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### World crime trends and emerging issues and responses in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice

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### Note by the Secretariat

#### *Summary*

The present document, which was prepared in accordance with the practice established pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/18, contains information on world crime trends and the state of criminal justice. It is based on “Monitoring SDG 16: a gender perspective”, report No. 4 of the Data Matters Series publication and reviews trends in progress being made towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16 from a gender perspective. In particular, it examines the sex-disaggregated data on victimization in relation to the crimes of homicide (indicator 16.1.1), human trafficking (indicator 16.2.2) and the solicitation of bribes (indicator 16.5.1), as well as improving perceptions of safety (indicator 16.1.4). It also examines the differential impact by sex of progress made with regard to the indicators related to criminal justice, including reducing the proportion of unsentenced detainees in the overall prison population (indicator 16.3.2) and improving firearms tracing rates (indicator 16.4.2). The General Assembly has approved all these indicators for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals.

\* E/CN.15/2023/1.



## I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is responsible for tracking global progress on several indicators that fall under Sustainable Development Goal 16, in relation to which Member States have committed to work towards building peaceful societies that are based on good governance and access to justice for all.<sup>1</sup> As part of the United Nations system, UNODC ensures that it mainstreams a gender perspective into all its work, including its research outputs.<sup>2</sup> As gender-sensitive research is typically aimed at identifying the social norms and root causes that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination, the first, crucial step in gender-sensitive research is to collect and present sex-disaggregated data.<sup>3</sup> The lack of such data is one of the major barriers to the accurate assessment of Member States' progress in promoting gender equality.

2. Sex-disaggregated data can bring to the surface gender concerns that may previously have been invisible.<sup>4</sup> It is possible to carry out a first, gender-sensitive assessment on the basis of the people-centred indicators under Goal 16, as they can be used to track the degree to which women and men have benefited differently from any progress achieved by Member States.<sup>5</sup> In the case of indicators that focus on institutions or events rather than people, a gender perspective can also be used to highlight the different involvement of, and impact on, men and women.<sup>6</sup>

## II. International crime and criminal justice trends

### A. Global and regional crime trends

3. The indicators used to track progress on Goal 16 capture a number of important global crime trends, including the gender dimensions of these trends. They include victimization rates for the crimes of homicide (indicator 16.1.1), human trafficking (indicator 16.2.2) and the solicitation of bribes (indicator 16.5.1). Victimization rates for these crimes vary by sex, and so progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals affects men and women differently.

#### **Indicator 16.1.1. Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age**

4. Target 16.1 is to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. Reducing the number of intentional homicides is crucial to meeting this target, because in recent years, homicide has been responsible for many more deaths worldwide than armed conflict and terrorism combined.<sup>7</sup>

5. In 2020, there were an estimated 437,000 homicide victims worldwide. This means that every hour, an average of 50 individuals were victims of intentional homicide. From 2015 to 2020, the annual number of homicide victims remained relatively stable: it is estimated that every year during this period, between 430,000 and 450,000 persons were killed intentionally, resulting in a total of more

<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 16 is to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Guidance Note for UNODC Staff: Gender Mainstreaming in the Work of UNODC* (Vienna, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Sex refers to male and female biological differences, while gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female, among other groups.

<sup>4</sup> UNODC, *Guidance Note for UNODC Staff*.

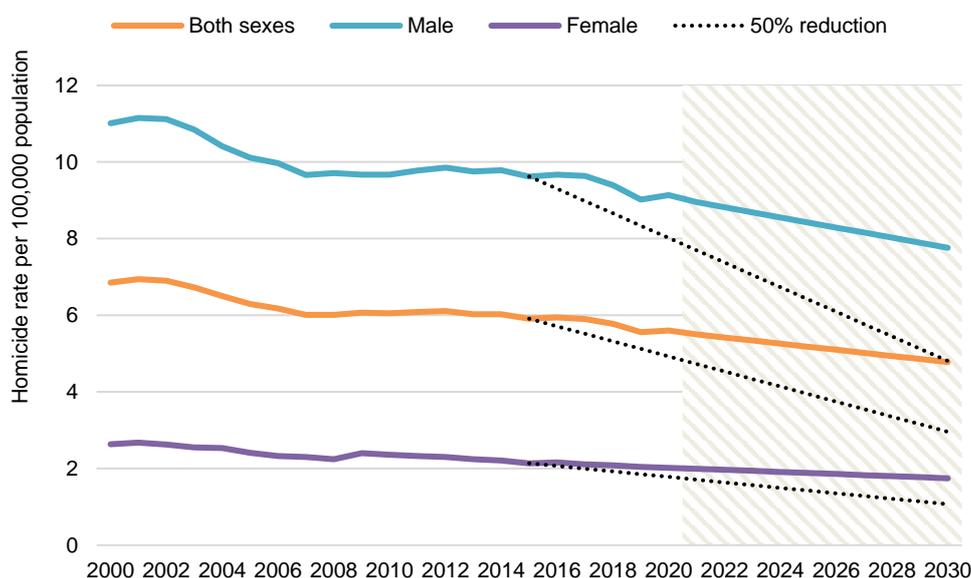
<sup>5</sup> Anne Marie Goetz and Rob Jenkins, "Gender, security, and governance: the case of Sustainable Development Goal 16", *Gender and Development*, vol. 24, No. 1 (February 2016), pp. 127–137.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Ginette Ascona and others, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2021* (New York, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide 2019* (Vienna, 2019).

than 2.5 million persons from 2015 to 2020. This is equivalent to the entire population of a large city such as Accra, Bandung, Fortaleza, Kyiv or Greater Vancouver. Owing to the growth in the global population, this stable number resulted in a decline in the homicide rate during this period, from 5.9 homicides per 100,000 population in 2015 to 5.6 in 2020.<sup>8</sup> It is projected that, if this trend were to continue, in 2030 the global rate of homicides per 100,000 population would be around 4.8, representing an overall decrease of 19 per cent (see figure I). This would be an important decline but would still fall short of target 16.1, to significantly reduce all forms of violence, if a “significant reduction” is interpreted as a minimum decline of 50 per cent.

Figure I  
**Trends in and projections of the global homicide rate (per 100,000 population), by sex, 2000–2030**



Source: UNODC estimates based on the UNODC homicide data set.

Note: Projections for the years 2021 to 2030 represent linear extrapolations of trends observed for the years 2015 to 2020.

6. Most homicide victims in 2021 were men and boys (81 per cent), with women and girls accounting for a much smaller share (19 per cent). Worldwide, the decline in the homicide rate from 2015 to 2020 was slightly more pronounced for women (-5.7 per cent) than for men (-5.1 per cent). However, there were considerable regional differences in both rates and trends (see figure II).

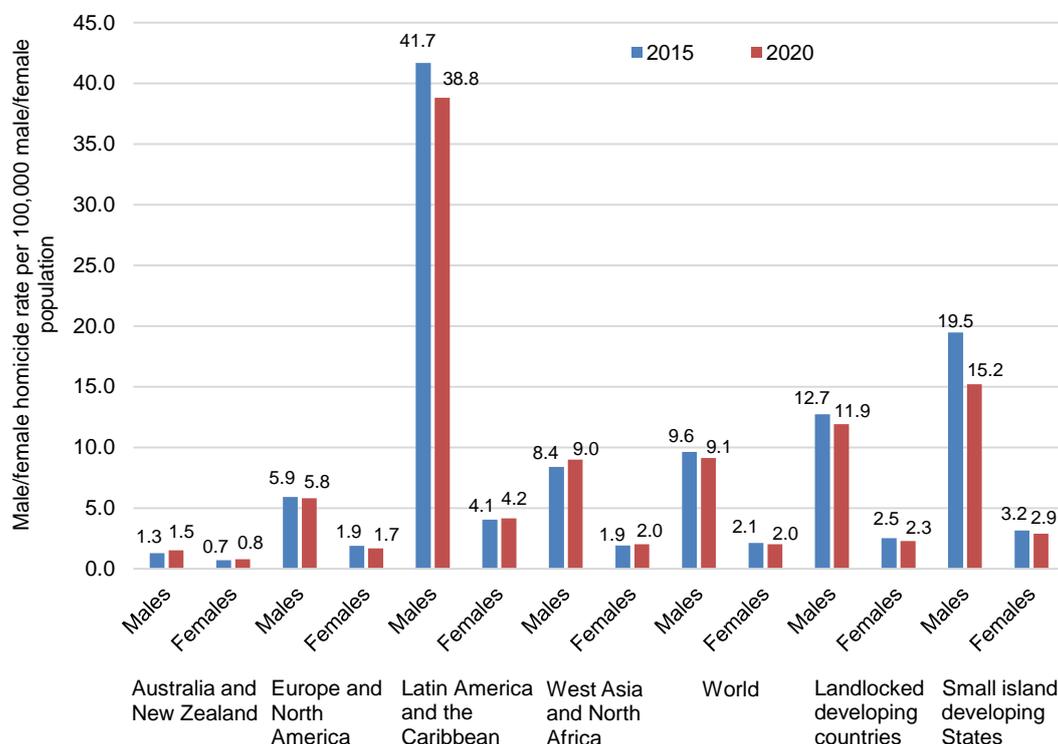
7. Latin America and the Caribbean is the region with both the highest male and female homicide rates and the greatest overall share of male victims: there were about 10 male homicide victims for every female homicide victim in 2020. The male homicide rate in the region declined by about 7 per cent from 2015 to 2020 (to 38.8 victims per 100,000 male population), while the female homicide rate increased by 3 per cent over the same period (to 4.2 victims per 100,000 female population).

