

# **Towards a Eurobarometer of public safety**

**Key findings of the first survey on public  
safety among the residents of the European Union**

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linked to Drugs Dependence

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## INTRODUCTION

According to several opinion polls, urban crime and other forms of social disorder are among the most pressing concerns of the public in the European Union; In many industrialised countries problems of community safety are presently viewed as more serious than those of the economy, the environment or national security. Within the framework of the European Union several initiatives have been taken which seek to address the mounting problems of crime and drugs abuse (e.g. the establishment of Europol in The Hague and the Drugs Observatory in Lisbon).

There is an obvious need for both policy makers and researchers in the Union to be able to compare the level and trends of crime within the Union. In the present situation no such information is available. As is generally known, police statistics of recorded crimes cannot be used for comparative purposes (Kangaspunta, 1995). Legal definitions, reporting patterns and recording practices of the police vary greatly over time and place. Criminal justice data on drugs-related arrests and convictions are generally widely available but varied legal systems make comparability difficult to achieve (EMCDDA, 1996). Credible information on public safety must be collected independent of the police, through standardized survey research among the public. Such studies on the experiences of the public of criminal victimizations and on their attitudes towards crime and crime control have been carried out in several European nations. In recent years an International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) was successfully carried out under the auspices of the UN in more than forty countries (Alvazzi, Zvekic, Van Dijk, 1992).

Against this background the proposal was made by the authors to carry out a pilot study for a European Crime Victims Survey, modelled after the U.N survey. The pilot study was eventually executed by International Research Associates (INRA) at the request of the European Commission (General Directorate V/E/2 and the Task Force for Justice and Home Affairs) as part of Eurobarometer 44.3 in the beginning of 1996.

In this report the key results of this pilot study will be presented. The focus in this report is on the perceptions of crime and drugs-related problems of the public. In the final paragraph proposals are offered for the development of a full-fledged Eurobarometer of public safety.

## METHODOLOGY

For the sake of the pilot study a questionnaire was designed which is an abridged version of the one used in the third sweep of the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS, 1996). The question on fear of street crime was identical to the one used in the ICVS. The questions on victimisation by violence and burglary were similar but for budget reasons the reference period was somewhat differently structured'. Questions on reporting to the police and anti-burglary devices were also slightly changed. A new question was added on the personal contacts of the respondents with drugs-related problems in their area of residence. The questionnaire is given in annex I.

The data were collected as part of wave 44.3 of the Eurobarometer, between February 27 and April 3, 1996. The Eurobarometer covers the population of the respective member countries, aged 15 years and over, resident in each of the member states. The basic sample design applied in all member states is a multi-stage, random (probability) one. In each EU country a number of sampling points was drawn, proportional to population size and density and stratified by type of area (metropolitan, urban and rural). In each of the selected sampling points a starting address was drawn randomly. Further addresses were selected at every Nth address by standard random walk methods. In each household, the respondent was selected at random. All interviews were face-to-face in people's homes and in their national language. The data of all countries were weighted for gender, age and region. EU averages were calculated on the basis of Eurostat population figures.

In total 16,235 persons were interviewed. In most countries the sample size was 1,000, with the exception of Germany (2,000 respondents, of whom 1,000 from the Western states and 1,000 from the Eastern states), the United Kingdom (1,300, of whom 1,000 from Great Britain and 300 from Northern Ireland) and Luxembourg (600). National samples of 1,000 are rather small for the measurement of rare events such as personal victimisations in the larger EU countries. The budget available for the pilot study did not allow for larger samples.

As said, the questions on actual victimisation differ from those used in the ICVS. The resulting rates are likely to be somewhat inflated (see footnote 1). Since they are also susceptible to sampling error, it was decided not to publish the national rates of victimisation. Sample sizes are sufficient to measure the levels of fear and perceptions of drugs-related problems<sup>2</sup>. In this report, we will present comparable rates of fear of crime and perception of drugs-related problems of all countries of the Union. The other data collected in the study will be used to gain a better understanding of the sources of fear of crime among the residents of the European Union.

