



CARICOM–UNDP

Diagnostic Document

This CARICOM–UNDP Regional Approach to Addressing Crime, Violence, Resilience, and Human Security in the Caribbean: Diagnostic Document

provides a regional analysis of the interconnected drivers, trends, and impacts shaping crime, violence, institutional trust, and human security across the Caribbean. Grounded in a public health and prevention-oriented framework, the document examines how violence intersects with governance, social inequality, mental health, organised crime, gender dynamics, youth vulnerability, and broader development pressures across the region.

The document draws upon extensive regional and national consultations, analytical inputs, and accumulated evidence from across the United Nations system, including Common Country Analyses (CCAs), the Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (MSDCF) process, agency programming, regional policy dialogue, and ongoing work on prevention, resilience, and citizen security. The analysis is also aligned with wider UNDP approaches to horizon scanning, foresight, and anticipatory risk assessment in support of long-term regional resilience and sustainable development.

The development of the document was strengthened through the engagement of a Peer Review Committee composed of regional experts and practitioners from academia, public health, justice, security, governance, and civil society, including representatives from CARICOM, CARPHA, the Caribbean Court of Justice, the Regional Security System, the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago, the University of the West Indies, and regional policy and probation networks.

The document also reflects a collaborative and consultative process involving technical inputs, review, and engagement from regional institutions and United Nations entities, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and the Saint Kitts and Nevis Citizen Security Secretariat.

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“All ah We is One”

A Regional Approach to Addressing Crime, Violence, Resilience, and Human Security in the Caribbean

UNDP is the leading United Nations organisation fighting to end poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet.

United Nations Development Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean, Floor 12, Dream Plaza, Costa del Este, Panama City, Republic of Panama program. Finally, we thank all participants for their active engagement and commitment to development.

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Acronyms

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
CARICOM – Caribbean Community Secretariat
GBV – Gender-based Violence
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
CARPHA – Caribbean Public Health Agency
IMPACS – CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security
NSO – National Statistical Office
LGBTI – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex persons

Executive Summary

Building a Caribbean Public Health Ecosystem for Violence Prevention

Crime and violence in the Caribbean represent a systemic human security challenge rooted in interconnected social, economic, institutional, and psychological drivers, with particularly severe and long-term impacts on children, youth, and families. Evidence demonstrates that enforcement-only responses cannot sustainably reduce violence alone.

A public health approach offers a pathway toward durable reduction by treating violence as a preventable outcome shaped by exposure, vulnerability, and protective factors across the life course, beginning in early childhood. Violence operates through self-reinforcing feedback loops across households, communities, institutions, and economies (e.g., trauma, disengagement, and repeated exposure reinforcing cycles of violence).

A sustained public health approach to crime can reduce violence, strengthen institutional trust, improve social cohesion, and enhance development resilience across the Caribbean.

The implication of this is that national success depends on building durable public systems capable of anticipating risk; coordinating across sectors; acting early; learning continuously; and sustaining political commitment.

A prevention ecosystem requires coordinated action across security, justice, health, education, social protection, and community systems. It depends not on isolated programmes but on enabling conditions – leadership,

data, financing, capacity, coordination, and trust. An ecosystem or prevention architecture, with coordinated policies, institutions, data systems, financing, and partnerships working together across sectors to provide people and families with safe and resilient communities, including through strengthened child protection, family support, and early intervention systems.

Therefore, violence reduction in the Caribbean requires system transformation, not isolated initiatives. Our nations come in different shapes and sizes, with different national needs and on-the-ground realities. Within this transformation, national pathways will differ, but regional cooperation is essential to sustain momentum, share learning, address transnational drivers, and support smaller states.

Core Strategic Conclusion: The Region Must Shift from Programmes to Sustainable Systems

1. A public health approach to crime is fundamentally a governance reform agenda. It shifts the state's core function from traditional, reactive enforcement to coordinated, data-driven, multi-sector risk management across health, education, social protection, and security systems and actors.
2. National success depends on building enabling conditions or architecture. Sustainable violence reduction emerges from institutionalised and consolidated data systems, cross-sector coordination, workforce capacity, and financing mechanisms that allow effective interventions to operate at scale, grow sustainably and endure beyond pilot cycles.
3. Regional institutions must act as catalysts, not implementers. Regional institutions are the custodians of agreed, multi-country frameworks and systems and must play a role in bringing countries together to co-design solutions to common challenges and then support the achievement of set goals by promoting, monitoring and refining these frameworks.
4. Sustained political attention is essential – prevention is a long game. The risk factors driving violence accumulate over years while measurable

reductions emerge over longer time horizons than political cycles, requiring consistent leadership, protected financing, and cross-administration policy continuity to achieve durable impact.

5. Measurement of costs and impacts is key to unlocking financing. The costs of action need to be clear and well articulated, but the costs of inaction (social, financial and environmental) also need to be well understood so that decisions can be made not only based on up-front financial requirements but on the multiplicative impacts of these resources and the potential savings generated in other areas.
6. Civil society engagement is not optional – it is structurally necessary. Prevention depends on trusted community interfaces, local knowledge, and service reach that state institutions alone cannot consistently generate, particularly in high-risk or marginalised environments.



PAHO/WHO Trinidad and Tobago

Recommendations

What Actually Builds a Public Health Ecosystem?

Prevention capacity is not one thing – it is a bundle of enabling conditions that create a prevention architecture. These conditions collectively determine whether prevention can function.

REGIONAL VS NATIONAL ROLES

The regional role should be understood as enabling rather than directing national action. The core principle is that the region provides frameworks, platforms, and support, while individual countries determine their own pathways according to national context and priorities.

At the regional level, priority actions include sustaining political commitment through regular high-level dialogue, developing tools to measure the costs and benefits of prevention, facilitating peer learning and South–South cooperation, and supporting meaningful civil society engagement.

PRIORITY REGIONAL FUNCTIONS

► *Maintaining Political Momentum Through High-Level Convening*

To sustain political commitment, a Regional Prevention Forum should be institutionalised. This forum would convene Heads of Government or Ministers on an annual or biannual basis, ideally linked to existing CARICOM processes. Its purpose would be to review progress, assess emerging risks, and provide strategic direction for regional prevention efforts.

► *Making the Economic Case for Prevention*

One of the major challenges is the invisibility of prevention benefits within public budgets. Regional support can help countries address this by enabling them to track prevention spending, link expenditures to measurable outcomes, and utilise appropriate financing frameworks.

To support this effort, a Regional Prevention Economics Platform should be established. This platform would develop methodologies for estimating the cost of violence, analysing returns on prevention investments, tagging prevention expenditures within national budgets, and providing guidance on strategic investment decisions.

