



**Crime Trends in Bulgaria:
Results of the National Crime Survey (NCS 2010) ¹**

- Police statistics often distort the real crime situation. Significant proportion of crimes are not reported to the police because victims are afraid, ashamed, consider the crimes too insignificant, or, frequently, do not trust the police. Some crimes, although reported, are not registered by the police, for various professional reasons or just to avoid the extra work.
- How would crime be affected in times of an economic crisis, and how would the police register changes in crime? Data from the NCS shows that in 2009 there was no increase in crime. Fears of a marked increase in crime as a result of the economic crisis were unfounded. Crime victim survey data from other European countries, Britain and the Netherlands, show similar trends. However, Ministry of Interior statistics report a nearly 9% growth in the number of registered crimes: a fact that could be explained by two key facts: the increase in the occurrence of certain crimes, and a decrease of non-reported crimes.
- In 2009, in Bulgaria, the most widespread crimes clearly increased. “Thefts from home” (burglaries, theft) increased from 1.7% (of households) in 2008 to 2.1 percent in 2009. In the other most frequently observed crime category, “theft of belongings from cars and car-parts”, the increase was from 2.6% to 2.9%. Significant growth was observed in robbery victimisation: from 0.19% to 0.35% of citizens.
- In 2009, victims of crime were much more likely to report crimes to the police. Particularly dramatic is the surge in reporting of burglaries: from 56 percent in 2008 to 81 percent in 2009. The most likely explanation is the increase in confidence in the police, which is increasingly contacted by victims of crime.
- Yet, approximately one in five crimes is not recorded by the police. Particularly worrisome is the significant share of families in the country - 23 percent who have had experience with attempted telephone fraud in 2009. This constitutes at least half a million people. Even though a very small share of these attempted frauds are successful (only about 0.6 percent

¹ The National Crime Survey (NSC) is conducted for eighth consecutive year by the Center for the Study of Democracy and Vitosha Research. The methodology used was developed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and is known as the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS). It is also used by the European Union. The purpose of this type of research is gather objective and comprehensive information on crime.

of individuals who have received such a call), the overall reporting of attempted telephone fraudulent is extremely low - below 15%.

- During economic crises there is growth in thefts (burglary, petty thefts from cars, agricultural produce, and robberies). At the same time due to the reduced purchasing power of the population, markets for certain 'luxury' illicit goods, associated with organized crime, might become smaller (drugs, 'paid sex', stolen luxury cars). As a result, there could be a shift of criminal groups towards more lucrative criminal activities, such as the smuggling and illegal distribution of cigarettes, or credit and debit card fraud.
- One of the criminal markets included in the survey is the drugs market. The NCS examines the "availability of different types of drugs" by asking respondents how easily they could obtain various drugs. The data shows that in the last 3 years (after 2008) there has been a sustained reduction in access to drugs. The most dramatic decline is in the access to cocaine and heroin. Accordingly, from 7.0% to 3,4% for access to heroin and from 6.5% to 3.6%. for cocaine. The smallest decrease is observed in the access to soft drugs - marijuana and various cannabis products. The overall decline could be attributed to the economic crisis and the related decrease in consumption, as well as to the pressure of the police of drug-distributing networks in the first quarter of 2010.
- Similar to the drugs market, the economic crisis impact is observed in the commercial sex services industry. There has been a marked decrease in the average price per 'trick' (from 30 EUR in 2008 to 20 EUR in 2009), as well as a decrease in the average number of 'tricks', from 3.1 per year to 2.9. At the same time, there is a growing support among citizens for the legalisation of prostitution: from 31% in 2008 to 35% in 2009. The number of those supporting a total ban, however, remains unchanged - about 41%.
- The market for paid sex continues to be of significant size. Nearly 6% of men admitted to have used in the past paid sex services. Informal networks (friends and acquaintances) remain the most popular method of finding paid sex services (25%). Hotels (13%), or Internet ads and newspapers (13%), and erotic bars (12%) were the other most commonly used methods. Brothels (5%) and the 'street' (11%) were mentioned less frequently.
- The 2009 crime trends showed that a number of persistent, objective factors continue to play significant role. The rising unemployment in 2009 and 2010 had an impact on certain types of thefts. At the same time, the effect of the rising unemployment has been softened by some demographic factors: fewer young people in the risk age (14-25 years) as a result of demographic decline in the 1990s. The demographic factor also affects the consumption of drugs or the market of sex services. In 2010, the increased pressure by the Interior Ministry on criminal gangs and individuals could also be considered as a factor that has impacted crime.