



Crime Trends 2012 - 2013

Policy Brief No. 41, October 2013

In 2012 there was a sharp increase in both the number of victims and the number of crimes compared to 2011. These trends take place in the context of a 10-year drop in crime rates. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) statistics of registered crimes in 2012 showed the opposite trend - a 6% drop from 114,781 in 2011 to 107,828 registered crimes in 2012 (Figure 1).

This difference is explained by the rising level of unregistered crimes that are not part of the official statistics. The current growth comes amid a gradual increase in the level of crime in 2009 and 2010 - a trend registered by the National Crime Survey (NCS)¹ and the statistics of the Ministry of Interior.

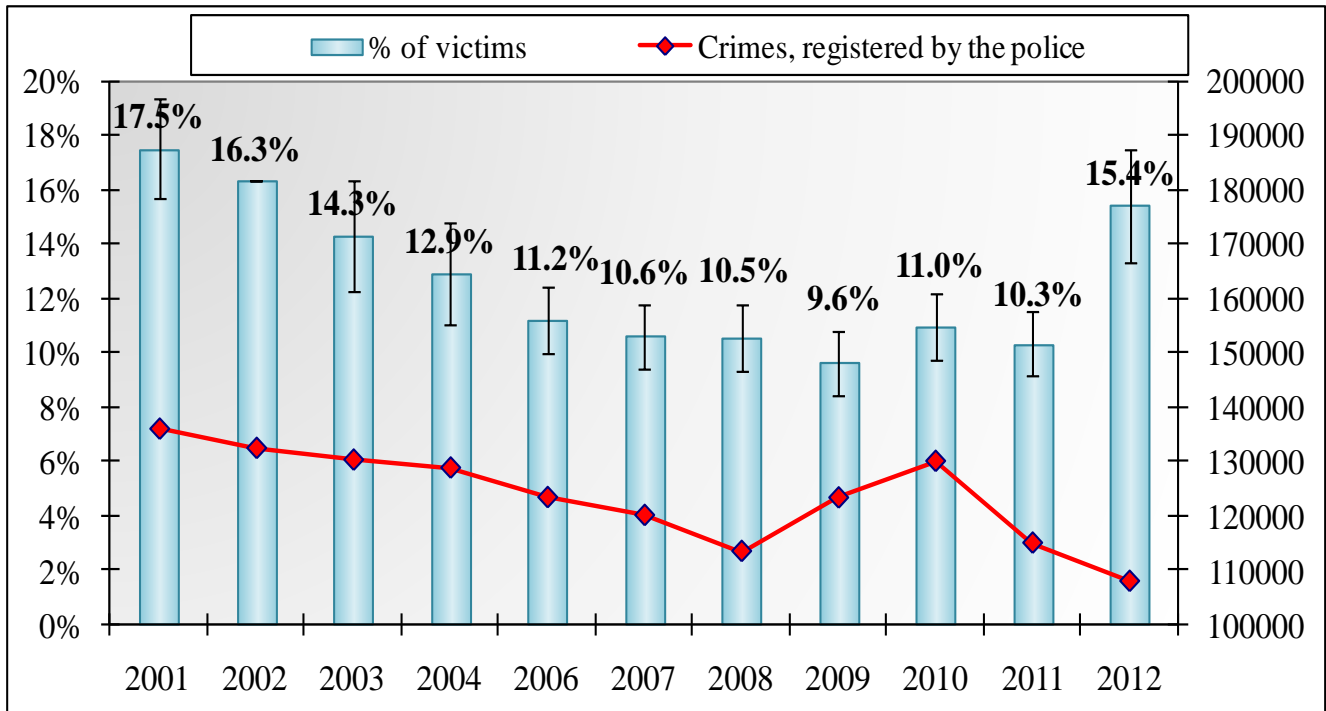
This is the fourth time since 1990 (Figure 2) when there is a rise in crime rates in a period of acute economic crisis in Bulgaria.