► *Enabling Whole-of-Society Engagement*

Effective prevention requires broad societal participation. A Caribbean Civil Society Prevention Forum should therefore be created to provide a structured platform for engagement. This forum would enable community organisations to share innovative practices, influence policy design, strengthen public legitimacy, and coordinate grassroots action across countries.

► *Enabling Learning Across Countries*

Given the complexity of violence prevention systems, continuous technical exchange is essential. South–South cooperation and knowledge sharing should be institutionalised through national and regional Communities of Practice (CoPs). Such platforms translate political commitments into operational knowledge, prevent duplication of effort, accelerate the adoption of proven interventions, and support small states with limited technical capacity.

National Communities of Practice should be established first, with clear terms of reference, defined membership, and regular schedules of activities, including recorded knowledge sessions. These national platforms can then be networked into a regional Community of Practice to facilitate coordinated learning and capacity development across the Caribbean.

► *Recommended Regional Architecture*

Evidence suggests that an effective regional system should consist of several mutually reinforcing layers. The political layer would provide strategic direction and accountability through an annual ministerial or leaders' forum. The technical layer would be anchored by a regional Community of Practice responsible for joint analytical work, standards development, and guidance. The societal layer would encompass national civil society organisations supported by a regional CSO forum and broader community engagement platforms. The financial and evidence layer would include a prevention economics platform and tools to measure costs and impacts. Finally, the knowledge layer would support peer learning networks and structured South–South exchange.

NATIONAL PRIORITIES

At the national level, countries should establish high-level political mandates for prevention, build integrated risk assessment and data systems, strengthen cross-sector coordination, and balance interventions across prevention, enforcement, and recovery. Sustainable financing must be secured, workforce capacity developed, communities engaged as partners, and systems for learning and accountability embedded within governance structures.

Critical National Pillars

► *Political and Institutional Leadership*

Political leadership is the single most important determinant of prevention success. Without it, prevention efforts remain marginal and under-resourced. Progress is evident when cross-government mandates are established, Cabinet-level signalling is clear, and prevention is embedded in national budgets. A national prevention mandate anchored at the centre of government – such as within the Office of the Prime Minister or Cabinet – is therefore recommended.

► *Risk Assessment and Analytical Capacity*

Prevention cannot occur without actionable intelligence. In many countries, relevant data exist but are fragmented, underutilised, or insufficiently granular. Effective systems integrate crime, health, and social data, conduct routine risk profiling, and produce decision-ready analytics. Establishing national violence observatories or joint analytical units would significantly strengthen this capacity.

► *Cross-Sector Coordination*

Because the drivers of violence span multiple systems, weak coordination leads to duplication and critical gaps. Strong prevention systems rely on inter-ministerial platforms, shared priorities, and formal coordination protocols. Governments should therefore formalise national multi-sector prevention mechanisms.

► **Balanced Coverage Across the Prevention Continuum**

Over-reliance on enforcement alone represents a structural failure. Effective ecosystems balance primary prevention aimed at risk reduction, secondary prevention focused on early intervention, and tertiary prevention addressing recovery and reintegration. Conducting a national mapping of investments across this continuum is recommended to identify imbalances and gaps.

► **Justice Reform, Legislative Frameworks and Access to Justice**

Justice systems are not only mechanisms for accountability after violence occurs. They are also core prevention institutions that shape trust, legitimacy, inclusion, and long-term social stability.

► **Sustainable Financing**

Prevention efforts often collapse without long-term financing. Short-term projects can undermine continuity and effectiveness. Sustainable progress requires integrating prevention into national budgets, establishing pooled financing mechanisms, coordinating funding streams, and aligning external assistance with national priorities.

► **Workforce Capacity**

Prevention is a specialised professional field requiring trained personnel across sectors. Effective systems establish institutional focal points, professionalise prevention roles, and ensure continuity of expertise across the system.

► **Community Engagement and Trust**

Prevention cannot succeed without legitimacy and public trust. Communities must be treated as partners rather than targets. This requires involving community members in the design, implementation, and evaluation of initiatives, maintaining continuous communication about progress and future plans, and embedding community actors – such as civil society

organisations, faith-based groups, and local networks – within the national prevention architecture as delivery, feedback, and early-warning partners. Engaging families and caregivers as frontline protective actors is also essential, recognising the household as a critical site for interrupting intergenerational transmission of violence risk.

► **Learning and Accountability**

Prevention systems must continuously adapt to changing conditions. Static plans are ineffective in complex environments. Mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and learning should therefore be institutionalised to support ongoing improvement.

OVERALL NATIONAL RECOMMENDATION

Countries should prioritise building enabling conditions before scaling programmes. This approach aligns with a phased model of development: early stages focus on risk assessment and coordination; mid-stage efforts align prevention strategies and develop trauma-informed systems; and later stages emphasise institutionalisation and sustained financing.

Methodology and Stakeholder Consultations¹

This Regional Diagnostic Document and its accompanying Framework for Action Document were developed using a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative data analysis, qualitative policy review, and cumulative stakeholder engagement across multiple regional and national processes on crime, violence, and prevention over the last two years.

Quantitative inputs included regional crime and violence statistics, public health indicators, social and economic data, and existing analytical frameworks such as the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap, the Pathway to Policy initiative (a joint effort led by CARICOM IMPACS, CARPHA, the George Alleyne Chronic Disease Research Centre at the University of the West Indies, and the Small Arms Survey)², and the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index³. These sources were used to identify broad trends, structural risk factors, and systemic gaps in prevention, enforcement, and resilience-building efforts across the Caribbean. Qualitative analysis drew on regional declarations, national strategies, thematic policy reviews, focus groups, and practitioner insights to contextualise these patterns within governance, institutional capacity, and development dynamics.

The analytical framework is guided by the assumption that crime and violence in the Caribbean are not isolated security problems, but systemic development challenges shaped by social, economic, institutional, and transnational factors. It assumes that sustainable reductions in violence require integrated prevention approaches that link security, justice, public health, education, social protection, and community resilience.

At the same time, the analysis recognises important limitations. Data availability, quality, and comparability vary significantly across countries,

particularly non-lethal violence, gender-based violence, mental health, and community-level risk factors. Under-reporting, informal economies, and uneven institutional capacity further constrain precise measurement. As a result, the findings should be interpreted as indicative of regional risk patterns and systemic dynamics rather than as precise national diagnostics.

Rather than relying on a single consultation exercise, this document synthesises insights from a series of structured and semi-structured engagements conducted over time through established policy, coordination, and dialogue platforms. These included regional development partner meetings, UN Common Country Analyses (CCA), Peace and security focus groups, civil society sensitisation sessions across OECS countries (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, St Kitts and Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, and Grenada), Caribbean Firearms Roadmap Mid-Term Review processes, the CARICOM/UNDP High-Level Forum: Addressing Crime and Violence as a Regional Challenge - Integrating Health, Justice and Social Policy, the Pathway to Policy advisory platform, and alongside individual expert interviews and SCORE-related consultations. Insights from these engagements were triangulated with quantitative data and policy analysis to ensure this document reflects both evidence-based findings and practitioner experience while remaining responsive to diverse national contexts and implementation realities.

