

# ISSUE BRIEF: CITIZEN SECURITY

CRISIS PREVENTION AND RECOVERY



United Nations Development Programme

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Resilient nations.*

Over 1.5 billion people across the world live in countries affected by violence, conflict or high levels of crime; and more than 526,000 people are violently killed each year, just over one per minute.

While a range of factors have caused violence and crime to fall in many peaceful developed countries over the last few decades, this is not a universal trend. Many developing countries face an alarming increase in violence and crime that erodes the very foundation of democracy and imposes huge social, cultural and economic burdens on societies that can least afford them.

In many African, Latin American and Caribbean countries for example, justice and security institutions are in crisis. A lack of security has become one of the most important development issues facing ordinary people.

The drivers of violence and insecurity are various and complex, but often include:

- A recent history of violence or conflict;
- Internal stresses, such as high youth unemployment, war economies, growing income inequality, and perceived injustice;
- External stresses, such as the easy availability of illicit firearms, population movement, an increase in organized crime, the presence of drug trafficking networks, or conflict among criminal groups for territorial control;
- Rapid or poorly planned urban development and urban poverty;
- Simmering tensions and conflict over ethnic, religious or political differences, inequity and unfair resource allocation;
- A culture of impunity, unaccountable security institutions, corruption or weak rule of law; and
- A breakdown of governance and weak institutions such as the police, judiciary and security services that cannot cope with or prevent these stresses.

As well as causing human suffering, crime and violence have negative impact on vulnerable developing economies — eroding business confidence, imposing burdensome costs and sometimes causing the loss of skilled citizens through mass migration. Importantly, tackling crime and violence through increased security and policing measures diverts resources away from other critical development services, such as health and education.

## WHAT IS CITIZEN SECURITY?

Citizen security is the process of establishing, strengthening and protecting democratic civic order, eliminating threats of violence in a population and allowing for safe and peaceful coexistence. It means effectively safeguarding inherent human rights, especially the right to life, personal integrity, inviolability of the home and freedom of movement.

Citizen security is not simply the reduction of crime, but a comprehensive and multi-faceted strategy for improving the quality of life of a population, community action for crime prevention, access to an effective justice system, an education that is based on values, respect for law and tolerance.

Citizen security is a fundamental part of human security.

## UNDP'S APPROACH

The complex causes of violence can no longer be met with separate, piecemeal interventions (e.g. disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, justice and security sector reform, small arms control, and conflict prevention). UNDP's approach to citizen and community security attempts to tackle all of the potential causes of crime and violence. This multifaceted approach helps countries to integrate violence prevention and crime control measures; targeting a broad range of issues, such as lack of social cohesion, impunity, drug trafficking, the proliferation of illegal firearms, human trafficking and migration.

UNDP also targets all levels of government; supporting the development of national policies; strengthening local and state institutions; helping the government to better coordinate security; improving the capacity of police to prevent violence; and training judges and court officials. Importantly, UNDP works with communities to understand their perceptions of the security challenges and takes practical action to address these, such as by imposing gun-free zones, keeping young people occupied and off the streets, improving job opportunities or simply fixing street lights to help reduce violence.

## THE GLOBAL PICTURE:

- The likelihood of being murdered in Honduras is more than 100 times the likelihood of being murdered in some developed countries;
- Since 1999, homicide rates have doubled in some Central American and Caribbean countries, putting murder now almost on a par with maternal mortality as a cause of death;
- The number of annual violent deaths in Pakistan increased from around 10,500 in 2004 to over 24,500 in 2009; and
- While the general trend across some developing countries is an increase in violence, some nations showed marked decreases in the number of violent deaths over the last decade. Burundi, Iraq and Nepal were three countries that saw less violent deaths as a result of stabilizing political situations more conducive to citizen security.

## UNDP IN ACTION

In **El Salvador**, in 2012 UNDP supported measures to improve police response times and implement gun free zones has helped reduce the crime rate by an average of 41.5 per cent in 27 municipalities.

UNDP Programmes in **Liberia** to reduce armed violence, control small arms and reform the security sector have helped the government to enhance security at the community level and develop ways of analyzing, understanding and monitoring national violence trends. Over 4,000 pieces of ammunition and other unexploded remnants of war have now been collected and destroyed, making communities safer.

In **Nicaragua**, the advice and assistance that UNDP has provided to police has helped improve public safety. Measures such as helping develop systems to renew concealed weapons licenses helped reduce firearms related crimes and murders by nearly five per cent in 2012.

In **South Sudan**, UNDP helped communities instigate firearms controls and supported the government with the establishment of 54 new police posts in areas with high levels of crime and violence. Because of the resulting improvements in security, skirmishes over cattle rustling have reduced, new residential and commercial properties are being constructed, displaced populations are returning in some areas and there has been an overall decline in violence.

In **Somalia**, justice and security has been strengthened in recent years through UNDP efforts to train members of the court to better conduct judicial decisions, especially for cases of sexual or gender based violence. UNDP has also helped strengthen security and protection mechanisms for communities by, for example, training over 14,000 police officers; establishing referral centres for victims of sexual violence; appointing female prosecutors; and promoting transitional justice to address past violations.



A bullet hole in the window of a district security office in Kaabong, northeast Uganda, serves as a reminder of the region's recent and more lawless past. Photo by Khristopher Carlson/IRIN

For more information contact UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery  
One United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY, 10017 USA  
[www.undp.org/cpr](http://www.undp.org/cpr)



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