



National studies on recidivism

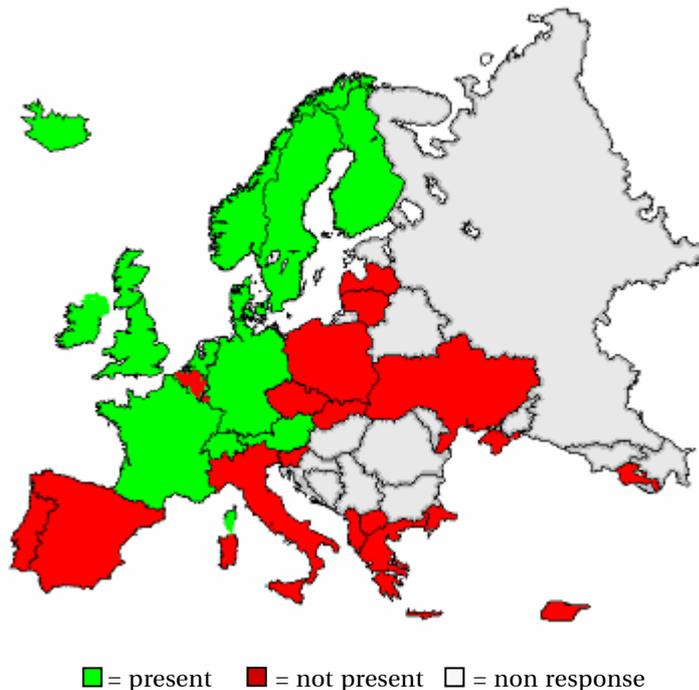
An inventory of large-scale recidivism research in 33 European countries

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In criminology, measuring recidivism is an established method for examining the effects of penal interventions. Over the last decades the automation of police and judiciary data has opened up opportunities to do large-scale recidivism research. Interested in the scope of this type of research, the WODC – the research bureau of the Ministry of Justice in the Netherlands – has made an inventory of the studies that are carried out in Europe. It appears that at least fourteen countries have recently carried out a study on a national scale. Steps are being taken to bring these countries together and to explore the possibility of making international comparisons of reconviction rates.

European countries with and without national recidivism studies



Method

A questionnaire on the subject of large-scale recidivism research was sent out to 41 European countries. In the end, after a rerun in the summer of 2005, 33 correspondents sent in their replies; a response rate of 80 per cent.¹ The survey contained questions on three topics: the prevalence of nationwide recidivism research, the types of data that are or have been collected and the re-

search design and methods that were used. The complete list of questions is included in the appendix. The answers of the correspondents have been entered in a database. As the information given is very diverse, it is not possible to present the exact differences between the national studies. Only the main points will be discussed.

¹ There are no data from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Malta, Romania and Russia. Malta seems to have had a national study though, among prisoners released in the period 1976-1994 (Baumer, 1997).

No national recidivism studies, until now

There are 19 European countries in which national research on recidivism of any kind is lacking or was absent until 2006:

Albania	Italy	Slovak Republic
Armenia	Latvia	Slovenia
Belgium	Lithuania	Spain
Cyprus	Luxemburg	Turkey
Czech Republic	Macedonia	Ukraine
Georgia	Poland	
Greece	Portugal	

In Macedonia there was a national study some 25 years ago. The report was published in 1979. In Spain there seems to be no research on a national level, but there have been general studies on recidivism in Catalonia. In Greece there are some statistics, but these are retrospective in nature (General Secretariat, 2006). According to the correspondents of Armenia, Belgium, Georgia, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic and Ukraine - there are large-scale databases in these countries that could be used for nationwide research. In Armenia, Slovak Republic and Czech Republic there actually are plans to initiate a national or large-scale study on recidivism. In other countries the reasons for *not* planning such a study, vary. Some correspondents report lack of finances, others suppose resources are directed to other issues or mention a lack of experience in doing this type of research.

