

# SUMMARY

## CRIME TRENDS IN FINLAND

The societal changes in Finland during the last decades are reflected in the statistics on recorded crime. Recorded crime in general increased during the 1960s and the 1970s due to rapid urbanization and as the large post-war age cohorts reached a crime-intensive age. The surge in recorded crime was followed by a period of more stable trends, but during the 1980s there were new increases in some categories of recorded crime. However, together with the economic recession in the early 1990s, many major crime categories like thefts began to decrease. As the economy has recovered there are new increases in some crime categories. Mostly, however recent changes in crime figures are small.

*Homicide 1993–2002.* The total annual number of police-recorded homicides (excluding attempts) has varied between 129 and 155 (131 in 2002). The average annual homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants was 2.7 in the period 1993–2002. In 2002, the rate was 2.5. The rate has remained relatively stable since the early 1970s.

Additionally, Finnish law distinguishes assaults resulting in death. In the past ten-year period, the number of these has varied between 21 and 38 (27 in 2002). The total number of completed homicides and assaults resulting in death was 159 in 2002, which was under the ten-year average (171). The number of infanticides has ranged from zero to three in the ten-year period (one in 2002). The total rate of all lethal intentional violent crimes reported to the police was 3.1 in 2002.

Studies of Finnish homicide patterns indicate that the social background of the parties involved reveals a large over-representation of marginalised, unemployed males. Drinking group quarrel is the typical conflict type leading to lethal outcome.

*Assaults 1993–2002.* In 2002 altogether 28,022 assault offences and 372 attempted homicides were reported to the police. The recorded number of nonlethal assault offences increased in the mid-1990s about 30 per cent, but during the most recent years the number has quite stable. The increase of the 1990s was rather due to technical redefinitions of assault offences and police campaigns aimed at improving the security of public places, than an increase of violent incidents on the field-level. This is confirmed by large-scale victimisation surveys that indicate a long-term (1980–1997) decrease in

violence resulting in physical injury. Apart from such definition and control action influences, the number of assaults has been roughly paralleled by changes in alcohol consumption and economic affluence. – Recorded rates of assault offences are highest in the most urbanized regions. This is true also of violence measured by victimisation surveys.

*Robberies 1993–2002.* Recorded robberies jumped upwards at the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s. In the mid-1990s, their number dropped back to an annual level of about 2000 offences. In 2002 the number of recorded robberies was 2,120, which was slightly less than the ten-year average (2,175). The number of bank or post office robberies increased in the late 1980s, peaking in 1992 (116 incidents). Subsequently, their number was halved after the introduction of systematic countermeasures. In 2002 only 19 bank or post office robberies were reported to the police. – Recorded rates of robberies are highest in the most urbanized regions.

*Sex offences 1993–2002.* Reported forcible rapes display an increasing trend from 1995, likely to reflect, in the first place, an increasing reportability of such offences. The number of forcible rapes increased about 20 % in 2002 compared with foregoing year, reaching thereby the earlier level of the year 2000.

Recorded numbers of sexual offences against children and minors fluctuates annually relatively much, reflecting the probably very large proportion of hidden crime in this event type and incoherent recording practises of serial crimes. Over time, the reportability of these offences is likely to have increased.

*Thefts 1992–2002.* The increase in recorded thefts that was apparent during the 1980s levelled off in the early 1990s, with a decrease occurring in 1994–1996. Large victimisation surveys also indicate a decrease in thefts in the mid-1990s. After a slight increase in the number of thefts again during 1998–2000 there was a 8 percent decrease in 2001 and no change in 2002. The crime figures seems to have stabilized.

Changes in the level of theft offenses appear to be connected with the economic development of society. Periods of economic upswings have often been followed by an above-average increase in recorded theft. – The rates of theft offences or crimes per population are highest in the most urbanized regions.

*Thefts of motorvehicles 1992–2002.* Recorded thefts of motorvehicles, majority of which are car thefts, increased in the 1980s, with a subsequent decline beginning in 1993, in line with other theft. The crime figures began to increase again in 1996 and the upward trend continued until the end of 1990's. However, in 2000 and 2001 there was a clear break in this development as the number of crimes decreased by 11 and 14 per cent. In 2002 there was only a slight increase (+ 2 %). According to the International Crime Victim Surveys, Finland scores below the European average in the frequency of car thefts. – In the 1990s and 2000s the crime rate, or the number of thefts of motorvehicles per 1,000 cars and motorcycles, has fluctuated between 8 and 12.