8. In contrast, in Europe and North America – regions with relatively low homicide rates overall – there was a more pronounced decline in the female homicide rate (-11 per cent) than in the male homicide rate (-2 per cent). In these regions, the gender gap in homicide victimization is also significantly smaller than in Latin America and the Caribbean, with approximately three male homicide victims for every female homicide victim in 2020.

<sup>8</sup> From 2015 to 2020, the global population increased from 7.4 to 7.8 billion, representing an increase of 5.6 per cent. See <https://population.un.org/wpp/>.

9. In general, the available data suggest that trends in male and female homicide rates are moving in the same direction, with the noticeable exception of Latin America and the Caribbean (see figure II). While most regions have recorded declining or stagnating homicide rates for both sexes since 2015, the regions of West Asia and North Africa, and of Australia and New Zealand, are outliers in this regard, with increases of 7 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively.

Figure II  
Regional homicide rates (per 100,000 population) by sex, 2015 and 2020



Source: UNODC estimates based on the UNODC homicide data set.

Note: Owing to limited data availability, estimates by sex are not provided for the regions of Central and South Asia, East and South-East Asia, Oceania, sub-Saharan Africa and least developed countries.

10. The difference between homicide rates for men and women varies not only according to region, but also with regard to the context in which male and female homicides are committed. While just 11 per cent of male victims were killed by intimate partners or family members in 2021, 56 per cent of female victims were. This pattern is seen in every region assessed.<sup>9</sup>

11. Some regional differences are observable in the female and male burdens of homicidal violence in the private sphere (see figure III). In regions with lower levels of intentional homicide (both inside and outside the home), such as Europe and Asia, the proportion of male homicides related to violence in the home is larger (17 per cent) than in regions with high levels of homicidal violence, such as Africa and the Americas, where the proportion falls to less than 10 per cent. Current and former intimate partners are by far the most likely perpetrators of lethal violence against women and girls. On the basis of available data from 75 countries and territories in all regions,<sup>10</sup> female homicides committed by current or former intimate partners account for an average of 65 per cent of all female intimate partner and family-related

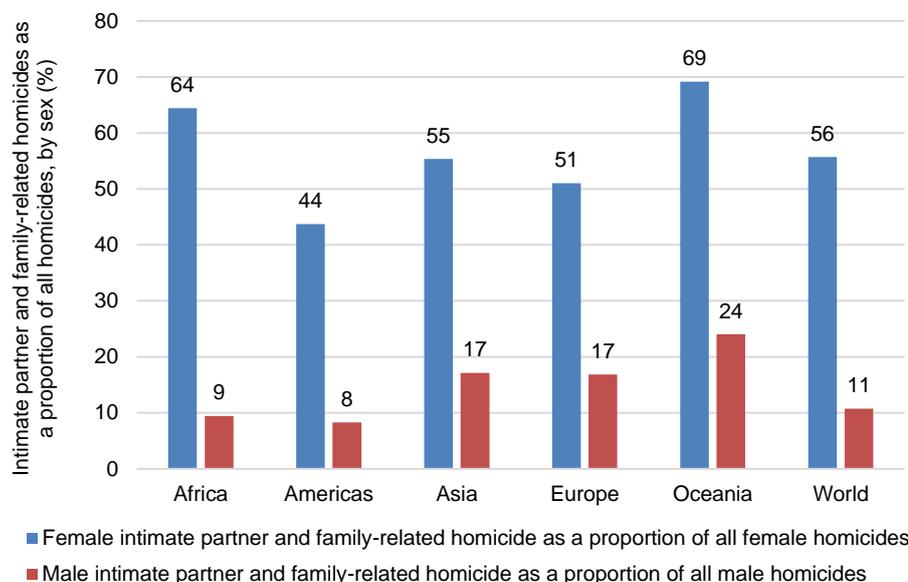
<sup>9</sup> See UNODC and UN-Women, “Gender-related killings of women and girls (femicide/feminicide): global estimates of gender-related killings of women and girls in the private sphere in 2021 – improving data to improve responses” (Vienna, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Data on female homicides perpetrated exclusively by intimate partners are available from 75 countries across all regions for at least one year in the period 2015–2021.

killings.<sup>11</sup> Women and girls also bear the overwhelming burden of all killings perpetrated by intimate partners, accounting, on average, for approximately 71 per cent of all intimate partner homicides in the 75 countries.<sup>12</sup>

Figure III

**Intimate partner and family-related homicides as a proportion of all female and male homicides, by region, 2021**



Source: UNODC estimates based on the UNODC homicide data set.

**Indicator 16.2.2. Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation**

12. Target 16.2 is to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. Targets 5.2 and 8.7 also relate to eliminating trafficking in persons.<sup>13</sup> Although trafficking in persons exists in every country and every region, it remains a largely hidden crime, with many perpetrators operating in the dark corners of the Internet and the global economy, entrapping victims for sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude and other forms of exploitation.<sup>14</sup> Women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected, although trafficking in men and boys has increased in recent years. Data from 2020 presented in the *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* indicate that of every 10 trafficking victims detected worldwide, about four are adult women and two are girls. Adult men account for about 2 of every 10 detected victims, while about 2 of every 10 detected victims are boys.<sup>15</sup>

13. Although the majority of detected victims of trafficking are female, the perpetrators who are apprehended tend to be men. On the basis of 9,803 investigations carried out in 96 countries in all regions, in 2020 about 70 per cent of all persons investigated by law enforcement authorities for human trafficking were men.

<sup>11</sup> Average weighted by the number of female intimate partner/family-related killings in each of the 75 countries.

<sup>12</sup> Average weighted by the number of intimate partner killings (male and female victims) in each of the 75 countries.

<sup>13</sup> Target 5.2 (Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation); and target 8.7 (Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms).

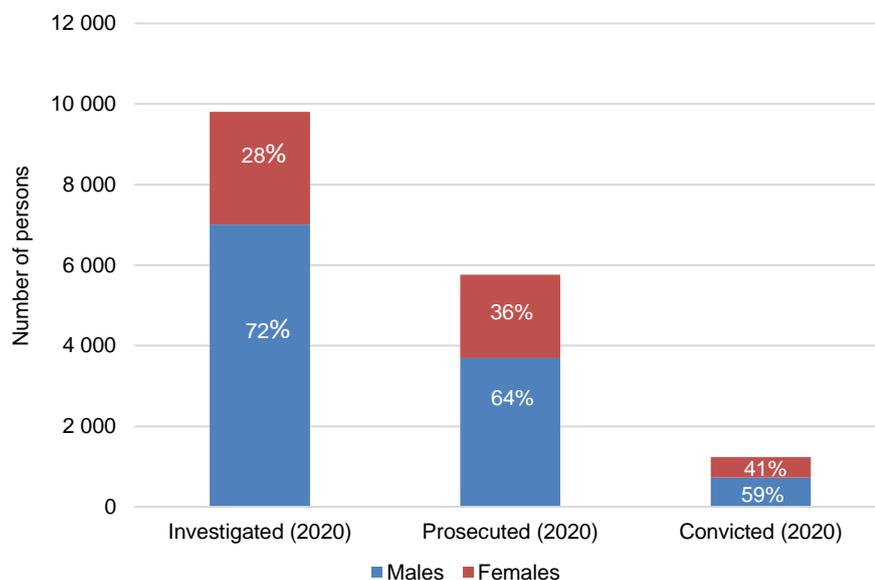
<sup>14</sup> *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020* (United Nations publication, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> Preliminary estimates from the UNODC *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* (United Nations publication, 2023).

However, at subsequent stages of the criminal justice process, the proportion of men prosecuted for and convicted of trafficking in persons and related offences becomes smaller. In 2020, of 5,765 prosecutions in 97 countries, about 64 per cent of all persons prosecuted for trafficking were men. In the same year, 59 per cent of all offenders convicted were men (see figure IV).