National recidivism studies

Fourteen European countries have or recently have had a national study on recidivism. These countries are listed in table 1 together with some of the salient features of the research. Some countries, like England and Wales, have had national research for a number of years now. For these countries only one or two of the most recent studies are mentioned in the table.

Most countries have data on all possible groups of *offenders* of different ages and convicted for several kind of sanctions. In France and Finland though, there are national figures for the prisoner population, but general statistics on other offender groups appear lacking.²

Another source of variation between the countries mentioned in the table is the *selection period*. For some countries this period is one year, for others the offenders are selected over a prolonged period of time. Some countries use more recent selection periods than others. In Germany for instance, a report was published on offenders sanctioned or released in 1994, while in England and Wales the most recent cohort that was sampled consists of juveniles dealt with by the Criminal Justice System in 2003. So, if comparisons between countries are made, one has to be aware of historical differences due to variance in the selection period.³

In several European countries provisions have been made to *monitor* recidivism rates over time. In the United Kingdom, the Nordic countries⁴ and

in Switzerland and The Netherlands recidivism is or can be measured on a yearly basis. These countries will not have problems synchronizing the period of the selection of offenders. In Germany there are plans to measure recidivism annually.⁵ One-off measurements have been held in Austria. For France and Ireland it is unclear whether the research will be repeated.

The *sample sizes* listed in the table are approximate sizes. As data collection procedures are automated, most countries do their research on entire offender populations. Sometimes a selection is made for convenience sake. In England and Wales for instance, for the two recurrent studies mentioned, only the cases of the first quarter of the year are selected.

² In France part of the research is retrospective in nature, too (Lecomte & Timbart, 2003). In this type of study researchers determine which part of the offender group has been prosecuted before.

³ Another point of interest here is the selection of the group of offenders who were sent to prison. England & Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Germany include prisoners that were *released* during the selection period, while Austria, Sweden, Switzerland and The Netherlands select the prisoners that were *convicted* in the same period the other sanctions were imposed.

⁴ Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden already work together to develop standard criteria and methods of measuring recidivism.

⁵ As are in Armenia, according to our correspondent.

Table 1: Examples of national studies on recidivism

Country	Reference	Offender group	Appr. N	Projects for repeated measurements
Austria	Pilgram (1994)	Adults sentenced in 1983 Juveniles sentenced in 1983	69.267 7.292	none
Denmark	Department of Prison and Probation (2001)	Persons released from prison or with a suspended sentence in 1996-1999	20.000 p.y.	annually
England & Wales	Spicer & Glicksman (2004) Home Office (2005)	Adults convicted or released from prison in 2001 Juveniles (10-17) convicted or discharged from custody in 2003	40.825 38.257	annually
Finland	Hypén (2004)	Offenders convicted on an unconditional prison sentence and released in the years 1993-2001	30.000	annually
France	Kensey & Tournier, 2005	Prisoners released from may/1996-april/1997	3.000	unclear
Germany	Jehle, Heinz & Sutterer (2003)	Persons sentenced or released from prison in 1994	1.000.000	none, so far
Iceland	Baumer, Wright, Kristinsdottir & Gunnlaugsson (2002)	All persons released from prison from 1994\1 through 1998\11	1.176	annually, on re-incarceration only
Ireland*	Institute of Criminology, Dublin	Men released from prison in 2001-2004	18.000	unclear
Northern Ireland	Mc Mullen & Rudy (2001) Decodts (2001)	Adults with a non-custodial disposal or released from custody in 2001 Juveniles (10-16) with a non-custodial disposal or released from custody in 2001	19.413 627	annually
Norway	Statistics Norway (2006)	Persons charged in 1996	65.000	annually
Scotland	Statistical Bulletin Criminal Justice series (2005)	Adults discharged from custody or given non-custodial sentences in 1999	45.245	annually
Sweden	Kriminalstatistik (2004)	All persons found guilty of criminal offences in 1999	76.700	annually
Switzerland	Storz (1997)	Adults convicted in 1986-1994	70.000 p.y.	no fixed interval
The Netherlands	Wartna, Tollenaar & Blom (2005)	Adults sanctioned in 1997 Juveniles (12-18) sanctioned in 1997	131.000 15.000	annually

* This study is in progress.