The consultations typically involved structured and semi-structured discussions with government officials, security and justice actors, public health institutions, civil society organisations, academic experts, development partners, and UN agencies. These engagements explored priority risks, institutional capacities, coordination challenges, prevention gaps, and emerging opportunities across different national and regional contexts. Emphasis was placed on multi-sectoral perspectives, including the intersections between security, health, education, social protection, youth engagement, gender equality, and community resilience.

This approach ensured that stakeholder perspectives informed the identification of priority risk areas, the framing of prevention-oriented responses, and the development of practical implementation pathways, while remaining responsive to diverse national realities and institutional capacities across the Caribbean.

Insights from these consultations were systematically integrated into this document through triangulation with quantitative data, policy reviews, and regional analytical outputs.

Analytical Framing

This diagnostic is informed by a structural and historically grounded understanding of crime and violence in the Caribbean. It recognises that contemporary patterns of insecurity are shaped by current policy choices and also by inherited institutional arrangements, social hierarchies, and uneven development trajectories that emerged during and after the colonial period.

These legacies continue to influence how education systems, policing, justice institutions, labour markets, and social protection systems distribute risk, protection, and opportunity across populations. Rather than treating these factors as background context, the diagnostic incorporates them as part of the causal landscape within which violence is produced, concentrated, and reproduced.

This framing does not replace the public health approach; it strengthens it. By situating risk factors within their historical and institutional context, the analysis supports prevention strategies that address both immediate drivers of violence and the structural conditions that make those drivers persistent.

Conceptual Framework

CARPHA DEFINITION⁴

“The public health approach to violence and crime is a systemic multidisciplinary evidence-based framework that seeks to understand, prevent, and mitigate violence and crime by addressing their societal, behavioural and environmental determinants. This approach applies public health principles - such as surveillance, risk, and protective factor identification, intervention, monitoring, and evaluation – to reduce the incidence impact, and recurrence of violence and crime. This approach involves multisectors, including law enforcement, health, education, academia, social services, and community stakeholders working collaboratively to design and implement interventions to reduce harm, enhance public safety and build cohesive communities.”

The Caribbean Public Health Approach to crime and violence: A Paradigm Shift in Citizen Security

The contemporary Caribbean response to citizen security is anchored in a paradigm shift that integrates the scientific foundations of the concept set by the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) with the high-level political mandate of the Needham’s Point Declaration. In operationalising this multisector approach within the Caribbean context, particular attention must be given to systems that shape risk across the life course. This includes child protection and safeguarding systems, family support services, and child-sensitive justice functions, which play a central role in preventing violence before it manifests in adolescence and adulthood.

The Core Framework

CARPHA defines the public health approach through a systematic, four-step process: surveillance, risk factor identification, intervention, and implementation. This methodology treats violence as a preventable social contagion requiring a diagnostic and therapeutic response. Within this system, health services function not only as treatment providers but also as critical operational entry points for early detection, risk identification, trauma response, and referral across prevention systems.

This scientific lens is operationalised by the Needham’s Point Declaration, which serves as a regional call to action for an all-of-government policy approach across sectors: health, justice, and social services. Together, these frameworks move the region beyond reactive policing toward a trauma-informed, “whole-of-society” ecosystem designed to dismantle the structural determinants of crime and violence and build long-term social resilience.

Within this prevention architecture, primary healthcare and emergency health systems occupy a particularly important operational role because they often encounter vulnerability before violence escalates into criminal justice involvement. Across the life course, health systems routinely engage individuals and families experiencing trauma exposure, violence against children (VAC), substance misuse, mental distress, family instability, and repeated injury. This positions Ministries of Health and broader health systems as service providers and institutional stewards of prevention-oriented surveillance, early intervention, psychosocial support, referral coordination, and trauma-informed recovery systems within a wider whole-of-government approach.

The framework is grounded in States’ binding international human rights obligations. The public health approach to crime and violence prevention provides a rights-realisation strategy to be implemented in line with international human rights law, including the principles of legality, proportionality, non-discrimination, best interests of the child, participation, accountability, and access to effective remedies.

Localising the Strategy: The Caribbean Context

While the public health approach has seen global success in jurisdictions such as Scotland, England, Canada and various U.S. states, its efficacy in the Caribbean depends on precise tailoring to the region’s unique history, geography, nuances, and cultural fabric. This document emphasises that global methodologies must be anchored in localised evidence rather than imported templates.

As such, six critical elements define the localisation of this framework:

1. The approach is a sovereign framework

This element affirms the need for the Caribbean to lead its own solutions. It emphasises that strategies to address crime and violence through a public health approach must be grounded in localised evidence, regional academic leadership, and national political will.

While public health approaches to violence prevention have demonstrated success globally their effectiveness in the Caribbean depends on careful adaptation to the region’s distinct geography, cultural dynamics, economics, and social realities. Current political and academic debates across the Caribbean underscore that global methodologies cannot be imported wholesale; they must be anchored in Caribbean-generated knowledge rather than external templates.

This shift reflects a maturing regional commitment to move beyond generic responses toward strategies that are culturally resonant, scientifically rigorous, and politically sustainable. In doing so, the Caribbean is not simply adopting an international trend, but actively defining a new standard for citizen security rooted in sovereignty and contextual relevance.

2. Moving beyond prevention and reaction

The Caribbean has been clear that a public health approach must go beyond prevention alone. It must also foster a healthy and resilient ecosystem in which individuals, communities, and nations can thrive by addressing the conditions in which people are born, live, work, and age.

housing, peaceful childhoods, stable employment, access to nutritious food, and strong social support networks. This includes recognising early childhood as a critical developmental window in which exposure to violence, neglect, and chronic stress shapes long-term behavioural, cognitive, and social outcomes. Caregiving environments – including parenting practices, family stability, and household stress – function as primary prevention systems, determining whether risk is transmitted or mitigated across generations. Just as health is not merely the absence of illness but the presence of enabling conditions for human flourishing, a public health approach to crime and violence must not only reduce harm but also cultivate environments in which every person can reach their full potential.

3. It acknowledges the region's geographical context

This element recognises that the Caribbean's unique geography, characterised by island states, porous borders, concentrated urban density, and mobility across territories, requires tailored systems of localised, territorial surveillance and prevention. Regional responses must reflect these spatial realities rather than rely on models designed for vastly different contexts.

4. Acknowledgement of Historical Legacies

A meaningful public health approach must also confront the historical legacies that shape contemporary violence. This includes recognising deep-rooted structural inequalities and colonial traumas, unique to the Caribbean context, that continue to function and echo as systemic blueprints for social exclusion and insecurity.