*Embezzlement 1992–2002.* The number of embezzlements recorded by the police shows a rather stable downward trend in the 1990s, although the number of crimes increased by 6 percent in 2001 and 2002. Since 1991, in case of series of embezzlements, each series is counted as one offence which has considerably reduced the annual variation in the crime figures.

*Fraud 1992–2002.* Recorded frauds increased steeply during the 1980s following the rapid introduction of credit cards. During the early 1990s, presumably because of the tightened controls in the granting of credit and credit cards, the number of recorded frauds decreased considerably. Part of the decrease is also due to the new counting rule of serial frauds – the same applied for embezzlement. In the late 1990s and in the beginning of the 2000s the number of annually recorded credit card frauds has been quite stable. – The rates of fraud by the population size of the region follow the same pattern as the rates of theft and embezzlement. They are clearly higher in big cities than in rural regions.

*Damage to property 1991–2002.* Offences of damage to property constitute one-tenth of police-recorded crimes against the penal code. After a peak reached in the late 1980's, the crime figures seems to have stabilized. In 2002 there was a 2 percent downward turn in the number of vandalism. Several cities have organized special projects against graffiti, which have reduced the number of unwanted painting and increased the number of caught taggers. The International Crime Victimization Survey has found Finland to be below the European average in rates of victimization to crimes of damage to vehicles. Between 3.7 and 5.6 percent of subjects responded that their car had been damaged during the previous 12 months.

*Tax offences and economic offences.* The public concern over economic crimes such as bankruptcy offences, accounting offences and tax fraud has increased in Finland during the recent decade. In 2002 the police recorded altogether 2573 offences of this kind, which was about 11 per cent more than the year before. The increase was probably due to increased efforts in controlling economic crime. All in all, changes in the level of control has had a substantial impact on the annual changes of recorded economic crimes in Finland during the last ten years. However, the decreasing tendency of economic criminal cases after the depression years of early 1990s could be a sign of diminishing economic crime.

*Drunken driving 1993–2002.* For recorded cases of drunken driving, the last ten years represent a rather stable period, with a decline between 1991 and 1994, likely to be largely explained by the economic recession which affected both traffic volumes and alcohol consumption. In proportion to the number of motor vehicles, the overall rate of drunken driving offenses has gradually declined. In the measurements of random roadside checks, the proportion of drivers with a blood alcohol content of 0.05 % or higher has been about 0.2 per cent in last ten years. In international perspectives these rates are very low. – The rates of drunken driving offences are highest in the less urbanized regions.

*Other traffic offenses 1993–2002.* The general trend of other traffic offenses has been decreasing over the 1990s and in the beginning of 2000s, when assessed in proportion to the number of registered motor vehicles. If the number of traffic fatalities and injuries in traffic is used as an indicator, also traffic safety has clearly improved: the annual number of fatalities has decreased from a high of 1,156 in 1972 to an average, during the 1980s, of about 550, and has continued to fall. The most recent data is from 2002, when 413 fatalities in traffic were recorded. – The rates of these offences are highest in the less urbanized regions, even if related to the number of motor vehicles.

*Narcotics offenses 1993–2002.* The number of sentences imposed by the courts for narcotics offences has up to the early 1980s varied between some 350 and 1,050 each year, with substantive increases during the 1990s. In 2001, the number of sentences where a drug offence was included amounted to 9,372; of these, 6,118 were sentences where the so-called principal offence was a drug offence. Use and possession of drugs for personal use are

considered to be crimes in Finland. In fact, the majority of sentences imposed for narcotics concern these crimes. The principal drugs are cannabis and amphetamine. Survey findings support the conclusion that the narcotics market is growing substantially. The increase in recorded crime is, however, also in part due to intensified control efforts. Yet, Finland continues to be the country with one of the smallest narcotics market in Western Europe. The rates of these offences are clearly highest in large urban locations.