The definition of recidivism

As the data sources used, reflect the way the countries handle crime, there are bound to be cross-national differences in the definition of the central concept of the research. Table 2 shows the types of crime data the fourteen countries process to measure recidivism. Understandably, none of the national studies is based on self reported data on crimes committed. Eleven out of fourteen countries use records on court appearances. In these countries the operative word for recidivism is 'reconviction'. In the Netherlands about half of the penal cases are decided by the Prosecutor's Office and never reach court. In Germany measures taken against juveniles at the prosecution

level are recorded, while measures against adults that do not lead to a court appearance are not. Both countries though, include all the recorded cases and use the term 'reconviction' to designate the event of recidivism. So, for all practical purposes this term seems to fit fine internationally. Except perhaps for Norway, Finland and Ireland. These countries use different data; Norway on charged crime and Finland and Ireland on re-incarceration. This will pose a problem once their recidivism rates are compared internationally. In Norway and Finland however, there are plans to utilize other types of data as well.

Table 2: Types of crime data used

	Austria	Denmark	England & Wales	Finland	France	Germany	Iceland	Ireland	Northern Ireland	Norway	Scotland	Sweden	Switzerland	The Netherlands
Self reported data on crimes committed														
Police records on charged crime		√	√				√			√				
Judicial records on prosecuted crime						√						√		√
Records on court appearances	√	√	√		√	√	√		√		√	√	√	√
Data on incarceration				√		√	√	√				√	√	√

Another matter for concern is the length of the observation period. In presenting figures on recidivism most countries use a standard period of observation. In the UK for instance, most research is focused on the computation of the two-year reconviction rate. Other countries, like France, Germany or Austria, maintain a longer period of observation. As a consequence, these countries will have higher reconviction rates. So, if one is serious about making international comparisons of reconviction rates, the length of the follow up period is another matter that will have to be synchronized.

Supplementary data

Reconviction rates can be computed for entire populations, but also for specific groups of offenders. Table 3 shows some of the distinctions that are made in the national studies of the four-

teen European countries. Most countries use type of offence and type of sanction to form the reconviction rates. The offences checked by the correspondents vary from inflicting bodily harm, sexual offences, burglary, robbery, theft and handling, fraud and forgery, criminal damage and drug offences. The types of sanctions or disposals most frequently mentioned are an unconditional prison term, a community service order, training order, probation order and a fine. Demographic variables that are often used are sex, age and nationality or land of birth. In the majority of the research reconviction rates were broken down by previous criminal record and in many countries there is information on the region of interest too. Because the correspondents were not asked to give an exhaustive list of the data that are collected, table 3 may not be comprehensive.

Table 3: Types of data used to break down reconviction rates

	Austria	Denmark	England & Wales	Finland	France	Germany	Iceland	Ireland	Northern Ireland	Norway	Scotland	Sweden	Switzerland	The Netherlands
Types of offence			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Types of sanction	√	√	√			√	√		√		√	√	√	√
Gender		√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Age	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Nationality				√		√				√			√	√
Employment status					√			√						
Marital status				√	√					√				
Criminal record			√	√	√	√			√		√	√	√	√
District or region	√			√	√	√				√	√		√	

The correspondents of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland indicate that the reconviction data could routinely be linked to other sources containing social-demographic information (work status, education, income and so on). Most correspondents however, foresee technical and judicial problems when databases of different origin are structurally merged. In England and Wales an integrative system is being developed

containing information on criminogenic needs. In the Netherlands data linkage is at an experimental stage.