Figure IV

**Persons investigated, prosecuted and convicted for trafficking in persons, by sex, 2020 or most recent**



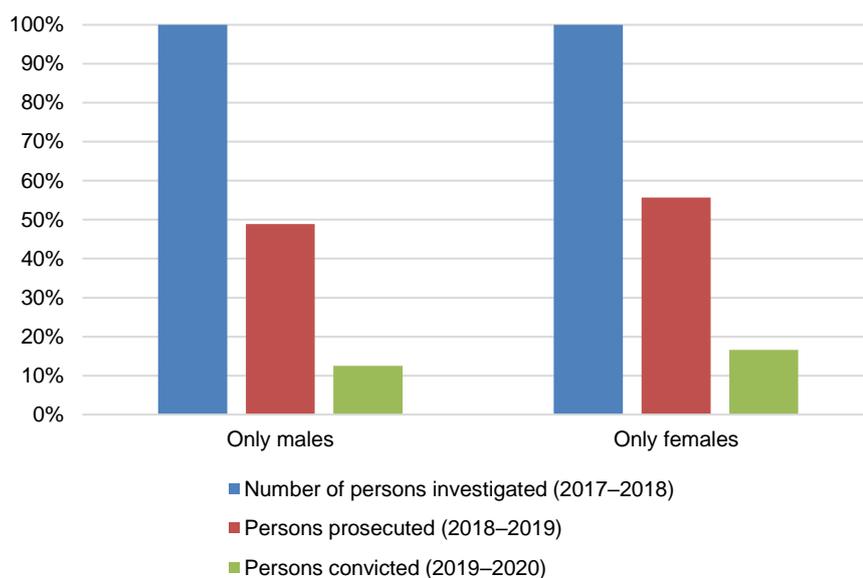
Source: UNODC estimates based on national data.

Note: The data on persons investigated relate to 96 countries; on persons prosecuted to 97 countries; and on persons convicted to 90 countries.

14. There may be various explanations for the difference in the proportion of women investigated and convicted at different stages of the criminal justice process. One explanation involves the nature of the data, as they relate to different sets of countries for each stage of the criminal justice process, and data on investigations, prosecutions and convictions in single years are likely to reflect different cases. The difference may also indicate that national criminal justice systems treat male and female perpetrators of human trafficking differently. Sex-disaggregated data on trafficking perpetrators from 26 countries for the period 2017–2020 show that the rate of persons prosecuted and convicted compared to persons investigated is higher for women than for men (see figure V). This suggests that women are more likely to be prosecuted and convicted compared to men. Various factors may explain this discrepancy, including more targeted investigations of women and limited access to justice for female suspects of human trafficking.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed analysis, see *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022*.

Figure V  
**Ratio of persons prosecuted and convicted to persons investigated in 26 countries, by sex, from 2017 to 2020**



Source: National data from 26 countries reporting on 2,643 men and 2,124 women investigated in 2017 and 2018; 1,295 men and 1,184 women prosecuted in 2018 and 2019; and 330 men and 352 women convicted in 2019 and 2020.

**Indicator 16.5.1. Proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, during the previous 12 months**

15. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development identifies corruption as a key impediment to sustainable development and establishes target 16.5, on substantially reducing corruption and bribery in all their forms.<sup>17</sup> Survey data on experiences of bribery in more than 120 countries show that people living in low-income countries suffer most from bribery: the average prevalence rate of bribery in low-income countries is 37.6 per cent, while high-income countries have a significantly lower average prevalence rate of 7.2 per cent.<sup>18</sup>

16. From a gender perspective, cross-national studies have shown that, on average, men are the target of bribery requests more often than women when in contact with public officials.<sup>19</sup> This general pattern is confirmed by available sex-disaggregated data on the prevalence of bribery in 18 countries in various regions. While the overall prevalence of being a target of bribery (for both sexes) varies widely between the 18 countries, from less than 1 per cent in Luxembourg to more than 45 per cent in Afghanistan, women are generally less likely than men, by an average of 5 percentage points, to be involved in bribery when in contact with a public official.<sup>20</sup> There are, however, significant differences between countries in the sample. In Ghana, Mexico and Nigeria, for example, the prevalence of bribery is more than 10 per cent lower for women than for men, while in Albania an opposite pattern can be observed: 21 per cent of women who had contact with a public official report having paid a bribe, compared with 17 per cent of men (see figure VI).

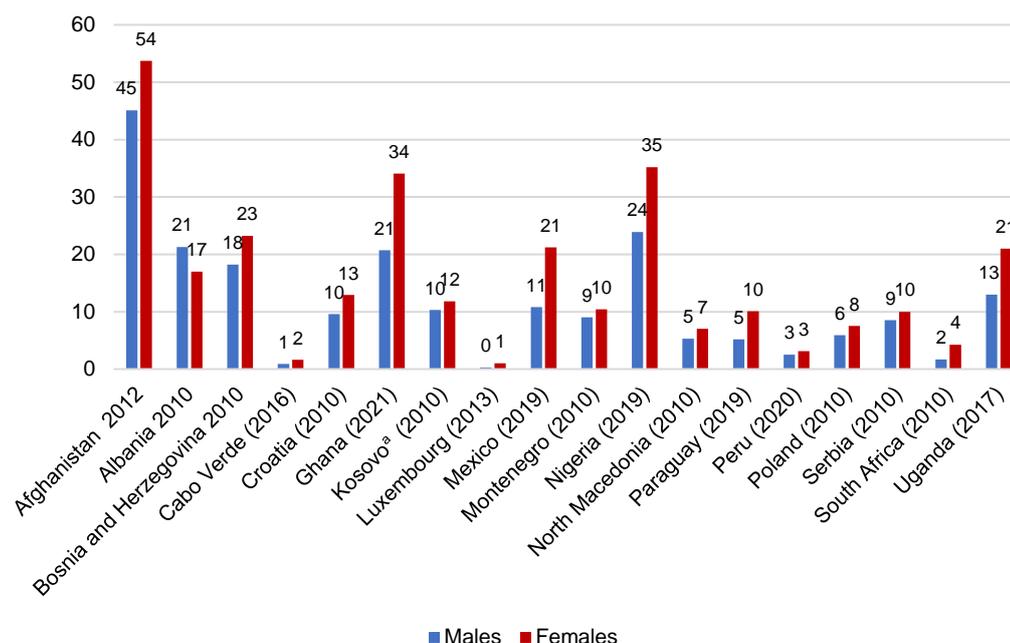
<sup>17</sup> General Assembly resolution 70/1.

<sup>18</sup> See UNODC, “Monitoring SDG 16: key figures and trends” Data Matters Series, No. 2 (October 2021).

<sup>19</sup> Naci Mocan “What determines corruption? International evidence from microdata”, *Economic Inquiry*, vol. 4, No. 46 (October 2008).

<sup>20</sup> This refers to the weighted average difference in bribery prevalence between men and women across the sample of 18 countries.

Figure VI  
Prevalence of bribery by sex, in countries and other areas with available data since 2010



Source: National sex-disaggregated survey data from 18 countries collected through the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems. The prevalence of bribery is calculated on the basis of the number of adults who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid or were asked to pay a bribe to a public official on at least one occasion in the 12 months prior to the survey, as a percentage of the adults who had at least one contact with a public official.

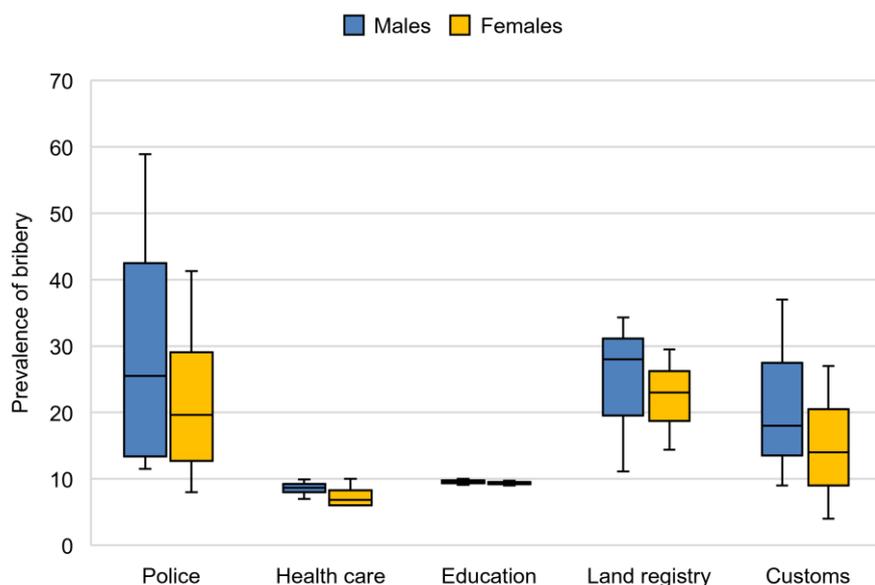
<sup>a</sup> References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

17. The difference in the prevalence of bribery experienced by men and women may be at least partly attributable to varying levels of bribery across sectors of the public administration and the different exposure of men and women to officials in these sectors. These factors are brought to light by survey data from 10 countries in various regions,<sup>21</sup> which show that the gender gap in bribery experiences differs across sectors, with sectors that are typically male-dominated displaying higher levels of bribery overall and larger gender gaps. Various factors can explain these differences, such as the sex composition of personnel in the different sectors or the different attitudes of civil servants in dealing with male or female citizens.<sup>22</sup> Further research is necessary to understand the gender dynamics of bribery, including the socioeconomic, organizational and cultural factors that shape gender-specific bribery practices in different countries.