KEY POINTS

- **Crime rates increased in 2012** compared to 2011 - 15.4 per cent of the population compared to 10.3 per cent, respectively, were victims of crime. The number of victims and the overall number of crimes increased both.
- **Growth of unregistered crimes:** for a third consecutive year the share of victims who do not report crimes to the police increased.
- **Growth in thefts:** despite the continuing decline in serious crimes such as murder and vehicle theft, there is an increase in crimes against property of the citizens.
- **Victims of crime in South Central and South Eastern regions** of the country are least likely to report crimes to the police. These areas are also characterized by high levels of crime victimisation.

¹ The National Crime Survey (NCS) has been conducted annually since 2001 by the Center for the Study of Democracy and Vitosha Research. The NCS is based on a nationally representative survey. In 2013, two instruments were used for data collection – the traditionally used face to face interviews (1000 respondents). For a first time, 2500 respondents were interviewed by telephone.

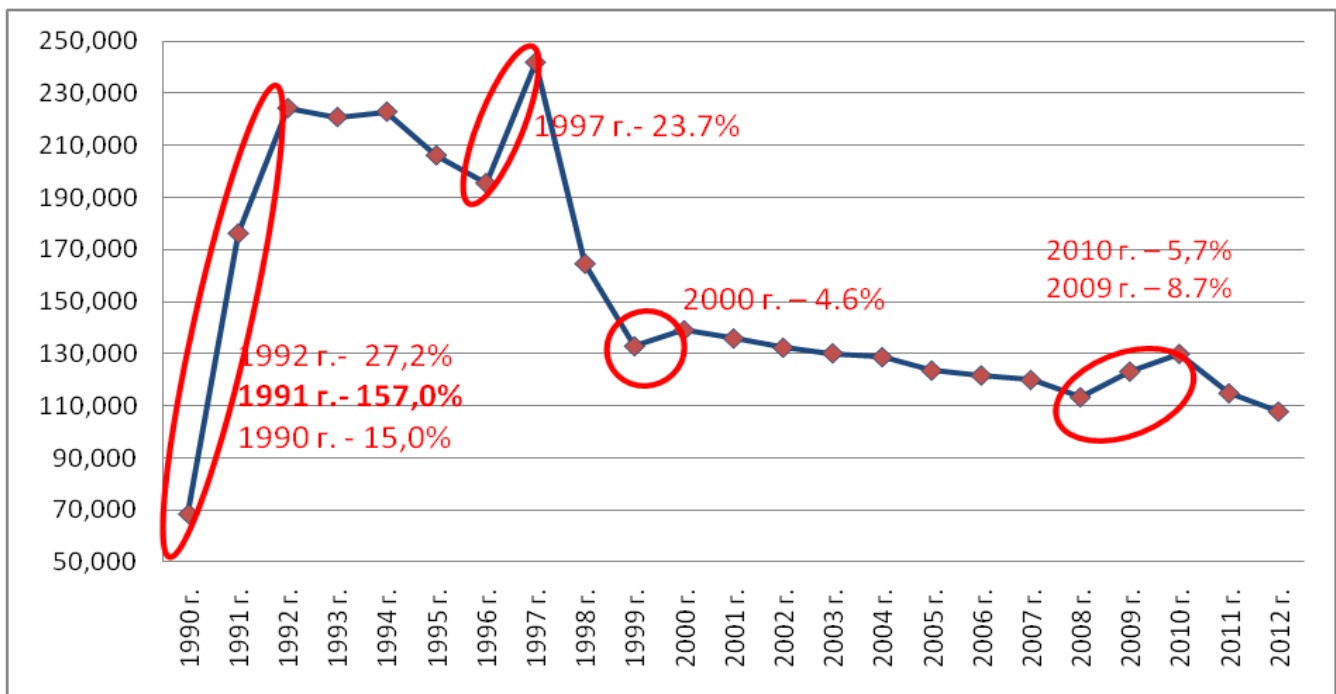
Figure 1. Victimization rates and registered crimes



In 2009, the number of crimes increased while the number of victims remained unchanged – i.e. at the beginning of the crisis, more people were becoming victims of more than one crime. At the same time, the

Ministry of Interior (MoI) statistics showed that registered crime declined to levels that were even lower than the ones seen before the economic crisis (2007-2008).