<sup>1</sup> In the ICVS the respondent is initially asked whether he/she was victimised by a type of crime over the past five years. Those who respond positively are subsequently asked whether they have been victimised during the last twelve months. This two-stage questioning about the experiences of last year is known to limit the extent of so-called forward time-telescoping of incidents which took place longer than a year ago. In the pilot study respondents were directly asked about their experiences last year. This more direct approach is likely to lead to the reporting of older incidents as if they happened last year. The rates are therefore likely to be somewhat inflated.

<sup>2</sup> For seven countries a comparison could be made between the results of the Eurobarometer and the ICVS 1996. The results on fear of crime proved to be very similar. This was not the case with the rates of victimisation by burglary and violence, for the reasons explained in the text.

## RESULTS

### **Fear of crime**

The reader is reminded that the following results are estimates based on interviews with a random sample of the population. The accuracy of the estimates is dependent on the size of the sample and the observed percentage. In the present study the real rates among the population may be one tenth lower or higher than the estimated rates. There is, for instance, a certainty of 95% that in the case of an estimated rate of 25%, the real rate of the population falls within the range of 23 to 27%.

Included in the questionnaire was a widely used proxy for fear of crime of citizens: "*How safe do you feel walking alone in the area where you live after dark? Do you feel very safe, fairly safe, a bit unsafe or very unsafe*".

A core result of the study is, in our opinion, the percentage of EU residents who do not feel safe in this situation. Thirty two percent, or one in every three, of the EU citizens does not feel safe in the street in their own neighborhood after dark.

Table 1a gives an overview of the EU averaged rate and of the national rates of EU member countries.

Table 1a; Fear of street crime; percentage of the public feeling a bit or very unsafe when walking in their own area after dark (in 1996) in the EU and per member country (n=16.235)

European Union	32
Austria	20
Belgium.	29
Denmark	11
Finland	13
France	29
Germany (Eastern states)	60
Germany (Western states)	34
Greece	28
Ireland	37
Italy	32
Luxembourg	18
Netherlands	19
Portugal	34
Spain	39
Sweden	19
United Kingdom	31

Sources: INRA (1996), Eurobarometer 44.3

Within the European Union feelings of unsafely are by far the most prevalent in the Eastern states of the Federal Republic of Germany (60%). Other regions/countries with high levels of fear of street crime are Spain (39%), Ireland (37%), Portugal (34%) and the Western states of the FRG (34%).

The lowest rates are found in the three Scandinavian member countries (Denmark: 11%;, Finland: 13% and Sweden: 19%), Luxembourg (18%), the Netherlands (19%) and Austria (20%).

Previous analyses have shown that feelings of unsafely in one's neighborhood are related to the actual incidence of various forms of street crime such as robbery and assault (Van Dijk, 1994; Van Dijk, Van Kesteren, 1996). The present item can be considered as an indirect measure of over all levels of exposure to actual violence in the public sphere.

Several Eastern and Central European countries participated in the third sweep of the ICVS which was also executed in the beginning of 1996<sup>3</sup>. In this survey feelings of unsafely were measured with the use of the same quesdon. In other respects the methodology of the survey was similar too (e.g. all interviews were carried out face to face).

For the purpose of a comparison with the EU rates, an overview is given of the rates of Eastern and Central European countries/cities in table Ib.

**Table Ib: Fear of street crime in Eastern and Central European countries/cities in 1996 (% feeling unsafe)**

Albania (Tirana)	41
Czech Republic	40
Estonia (95)	51
Hungary (Budapest)	37
Latvia	62
Poland	34
Rumania (Bucharest)	51
Russia (Moscow)	69
Slovakia (92)	46
Slovenia (92) (Ljubljana)	22
ex-Yueoslavia (Belgrade)	37

Source: J. van Kesteren (1996).

As can be seen in table Ib, all Eastern and Central European countries or cities, with the exception of Slovenia show higher levels of feelings of unsafely than the EU average. In some countries the survey was carried out in the capital only. The city rates are likely to be higher than the national rates of those countries, as fear of crime is positively related to urbanization. Even accounting for this, the rates are high in comparison to the EU average. The highest rates are found in Moscow (69%), Latvia (62%), Estonia (51%) and Bucharest (51%).