<sup>21</sup> Ghana (2021), Nigeria (2019) and Iraq (2011); and, in the Western Balkans, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and North Macedonia, as well as Kosovo (2010). The related reports are available at [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/population-surveys.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/population-surveys.html).

<sup>22</sup> For country-specific gender analyses of bribery experiences, see UNODC, *Gender and Corruption in Nigeria* (Vienna, 2020); and UNODC, *Corruption in Ghana: People's Experiences and Views* (Vienna, 2022).

Figure VII  
**Prevalence of bribery by sex of bribe-payer and type of public official, in 10 selected countries**



Source: National sex-disaggregated survey data from Ghana (2021), Nigeria (2019) and Iraq (2011); and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and North Macedonia, as well as Kosovo<sup>23</sup> (2010).

Note: The whiskers show the maximum range of bribery prevalence across the sample and the boxes show the middle half of the data (the interquartile range). In Iraq, estimates for the education and customs categories were not available. In the Western Balkan countries, estimates for the education and land registry categories were not available.

#### **Indicator 16.1.4. Proportion of the population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live after dark**

18. By providing a perception-based measure of insecurity, indicator 16.1.4 gives a more holistic picture of people's experiences of safety, crime and violence. This is important because people's perceptions of safety may be shaped by various factors, some of which are independent of their actual experiences of violence.<sup>24</sup> Although personal experiences of violence undoubtedly influence people's perceptions of safety, other factors such as media coverage and the public discourse on crime also have an impact.<sup>25</sup> Feeling unsafe in public can have a negative influence on people's well-being and can result in them having less trust and contact with others and engaging less in the community; it therefore represents an important obstacle to development.

19. On the basis of available survey data from 114 countries in all regions, an average of about 69 per cent of the population report feeling safe or very safe walking alone around the area they live after dark.<sup>26</sup> This global average has remained stable during the period for which data are available (2016–2021) (see figure VIII). Stark differences in perceptions of safety are observable across regions. On average, Australia and New Zealand,<sup>27</sup> sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the

<sup>23</sup> References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

<sup>24</sup> Emily Gray, Jonathan Jackson and Stephen Farrall, "Reassessing the fear of crime", *European Journal of Criminology*, vol. 5, No. 3 (July 2008), pp. 363–380.

<sup>25</sup> For a review of the literature on fear of crime, see Nicole Rader, "Fear of crime", Oxford Research Encyclopaedias, Criminology and Criminal Justice, 29 March 2017.

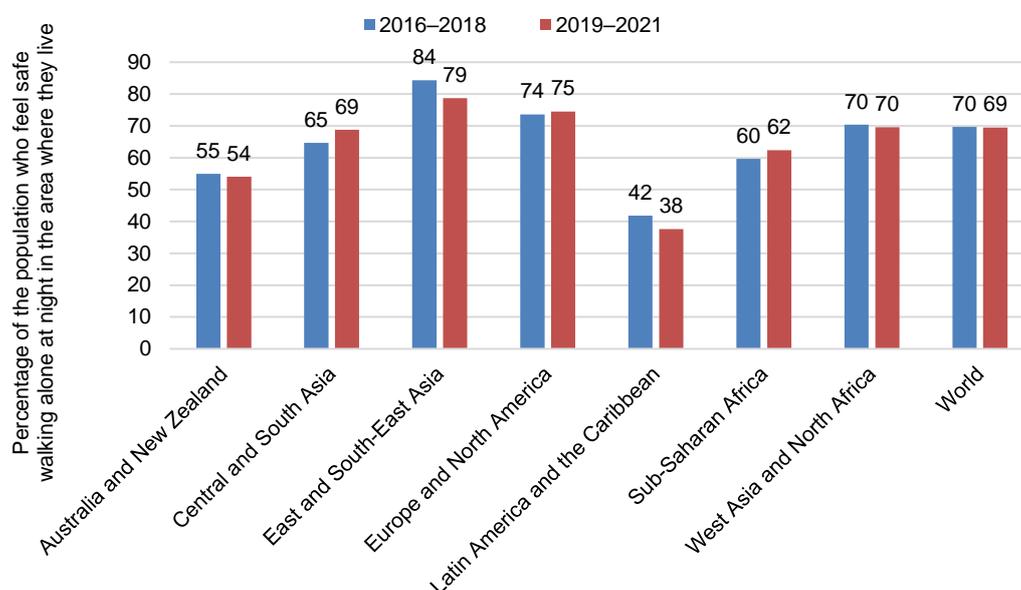
<sup>26</sup> Most surveys include the qualifications "after dark" or "at night" in the question wording.

<sup>27</sup> Data for Australia are from the National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing, and for New Zealand from the Gallup World Poll. The question wordings are standard and

Caribbean are the regions where respondents feel least safe. In East and South-East Asia, Europe and North America, and West Asia and North Africa, respondents feel comparatively safer.

Figure VIII

**Proportion of the population that feel safe walking alone at night around the area they live, by region, 2016–2021 (114 countries)**



*Source:* National data collected through the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and the Gallup World Poll.

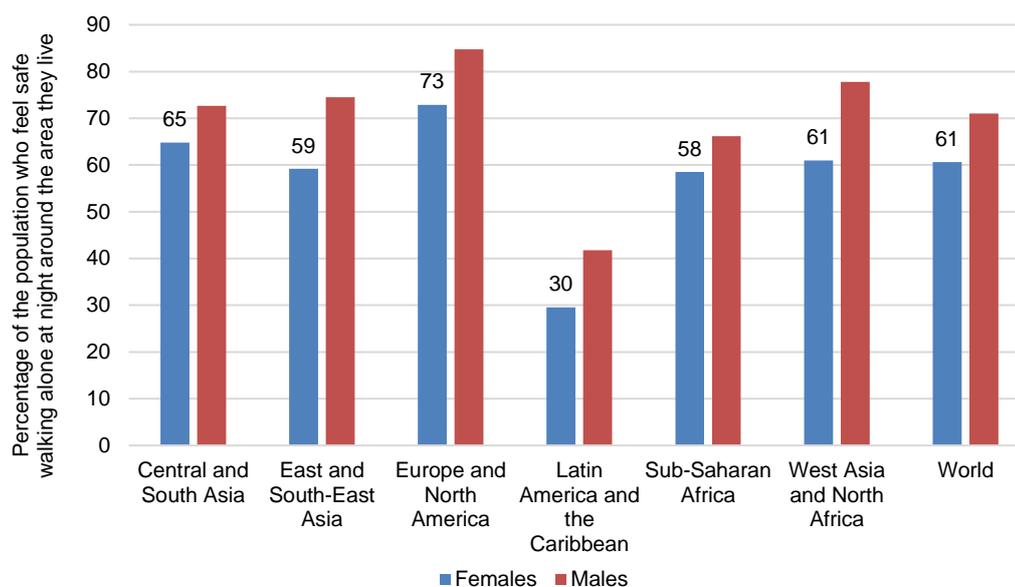
*Note:* Regional aggregates refer to 3-year averages weighted by countries' population size. Most surveys include the qualifications "after dark" or "at night" in the question wording. Data coverage: Australia and New Zealand (2 countries), Central and South Asia (12 countries), East and South-East Asia (13 countries), Europe and North America (25 countries), Latin America and the Caribbean (13 countries), sub-Saharan Africa (33 countries), and West Asia and North Africa (16 countries). No data are available for Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand).

20. Perceptions of safety differ markedly between women and men. At the global level, on the basis of available sex-disaggregated data from 106 countries for the period 2019–2021,<sup>28</sup> the proportion of women who reported feeling safe walking alone around the area they lived was an average of 10 per cent lower (61 per cent) than men (71 per cent). This pattern is observable in all world regions, but is particularly pronounced in East and South-East Asia, and in West Asia and North Africa (see figure IX).

comparable across countries. This suggests that the relatively low reported perception of safety in the two countries is unlikely the result of a measurement error.

<sup>28</sup> The sample includes all 106 countries with sex-disaggregated data on indicator 16.1.4 for at least one survey year in the period 2019–2021.

Figure IX  
**Proportion of the population that feel safe walking alone at night around the area they live, by sex, 2019–2021 average (106 countries)**



*Source:* National data collected through the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and the Gallup World Poll.