By acknowledging these past wounds, the approach shifts away from punitive control toward restorative healing, addressing generational cycles of disenfranchisement that fuel modern crime. These intergenerational cycles are often mediated through childhood exposure to violence, trauma, and institutional neglect, making violence against children (VAC) not only a consequence of structural inequality but a key mechanism through which it is reproduced over time. This perspective ensures that interventions move beyond treating symptoms and instead dismantle the historical disadvantage embedded within the region's social fabric.

5. It is community-centred

This element honours the Caribbean's deeply rooted cultural value of community, recognising that citizen security is a shared responsibility that extends beyond traditional policing.

By engaging the "whole village" – grassroots leaders, faith-based organisations, academia, youth networks, civil society, vulnerable groups and the private sector – the approach fosters collective ownership over public safety as a responsibility of the Government. This ensures interventions are not top-down impositions, but collaborative efforts that leverage local trust, social capital, and cultural cohesion to build safer communities.

6. It is Sustainable

Aligned with the long-term vision articulated in the Needham's Point and George-Bridge Declarations, this approach prioritises generational transformation over the short-term pressures of electoral cycles.

Healing collective trauma and restructuring social systems require stable investment and continuity beyond changes in political leadership. This commitment to longevity ensures that citizen security becomes embedded in the enduring institutional architecture of the state, providing a predictable and lasting pathway toward a more peaceful and resilient Caribbean.

The Working Definition

Taking these localised elements into consideration, this document adopts the following working definition to guide the Framework for Action and subsequent programmatic elements:

"The Caribbean Public Health Approach to Violence is a sovereign, data-driven and trauma-informed strategy that treats violence as preventable. It strengthens Social Immunity by addressing structural inequality, historical trauma, and the region's unique territorial realities through risk-informed, rights-compliant security responses, community-led prevention and restorative systems, and locally informed, regionally defined government policy solutions. By integrating health, education, justice and security into a unified

'whole-of-government' mandate, this approach secures the Caribbean's most vital asset: its people."

Thus, the Theory of Change underpinning the Proposed Framework for Action is grounded in three core shifts:

- From fragmented responses to aligned systems

- From reactive interventions to reconfigured institutional practice

- From crisis management to sustained impact

When institutions operate in isolation, risk pathways remain unaddressed and violence continues to reproduce itself. When systems align around shared risk profiles, coordinated prevention, enforcement, and recovery become possible.

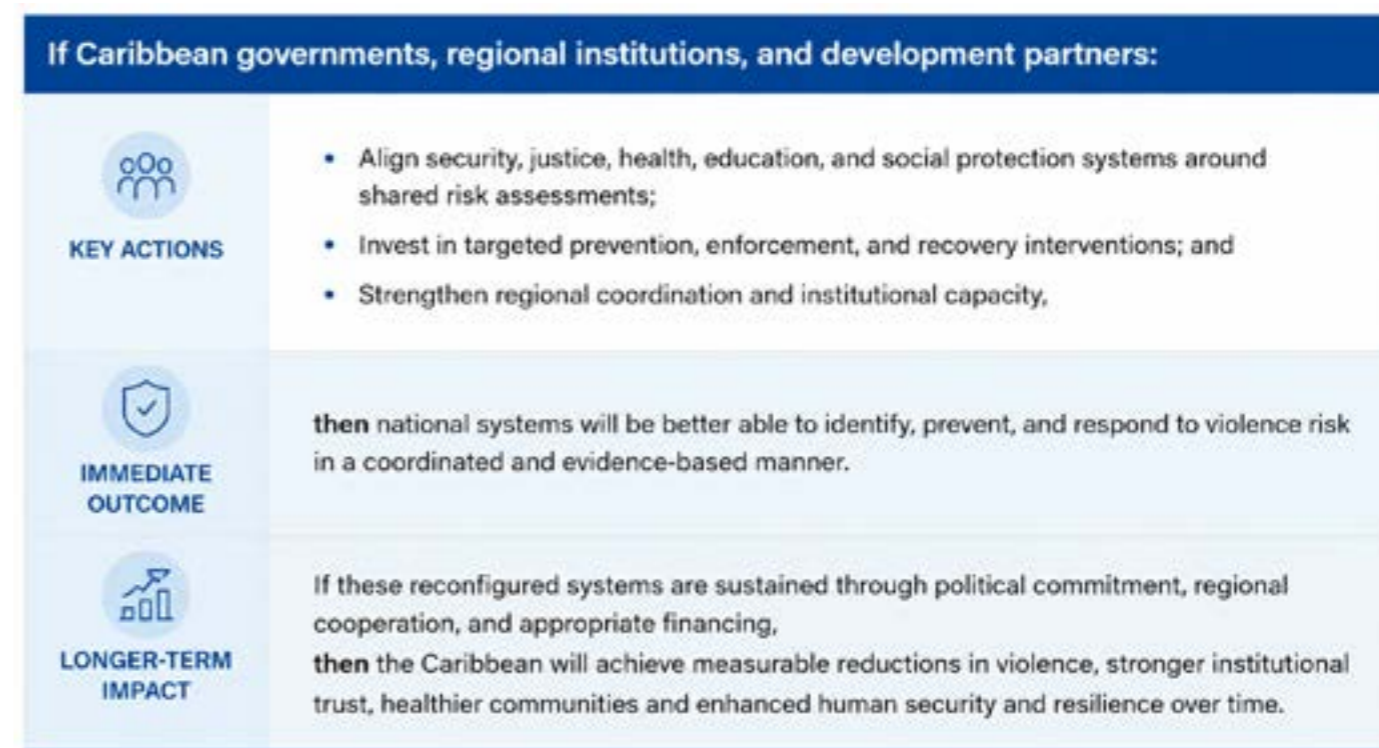


Figure1: Theory of Change

Outcome 1: Strengthened Social and Institutional Resilience to Prevent Crime and Violence:

Output 1.1: Integrated national and local frameworks are established for crime and violence prevention, grounded in public health, human rights, and developmental approaches.

Output 1.2: Cross-sectoral community platforms are institutionalised to enhance trust, youth inclusion, and collaboration between justice actors, civil society, and local government.

Outcome 2: Effective, Inclusive, and Trustworthy Systems for Managing Violence and Harm

Output 2.1: Security, justice, and social systems adopt evidence-based, trauma-informed, and coordinated practices that reduce harm, support victims, and improve system responsiveness.

Output 2.2: National systems implement inclusive policies and tools that expand access to protection and justice, support reintegration, and reduce systemic inequalities.