*Juvenile crime.* The numbers of juveniles suspected of crimes against the Penal Code has been relatively stable in the last two decades. Their proportion out of all persons suspected of these crimes has slowly decreased.

The rate of juvenile theft offences decreased in the 1990s. This is so especially in the age bracket 15–17 years. The rates of assaults committed by juveniles increased at the same time, particularly after 1995 when assaults were redefined in the Penal Code reform.

Typical juvenile offences (with high proportions of young suspects) are status offences related to alcohol possession and identity documents. Beyond these, car thefts, damage to property and robberies have unusually high proportions (23–30 %) of juvenile suspects (less than 18 years old). Also thefts and assaults have relatively high percentages (14–16 %) of juvenile perpetrators.

*Juvenile homicide.* The involvement of juveniles as perpetrators of homicide is rare. In 2002, 13 juveniles less than 18 years of age were suspected of homicide, representing 7.8 per cent of all homicide suspects. In the late 1990s, homicides committed by 15–17 year olds started to increase. Homicides committed by juveniles under 15 years of age are extremely rare: there were nine suspects in the ten-year period 1983–1992 and nine suspects in the ten-year period 1993–2002.

*Women as perpetrators and victims of violence.* In year 2002 15 % of all the persons suspected by the police of crime were women. The women's share was the highest (one fourth) in certain property crimes like shoplifting and embezzlement, and the lowest in crimes like drunken driving, vandalism and assault (one tenth or less of the suspects were women). In year 2001 47 women got killed in Finland; 25 of them were killed by their partners. The amount of women killed per year has varied between 32 and 61 per year during the last 10 years. Women experience violence in their intimate relationships more often compared to men. In year 2002 one in ten of the violence cases reported to the police was categorised "family violence".

Furthermore, a study on aggravated assaults reported to the police in 1998 revealed that most of the women had been assaulted by their partners or family members.

*Foreigners and crime.* In 2002, about 15,800 foreigners who had residence in Finland, were suspected of some offence. This rate was 2.8 % out of all persons suspected of offences known to the police in Finland. The number of offences committed by foreigners has increased almost 50 % since 1996. In 2002, about 104,000 foreigners had residence in Finland. In addition about 16,400 foreigners not having residence in Finland, tourists and other visitors were suspected of offences in 2002.

One-third (33 %) of all foreigners suspected of crimes were Russians, 11 per cent were Estonians, and 11 per cent were Swedes. Foreigners were most typically suspected of traffic offences (45 % in 2002). Forcible rapes, other sexual offences, robberies and frauds were offences where foreign suspects were most clearly over-represented in 2002 (forcible rapes 17 per cent and other sexual offences 16 per cent of all suspects).

Of all foreigners sentenced to imprisonment in 2002, over one-fourth (28 %) were Russians, and about one-fifth (20 %) were Estonians. The number of foreigners in Finnish prisons has been increasing rapidly in last ten years, from about one per cent to 8–9 per cent (2002) of the average daily prison population. Foreigner participation in the growing narcotics markets is a central factor in this development.

Studies of foreigners as crime victims indicate that they commonly suffer from many varieties of discrimination, including attacks of racist violence. Persons with a Somalian origin were particularly often exposed to such events. Also persons with an Arabic or Turkish background had experienced discrimination and racist violence more frequently than other foreigner groups.

*The role of alcohol* is marked in Finnish criminality, especially in crimes of violence. Indeed, one explanation given for the relatively high level of violence in Finland is the drinking culture characterised by heavy drinking patterns. In individual crime situations the presence of alcohol is striking. According to the police records the proportion of intoxicated offenders in homicides has under the last years varied between 61 to 75 per cent and in assaults between 71 to 73 per cent. Also many of the victims of violence were under the influence of alcohol when assaulted. According to a recent Finnish

homicide study about half of the homicides occurred in drinking situations of marginalized and alcoholized men (Lehti 2002).

The frequency of the use of alcohol and the risk of victimization to violence while intoxicated is demonstrated also in population victim surveys. According to Finnish surveys of "everyday violence" (1988–1997), in about two out of three incidents of violence either the offender or the victim or both were under the influence of alcohol. Moreover, the frequency of the use of alcohol and especially the frequency of being drunk is clearly connected to the frequency of victimization experiences (Aromaa & Heiskanen 1996).