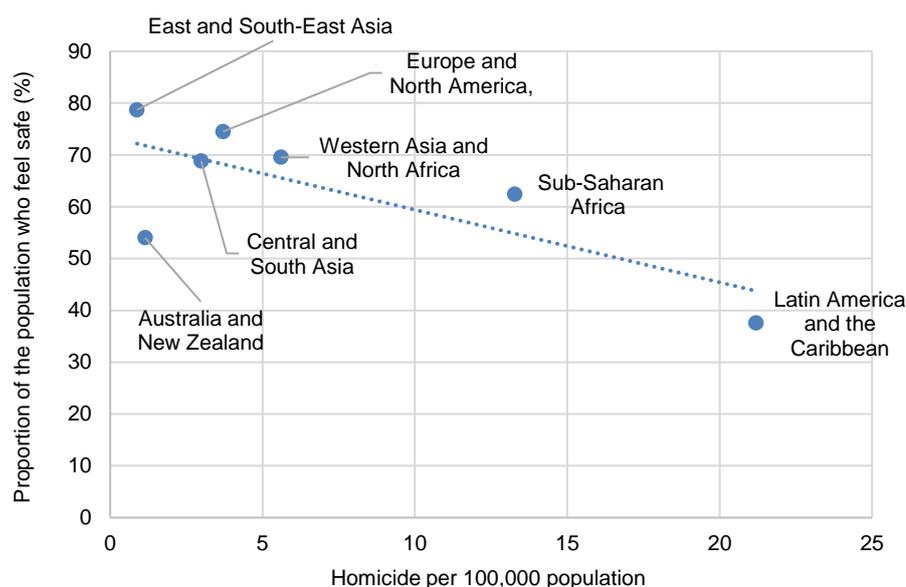
*Note:* Regional perceptions of safety refer to three-year averages weighted by countries' population size. Most surveys include the qualifications "after dark" or "at night" in the question wording. Data coverage: Central and South Asia (12 countries), East and South-East Asia (12 countries), Europe and North America (21 countries), Latin America and the Caribbean (11 countries), sub-Saharan Africa (33 countries), West Asia and North Africa (16 countries), and Oceania, including Australia and New Zealand (1 country). Owing to limited data availability, estimates by sex are not provided for Oceania, including Australia and New Zealand; however, the data from the one country in that region included in the data coverage are factored into the world average.

21. To help understand what determines people's perceptions of safety, it is useful to investigate whether actual occurrences of criminal violence influence those perceptions. One way of doing this is to examine possible links between homicide rates and average perceptions of safety in the population.<sup>29</sup> When doing so at the regional and country levels, the data reveal that a link does exist: in regions and countries with higher homicide rates, both men and women tend to feel less safe (see figure X). Women feel less safe than men across all world regions, despite the fact that they are less likely than men to become victims of homicide. This indicates that women consistently feel more vulnerable than men, irrespective of the level of homicidal violence in their surroundings.<sup>30</sup> Although these data do not offer explanations as to the reason for this difference, they indicate that levels of non-lethal violence and sociocultural factors play a role in shaping women's perception of safety.

<sup>29</sup> Because of its lethal outcome, homicide tends to have greater definitional specificity than other types of crime. Furthermore, homicide can be considered a reasonable proxy for violent crime as well as a robust indicator of overall levels of violence within countries.

<sup>30</sup> It is also important to note that the regional averages hide significant differences between countries within each region and that the association shown in figure X may not necessarily apply at lower levels of geographical aggregation.

Figure X  
Regional homicide rates (2020) and perceptions of safety (2019–2021)



Source: National data from 116 countries collected through the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and the Gallup World Poll.

Note: Regional homicide rates refer to the year 2020. Perception of safety aggregates refer to three-year averages for the years 2019 to 2021, weighted by countries' population size. No data are available for Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand).

## B. Criminal justice system

22. In addition to measuring crime trends, there are indicators under Goal 16 that measure progress in criminal justice. These include the share of unsentenced detainees in the overall prison population (indicator 16.3.2) and firearms tracing rates (indicator 16.4.2). As is the case with crime, the experiences of men and women with respect to these aspects of the criminal justice system are often strikingly different.

### Indicator 16.3.2. Unsentenced detainees as a proportion of the overall prison population

23. Target 16.3 is to promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all. Although there is no single definition of access to justice, it is broadly concerned with the ability of people to defend and enforce their rights and obtain just resolution of their legal problems.<sup>31</sup> There is no single indicator that can precisely measure the complex and multifaceted nature of the rule of law and access to justice, but the percentage of pretrial (“unsentenced”) detainees within the prison population can serve as a proxy indicator for measuring the efficiency of the criminal justice system and can capture one of the dimensions of access to justice.<sup>32</sup> A low percentage of such detainees within the prison population reflects overall respect for the principle that persons awaiting trial must not be detained in custody unnecessarily, which, in turn, is premised on aspects of the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty.<sup>33</sup>

24. By the end of 2020, there were significantly fewer persons held behind bars worldwide than the previous year: from 2019 to the end of 2020, the global prison

<sup>31</sup> See Praia City Group, *Handbook on Governance Statistics* (2020), p. 100.

<sup>32</sup> UNODC, Department of Peace Operations and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “United Nations system common position on incarceration” (April 2021), p. 3.

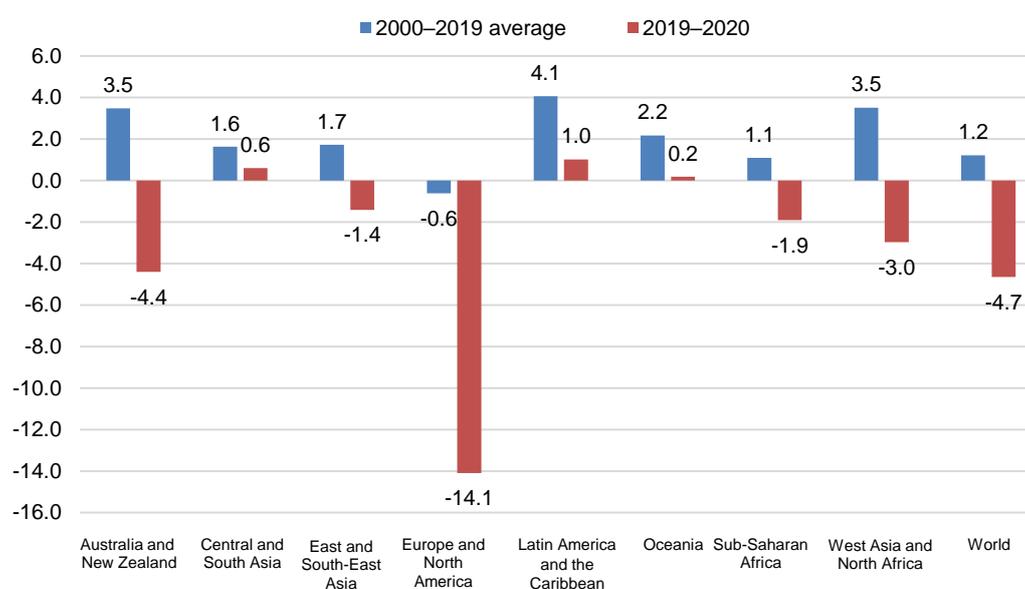
<sup>33</sup> See United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures (the Tokyo Rules), rule 6.1.

population declined by around 4.7 per cent, from just under 11.8 million to 11.2 million (see figure XI).<sup>34</sup> This represents a historical event, as the global prison population had grown steadily in the previous two decades, from 9.4 million in 2000 to 11.8 million in 2019, with an average annual increase of 1.2 per cent (roughly in line with global population growth).<sup>35</sup> In relative terms, the global reduction in the prison population in 2020 was more pronounced for women (-10.3 per cent) than for men (-4.2 per cent). However, in absolute terms, the global reduction in male prisoners (-466,000) was larger than the reduction in female prisoners (-81,000). The global picture masks substantial differences between regions.

25. While, from 2019 to the end of 2020, there was a significant decline in the number of persons held in detention in Europe and North America (-14.1 per cent), Australia and New Zealand (-4.4 per cent), and West Asia and North Africa (-3 per cent), other regions, such as Latin America and the Caribbean (1 per cent), Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) (0.2 per cent), Central and South Asia (0.6 per cent), and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) (0.2 per cent) recorded fluctuations that were not very different from the year-on-year changes observed in previous years (see figure XI).

Figure XI

**Year-on-year change (percentage) in total persons held in detention, by region**



*Source:* UNODC estimates based on national data collected through the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and the World Prison Brief.