Figure 2. Registered crimes by the Ministry of Interior (1990 – 2012)



Increase of unreported crime

One of the most important indicators that NCS is monitoring is the level of "hidden crime" – crimes that are not reported to the police and were not included in police statistics. This indicator also shows the confidence of victims of crime in the police.

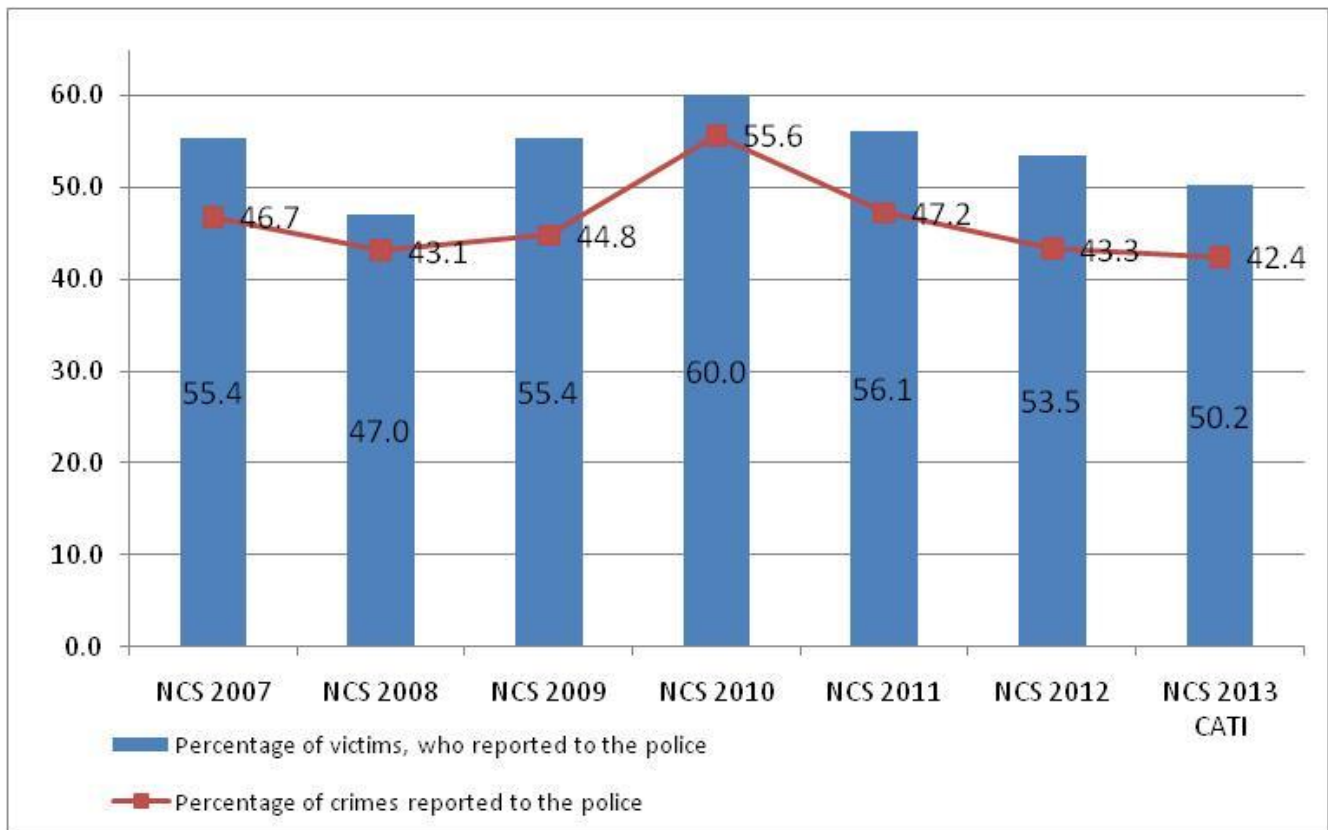
According to NCS data, in 2012 the number of unregistered crimes grew, with only 42.4 per cent of all crimes being reported to the police. Every second crime victim preferred not to report the crime to the police.