The role of alcohol appears also on macro level or as a connection between the overall consumption of alcohol and violence. In a Finnish time series study covering the time period 1950–2000 it has been estimated that a one litre increase in annual per capita alcohol consumption (100 % alcohol) corresponds to a 3 to 6 percent increase in the assault rate (Sirén 2002).

The connection between criminality and alcohol is highlighted among prisoners. A recent estimate is that at least 40 percent of the Finnish prisoners are alcoholics.

*Crime trends in large cities.* The regional differences in criminality are huge. About 60 % of property crimes and 50 % of violence crimes have been committed in large cities of at least 50,000 inhabitants. About 40 % of all inhabitants in Finland live in these large cities. There are also differences between the large cities concerning the number of crimes. Property and assault crimes are recorded two times or even more in towns of high level criminality than in towns of low level criminality.

There are more offenses per capita known to the police in Helsinki, the capital of Finland, than in other large cities. However, in some cities in Middle and Northern Finland even more violence crimes are committed than in Helsinki. The rates of traffic offences are highest in the less urbanized regions. The differences in criminality between cities have been annually quite unchanged in the last ten years.

*Fear of crime.* Large national population surveys measuring victimisation and fear of crime indicate that concern/fear of street crimes continues to grow. In contrast, concern for one's home being burglarized has slightly decreased (the 1997 survey) after a clear increase between 1988 and 1993. In international comparison there was least concern about burglary in Finland and other Scandinavian countries according to the 2000 international crime victims survey. Also feelings of vulnerability on the streets at night were one of the

lowest in Finland, Sweden and Denmark based on the international victimisation survey and the Eurobarometer of public safety.

The popularity of burglary protection by various methods has grown clearly since 1988.

*Front-page violence and fear of crime 1980–2003.* This section is based on a quantitative content analysis of crime related headlines in the front pages of the two national tabloid newspapers. The analysis included only headlines about criminal violence and other crimes in Finland (accidents, wars and violence in other countries were excluded).

The intensity of front-page violence reporting in the two newspapers increased from 1980 to 2003, the most drastic increase taking place between the years 1988 and 1993. Headlines about lethal violence increased especially in the 1990's. After a period of massive increase in tabloid violence reporting, the most recent years indicate signs of saturation.

During the period 1980–1997, the repertory of tabloid front page crimes changed. Reporting other crimes such as property offences, economic crimes and drugs increased moderately and did not "keep up with" the drastically increasing number of headlines about criminal violence.

According to nationally representative victim surveys, the actual risk of violence remained stable, while violence reporting skyrocketed. The increase of violence reporting was however accompanied by a substantial increase of fear of violence during the period 1988–1993. The causal links between these phenomena call for further study. The increase of violence reporting may partially explain why fears increased even though the risk of violence remained stable and even decreased.

*International perspectives.* The four sweeps of the International Crime Victims Survey (1989, 1992, 1996 and 2000) have shown Finland to have a relatively low overall victimisation rate. In the survey covering eleven different offences ranging from car crimes to property crimes and contact crimes, the only exceptions concern assault and sexual violence, in respect of which the rate in Finland is higher than the average for Western European countries. Crimes included in the survey were less likely to be reported to the police in Finland than in Western Europe on average.

Regarding reported crime, Finland has the lowest theft rate of all the Nordic countries. This can be attributed to the differences between the Nordic countries in prosperity, urbanisation and population density. Finland also has the lowest narcotics offence rate. As for assault, Finland and Sweden have

higher rates than do Denmark and Norway. This difference is corroborated by the results of victimisation surveys. However, it has also been suggested that part of the difference is due to the greater accuracy and comprehensiveness of recording in these two countries.

The clearance rate for offences in Finland is relatively high in an international perspective. Up to the 1990s, over one-half of all reported property offences and some 90 % of all reported violent offences were cleared. During recent years, the clearance rate has been decreasing significantly. At least a part of this has, however, been a consequence of the introduction of an improved automated police information system that replaced the previous manual system in the mid-nineties.