26. The global reduction in the number of prisoners from 2019 to the end of 2020 can be attributed to various factors, including the emergency release of prisoners by many countries in the months following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19),<sup>36</sup> the reduced admission of new detainees owing to court delays or in

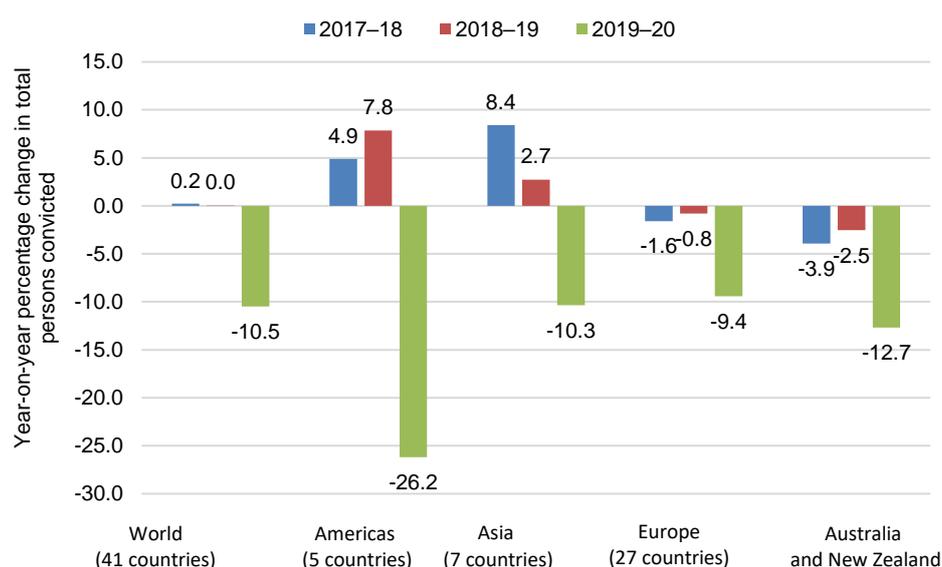
<sup>34</sup> As a result of an improvement in the coverage of national data, the estimate for 2019 of 11.77 million is slightly higher than the estimate for 2019 of 11.75 million published by UNODC in July 2021 (UNODC, “Nearly twelve million people imprisoned globally: nearly one-third unsentenced with prisons overcrowded in half of all countries”, Data Matters Series, No. 1 (2021)).

<sup>35</sup> World Bank, “World Bank Open Data”, Population growth (annual %) database. Available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.GROW>.

<sup>36</sup> From March 2020 to February 2021, UNODC collected data on emergency release mechanisms adopted by Member States in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings and recommendations of this exercise can be found in the “COVID-19 guidance note on emergency release mechanisms for detainees and prisoners during COVID-19: findings and recommendations” (2021). The compilation of data collected from publicly available sources revealed that at least 700,000 persons worldwide had been authorized or considered eligible for

response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as reduced crime and law enforcement activities during the lockdown measures. Data on the specific drivers of the dramatic decline in the global prison population in 2020 remain limited. Data available from 41 countries (mostly in Europe) that reported on the yearly number of persons convicted of a crime for the period 2017–2020 suggest that a general slowing down of the criminal justice process during the first year of the pandemic might have contributed to the reduction in the number of persons held in detention from 2019 to 2020, with the important caveat that not all convictions lead to a prison sentence. Although the total number of convictions in the 41 countries that reported data changed very little from 2017 to 2018 (by 0.2 per cent) and from 2018 to 2019 (no change), convictions dropped significantly (-10.5 per cent) from 2019 to the end of 2020. This trend is observable across different world regions, although data on convictions are limited outside of Europe (see figure XII).

Figure XII

**Year-on-year change (percentage) in total persons convicted, by region**

*Source:* National data from the following 41 countries that reported on the total number of persons convicted every year from 2017 to 2020 through the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems: Chile, Grenada, Mexico, El Salvador, United States of America, Azerbaijan, Hong Kong, China, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Türkiye, Uzbekistan, Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, Czechia, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, Finland, France, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Montenegro, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Australia and New Zealand.

27. Despite the dramatic reduction in the global prison population recorded during the first year of the pandemic, the proportion of prisoners who are held in detention without being sentenced for a crime (unsentenced detainees) has remained relatively unchanged at the global level. Analysis of the emergency release mechanisms adopted by many Member States in response to the pandemic indicates that the focus was primarily on convicted persons rather than pretrial detainees.<sup>37</sup> This is likely because instruments that were commonly used to release prisoners were pre-existing constitutional or executive powers (e.g. presidential or royal pardons), which are typically applied to convicted prisoners.<sup>38</sup> At the end of 2020, approximately one in

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release through emergency release mechanisms adopted by 119 Member States. It is important to note that not all announcements of release materialized in practice and that some release mechanisms were temporary in nature.

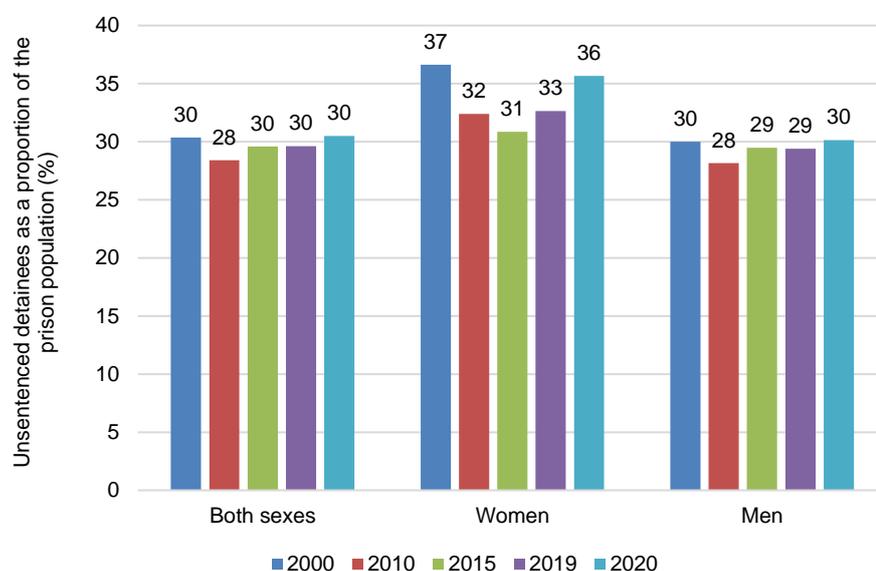
<sup>37</sup> UNODC, “COVID-19 guidance note on emergency release mechanisms for detainees and prisoners during COVID-19: findings and recommendations” (2021).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

every three prisoners worldwide was being held in detention without having been sentenced for a crime, which is about the same proportion as the last two decades (see figure XIII). Gender-disaggregated data suggest that the proportion of unsentenced detainees was slightly higher in the female prison population (36 per cent in 2020) than in the male prison population (30 per cent). In absolute terms, however, the global number of male unsentenced detainees (3.2 million) is higher than the number of female unsentenced detainees (252,000). The slight increase in the proportion of the female prison population that are unsentenced detainees from 2019 to the end of 2020 (from 33 per cent to 36 per cent, see figure XIII) appears to have been driven primarily by a drop in the total number of sentenced female detainees (-14 per cent from 2019 to the end of 2020), rather than a significant change in the number of unsentenced female detainees (-2 per cent). This is likely because emergency releases in many countries focused on sentenced detainees (rather than pretrial detainees) and several countries included gender-specific release criteria, such as being pregnant, breastfeeding or being mothers of infants or young children.<sup>39</sup> Overall, the figures on unsentenced detainees highlight that, despite the significant reduction in global numbers of prisoners as a result of the pandemic, there has been very limited progress in improving access to trial within a reasonably short period of time for both male and female prisoners, despite the international legal obligation for it not to be the general rule that persons awaiting trial be detained in custody.<sup>40</sup>

Figure XIII

**Unsentenced detainees as a proportion of the prison population at the global level, by sex (indicator 16.3.2)**



Source: UNODC estimates based on national data collected through the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and the World Prison Brief.

**Indicator 16.4.2. Proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments**

28. Target 16.4 is to significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime by 2030. The establishment of the illicit nature of weapons seized, found and surrendered

<sup>39</sup> The countries that explicitly included gender-specific criteria in their emergency release mechanisms included Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, the Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Georgia, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Peru, Rwanda, Tunisia, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe. See UNODC, “COVID-19 guidance note on emergency release mechanisms for detainees and prisoners during COVID-19”.

