

## The International Crime Victims Survey

The International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) is a global programme of standardized surveys used to ask random samples of people about their experiences with crime and the police and their feelings of safety.

An international working group, jointly formed by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, the Dutch Ministry of Justice, the British Home Office and the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Criminality and Law Enforcement, is responsible for the conceptual and methodological development of the ICVS. The working group also coordinates with participating countries, develops and maintains the data sets, conducts analyses and disseminates the survey results.

Why is such a survey needed? There are two main reasons. First, measures of crime from other sources used in cross-country comparisons are often inadequate. Because the measures are based on police records, they can be greatly affected by differences among countries in how the police define, record

and count crimes. Indeed, many developing countries have no central registry of crimes, leaving the ICVS as the only source of information. Second, the survey may prompt participating countries to conduct research on crime and victimization and to develop crime and criminal justice policies based on this research.

The project started in 14 industrial countries in 1989. Since then, 71 countries have participated at least once, for a total of 145 surveys. In most of the participating countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe the surveys were conducted in the capital city through face-to-face interviews of a sample of 1,000 people. In industrial countries the surveys were done nationwide by telephone, generally with a sample of 2,000 people.

The ICVS produces data on victimization for a number of crimes, including assault, robbery, bribery, sexual assault and property crimes. Results from the most recent surveys, conducted in the 1990s, are presented in table 20.