that the person suspected on reasonable grounds was innocent.

In 2013, there were 211,000 person-based clearances, which is 10 percent less than the previous year. There were approximately 297,000 technical clearances, which is 1 percent less than the previous year.

Looking at the last ten years (2004–2013), the trend in the number of person-based clearances shows a slight increase of 6 percent. However, the increasing trend came to a halt in 2010, and since then a reduction in the number of person-based clearances can be noted.

The percentage of person-based clearances, i.e., the number of such clearances in relation to the number of reported crimes, amounted to 15 percent for all crimes, which represents a decrease of 2 percentage units compared to 2012. The trend in the percentage of person-based clearances shows a slight increase over the past ten years up to 2010, after which this percentage has decreased.

### Persons suspected of offences

Statistics on persons suspected of offences include suspects who are, at least, suspected on reasonable grounds, and for whom the police or prosecutor maintain this degree of suspicion once the investigation is completed. Young persons under the age of 15, who are not criminally responsible under the law, are not included in the statistics on suspects. A suspect’s registered participation in a specific offence is termed “crime participation”. The number of such participations is presented in the same chapter as the statistics on suspects.

Approximately 107,000 individuals were registered as crime suspects in 2013, which is a 9 percent reduction when compared with 2012. The annual number of registered suspects has increased since 1975, but the number has both risen and fallen during the period. The increase in the number of suspects since 1975 remains, but not when taking into account the population growth. Compared with 2004, the number of suspects per 100,000 inhabitants has decreased by 4 percent.

In 2013, those suspects had been registered as taking part in 319,000 crimes (crime participations), equal to 3.0 crimes per suspect. However, the distribution of crime participations was unevenly spread between the suspects, with two thirds being suspected of participation in one crime, just over a third of participation in two or more crimes and, among those suspected, 2 percent for participation in more than ten offences. The number of crime participations fell by 5 percent between 2012 and 2013.

### Persons convicted of offences

Statistics on persons convicted of crimes record the conviction decisions made over a calendar year. “Conviction decisions” refers to a conviction in a district court or a decision by a prosecutor, such as a summary sanction order or a waiver of prosecution. The same individual may be convicted on more than one occasion during a year – they will then be counted several times in the statistics. When several people are included in the same judgment, each individual is counted as a unit for statistical purposes. An individual may be sentenced for several different offences in the same conviction, in which case only the most serious offence (as determined by the range of punishment) and the severest sanction will be recorded in the statistics on convictions. As a supplement, there are statistics on crime convictions in which all crimes for which convictions have been issued are included.

Approximately 117,000 conviction decisions were made in 2013. More than half of these, 64,000 deci-
sions, were district court judgments while the remaining 52,300 decisions were decisions by prosecutors in the form of summary sanction orders or waivers of prosecution. The number of conviction decisions fell by 10 percent in 2013 compared to the previous year. Waivers of prosecution fell by 19 percent to 17,600 compared with 2012 while the summary sanction orders fell by 7 percent to 34,700. Court judgments fell by 9 percent. The number of judgments with imprisonment as the main sanction fell by 8 percent to 11,200 judgments in 2013, which is the lowest level since the mid-1970s. The number of conviction decisions has fallen in all age groups. The numerically largest decrease has occurred in the 30–49 age group.

Seen in a longer-term perspective, the number of conviction decisions has more than halved since 1975. A major part of this reduction occurred already at the end of the 1970s, in connection with the decriminalisation of public drunkenness. Since then it has been primarily the number of summary sanction orders that has fallen. This is in part due to increased possibilities for imposing summary breach-of-regulations fines (which are not included in the category “convicted persons”), and in part to a fall in the number of cleared crimes, in particular between 1994 and 1996.

In 2013, legal proceedings were begun for 205,000 crimes, which means that the 117,000 conviction decisions were for 1.8 crimes on average.

The Prison and Probation Service

The Prison and Probation Service statistics record how many individuals were registered at correctional facilities as per 1 October, the number of individuals admitted to correctional facilities during the calendar year, and information about individuals in non-institutional care and about individuals placed in remand centres. Non-institutional care includes individuals on parole, those sentenced to protective supervision or who are serving their prison sentence under intensive supervision with electronic control, as well as those with a conditional sentence involving community service. Individuals sentenced to conditional sentences with community service are not supervised by probation authorities, but the probation authorities administer their community service.

In 2013, 8,980 individuals were admitted to correctional facilities, which is a decrease of 6 percent compared to 2012. The number of individuals registered at correctional facilities on 1 October 2013 was 4,380, which is a 10 percent decrease on the previous year. The number of admissions in 2013 is the lowest number of admissions for the entire measurement period 1975–2013. In 2013, the number of individuals who began being supervised in non-institutional care – sentenced to protective supervision or on parole – was approximately 11,200. This was a reduction of 8 percent compared with 2012.

On 1 October 2013, approximately 1,640 individuals were held in remand centres, which is a 7 percent decrease compared with 1 October 2012.

Recidivism

Statistics on recidivism record the share of individuals who relapse into crime, and are convicted for it, following an initial event. The numbers do not describe the actual proportion of recidivism among convicted persons, but only relapses into crime that have come to the knowledge of the justice system and have led to a conviction (registered relapses).

Of all individuals with an initial event in 2007, 25 percent relapsed into crime (and were subsequently convicted for it) within one year, 35 percent within two years and 40 percent within three years of the initial event. The statistics show very small changes over time. The share of recidivism differs clearly by gender. 28 percent of women had relapsed within three years, while the share among men was 43 percent.

The risk of recidivism increases substantially with the number of previous convictions. Of those with nine or more previous convictions, 80 percent relapsed within one year. After three years, 93 percent had relapsed into crime. The share of recidivists among those with 4–8 previous convictions was also high: within three years, 83 percent had relapsed into crime. In this context, “previous convictions” refers to court judgments that have gained legal force, or other conviction decisions, five years prior to the initial event.

A regression analysis corroborates most of the patterns that emerge from the statistics. Men relapse more often than women; the risk of recidivism increases with the number of previous convictions; and there is no difference over time. Men have a 51 percent higher risk of relapsing into crime than women, and individuals with more than nine previous convictions are more than 25 times more likely to relapse into crime than those without previous convictions.

The median number of days until the first relapse was almost eight months (239 days) in 2007. The gender difference is small: 254 days for women and 236 days for men.
This outline summarizes (in round figures) some of the data from the Criminal Statistics for 2013, describing some of the year's occurrences throughout the criminal justice process. The data are not intended to describe the “flow” of the criminal justice system. Such a comparison is not possible to make as the various figures are based on different units and definitions (see instructions for reading). The “outflow” from the system, i.e. offences and cases that resulted in no subsequent action – for example reported offences where no suspect was found, are not included in this outline.