

Safety and crime

Safety and crime rates in the society reflect to what extent people feel that their freedom of movement and their property are protected. A high level of personal safety can promote openness, social contact and cohesion.

In most OECD countries, people's feeling of safety while walking alone at night has changed only moderately over time (Figure 7.10). The number of countries where feeling safe while walking alone at night has increased and is larger than the number of countries where it has decreased. **Feeling safe while walking alone at night is generally strong in the Nordic countries, but also in Austria, Canada, Germany and Slovenia where similar levels have been recorded.** Until now few signs indicated that an effect of the economic crisis would be that walking alone at night was becoming less safe. One exception is Greece, where the feeling of safety while walking alone at night has now reached the lowest level among the OECD countries.

One hypothesis could be that the economic crisis has reduced night-life related noise and tensions, resulting in people feeling safer while walking alone at night. However, **the crime rates also remained relatively stable from 2004 to 2010, measured as the OECD average (Figure 7.11). The increase was highest in Greece, Italy and Turkey, while the decline was strongest in Japan, Poland and Portugal.** An ageing population as well as a development towards less use of cash and better safety technology can contribute to reduced crime rates.

In most OECD countries, the confidence in the local police is high, and has remained so during the crisis. At the OECD average, it increased slightly from 2007 to 2012 (Figure 7.12). The increase was biggest in Chile, Estonia, Greece and the Slovak Republic. Belgium, Hungary, Mexico and Norway experienced the largest decline.

Among the emerging economies, people's safety walking alone at night increased in Argentina, Brazil, China and the Russian Federation, while it declined in India, Indonesia and South Africa. The change in confidence in local police showed a similar pattern, with an increase in Argentina, Brazil and Indonesia, while it declined in India and South Africa.

Definition and measurement

Data on trust in local police and safety comes from the Gallup World Poll. The Gallup World Poll is conducted in more than 150 countries around the world based on a common questionnaire, translated into the predominant languages of each country. With few exceptions, all samples are probability based and nationally representative of the resident population aged 15 years and over in the entire country, including rural areas. While this ensures a high degree of comparability across countries, results may be affected by sampling and non-sampling error, and variation in

Definition and measurement (cont.)

response rates. Sample sizes vary between around 1 000 and 4 000, depending on the country and data should be interpreted carefully. These probability surveys are valid within a statistical margin of error, also called a 95% confidence interval. This means that if the survey is conducted 100 times using the exact same procedures, the margin of error would include the "true value" in 95 out of the 100 surveys. With a sample size of 1 000 the margin of error at 50% is ± 3 percentage points. Because these surveys use a clustered sample design, the margin of error varies by question.

Trust and safety are based on binary questions created by Gallup. For example: "Do you feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where you live? In the city or area where you live, do you have confidence in the local police force, or not?". Rates are calculated omitting "Don't know" and "Refused" from the denominator.

Data on crime rates are based on the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) Database which is based on administrative data. UNODC collects data on crime and the operation of criminal justice systems in order to make policy-relevant information and analysis available in a timely manner to the international community.

The index is based on the total number of persons brought into formal contact with the police and/or criminal justice system, all crimes taken together. "Formal contact" with the police and/or criminal justice system may include persons suspected, or arrested or cautioned. When using the figures, any cross-national comparisons should be conducted with caution because of the differences that exist between the legal definitions of offences in countries, or the different methods of offence counting and recording.

Further reading

Dragolov, G., Z. Ignacz, J. Lorenz, J. Delhey and K. Boehnke (2013), *Social Cohesion Radar. Measuring Common Ground*, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Germany.

The Economist (20 July 2013), "The Curious Case of the Fall in Crime".

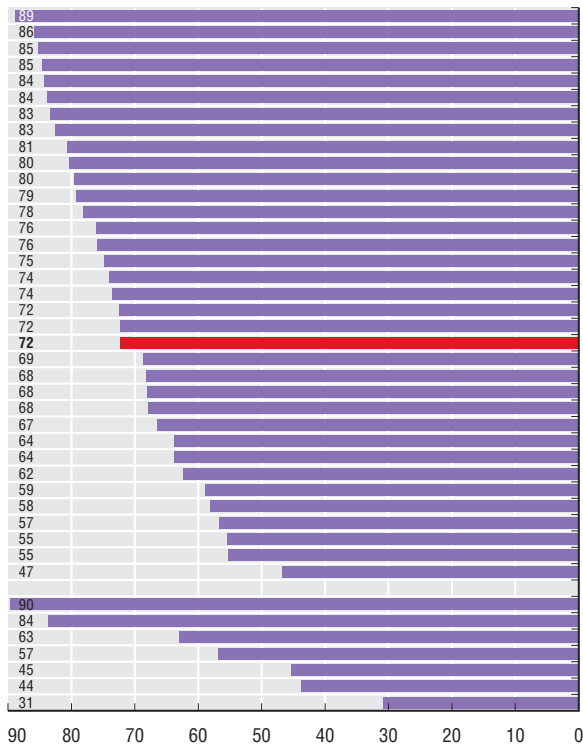
Figure notes

Figure 7.11: "Formal contact" with the police and/or criminal justice system may include persons suspected, or arrested or cautioned. Rate per 100 000 population. Please note that when using the figures, any cross-national comparisons should be conducted with caution because of the differences that exist between the legal definitions of offences in countries, or the different methods of offence counting and recording.