Methods used to analyse recidivism

In all countries researchers use raw percentages to express the prevalence of recidivism. In some countries the number of new convictions is presented too. English and Dutch researchers often

compute adjusted rates in order to isolate the net effects on recidivism. In England & Wales, Norway, Switzerland and Northern Ireland logistic regression is used to analyse the influence of co-variates. In the Netherlands researchers apply Cox regression. Ireland, Finland and Iceland do survival analysis procedures too. In some European countries the data have already been used to generate statistical predictions.

England & Wales are advanced in this area, as the first risk assessment tool based on population data was developed in 1998. Recently similar work has been done in the Netherlands. In Finland and Northern Ireland too, the data has been or will be used to generate statistical predictions. In Scotland, Denmark, Sweden and possibly Ireland this option is under consideration.

Table 4: Methods used to analyse or quantify recidivism

	Austria	Denmark	England & Wales	Finland	France	Germany	Iceland	Ireland	Northern Ireland	Norway	Scotland	Sweden	Switzerland	The Netherlands
Raw percentages	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Adjusted rates			√											√
Frequencies		√				√					√		√	√
Logistic regression			√	√					√	√			√	
Survival analysis				√			√	√						√
Cox regression														√

Making international comparisons

To summarise, the results of the questionnaire show that in a growing number of countries automated databases are used to do nationwide research on recidivism. In fourteen European countries now there are national statistics in one form or another. Obviously, the next step would be to make international comparisons. To this end an international working group has been formed. The primary aim of this group is to figure out the exact differences between the work done in the participating countries. From there, the representatives of those countries will try to

formulate an international standard for this type of research. A standard that actually will be used to make cross-national comparisons. At the moment thirteen of the fourteen countries are participating in the working group. Once the standard has been set, other nations may join this initiative. The exchange of knowledge among experts in this field should speed up the realization of planned projects and help scientists across the world to set up their own national recidivism research.

Major publications on large-scale recidivism research in 17 European countries

Austria

Pilgram, A.

Die erste Österreichische Rückfallstatistik – ein Mittel zur Evaluation regionaler Strafenpolitik
Österreichische Juristenzeitung, 1991, vol. 46, pp. 577-586

Pilgram, A.

Wandel und regionale Varianten der Jugendgerichtspraxis auf dem Prüfstand der Österreichischen Rückfallstatistik

Österreichische Juristenzeitung, 1994, vol. 49, pp. 121-126

Catalunia

Capdevila Capdevila, M., M. Ferrer Puig, E. Luque Reina

La reincidència en el delicte en la justícia de menors

Barcelona, Generalitat de Catalunya, 2005

Denmark

Department of Prison and Probation

Recidivism 1996-1999

Kopenhagen, Department of Prison and Probation, 2001

Kyvsgaard, B.

The criminal career: the Danish longitudinal Study

Cambridge University Press, 2003

Statistical Yearbook

Persons with imprisonment in 2001 and the number of previous imprisonments in 2003-1998

Kopenhagen, Statistics Denmark, table 228, 2005

England & Wales

Home Office

Juvenile reconviction: results from the 2001 and 2002 cohorts

London, Stationary Office, 2004

Home Office

Juvenile reconviction: results from the 2003 cohort.

London, Stationary Office, 2005

Prime, J.

Progres made against Home Office Public Service Agreement Target 10

London, Home Office, 2002

RDS NOMS

Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2003. England and Wales.

London, Home Office, 2004

RDS NOMS

Sentencing statistics 2003. England and Wales.

London, Home Office, 2005

Spicer, K., A.Glicksman

Adult reconviction: results from the 2001 cohort

London, Home Office, 2004

Finland

Hypén, K.

Released from prison in Finland 1993-2001 and the re-entered

Helsinki, 2004

Kuivajärvi K.

Rikas maksaa rahallaan, köyhä selkänahallaan' – tutkimus sakkovankien vankilaurasta

Oikeus 2003, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 102-118

Lappi-Seppälä T.