Analysis of the NCS data since Bulgaria’s entry into the EU (2007) shows that in 2010 the unreported crime rate was record-low. This trend was explained in previous NCS analyses² with the regular positive coverage of the activities of the police by the media. With the growing criticism of the media towards the activity of the MoI at the end of the mandate of the government, a drop in reported crime was observed.

Factors for unreported crimes

The reasons for non-reporting crimes vary according to the type and gravity of the crime. The reasons usually mentioned by victims include:

Figure 3. Share of victims and crimes reported to the police



² Center for the Study of Democracy (2011) *Crime Trends in Bulgaria 2000 – 2010*, Sofia: CSD

- **Police would do nothing** – this reason expresses typically lack of confidence in the police. It is the most often named reason when it comes to crimes which citizens do not consider significant. For instance, with theft from cars, 42% of the victims, who chose not to report it to the police, mentioned this as the main reason. For 30% of the victims of burglaries this was also the leading reason.
- **Police could do nothing / There is no evidence** – this explanation is given especially when victims think that it would be really hard to find the perpetrator, in cases of robberies or thefts from adjacent premises (attics, basements). This reason was mentioned by 20 % of victims of theft from cars, and 17% of victims of burglaries who chose not to report them to the police.
- **It wasn't that serious, I suffered no losses** – this explanation represents a more general trend when suffered damages are light and victims are reluctant to report the crime to the police (thefts from adjacent facilities, attempted burglaries or fraud). This reason was mentioned most often by victims of attempted burglaries (40 %) or threat (26 %).
- **My family handled the situation alone** – it refers to situations when the perpetrator is either a relative or an acquaintance of the family. This reason was mentioned only by 3 % и 6 % of the victims who did not report the crime. This is the least mentioned reason for not reporting a crime.

Mistrust in police, however, applies only to the filing of certain categories of crimes. For example, victims of car theft or assault have much greater confidence that the police would *and* can help them. In robbery cases significant reason for not reporting crime to the

police is the victim's fear of retaliation. Assault and threats victims often give as reasons for not reporting the crime to the police "other" or "not a police matter" because in many cases it concerns crimes that happened in the context of personal or family relations.

National Crime Survey (NCS) and police statistics³

- The data in the NCS is collected through a nationally representative survey of victims of crime.
- While the statistics of the Mol include only the registered crimes, the NCS also covers the crimes not reported to the police.
- Mol Statistics includes less than half of the actual crimes committed in the country.
- The Mol statistics are distorted, as they underreport less serious crimes as well as crime in regions of the country where there is low confidence in the police.
- The method used to conduct the NCS is internationally recognized and applied in most European countries and the USA.

Police 'filters'

According to the NCS data, out of approximately 600,000 crimes per year, 300,000 are not reported to the police. Therefore, the remaining 300,000 crimes should be registered by the police and reflected in Mol statistics. However, the annual number of crimes in Mol statistics is only 110,000. For a variety of reasons, **about 190,000 crimes that**

³ In 2013 the National Crime Survey used two methods for data collection: telephone interviews (CATI method) and face-to-face interviews. The phone interviews registered a larger number of crimes and victims - 2 percentage points higher than those of a face-to-face interviews.

are reported to the police do not get registered and are not investigated (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Unregistered crime and police filters



We call these informal mechanisms for avoiding crime registration 'police filters'. The use of these filters is driven by various factors. Some of them may be blamed on the victims, who may mistakenly perceive a certain incident as crime, while it is not. In these cases, the police would refuse to register the crime.