What the framework runs into in practice

Injury surveillance as a core prevention function

A persistent constraint on effective violence prevention in the Caribbean is the fragmentation of data on violence-related injuries, trauma, and non-lethal harm. While homicide statistics are more routinely captured, information on firearm injuries, assaults, domestic violence, repeat victimisation, and the health system impacts of violence remains uneven, underreported, and poorly integrated across sectors. This limits the region's ability to fully understand violence dynamics, identify

emerging risks, and design timely, evidence-based prevention and response strategies.

Consistent with the Caribbean public health approach to crime and violence, injury surveillance is not treated as a technical add-on but as a foundational prevention function, anchored in routine data generated through health systems, including emergency care, primary care, and community health services. Systematic collection and integration of injury data enable early identification of high-risk populations and locations, supports timely intervention, and strengthens the capacity of institutions to move from reactive response toward anticipatory prevention.

Recent regional policy work has already articulated this need. The Pathway to Policy: Firearms Trafficking and Public Health in the Caribbean report calls for strengthened national injury surveillance systems and the development of a regional, multisectoral mechanism to integrate health, security, forensic, and justice data using common definitions and minimum datasets. It further proposes the establishment of a Caribbean Integrated Violence Surveillance System under joint CARICOM IMPACS-CARPHA governance, capable of generating near real-time alerts, trend analysis, and comparable regional dashboards to support prevention, accountability, and resource allocation.

This Diagnostic and accompanying Action Plan align with that direction. The proposed regional approach therefore treats injury surveillance as an enabling backbone for prevention, resilience, and institutional coordination – supporting early warning, informing targeted interventions, and ensuring that violence prevention strategies are grounded in reliable, comparable, and actionable evidence across Member States.

Trust, protection, and safe reporting as prevention infrastructure

A central constraint on effective violence prevention in the Caribbean is not only limited-service coverage or fragmented data, but persistent deficits in trust between communities and institutions. Survivors and witnesses frequently do not report violence because they fear retaliation, blame, or secondary harm through the very systems intended to protect them.

This dynamic produces a structural blind spot in prevention efforts. When reporting pathways are perceived as unsafe or punitive, violence remains hidden, risk assessments are distorted, and prevention resources fail to reach those most exposed to harm. Under-reporting is therefore not a data quality issue alone, but a protection and legitimacy issue with direct consequences for prevention effectiveness.

Evidence from across the region suggests that safe reporting must be understood as an end-to-end pathway, encompassing confidential intake, survivor protection, referral and support, feedback, and accountability. Where any element of this chain is weak, trust erodes and reporting collapses.

As a result, prevention systems that do not explicitly design for protection, survivor safety, and institutional legitimacy are unlikely to scale or sustain impact, even where programmes and resources are available.

Mobility, return dynamics, and shifting risk environments

A further structural dynamic shaping violence risk in the Caribbean relates to the impact of mobility, migration, and return dynamics on local risk environments. Population movement, including internal migration, regional mobility, and forced returns such as deportations, can alter the distribution of risk across communities. Individuals returning to contexts characterised by limited economic opportunity, weak reintegration support, and exposure to pre-existing social and criminal networks may face heightened vulnerability to violence, re-recruitment into illicit economies, and social marginalisation.

These dynamics are not consistently captured in existing data systems and are rarely integrated into risk assessment frameworks. As a result, prevention systems may overlook emerging concentrations of vulnerability linked to return and reintegration processes. Strengthening the integration of mobility-related dynamics into violence risk analysis, reintegration systems, and community-level prevention responses is therefore critical to improving early identification and targeted intervention.



Health Systems as Prevention Platforms

Health systems possess several comparative advantages within violence prevention ecosystems that extend beyond their traditional treatment role. Unlike many institutions that engage individuals only after serious harm or criminal justice involvement has occurred, health systems maintain continuous contact with populations across the life course through primary care, emergency medicine, maternal and child health services, school health programmes, mental health services, and community-based outreach systems.

This gives health systems a distinctive prevention function. They can identify cumulative vulnerability earlier, detect repeated exposure to violence and trauma, support referral pathways, provide psychosocial intervention, and contribute to integrated risk assessment before violence escalates into more severe harm.

Emergency departments and trauma services are particularly important operational sites within this ecosystem. Repeated injury presentations, firearm-related injuries, domestic violence injuries, self-harm, substance misuse, and untreated psychological distress can all function as indicators of wider social vulnerability and escalating violence risk. When systematically captured and integrated with other institutional data systems, these interactions can strengthen early warning, prevention targeting, and coordinated intervention.

Primary healthcare systems are equally critical because they provide sustained engagement with families and communities over time. This positions them to support violence prevention through parenting support, early childhood intervention, trauma-informed care, suicide prevention, substance misuse treatment, and community-based mental health and psychosocial support.

Within a public health approach to crime and violence, health systems should therefore be understood not only as treatment systems, but also as foundational prevention infrastructure

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Regional Overview

Crime and violence in the Caribbean constitute a systemic regional challenge, not a collection of isolated national security problems. While levels and forms of violence vary significantly across countries, the region is characterised by a similar risk profile: persistently high homicide rates relative to global averages, entrenched organised criminal activity, and deep interaction between violence, social inequality, governance capacity, and human development outcomes. These dynamics increasingly cut across borders, sectors, and institutions, placing pressure on states' ability to deliver security, justice, and social cohesion simultaneously.

The Caribbean's security environment is largely shaped by its geopolitical position within global illicit economies. The region continues to function as a strategic transit corridor for narcotics destined for North America and Europe, while simultaneously absorbing a disproportionate share of illicit firearms originating outside the region.

In 2023–24, firearms were involved in an estimated 86% of homicides reported by Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member states and associate members⁶. Between 2017 and 2024, patterns of illicit firearms trafficking from the United States to the Caribbean showed little overall change, with consistent sourcing locations, shipment scales, and transport methods. Illegal procurement remains highly concentrated in limited areas of the southern coastal United States, particularly in Florida.⁷ These transnational flows intersect with local gang structures, urban marginalisation, and fragile institutional ecosystems, producing violence patterns that are difficult to address through enforcement alone.

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At the same time, crime and violence in the Caribbean cannot be understood solely through the lens of organised crime or firearms proliferation. Regional evidence increasingly points to closed feedback loops linking household stress, youth vulnerability, trauma, weak social/public service provision, and institutional legitimacy⁸. Violence manifests not only as lethal crime but also as intimate partner violence, violence against children, sexual violence, and persistent fear that constrains everyday life and economic participation. These forms of violence reinforce one another, embedding insecurity within families, communities, and social institutions.

The regional picture is further complicated by sharp contrasts between the Caribbean's external image and internal realities. Tourism-driven economies depend on perceptions of safety and stability, yet some Caribbean communities can experience sustained exposure to violence, informal governance by gangs, and limited access to justice or social protection. This disjuncture places governments under dual pressure: to project stability internationally while managing deep domestic vulnerabilities that undermine long-term resilience.