Ehdollisen rangaistuksen käyttökerrat ja –kasautumat

Oikeuspoliittisen tutkimuslaitoksen tutkimustiedonantoja 42, 1999

Marttunen, M., J-P. ja Takala

Nuorisorangaistus 1997-2001. Uuden rangaistuslajin arviointi

Oikeuspoliittisen tutkimuslaitoksen julkaisuja 192, 2002

Suomen Virallinen Tilasto (SVT)

Uusintarikollisuus 1981-1991

Oikeus 1995:8, 1995

France

Lecomte, C., O. Timbart

Les condamnés de 2001 en état de récidive

Bulletin d'information statistique de ministère de la Justice, 2003

Kensey, A., P.V. Tournier

Base de données prisonniers du passé?

Paris, Ministère de la Justice/Université Paris I, 2005

Kensey, A., P.V. Tournier

Sortants de prison: variabilité des risques de retour

Paris, Ministère de la Justice, 2005

Germany

Heinz, W., J. Jehle

Rückfallforschung

Wiesbaden, Schriftenreihe der Kriminologischen Zentralstelle Bd.45, 2004

Jehle, J., W. Heinz, P. Sutterer

Legalbewährung nach strafrechtlichen Sanktionen. Ein kommentierte Rückfallstatistik

Berlin, Bunderministerium der Justiz, 2003

Greece

General secretariat of National Statistical Service of Greece

http://www.statistics.gr/table_menu_eng.asp?dt=0&sb=SJU_2&SSnid=Criminal%20Justice

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Iceland

Baumer, E., R. Wright, K. Kristinsdottir, H. Gunnlaugsson

Crime, Shame, and Recidivism: The Case of Iceland

British Journal of Criminology 2002, vol. 41, pp. 40-59

Macedonia

Arnoudovski, L., V. Caceva

Redidivism and recidivists

Skopje, 1979

Malta

Baumer, E.

Levels and predictors of recidivism: the Malta experience

Criminology, 1997, vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 601-628

Northern Ireland

Decodts, D.

Juvenile Reconviction in Northern Ireland 2001

Research and statistical Bulletin 6/2005

http://www.nio.gov.uk/juvenile_reconviction_in_northern_ireland_2001-2.pdf

downloaded February 9, 2006

Francis, B., J. Harman, L. Humphreys

Predicting Reconviction Rates in Northern Ireland

Research and statistical Bulletin 7/2005

http://www.nio.gov.uk/predicting_reconviction_rates_in_northern_ireland_7-2005.pdf

downloaded February 9, 2006

McMullan, S., Ruddy, D.

Adult Reconviction in Northern Ireland 2001

Research and statistical Bulletin 3/2005

http://www.nio.gov.uk/adult_reconviction_in_northern_ireland_2001_3-2005.pdf

downloaded February 9, 2006

Norway

Møglestue, I.

Stadig flere pådrar seg ny straffereaksjon

Samfunnsspeilet 1996, vol 19, no 2, Statistics Norway

Skarðhamar, T.

Lovbruddskarrierer og levekår. En analyse av fødselkullet 1977. (Criminal careers and living conditions. An analysis of the birth cohort born 1977)

Statistics Norway, Rapport 2005/9, 2005

Statistics Norway

http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/03/05/a_krim_tab_en/

downloaded February 9, 2006

Scotland

Loucks, N.

Recidivism amongst Serious Violent and Sexual Offenders

Edinburgh, 2002

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/justice/rsvo-00.asp>

downloaded February 9, 2006

Scottish Executive National Statistics

Reconvictions of offenders discharged from custody or given non-custodial sentences in 1999

Statistical Bulletin Criminal Justice series CrJ/2005/7, 2005

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/06/20134117/41183>

downloaded February 9, 2006

Sweden

Krantz, L., K. Lindsten

Kriminalvårdens redovisning om återfall 2002

Norrköping, Kriminalvården, 2003

The Swedish National Council of Crime Prevention

Kriminalstatistik 2004 (ch. 6)

Stockholm, 2005

Switzerland

SFSO

Strassenverkehrsdelinquenz und Rückfall, Délinquance routière et récidive

Neuchâtel, Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2000

SFSO

Drogen und Strafrecht, Drogues et droit pénal (with data on recidivism),

Neuchâtel, Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2002

Storz, R.