In many other cases, though, police officers refuse to register actual crimes. **Political and managerial pressure** for 'lower crime rates' is the major reason for non-registration by police of committed crimes.

The basic measurement of police performance (both at the level of police unit and at officer levels) is **the clearance rate, as well as** the overall number of registered crimes. Thus, a large number of registered crimes for a given period, and respectively a low clearance rate present career risks for police managers and officers alike.

There is a strong incentive to avoid crime registration, in particular of crimes with low chances of being solved.

Beside the police, prosecutors and investigators may also influence the registration or non-registration of a

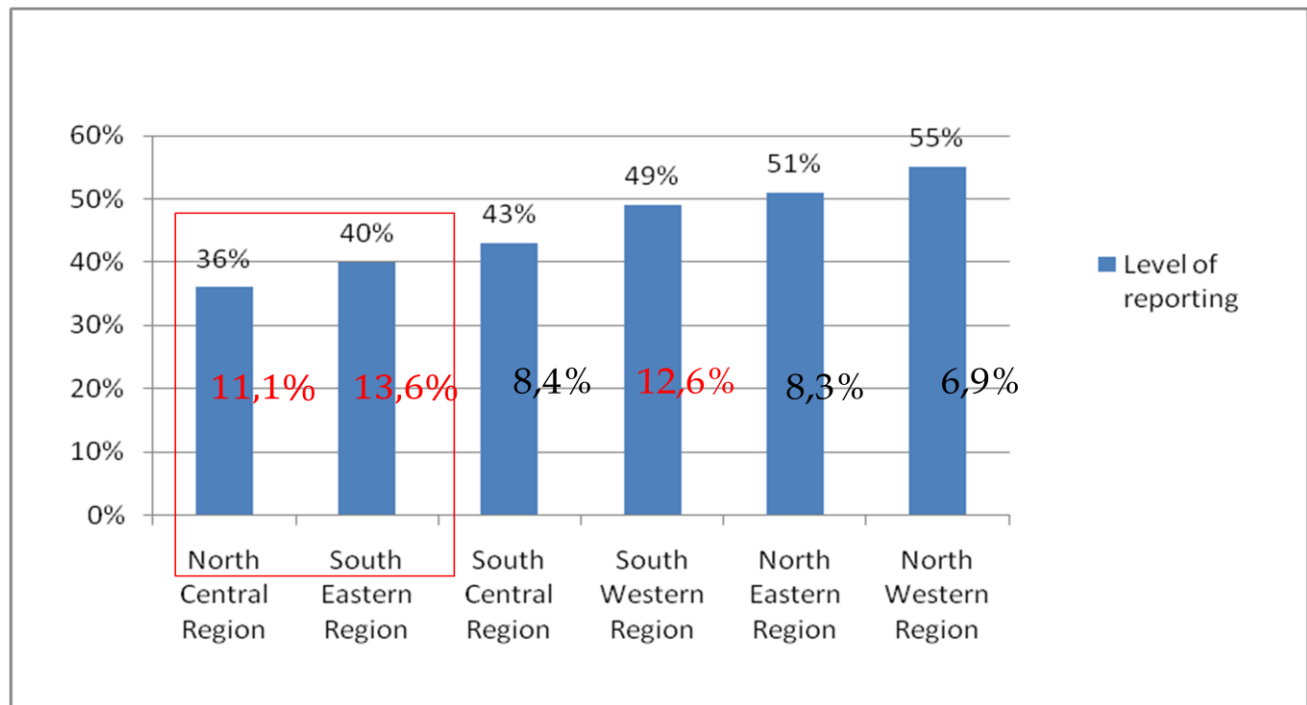
reported crime. However, they are 'secondary filters' and their impact on the overall number is considerably smaller compared to police.