Importantly, the burden of violence is unevenly distributed. Young men are disproportionately represented among both perpetrators and victims of lethal violence, while women and girls face heightened risks of violence within the home and intimate relationships. In addition, gender non-conformity and social stigma create a 'perpetual state of vulnerability.' Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex persons (LGBTI)⁶⁸, sex workers, and people who use drugs are often targeted twice: first by criminal actors, and second by the state through discriminatory laws and institutional neglect⁹. Migrants, refugees, and individuals in informal or irregular employment face elevated exposure to exploitation and abuse, often compounded by barriers to reporting and accessing services¹⁰. These patterns reflect underlying structural inequalities related to gender norms, economic exclusion, and uneven state presence.

From a regional perspective, crime and violence are also increasingly entangled with broader development stressors. Economic shocks, cost-of-living pressures, climate-related events, and

demographic change place additional strain on households and public services, amplifying risk factors associated with violence. Where social protection systems are limited and mental health and trauma services under-resourced, these pressures translate into cumulative vulnerability rather than short-term shocks. Over time, this erodes trust in institutions and weakens the social contract, creating environments in which violence becomes both more likely and more normalised.

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By 2025, there is now recognition across Caribbean governments, regional institutions, and development partners that traditional, sector-specific responses are insufficient. Enforcement and interdiction remain necessary, but without parallel investment in prevention, resilience, and institutional coordination, gains are difficult to sustain. The region requires both protection and prevention. The regional challenge, therefore, is not only the scale of crime and violence but also its embeddedness within development systems – linking security, health, education, social protection, governance, and economic opportunity – and establishing a joint position across governments in the region.

This regional overview underscores why crime and violence must be addressed as human security challenges with direct implications for development trajectories, democratic legitimacy, social cohesion, and the overall health of countries. It also explains the increasing convergence around public health and systems-based approaches at



Figure 2: Caribbean Crime and Violence as a Closed System of Feedback Loops: An Integrated Prevention and Firearms Dynamics Model¹¹

both national and regional levels. Understanding this broader context is essential for interpreting current statistics, identifying persistent and emerging trends, and assessing the implications for resilience and human security across the Caribbean.

Current Crime and Violence Statistics

Available regional data for 2024–2025 confirm that the Caribbean remains one of the most violence-affected regions globally, with peace, justice, and institutional indicators under sustained strain across most Member States. As reflected in the 2025 Sustainable Development Report, no Caribbean country assessed is currently on track to meet SDG 16¹², with the majority classified in the lowest performance categories. This places crime and violence – and its prevention – at the core of development.

Homicide and Lethal Violence

Homicide rates across the Caribbean remain well above the global average, positioning the region among the most affected worldwide. While there is considerable variation between countries, the regional pattern is clear: several Caribbean states consistently record homicide rates multiple times higher than global levels, even as global projections anticipate a gradual decline in lethal violence through 2030¹³.

Firearms are the dominant instrument of lethal violence. Regional and international tracing data indicate that the majority of firearms used in serious crimes are illicitly imported, with a substantial proportion originating outside the region. This reflects the Caribbean’s structural exposure to transnational trafficking routes and the integration of local gangs into wider illicit supply chains. Despite improvements in interdiction, seizures, and legislative reform in several countries, these gains have not yet translated into sustained reductions in community-level firearm violence across the sub-region.

Gender-Based and Domestic Violence

Non-lethal violence, particularly intimate partner violence and violence against women and girls, represents a pervasive and underreported dimension of the regional violence profile. Survey-based data from across the Caribbean indicate high prevalence rates of domestic violence, with between roughly four and five in ten women reporting experiences of physical, sexual, or psychological violence in some countries¹⁴.

These patterns are closely associated with harmful gender norms, economic dependence, and early unions. Data show that a significant proportion of women enter marriage or unions before the age of 18 in several Caribbean states, a factor strongly correlated with elevated lifetime risk of intimate partner violence¹⁵. While legislative reforms have raised the legal age of marriage in some countries, exceptions and enforcement gaps persist, reinforcing the link between legal frameworks, social norms, and violence risk.

Youth and Risk Concentration

Violence in the Caribbean is highly age- and gender-concentrated. Young men account for a disproportionate share of homicide victims and perpetrators, particularly in urban and coastal corridors where unemployment, informal economies, and limited service provision intersect. Persistent youth unemployment – averaging well above global norms – compounds these risks by narrowing legitimate pathways to social and economic mobility.

Population-level data also point to deep social mistrust toward young people, especially those who are unemployed or perceived as idle.¹⁶ This exclusion dynamic weakens protective community relationships and increases exposure to gang recruitment at precisely the life stage when belonging, identity, and opportunity are most consequential.

Institutional Performance and Reporting Gaps

Justice system indicators further contextualise violence trends. Across much of the region, slow court processes, prolonged pre-trial detention, overcrowded prisons, and low conviction rates for serious offences undermine deterrence and public confidence.¹⁷ In the case of gender-based and domestic violence, low reporting rates and limited access to survivor-centred services obscure the true scale of harm and reinforce perceptions of impunity.

The intersection between crime and public health

The intersection of alcohol, drug abuse, and mental health issues creates a self-reinforcing cycle of criminality. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNODC (2025)¹⁸ this global burden is categorised by three primary linkages:

- Alcohol remains the world’s leading “violence-inducing” substance. The WHO Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health estimates that roughly 40% of violent crimes worldwide involve a perpetrator under the influence¹⁹. Neurobiological research confirms that alcohol specifically impairs the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for impulse control and rational decision-making²⁰.

- A 2025 meta-analysis published in The Lancet Psychiatry found that approximately 15–20% of the global prison population suffers from severe mental health disorders, including depression (12.8%), psychosis (4.1%), and schizophrenia (3.6%). In the absence of community-based care, the justice system becomes a “default asylum,” driving high recidivism²¹.
- The WHO (September 2024) reports that lost productivity due to depression and anxiety alone costs the global economy \$1 trillion annually. When combined with substance-driven crime, this erodes the human capital of countries and regions.

While this data is global, rather than specifically regional, it underscores the importance of integrated data-gathering in the Caribbean to tailor evidence-based policy responses.

Health systems occupy a unique position within violence prevention ecosystems because they often encounter risk earlier, more frequently, and across a wider cross-section of the population than many other state institutions. Emergency departments, primary care clinics, school health systems, maternal and child health services, mental health services, and community-based health workers routinely interact with individuals and families experiencing violence exposure, trauma, substance misuse, psychological distress, self-harm, family instability, and other cumulative risk factors associated with later victimisation and offending.