The lowest rate is found in Poland (34%). A comparison with the results of the ICVS of 1992 (42%) indicates that in Poland feelings of unsafely have declined over the past three years.

The relatively high rates in the eastern, ex-communist parts of Europe puts into perspective the high rates in Eastern Germany. High levels of fear of street crime seem to be a characteristic for the countries in transition. As said, such feelings are indicative of higher exposure to actual violence. They may also reflect anxieties about other aspects of society (Van Dijk, 1994).

Finally, we have put the EU rates in a global perspective. In table Ic are depicted the percentages of people living in cities of 100,000 inhabitants or more who feel unsafe per

<sup>3</sup> The ICVS 1996 was supervised by an international working group, consisting of Prof. dr J.J.M. van Dijk (chair), Dr. U. Zvekic (UNICRI) and Mrs. P. Mayhew (Home Office). The data collection in Estonia, Latvia, Russia, Rumania, Hungary, Albania and ex-Yugoslavia was made possible through grants from the Ministry of Development Aid of the Netherlands, the Home Office of England/Wales and HEUNI in Finland. The studies in Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia were locally funded.

global region. The EU rates for city dwellers are based on ICVS data of 1992 and 1996 (covering eight member countries<sup>4</sup>). This rate is compared with the urban population rates of North America (USA, Canada), South America (Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina, Costa Rica), Asia (China, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Kyrgistan, Phillipines), Australia (Australia/New Zealand) and Africa (Egypt, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunesia, Uganda, Zimbabwe), taken from the ICVS 1996 and 1992<sup>5</sup>.

**Table Ic Fear of street crime among the urban population of the EU, Eastern and Central Europe, North America, Asia, Australia, Africa and South America in 1992/1996 (% feeling unsafe)**

	number of countries	% public feeling unsafe
European Union	8	29
Central/Eastern Europe	12	49
North America	2	30
Asia	6	30
Australia (1992)	2	30
Africa	6	37
South America	4	48

Source: State University of Leiden/ICVS 1992/1996

Comparing the rates of global regions shows that the EU safety level in urban areas is similar to that in North America and Asia. In some Asian cities such feelings are markedly less prevalent. Elsewhere in the world a larger part of the public living in urban areas feels unsafe in their own neighborhood. The variation in national rates of fear reflects that of actual victimization by violent crime (Van Dijk and Van Kesteren, 1996<sup>2</sup>). The fear levels in Central and Eastern Europe, however, are somewhat out of proportion.

#### **Demographical and social disaggregations**

Feelings of unsafely are not equally distributed among the public. As said, such feelings tend to be more prevalent in urban areas where the exposure to actual violence is higher. Feelings of unsafely are also known to be higher among those groups of the population who are socially and/or physically more vulnerable to crime. Physical vulnerability means exposure to attack, powerlessness to resist attack, and exposure to more serious consequences if attacked. Social vulnerability means both exposure to actual violence and limited resources to deal with the financial consequences of attacks (Skogan, Maxfield, 1981; Killias, 1990).

Table 2 gives in an overview of the rates of some relevant groups of the population.

<sup>4</sup> United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium (1992), France, Finland, Sweden, Italy (1992) and Austria. Data from 1992 were used for the countries which did not participate in the 1996 sweep of the ICVS. Sample sizes vary between 1,000 and 2,000 per country.

<sup>5</sup> In most countries in Asia, South America and Africa the survey was carried out among a sample of the population of the capital (n=1,000).

**Table 2: Fear of street crime 'by different groups of the population of the European Union (% feeling unsafe)**

Gender	
male	19
female	44
Age	
15-24	29
25-39	26
40-54	29
55+	42
City size	
village	24
small/medium	33
large (> 500,000)	40
Income	
low	34
medium low	28
medium high	26
high	23

Source: INRA, 1996/Eurobarometer 44.31

The results confirm that physical and social vulnerability is related to fear of street crime. Fear is more prevalent among women, the elderly (> 55), urban dwellers and the lower income groups. This pattern was consistent in all member countries, but the links between city size and income and fear are stronger in some countries than in others.

