

Crime and punishment: what the stats show

Official statistics show a decline in the number of crimes reported since 2005. Does this suggest that less crime is taking place, or that faith in the police has plummeted? JAMES DEBONO investigates

ACCORDING to figures released by the National Office of Statistics, the number of crime reports was 13,803 in 2008: down by 8% over the previous year, and by a considerable 14% since 1999.

Yet this data only takes in consideration crimes that have been reported to the police. Research shows that throughout Western societies,

more than 50% of offences are never reported.

This phenomenon is known as the dark figure of crime. Crimes may go unreported for a variety of reasons, including a lack of trust in the police and its ability to bring the culprits to justice, fear of victimisation or because the victim might feel embarrassed reporting the crime.

Robberies from homes

Significantly, reported robberies registered the largest percentage drop (27%) between 2007 and 2008. Statistics show that domestic robberies have practically remained at the same level as they were in 1999, after reaching a peak of 1,113 in 2005.

This suggests that domestic robberies increased by a staggering 40% between 1999 and 2005 only to fall again by 40% in the next few years.

But robberies are not declining at the same rate across the country and some localities have even seen a rise in burglaries.

While St Paul's Bay has registered the highest amount of burglaries between 2004 and 2008, Sliema had the most robbed locality in 2008, increasing from 40 in 2004 to 72 in 2008.

Sliema's high standard of living and its ageing population could be acting as an incentive to thieves.

Criminologist Saviour Formosa thinks that the

high rate of burglaries in localities like Sliema, is linked to the lack of social cohesion, resulting in lack of support for potential victims such as the elderly. Commercial development also attracts persons who then commit offences in the areas close by. A case in point is Swieqi, which – despite being a relatively small town – was the fourth most robbed locality in 2008.

Surprisingly, Marsa – which has a bad reputation solely due to its long-term association with prostitution, as well as the more recent presence of the open centre for asylum seekers – emerged as one of the safest localities in Malta in terms of reported house burglaries.

In fact only two burglaries took place in Marsa last year. The number of burglaries in this locality declined from 21 in 2005, to six in 2007, and two in 2008. Likewise, Gudja, Dingli, Xghajra, and

Safi registered two burglaries apiece, again despite the presence of another open centre in the latter locality.

Small villages with a strong sense of community, especially in Gozo, remain the safest places to live: only one burglary was recorded in Mqabba and Mdina (Malta), and Fontana, Sannat and San Lawrenz (Gozo) and nil in Gharb, Ghasri and Qala.

The only kind of criminality which has risen substantially in the past years was drug trafficking, which increased by nearly 21% between 2007 and 2008.

But other statistics presented in parliament show that more people were taken to court for possession (1724 between 2004 and 2008) than for drug trafficking (502). And a staggering 1,801 were taken to court for loitering for prostitution.

	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2008
Reported crime	16,031	15,929	17,739	18,580	15005	13,803
Homicides	10	5	-	4	4	6
Violent crimes			403	422	382	
Robbery	212	160	195	256	200	147
Domestic Robbery	675	618	682	1,113	735	674
Motor Vehicle	1,076	848	887	672	388	398
Drug Trafficking	100	?	?	113	149	180



(Source: Demographic Review 2008, published by National Office of Statistics)

Lowest number of burglaries in 2008

Qala, Ghasri, Gharb	345
Mqabba, Mdina, Fonatana, Sannat, San Lawrenz	270
Marsa, Gudja, Dingli, Xghajra, Safi	255

(Source: Parliament)



Localities with highest number of burglaries in 2008

Sliema	72
St Paul's Bay	64
St Julian's	54
Swieqi	45
B'Kara	34

Number of people arraigned in court for different crimes (2004-2008)

Prostitution	1801
Drug Possession	1724
Drug Trafficking	502
Hold ups	52
Homicides	17

(Source Parliament)

Less crimes, more prisoners

NSO figures show that while the official crime rate is on the decline, the prison population has increased from just 230 in 1999 to 444 in 2008.

A reply to a parliamentary question reveals that 525 persons were admitted at least for some time in prison in 2008. This was the highest figure since 2004 when only 457 were admitted.

Of the 2323 persons jailed for some time between 2004 and 2008, 650 were foreigners. In 2008 alone 146 foreigners were jailed. Valletta was the locality with the highest number of inmates. Over a four year period Qormi was the locality with the second highest number of inmates but in 2008 the runner up position was taken by Saint Paul's Bay.

Only 47 Gozitans were jailed between 2004 and 2008. Of these 16 were jailed in 2008.

Statistics also show that most inmates end up relapsing after being freed from prison.

Statistics released in parliament in 2006 show that 61 per cent of Corradino's inmates had served more than one term in prison.

Further proof that prison is failing in its correctional mission is that 44 per cent of prisoners have served more than three terms in prison.

And if prison is serving as a university of crime, 26

hardcore inmates deserve a doctorate: they have entered prison at least seven times.

A study of prison inmates conducted by "Mid-Dlamghad-Dawl" (MDD), the NGO which works among convicts, showed that one-third of prisoners do not engage in any work at all.

Out of 211 prisoners – half the current prison population of 406 – interviewed by MDD in January this year, 37% or 80 prisoners remain idle all the time.

Only 19 were learning or practicing a trade. Moreover, only 34 inmates were learning an academic subject at the prison school.

More than 75% of all respondents declared that they were afraid of the future. 20% expressed their fear of ending up again in prison. Others mentioned the fear of society rejecting them, fear of whether their families would accept them or not, falling back into the drug habit, and a substantial number feared not finding a job.

Other fears mentioned by the inmates surveyed by MDD included fear of not finding an accommodation once out of prison and the fear of ending up alone.

23% of inmates declared that they do not even think about the future expressing doom, resignation and fear.

	1999	2003	2007	2008
Prison Population	230	278	382	444
Police	1734	1845	1993	1884

Admission of inmates by locality

	2004	2008
Valletta	39	49
St Paul's Bay	21	25
Bormla	20	23
Msida	2	21
Poala	3	21
Bkara	18	20
Zabbar	29	20
San Gwann	6	19
Qormi	49	18
Isla	4	18
M'Scala	12	16
Gozo	3	16
Hamrun	8	15
Marsa	7	14

Localities with highest number of inmates between 2004 and 2008

Valletta	199
Qormi	145
Zabbar	115

Localities with lowest number of inmates between 2004 and 2008

Safi	6
Gudja	5
Mtarfa	4
Mgarr	4
Lija	3
Mdina	1

(Source: parliament)



Most common crimes between October 2007 and April 2008

Theft	4,733
Damage to property	1,493
Bodily harm	551
Domestic violence	179
Fraud	135
Drugs	83
Violence against police	61
Arson	58
Computer Misuse	57
Prostitution	14
Sexual Offences	24

(Source: Parliament)

Localities with highest number of burglaries between 2004 and 2008

St Paul's Bay	345
Sliema	270
St Julian's	255
Mellieha	215
Swieqi	168