From a prevention perspective, health systems therefore function not only as treatment providers but also as operational platforms for surveillance, early identification, referral, trauma response, and coordinated intervention. In practice, repeated injury presentations, untreated trauma, substance misuse, chronic stress, and mental distress can all operate as early warning indicators of broader social vulnerability and escalating violence risk. This gives Ministries of Health and national health systems a potentially important stewardship role within prevention-oriented governance frameworks, particularly when integrated with education, justice, social protection, and community systems.

Primary healthcare systems are especially important within this architecture because of

their continuity of contact with households and communities across the life course. Unlike many institutions that engage populations episodically or after harm has escalated, primary care systems are positioned to identify vulnerability earlier and support prevention before violence becomes entrenched. This includes supporting parenting and caregiving systems, identifying childhood trauma and violence exposure, strengthening referral pathways, addressing substance misuse and mental distress, and linking vulnerable populations to broader social support systems.

Several Caribbean countries have already begun moving in this direction. In Jamaica, for example, current health sector reforms emphasise strengthening primary healthcare, expanding community-based mental health approaches, integrating surveillance systems, and improving institutional capacity for mental health and psychosocial support.²² Jamaica's mental health investment analysis further estimated that scaling up treatment for depression, anxiety, and psychosis could generate substantial long-term economic and social returns by reducing disability, improving productivity, and lowering wider social costs, reinforcing the argument that mental health should be understood not only as a health issue, but also as a development and prevention priority.²³

The Mental Health Burden

Mental health disorders are precursors to social instability. According to the PAHO/WHO Mental Health Atlas (2025), neurological disorders peak before age 30, with early onset linked to chronic unemployment and reduced lifetime productivity²⁴. On the other hand, individuals with mental disorders face significantly higher risks of premature death due to unattended physical health issues and suicide, a trend highlighted in the 2025 World Mental Health Day briefings.

Common risk factors for suicide include intense emotional distress and depressive conditions, easy access to highly lethal means, the use of alcohol and other drugs, and dysfunctional family environments²⁵.

Regional Snapshots

In 2023, the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on NCDs and the UHC Partnership funded a joint WHO-UNDP initiative to catalyze multisectoral action for mental health and NCD prevention. The following section outlines findings in Guyana and Suriname.

Guyana:

Guyana faces a severe suicide crisis, ranking as the country with the second-highest suicide rate globally (approximately 40 per 100,000 people) in 2018²⁶. According to the Guyana Ministry of Health (2025), rural Indo-Guyanese men and Hindus are the most affected demographics, with pesticide ingestion being the most common method of suicide.^{27 28}

Suriname:

Mental health and alcohol dependence in Suriname contribute to 7.1% of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs). A report of several UN agencies highlights a mayor treatment gap: 90% of those suffering from depression do not seek professional help.²⁹

Substance Use and Violence

According to the UNODC World Drug Report (2025)³⁰, alcohol misuse is a primary driver of interpersonal violence, including domestic abuse and transport-related injuries. Heavy consumption is also statistically linked to risky behaviors such as early sexual initiation and unsafe sex, placing an additional burden on public health infrastructure.

Data from the UN Women/PAHO Caribbean Women's Health Survey indicates that in countries like Guyana³¹ and Trinidad and Tobago³², alcohol is a factor in over 50% of Intimate Partner Violence cases. Children in these environments are four times more likely to enter the criminal justice system themselves, according to CARICOM IMPACS (2025).³³

The Regional Comparative Report Survey of Individuals Deprived of Liberty: Caribbean 2016–2019 The Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago published by the Interamerican Development Bank found that,

“There is very limited access to treatment for drug addiction within prisons in the Caribbean. Addiction to drugs and alcohol is a serious impediment for successful reentry. Governments should develop agencies that can help inmates once they are released from prison. Inmates require assistance in three critical areas: access to jobs, social assistance for family reunification, and drug addiction. Reentry is a very difficult process, and the surveys demonstrate that there is almost no support, which leads to high rates of recidivism, often very soon after leaving prison.”³⁴

Reading the Numbers Together

Taken together, current statistics reveal a region where crime and violence are persistent, structurally embedded, and unevenly distributed, with lethal violence, gender-based violence, youth vulnerability, and institutional strain reinforcing one another. The data do not point to a short-term spike or episodic crisis, but to a stable pattern of elevated risk that resists isolated or purely enforcement-led responses.

These statistics provide the baseline for understanding how crime and violence are evolving in the Caribbean. Emerging trends – from technological change and climate stress to the burdened mental health landscape – have the potential to further amplify existing vulnerabilities if prevention, resilience, and a public health-centered approach to security are not systematically strengthened.

Crucially, this crisis functions as a public health epidemic. The Caribbean healthcare system is burdened by the “hidden costs” of violence – ranging from the high-intensity surgical resources required for gunshot wounds to the long-term mental health crisis and intergenerational “toxic stress” that degrades community resilience³⁵. When crime is viewed as a health outcome, it becomes clear that security cannot be achieved in a vacuum; the erosion of public health directly fuels democratic disengagement and social instability.

When crime is viewed as a health outcome, it becomes clear that security cannot be achieved in a vacuum; the erosion of public health directly fuels democratic disengagement and social instability.

Emerging and Persistent Trends

Crime and violence in the Caribbean are shaped by a combination of long-standing structural patterns and new or intensifying dynamics that interact with them. Understanding this distinction is essential. Persistent trends explain why violence remains entrenched despite periodic improvements, while emerging trends indicate where risk profiles may shift or accelerate if prevention and resilience are not strengthened.

Recognising Persistent Structural Trends

Several features of the Caribbean's violence landscape have shown remarkable continuity over time, even as national contexts differ.

1. First, organised crime and firearms-driven violence remain central to regional insecurity. Illicit firearms continue to amplify lethality, while local gangs operate within transnational trafficking economies that link drugs, weapons, extortion, and informal governance. These dynamics have proven resistant to enforcement-only approaches, particularly where interdiction successes are not matched by reductions in demand, vulnerability, and community-level recruitment.
2. Second, youth vulnerability remains structurally embedded. Across much of the region, young men face constrained pathways to education, employment, and social mobility. School disengagement, untreated mental health challenges, and weak labour market transitions persist. These conditions sustain a predictable recruitment pool for gangs and illicit economies, reinforcing cycles of victimisation and offending.
3. Third, gendered violence continues to be normalised and under-addressed. Intimate partner violence, violence against women and girls, and violence against children remain widespread across countries, often hidden from formal reporting systems. Harmful gender norms, early unions, economic dependence,

and gaps in survivor-centred justice responses sustain these patterns. Importantly, gender-based violence is not separate from broader insecurity: it functions as both a human rights crisis and a driver of intergenerational trauma that feeds wider violence cycles.