The unequal distribution of fear among the residents of the EU can be illustrated by a comparison between two extreme groups. Of the young males living in villages 9% feels unsafe. By contrast, 62% of the women of 55 and older living in the Union's larger cities feels unsafe.

The sources of these feelings will be looked at more closely at the end of this report.

## PERCEPTION OF DRUGS PROBLEMS

Since drugs-related problems play an important role in the public debate on crime and fear of crime in the European Union, a special question was put to the respondents about their contacts with these.

The question was: *"Over the past 12 months, how often were you in contact with drug related problems in the area where you live? For example, seeing people dealing in drugs, taking or using drugs in public places, or by finding syringes left by drug addicts".*

Table 3 gives the rates for the EU and the member countries.

**Table 3: Personal exposure to drugs-related problems in the past 12 months in the EU and per member country (n= 16-235); % "often or from time to time"**

European Union	14
Austria	10
Belgium	11
Denmark	8
Finland	7
France	12
Germany (Western states)	13
Germany (Eastern states)	4
Greece	14
Ireland	16
Italy	14
Luxembourg	8
Netherlands	17
Portugal	19
Spain	24
Sweden	7
United Kingdom	14

Source: INRA, 1996/Eurobarometer, 44.3

Fourteen percent of the EU citizens are often or from time to time personally confronted with drugs-related problems in their own living area. Such contacts are the most common among the public in Spain (24%), Portugal (19%), the Netherlands (17%) and Ireland (16%). The lowest rates are found in the Eastern German states (4%), the Scandinavian countries (Finland: 7%; Sweden: 7%; Denmark: 8%) and Luxembourg (8%).

### Demographical and social disaggregations

Like feelings of fear, personal contacts with the drugs scene are unlikely to be evenly distributed among the population. In the absence of any guidance from previous research findings, we have again looked at the relationships with gender, age, city size and income level. The results are given in table 4.

**Table 4: Personal exposure to drugs-related problems over the past 12 months by different groups of the EU population; % "often or from time to time"**

Gender	
male	15
female	13
Age	
15-24	25
25-39	15
40-54	12.
55+	8
City size	
village	9
small/medium	14
large (> 500,000)	20
Income	
low	13
medium low	11
medium high	12
high	12

Source: INRA, 1996/Eurobarometer 44.3

Like fear of street crime, personal contacts with the drugs scene are more common among city dwellers. Of the residents of cities of more than half a million inhabitants 20% experienced such encounters. However, in other respects this item is differently distributed across the population than fear of crime. Such contacts are much more common for young people than for the elderly. There are no significant differences between the sexes and the various income groups. The results suggest that groups which most often visit city centres are the most likely to come into contact with drugs-related problems.

## THE SOURCES OF FEAR

Fear of street crime is a social problem in its own right. It undermines feelings of well-being and may in its more extreme manifestations keep people away from participation in social activities. It is therefore important for policy making, to understand what are the most important determinants of the public's fear of crime.

There is ample evidence from previous studies that fear of (street) crime cannot be understood as just the result of the existing threat of actual violence. Reference was already made to the importance of the vulnerability factor in explaining the distribution of fear across the public. In the criminological literature, fear of street crime is often related to the perception of "incivilities" or other forms of social disorder in one's area (Hare, 1996). This factor has become known in the USA as the "broken windows" hypothesis (Wilson and Kelling, 1981). Examples of such social and environmental cues to danger are loitering teenagers on street corners, tramps and beggars on the street, graffiti, litter strewn around, abandoned houses and broken windows. In the European context, the presence of a visible, local drugs scene might also be a source of feelings of unsafely.

In order to analyse the factors which are, independently of each other, most strongly related to fear of street crime, a multivariate analysis was carried out of the relationships between several relevant social factors and the individual scores for fear of crime. The results of this so-called stepwise regression analysis are given in table 5.