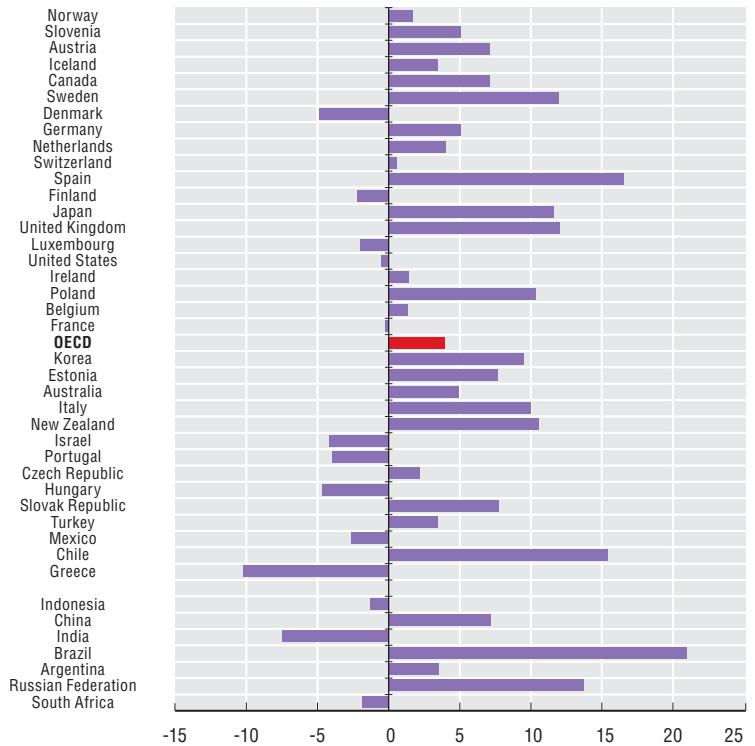
Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

7.10. Differences in feeling of safety walking alone at night

Panel A. Feeling of safety walking alone at night in the city or area where you live, 2012 (%)

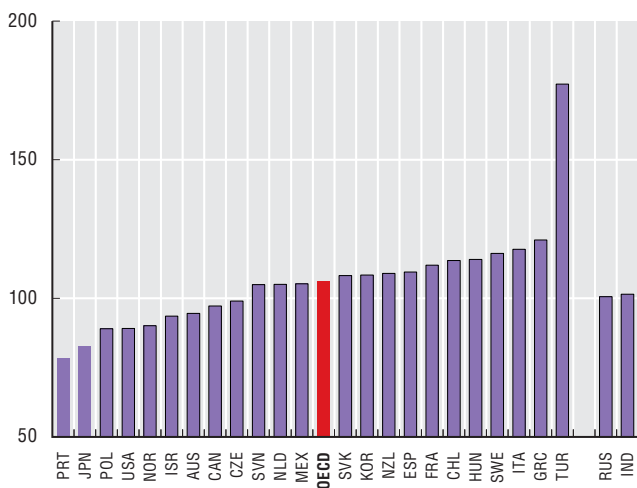


Panel B. Percentage point change between 2007 and 2012



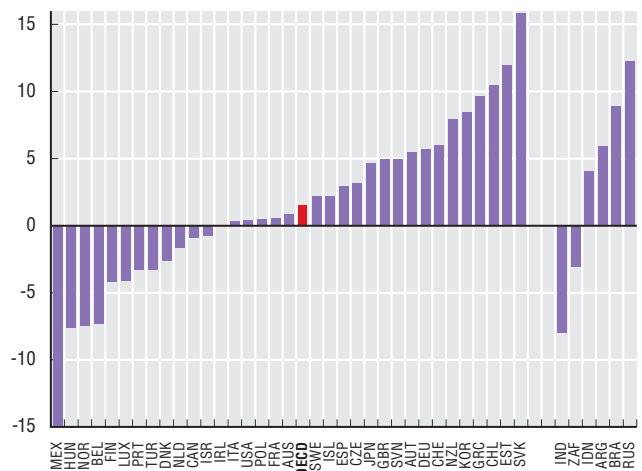
7.11. Crime rates stable in most countries

Total persons brought into formal contact with the police and/or criminal justice system in 2010, all crimes 2010, index 100 in 2004



7.12. Confidence in the local police remained high

Percentage points variation in confidence in the local police between 2007 and 2012



Source: Gallup World Poll (www.gallup.com); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) (www.unodc.org).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932966713>



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