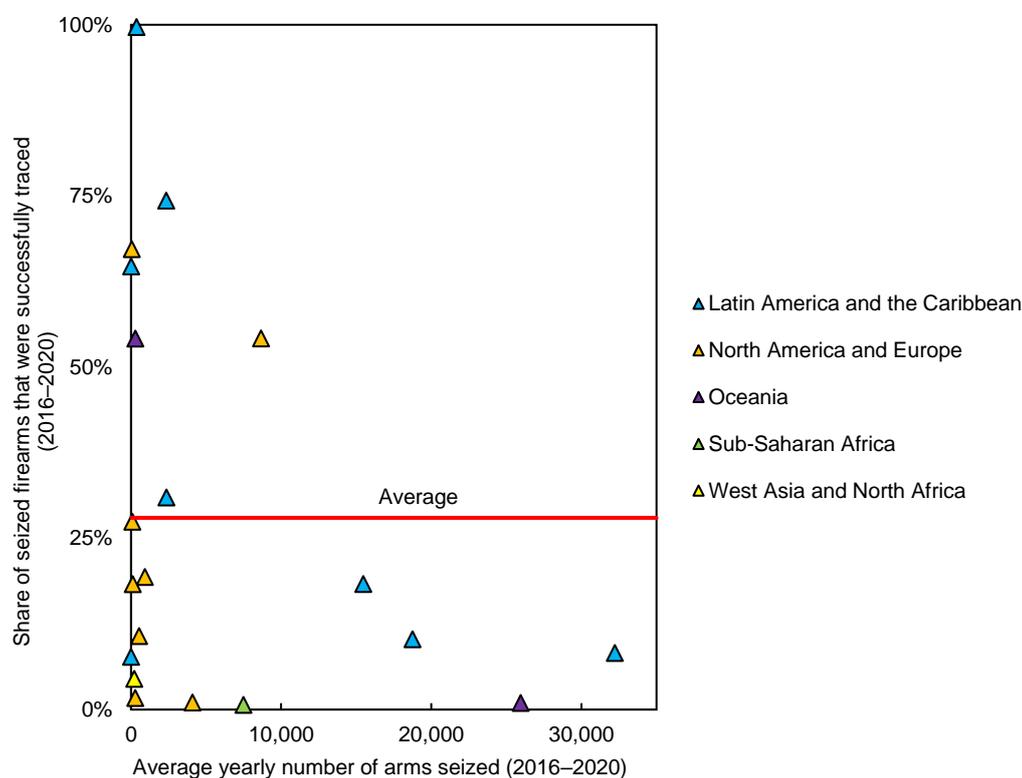
<sup>40</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 9, para. 3.

in the context of crime or armed conflict constitutes a key step towards this target. Comprehensive investigations to identify the point of diversion of seized firearms to the illicit market (the “tracing” of seized weapons) are an important step in dismantling organized criminal groups and the illicit flows they manage. Indicator 16.4.2 monitors the efficiency of tracing efforts undertaken by countries.<sup>41</sup>

29. From 2016 to 2020, countries with available data<sup>42</sup> successfully traced an average of 28 per cent of seized weapons that were potentially traceable (see figure XIV).<sup>43</sup> Successful tracing varies widely between and within regions and is associated with the overall volume of arms seized. In countries where the yearly average number of firearm seizures exceeds 10,000 – the majority of which are in Latin America and the Caribbean – the proportion of arms that are successfully traced is below the global average, which may indicate the challenge that the sheer volume of seizures in these countries poses to establishing the illicit origin of seized arms. In contrast, countries with low overall levels of arms seizures exhibit greater variability in the proportion of arms successfully traced. In North America and Europe, a relatively low<sup>44</sup> success rate for firearms tracing was reported in six out of eight countries. However, some countries, such as Peru (74 per cent) and Spain (54 per cent), were able to trace the majority of seized firearms (see figure XIV).

Figure XIV

**Tracing success (indicator 16.4.2) versus number of arms seized (2016–2020)**



Source: National data from the following 20 countries, submitted through the United Nations illicit arms flows questionnaire: Albania, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Brazil, Bulgaria, Colombia, El Salvador, France, Grenada, Kenya, Lithuania, Morocco, Peru, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom.

<sup>41</sup> Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-16-04-02.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> Based on simple average of data from 20 Member States between 2016 and 2020 reported through the illicit arms flow questionnaire.

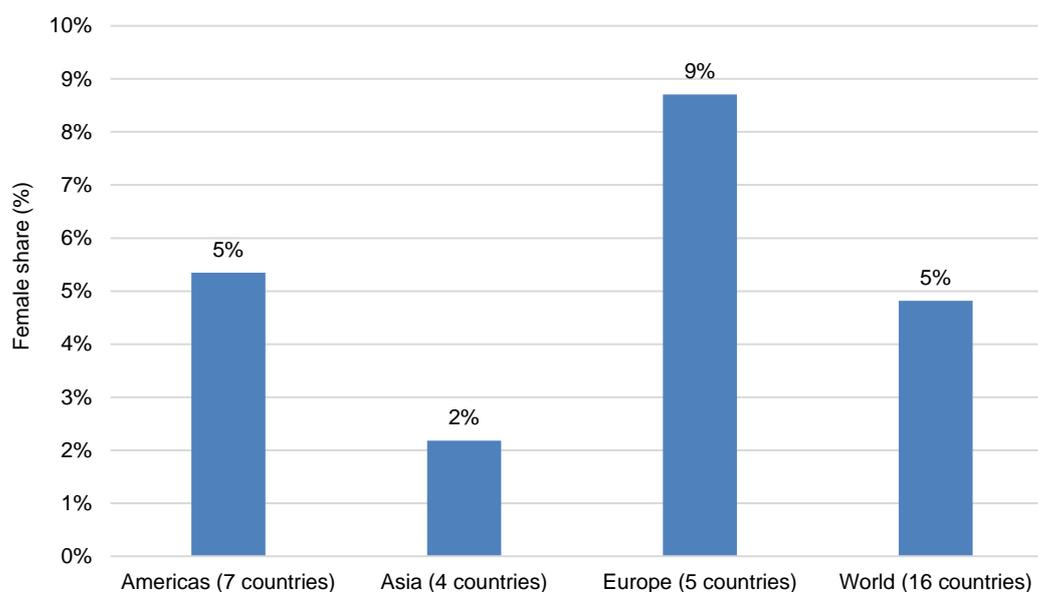
<sup>43</sup> Potentially traceable firearms exclude firearms seized from their legitimate owners or without unique marking. Firearms whose marking status was not recorded are also included and considered as “unsuccessful” instances of efforts to identify the illicit origin.

<sup>44</sup> Below the average of 28 per cent.

30. Available data show that the majority of the perpetrators of firearms trafficking are men. Sex-disaggregated data from 16 countries in the Americas, Asia and Europe for the period 2016–2020 suggest that the proportion of persons brought into formal contact, prosecuted or convicted for firearms trafficking that are women is relatively low, at an average of 5 per cent (see figure XV). At the country level, the proportion of women was from 1 per cent to 10 per cent, with only a few countries recording a proportion higher than 10 per cent. At the regional level, the highest average proportion of women was found in Europe (9 per cent), while the lowest was recorded in Asia (2 per cent). In the Americas, the proportion of women was an average of 5 per cent. Countries in the Americas tend to record the highest numbers of people brought into formal contact, prosecuted or convicted for firearms trafficking (on average, more than 11,350 persons per country from 2016 to 2020) with figures being significantly lower in European countries (360) and Asian countries (4,700).

Figure XV

**Female share (percentage) of persons brought into formal contact, prosecuted or convicted for firearms trafficking in the Americas, Asia and Europe (weighted averages, 2016–2020)**



*Source:* National data from the following 16 countries, submitted through the United Nations illicit arms flows questionnaire: Americas (El Salvador, Peru, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Canada and Uruguay), Asia (Armenia, Uzbekistan, Türkiye and Kazakhstan), and Europe (Romania, Greece, Spain, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Sweden).

### III. Work towards better data

31. One of the core missions of UNODC is to produce and disseminate high-quality statistics on crime and criminal justice at the international level. To achieve this mission, UNODC works to strengthen national capacities to produce, disseminate and use crime and criminal justice statistics as official statistics. This involves the development of statistical methodologies, the provision of technical assistance and the collection and publication of comparable data at the global level.

32. As the custodian of the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes, which was endorsed in 2015 by the Statistical Commission and by the Economic and Social Council on the recommendation of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, UNODC continued to promote its implementation to ensure data comparability at the national, regional and global levels. This included the development of methodological guidelines to strengthen the use of administrative data for the production of crime and criminal justice statistics.

33. On the basis of the International Classification, UNODC and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) have developed a new statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killing of women and girls (also referred to as femicide or feminicide). The framework, which was endorsed by the Statistical Commission at its fifty-third session, in March 2022, provides a statistical definition of gender-related killings of women and girls, a list of variables that can be used to record gender-related motives for killings and the data blocks that together comprise the total number of such killings. The framework also provides implementation guidance for national statistical systems. UNODC, its centres of excellence for statistics on crime and criminal justice in Mexico and the Republic of Korea and UN-Women are now initiating the roll-out of technical support for Member States to implement the framework. To that end, draft guidelines and a template for data assessment and data collection were developed to be piloted in selected Member States.