Table 5: Factors related to fear of street crime'; results of a stepwise regression analysis (n=14,379);

variables in the equation	Beta	signT
gender (male/female)	+ .26	.0000
city size (small/large)	+ .17	.0000
income (high/low)	+.14	.0000
age (young/old)	+ .12	.0000
exposure to drugs related problems (never/often)	+ .09	.0000
victimization by violent crime (no/yes)	+.07	.0000

The analysis shows that the factor most strongly related to fear of street crime is gender. This result is somewhat surprising because actual victimisation rates for robbery or attacks are not higher for women. Men as a group may be less ready to admit to feelings of unsafely. This machismo factor cannot explain the strength and consistency of the gender factor in fear of street crime. An alternative and more plausible explanation is that women feel less capable to resist attacks and are more likely to be confronted with a wide range of threatening forms of sexual harassment in both private and public spaces (Junger, 1987; Stanko, 1990). The latter interpretation is supported by the finding that the gender differences are most pronounced among the younger age groups (15-40 year).

The second determinant of fear is the place of residence. Those living in urban areas are more likely to feel unsafe, regardless of other characteristics. This relationship points to the importance of actual exposure to violent crime as a source of fear. In all European countries the level of violent crime is higher in large cities than in rural areas (Van Dijk, Van Kesteren, 1996).

Europeans with lower incomes tend to feel less safe in their neighborhoods. This relationship can be explained as the result of their residential proximity to places with high crime rates - often neighborhoods where various types of social problems are concentrated - and to their limited resources to deal with the consequences. The poverty factor behind feelings of unsafely is illustrated by the high level of feelings of unsafely among unemployed. Men in the EU who are looking for work are twice as likely to feel unsafe (19%) than those employed (8%)<sup>6</sup>.

The analysis also shows that older citizens more often feel unsafe in their own area. The elderly, like women, are not more at risk than other groups of the population (although they may form a target group for certain forms of street robbery in some countries). The phenomenon of fear among the elderly can be understood as resulting from their physical vulnerability and from the severity of possible medical consequences.

Finally, the analysis has born out that citizens who come into contact with the drugs scene and those actually victimised by violent crime, exhibit more feelings of unsafely, regardless of other characteristics. The hypothesis that within the European Union the presence of local drugs scenes acts as a source of feelings of unsafely is confirmed by this result. It is interesting to note that this "junkie factor" might even be a more important source of fear than actual victimisation by violent crime.

To sum up, those who are actually more exposed to drugs-problems and street crime are more fearful. Apart from this, the socially and physically more vulnerable groups of the population feel more threatened by crime. Women suffer more from it than men. Fear is also exceptionally high among the elderly and the unemployed in urban areas.

This analysis was repeated for each of the EU member countries separately. In each country the distribution was largely the same. At the level of countries, the results also confirm the above mentioned conclusions. The average levels of fear are highest in countries where the population is less affluent and more often confronted with drugs-related problems.

<sup>6</sup> Based on ICVS data 1996 for Western Europe.

## DISCUSSION

In this report for the first time comparable statistics on public safety for all member countries of the European Union are presented.

Fear of street crime seems a concern for at least a third of the total EU population. One in every three Europeans does not feel safe after dark in their own neighborhood. Few if any other social problems touch so negatively upon such a large part of the public.

In an international perspective, the cities of the European Union seem relatively safe. Feelings of unsafely lie at the same level in the USA, Canada and some Asian countries. Elsewhere in the world a larger part of the public does not feel safe in their own area. It is worth mentioning that feelings of unsafely are particularly widespread in most of the European countries in transition, including the new states of the Federal Republic of Germany. Public safety seems an important priority area for cooperation programmes between the Union and these countries.

Fear undermines participation in social activities and is a direct threat to the quality of life of citizens. It is related to social characteristics of the residents, including social exclusion. But is also related to the personal exposure to drugs-related problems and to actual victimisation by crime. The prevalence of feelings of unsafely in the Union calls for a strengthening of policies aimed at reducing crime and openly displayed drugs abuse.

Feelings of fear are the strongest among the more vulnerable parts of the public (women, the elderly and the socially marginalized). They threaten to further increase social inequalities among the citizens of the Union.

The results suggest that an EU initiative to improve the exchange of information on the prevention of drugs-related urban crime would address a social problem which directly affects a large part of the European citizenry. As a first step, the EU could initiate the development of an Eurobarometer of public safety. It should provide funding for the execution of an annual or biannual, full-fledged EU victimisation survey. With a view to the pressing problems of public safety in this part of Europe, it is desirable to include the countries in transition in this project. In these countries too, the European survey could build upon the existing experiences with the surveys carried out by the UN.