Tools to minimise police filters

- Setting up a specialised unit of the MoI Inspectorate to carry out random checks (based on a sample) on handling of crimes reported to the police;
- Regular checks and control on a sample of cases reported on the emergency line 112;
- 'Mystery shopper' approach by undercover officers of the Inspectorate (reporting a crime in a police department);
- Public awareness campaign to explain the advantages of reporting crimes (e.g. non-reported crimes are often repeated if they are not prosecuted, and the same citizens may become victims of multiple crimes);
- Incentives to citizens to notify the Inspectorate if they experience difficulties in registering a crime.

Regular comparison with data from NCS, as well as effective internal control would minimise the impact of police filters, resulting in investigation of most of the reported crimes. A first step to this end would be a review of the NCS data for administrative regions with obvious discrepancies and a high level of unreported crime.

In 2010, in the North Central and the South Eastern regions only 36% and 40% (respectively) of crimes were reported (Figure 5). At the same time, crime levels in both regions are relatively high, with 11.1% and 13.6% of the population reported they were victims of crime.

Figure 5: Latency and victimisation levels by region (2010)

Growth of crimes against property⁴

The victimisation survey gives ground to draw certain conclusions about the some frequent categories of crimes. For other crimes, where the unreported rate is low, police statistics can be used as a reliable source. These are the main trends observed based on both sources:

- The long term trend of **decline in serious crimes** (homicide and car theft) continued. The homicide rate, however (1.9 per 100,000) remained above the average European level.
- Attempts to commit so called **telephone frauds⁵** are still at an extremely high level,

⁴ The trend analysis is based on data from NCS 2012 and NCS 2010. Certain methodological differences prevent the use of data from 2011.

⁵ These frauds, almost entirely committed by certain Roma ethnic subgroups, usually have the following modus operandi: numerous

with almost 20% of the population being contacted at least once by a fraudster.

- **Theft of car parts or personal belongings from cars** are growing (from 4.6 % to 6.2 % of all car owners). Police statistics has not captured this trend. Similar is the trend in purposeful damage of cars (from 5.6% to 7.9% of all car owners).
- Victims of **attempted burglaries** and **committed burglaries** are also on the rise (respectively from 1.3 % to 2.6 % and from 2.07 % to 2.11 %⁶).
- Growth in **property theft**. The number of victims of personal property theft is up

callers place calls trying to reach (typically) an elderly person. The victim is informed that a relative has been in accident, and life-saving surgery requires a large sum of cash. Via intermediaries the criminals arrange a meeting and obtain the cash from the victim.

⁶ Despite the statistically insignificant increase, data on the attempted burglaries for the past 5 years indicate a statistically significant growth from 5.5% to 8.7%.

from 3.0 % to 5.1 %, and bicycle theft is up 3.2 % to 3.8 %.

- **Robbery** victims increased (both the 5-year and the 2012 indicator), from 0.3 % to 0.8 %. Similar trend is observed with victims of threats (from 1.9 % to 2.2 %).

products, which are typically smuggled into the country by organised criminal groups.

Highlights for 2013

Social instability in 2013 influenced the dynamics of crime. The periods of protests and political turmoil stimulated the growth in crime level.

Data from 2009 onward showed that the economic decline and slow recovery are the key factors affecting crime. Based on the high unemployment rates in 2013, it would be safe to forecast that the instability in crime dynamics would continue.

A new aspect of the crime scene is the **sharp increase in the number of immigrants**. Drawing on the experience of Western Europe with drastic changes in the immigration patterns, the following forecast can be made:

- Increase in the number of certain mass crimes should be expected, in particular 'survival thefts' (from food and department stores). The refugee / immigrant levels are still very low, and the number of 'immigrant crimes' are unlikely to surpass 1% of all crimes.
- In the mid-term there may even be a fall in immigrant related crime, as immigrants will move to other countries, or integrate in the labour market.
- The relation between economic / refugee migrants and organised crime and insignificant, and in the short to mid-term it is unlikely the immigrant refugees will be involved in organised crime activities.
- A typical survival strategy for immigrants is their involvement in the grey economy, in particular the retail distribution of pirated