34. Furthermore, UNODC is developing guidelines to support criminal justice institutions in producing and disseminating statistical data on crime and criminal justice. The first guidelines for the production of statistical data by the police were launched on 28 November 2022. The guidelines offer a basic framework for the collection, production and dissemination of police statistics. They are intended to improve national data-collection efforts, promote evidence-based decision-making and improve transparency. The guidelines offer a statistical framework with a recommended set of minimum variables to collect across 12 different areas, illustrated using country examples. In addition, they includes guidance on how to use and manage the data. Guidelines for the production of statistical data by the prosecution, courts and prisons are under development and will be released in 2023.

35. Building on the International Classification further, UNODC and the International Organization for Migration have developed the draft international classification standard for administrative data on trafficking in persons. The classification, which will be finalized after further country consultations in 2023, is aimed at enhancing data collection and reporting on trafficking in persons by improving data harmonization and comparability.

36. Lastly, UNODC, in collaboration with its Centre of Excellence in Mexico, has developed the draft statistical framework for measuring corruption following a global hybrid consultation and the results of discussions by the Task Force on Corruption Measurement. The framework will be presented to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-fourth session, in March 2023, for discussion.

37. Although administrative data provide a wealth of information on different facets of crime, such as the location of a crime or details of the victim and the response by the criminal justice system, not all crimes are reported or detected. To uncover this dark figure of crime, surveys are critical in order to obtain information on the prevalence of crime and the rate of reporting to the police.

38. While a significant number of countries, in particular in the Americas, carry out national victimization and corruption surveys, at the global level there is limited survey-based data available for measuring progress in the areas of violence, access to justice, corruption and trafficking in persons. This constitutes a major impediment to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. UNODC joined forces with the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in late 2019 in order to develop an internationally standardized and tested survey instrument to be used by countries that do not have a dedicated survey programme to collect data for 13 survey-based indicators under Goal 16. The survey questionnaire on Goal 16 is divided into the following six modules: access to justice, corruption, governance, discrimination, trafficking in persons and violence. The survey questionnaire is designed to be a flexible tool that can be adapted to national needs; countries can conduct it as a stand-alone population survey or implement selected modules as part of other ongoing survey operations.

39. To ensure the implementation by Member States of the methodologies referred to above, namely, the measurement of corruption, the collection of administrative data and the conduct of victimization surveys, UNODC relies on the following two regional centres, which were established in partnership with national statistical agencies and which play a pivotal role in supporting countries in strengthening crime and criminal justice statistics:

(a) The UNODC-National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI) Centre of Excellence for Statistical Information on Governance, Victims of Crime, Public Security and Justice, based in Mexico City and established in 2011;

(b) UNODC-Statistics Korea (KOSTAT) Centre of Excellence for Statistics on Crime and Criminal Justice in Asia and the Pacific, based in Daejeon, Republic of Korea, and established in 2019.

40. The impact of the work of those centres in supporting countries in the two regions is a testament to the successful model of partnership between national statistical offices and United Nations agencies that combines peer support with the development of international standards.

41. The centres have continued to conduct capacity-building programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in Asia and the Pacific, respectively. These programmes involved on-site and online training sessions on crime victimization and corruption surveys, the measurement of homicide, the implementation of the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes, the upgrading of quality standards for crime and criminal justice statistics and the streamlining of gender in crime and criminal justice statistics. For example, the UNODC-INEGI Centre of Excellence delivered a regional workshop on the International Classification for five countries in the Caribbean and provided technical assistance in relation to the correspondence tables between the International Classification and the criminal codes of three other Caribbean countries, while the UNODC-KOSTAT Centre of Excellence organized an expert-led webinar to provide introductory information on crime statistics from a gender perspective. The centres also played a central role in the development of new methodological tools. For example, the UNODC-INEGI Centre of Excellence contributed to the statistical framework for measuring gender-related killings of women and girls, the conceptual framework for measuring illicit financial flows and the work to improve the measurement of corruption. The UNODC-INEGI Centre also published a compilation of best practices for reporting, storytelling and visualizations relating to victimization survey results in May 2022 to facilitate the dissemination and use of the data and serves as the technical secretariat of the Working Group on Public Security within the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

42. The centres of excellence have promoted and organized several activities at the regional and international levels, expanding and developing partnerships with other entities, including the sixth International Conference on Governance, Crime and Justice Statistics organized, and held in a hybrid format, by KOSTAT, INEGI and UNODC in November 2022. The Conference, which was attended by about 750 participants from 95 countries, provided a platform for experts to share the latest developments in crime statistics and discuss the role of statistical agencies in strengthening crime statistics.

43. In addition to the work of the two centres of excellence, UNODC, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, delivered online training to strengthen national capacities to monitor Goal 16 in Africa and the Near and Middle East. The training, which comprised six weekly webinars held in November and December 2022, strengthened the technical skills of representatives of national authorities, raised awareness of existing tools and fostered dialogue between data producers and users

on generating and using indicators under Goal 16. The activity was attended by more than 400 experts and practitioners from national institutions in almost 80 countries active in producing and using metrics in areas relevant to Goal 16.

44. Dedicated activities to support countries in producing accurate, relevant and timely crime and criminal justice statistics have been delivered by UNODC and other partners in 2022. They include technical support to conduct the first nationally representative corruption survey in Ghana, culminating in the publication by UNODC of the *Corruption in Ghana* report in July 2022. Technical support activities are also under way to conduct the third corruption survey in Nigeria, a workshop on measuring violence against women in Algeria and a workshop on administrative crime statistics and the implementation of the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes in Cameroon (December 2022).

45. The provision of support to countries in measuring illicit financial flows has been an important area of work in recent years. National statistical offices and other relevant authorities have been involved in development account projects implemented in Latin America (together with the UNODC-INEGI Centre of Excellence and UNODC), Africa (in partnership with the Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) and Asia (together with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). The projects have involved more than 10 countries in the area of methodologies to estimate illicit financial flows stemming from illegal markets such as drug trafficking, smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons. In December 2022, early estimates were released on illicit financial flows related to drug trafficking and trafficking in persons in Bangladesh, Nepal and the Maldives.

46. The annual mandated data-collection questionnaires on crime and the criminal justice system, trafficking in persons and illicit arms flows sent by UNODC to Member States are a critical component of efforts to harmonize data on crime and criminal justice at the global level. As part of the 2022 data cycle, UNODC conducted five regional briefings on the completion of the questionnaires and increased its collaboration with national focal points to strengthen the reporting of national data at the global level in accordance with the definitions of the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes. As a result, the response rates to the questionnaires returned to their pre-pandemic level.

47. Thanks to the data collected through the questionnaires, UNODC and its centres of excellence can regularly publish global figures on crime as part of research briefs known as the Data Matters Series. The series includes the second global research brief on the gender-related killing of women and girls, which was developed in partnership with UN-Women, offers global and regional estimates on femicide and provides extensive recommendations to strengthen comprehensive and multisectoral responses. The research brief for 2022 found that on average, more than five women or girls are killed every hour by someone in their own family; in 2021, an estimated 45,000 women and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members. Although these numbers are alarmingly high, the true scale of femicide may be higher, and UNODC is working to strengthen understanding of this crime and promote more effective responses to it. A second global research brief on monitoring progress towards Goal 16 was launched in September 2022. The brief focuses on presenting new, sex-disaggregated data and trends on several indicators under Goal 16 in order to shed light on the gender dimensions of global progress towards promoting peace, justice and strong institutions. The brief shows that women and men are affected differently by Member States' progress towards Goal 16. In addition, regional snapshots of prison populations in different parts of Asia were published. The regional and global estimates published in these briefs and snapshots provide not only information for evidence-based policymaking, but also points of comparison for countries that have not yet published data, thus creating a positive feedback loop and contributing to better data.

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## IV. Conclusion

48. The present document has highlighted the importance of monitoring gender differences as progress is made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals on peace and security. Although men are more likely to be victims of homicide in all regions of the world, women are disproportionately affected by violence in the home and at the hands of intimate partners. Women and girls comprise the majority of detected victims of human trafficking and are more likely to be convicted when identified as suspects in such crime. Experiences of being solicited for bribes also differ by gender, with women less likely to be targeted in most, but not all, countries. Women are significantly less likely to feel safe walking alone at night than men in every region of the world.

49. With regard to access to the protections offered by the criminal justice system, experiences also differ between genders. As men comprise the vast majority of prisoners worldwide, more men than women benefited from the recent reduction in prison populations; in relative terms, however, the female prisoner population experienced a greater reduction. Although the global prison population is significantly smaller than it was at the start of the pandemic, the proportion of prisoners of both sexes that are being held awaiting trial has not changed much, and women prisoners are more likely to fall into this category. As law enforcement agencies combat firearms trafficking through firearms tracing, men are more likely to be affected because in all regions men make up the bulk of those charged with trafficking in firearms.

50. It is clear from the data examined above that men and women are affected by crime and insecurity in different ways. To improve the monitoring of the gender aspects of progress in global development, including experiences of crime and justice, UNODC will continue to solicit and examine sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data. The insights gained could be useful in formulating gender-sensitive policies and ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of a better life for all.

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