Rückfallraten, Taux de récidive

Bern, Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 1997

Storz, R.

Strafrechtliche Verurteilungen und Rückfallraten, Condamnations pénale et taux de récidive

Bern, Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 1997

The Netherlands

Wartna, B., N. Tollenaar, M. Blom

Recidive 1997. Een cijfermatig overzicht van de strafrechtelijke recidive van volwassenen en jeugdige daders

Den Haag, Boom Juridische uitgevers, 2005

Onderzoek en beleid, nr. 227

Wartna, B., N. Tollenaar, A. Essers

Door na de gevangenis. Een cijfermatig overzicht van de strafrechtelijke recidive onder ex-gedetineerden
Den Haag, Boom Juridische uitgevers, 2005
Onderzoek en beleid, nr. 228

Wartna, B., S. el Harbachi, A. van der Laan

Jong vast. Een cijfermatig overzicht van strafrechtelijke recidive van ex-pupillen van justitiële jeugdinrichtingen

Den Haag, Boom Juridische uitgevers, 2005
Onderzoek en beleid, nr. 229

Wartna, B., S. el Harbachi, L. van der Knaap, L

Buiten behandeling. Een cijfermatig overzicht van de strafrechtelijke recidive van ex-terbeschikkinggestelden
Den Haag, Boom Juridische uitgevers, 2005
Onderzoek en beleid, nr. 230

Appendix: Questionnaire on large-scale recidivism research in Europe

STUDY

1. Is there any kind of large-scale study of recidivism in your country? If so, what is its scope? *If none, please skip to question 3.*
2. If there are any publications, what is the main publication of the study mentioned above?
3. Does your country have a national or large-scale database that can be used for this purpose? No/yes, namely:
4. Are there any plans to initiate a national or large-scale study on recidivism? If so, when is it due? If not, what are the problems blocking the realisation of such a study?

For countries in which there is neither a large-scale recidivism study nor any plans to initiate such a study, the questionnaire ends here. If there is a large-scale study on recidivism in your country or there are plans to initiate such a study, please answer as many of the following questions as possible.

DATA

5. Which types of crime data are accessible or are being accessed (e.g. self report on committed crime, police records on reported crime, judicial records on adjudicated crime etc.)?
6. How would you describe the quality of the data?
7. Can the data be linked to other sources of information (for instance, to employment information, or to information on other criminogenic needs, mental health information, etc.)? If so, which sources are available and what kind of data do they contain? If not, what is the reason the data sources cannot be matched (e.g. technical or juridical reasons)?
8. Can you give examples of the sample sizes used for studying recidivism in your country?
9. Are these samples the entire (sub) populations for a certain period of time or are they (random) sub-samples?
10. Which types of offenders are included in the study and which are specifically excluded from analyses?
11. Do you have a fixed observation period for measuring recidivism and if so, how long is this period? Otherwise, which observation periods are used?
12. What is the type of measure for recidivism (e.g. police contact, re-arrest, judicial contact, reconviction, re-incarceration, or self reported crime etc.)?
13. Do you distinguish between different types of seriousness of recidivism? If so, which types?
14. What is the smallest time unit that can be distinguished in your data (e.g. years, months, days)?
15. Which types of offences are being distinguished (e.g. inflicting bodily harm, vandalism etc.)?
16. Which types of sanctions or disposals are being distinguished (e.g. imprisonment, community service order, fine etc.)?
17. Which demographic variables are used (e.g. ethnicity, sex, age etc.)?

METHOD

18. What methods do you use to analyse or quantify recidivism? (Like raw percentages of recidivism or regressions)
19. Do you use or do you intend to use your data to generate statistical predictions? (e.g. adjusted rates, risk assessment).
20. Do you have projects for monitoring recidivism over time? If so, what is the interval for monitoring recidivism (for example, on a yearly basis)?