To prepare the survey, it seems advisable to set up a steering committee of European experts. The committee should oversee the design of the questionnaire and data collection and be made responsible for data analysis and reporting. Sample sizes for the larger countries must be larger than the ones used in this pilot survey. The questionnaire should be similar to the ICVS of the UN to the largest possible extent.

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ASK ALL

Now I would like to ask you some questions about public safety.

Q.133. How safe do you feel walking alone in the area where you live after dark ? Do you feel very safe, fairly safe, a bit unsafe or very unsafe ? (INT. IF RESPONDENT SAYS NEVER GOES OUT, STRESS "HOW SAFE WOULD YOU FEEL?")

- Very safe
- Fairly safe
- A bit unsafe
- Very unsafe

EB44.3 - NEW

Q.134. Over the last 12 months, how often were you personally in contact with drug-related problems in the area where you live? For example, seeing people dealing in drugs, taking or using drugs in public places, or by finding syringes left by drug addicts ? (READ OUT)

- Often
- From time to time
- Rarely
- Never
- DK

E344 3 - NEW

Q.135 a) Over the last 12 months have you been attacked or seriously threatened ? (IF YES) Did it happen once or more than once ?

b) And over the last 12 months did anyone try to break into or actually break into your house or apartment and try to steal or actually steal something " (IF YES) Did it happen once or more than once ?

READ OUT	no	yes once	yes more than once	DK
a) Attack/Threat				
b) Theft				

E544 3 - NEW

Q.136 a) (IF ATTACKED/THREATENED ONCE OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS : CODE 2 IN Q 135 a) Did you or anyone else report this attack or serious threat you were victim of over the last 12 months to the police, or not ?

- Yes
- No
- DK

EB44.3-NEW

**A TOUS**

A présent, je voudrais vous poser quelques questions sur la sécurité publique.

Q.133. Dans quelle mesure vous sentez-vous en sécurité quand vous marchez seul dans votre quartier et qu'il fait noir ? Vous sentez-vous tout à fait en sécurité, plutôt en sécurité, pas très en sécurité ou pas du tout en sécurité ? (INT. : SI LE REpondant DIT QU'IL NE SORT JAMAIS, INSISTER "DANS QUELLE MESURE VOUS SENTIRIEZ-VOUS EN SECURITE..." ?)

- Tout à fait en sécurité
- Plutôt en sécurité
- Pas très en sécurité
- Pas du tout en sécurité

EB44.3 - NOUVEAU

Q.134. Au cours des 12 derniers mois, à quelle fréquence avez-vous été personnellement en contact avec-dés problèmes de drogue dans votre quartier ? Par exemple, en voyant des gens qui vendent ou achètent de la drogue, qui prennent ou utilisent de la drogue dans des lieux publics, ou en trouvant des seringues laissées par des drogués ? (LIRE)

- Souvent
- De temps en temps
- Rarement
- Jamais
- NSP

E344.3 - NOUVEAU

Q.135. a) Au cours des 12 derniers mois, avez-vous été agressé ou sérieusement menacé ? (SI OUI) Cela s'est-il passé une fois ou plus d'une fois ?

b) Et au cours des 12 derniers mois, quelqu'un a-t-il essayé de s'introduire ou s'est-il effectivement introduit dans votre maison ou appartement, essayant de voler ou volant effectivement quelque chose ? (SI OUI) Cela s'es:-il passé une fois ou plus d'une fois ?

LIRE	Non	Oui une fois	Oui plus d'une fois	NSP
a) Agression/Menace				
b) Vol				

EB44.3 - NOUVEAU

Q.136. a) (SI UNE SEULE ATTAQUE/MENACE AU COURS DES 12 DERNIERS MOIS : CODE 2 EN Q.135a) Cette agression ou menace sérieuse dont vous avez été victime au cours des 12 derniers mois, a-t-elle été déclarée ou non à la police que ce soit par vous ou par quelqu'un d'autre ?

- Oui
- Non
- NSP

EB44.3 - NOUVEAU