4. Fourth, institutional fragility and legitimacy gaps persist. Slow justice processes, limited rehabilitation and reintegration capacity, and weak accountability mechanisms continue to undermine deterrence and public trust. In many communities, these weaknesses allow informal or gang-based authority structures to fill governance vacuums, further entrenching violence and fear.
5. Together, these persistent trends explain why violence in the Caribbean is not episodic but systemic, reproducing itself through households, communities, and institutions.

Recognising Emerging and Intensifying Dynamics

Alongside these enduring patterns, several emerging or accelerating trends are reshaping the regional risk environment.

New Technologies: One such trend is the increasing sophistication of criminal activity, including the use of digital tools and new technologies like drones. While Caribbean-specific data remain limited, evidence from comparable regions suggests growing risks related to technology-facilitated crime, including online extortion, financial fraud, cyber-enabled trafficking coordination, and digital surveillance and control within intimate partner violence. These developments risk widening the capability gap between criminal networks and state institutions, particularly where regulatory and investigative capacities lag behind technological change.

Climate, Peace and Security: A second emerging dynamic is the deepening interaction between climate stress and violence risk. Repeated climate shocks – storms, flooding, heat stress – are placing additional pressure on already vulnerable households and communities. Displacement, livelihood loss, and service disruption disproportionately affect low-income and informal settlements, many of which overlap with violence hotspots. Over time, these pressures increase

household stress, heighten risks of domestic violence, and concentrate vulnerable populations in areas with limited state presence.

Migration: Third, migration, emigration and displacement pressures are intensifying. Economic instability, climate impacts, and regional crises are increasing cross-border and internal movements of people. Migrants and refugees – especially those with irregular status – face elevated exposure to exploitation, trafficking, and violence, while also straining social services and informal housing markets. These dynamics introduce new layers of vulnerability into existing violence ecosystems.

Trust in Democracy: Fourth, democratic disengagement and declining institutional trust are becoming more salient risk factors. Recent electoral cycles across the Caribbean have remained peaceful and constitutional, yet declining participation and differentiated engagement point to thinning social legitimacy in some contexts. Where citizens perceive institutions as unresponsive or ineffective – particularly in delivering safety, justice, and opportunity – disengagement becomes a quieter but consequential form of instability, with implications for prevention and social cohesion. This can impact reporting on crime and violence by citizens.

Interacting Trends and Risk Amplification

Crucially, emerging trends do not replace persistent ones; they interact with and amplify them. Technological change can strengthen organised crime; climate stress can deepen household and youth vulnerability; migration pressures can strain weak protection systems; and legitimacy erosion can further weaken institutions' ability to respond effectively. These interactions increase the likelihood that violence will adapt rather than decline, shifting form while remaining structurally rooted.

Furthermore, this crisis acts as a structural drain on national development. Every dollar diverted to the emergency response of gunshot wounds, prison management, and policing is a dollar systematically stolen from public health, education, and social protection. This creates a structural trade-off in which resources are diverted from foundational prevention investments – including early childhood development, family support,

and universal healthcare – toward reactive expenditures, reinforcing the very conditions that sustain violence over time.

The result is a self-perpetuating loop of legitimacy erosion, further weakening institutions' ability to respond effectively. These interactions increase the likelihood that violence will adapt rather than decline, shifting form while remaining structurally rooted in a landscape of underfunded social services and burdened health systems.

The implication is clear: without deliberate investment in prevention, resilience, and institutional coordination, the Caribbean's violence landscape is likely to become more complex and harder to govern, even if headline indicators improve in specific countries or periods.

Understanding these emerging and persistent trends provides the necessary bridge between current statistics and their implications for human security and resilience. It clarifies why addressing crime and violence requires not only managing present risks but also anticipating how they evolve within broader development, governance, and environmental contexts.

Implications for Human Security and Resilience

Taken together, the regional context, current statistics, and observed trends indicate that crime and violence in the Caribbean constitute a multidimensional human security challenge, with direct and compounding effects on development outcomes, institutional legitimacy, and social cohesion. Crucially, these dynamics also reveal a systemic prevention deficit: violence is not only widespread but also insufficiently anticipated, interrupted, or mitigated through existing governance and development systems.

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Human Security, Prevention, and the Household

At the household level, sustained exposure to violence undermines personal safety, wellbeing, and dignity, while eroding the foundations of primary prevention. High rates of homicide, domestic violence, and community insecurity generate chronic stress and trauma, constraining daily behaviour and decision-making. In violence-affected contexts, families face heightened risks of breakdown, poor mental health outcomes, disrupted education, and reduced economic participation. Over time, these pressures weaken families and caregiving systems – the very social units through which violence is most effectively prevented. These dynamics position caregiving environments – including parenting practices, emotional support, supervision, and household stability – as a primary prevention system through which violence risk is either amplified or interrupted across the life course.

For women and girls, insecurity is often most acute within private spaces. Elevated levels of intimate partner and domestic violence demonstrate how failures of early prevention, protection, and accountability allow harm to persist over long periods. For children and adolescents, early exposure to violence – including widespread and often underreported violence against children (VAC) within households and communities – shapes life trajectories, influencing educational attainment, mental health, social behaviour, and long-term involvement in violence. These patterns underscore that violence prevention is inseparable from trauma-informed care, family support, and access to protection services across the life course.

At the community level, persistent violence weakens preventive social cohesion. Fear limits social interaction, discourages collective action, and reduces the capacity of communities to act as buffers against risk. In some contexts, gangs and illicit actors fill governance and economic gaps, crowding out legitimate institutions and normalising violence as a means of regulation or survival – further raising the cost of prevention over time.

Institutional Trust and Preventive Capacity

Violence has equally profound implications for institutional prevention capacity. Where crime persists and justice systems are slow, inaccessible, or perceived as ineffective, public trust in policing, courts, and governance erodes³⁶. Low reporting rates for serious crimes – particularly gender-based violence – reflect not only stigma and fear but also limited confidence that institutions can prevent recurrence or provide redress.

This erosion weakens the social contract and undermines secondary and tertiary prevention. Citizens disengage from formal institutions, cooperation declines, and compliance becomes fragile. Over time, a self-reinforcing cycle emerges in which institutional weakness fuels violence, and violence further degrades institutional capacity. From a human security perspective, prevention depends not simply on the existence of institutions, but on whether they are experienced as credible, responsive, and capable of acting early.

Resilience, Inequality, and Preventable Risk

The cumulative impact of crime and violence is to undermine development resilience and increase preventable risk. Violence diverts public resources toward reactive responses, constrains private investment, and depresses productivity. It also interacts with other shocks – economic volatility, climate events, and migration pressures – reducing societies' ability to absorb and recover from stress.

These impacts are unevenly distributed. Communities already facing poverty, informality, and limited service access bear a disproportionate share of violence-related harm, widening inequalities and entrenching exclusion. Where social protection systems are thin and mental health and trauma services under-resourced, shocks translate into long-term vulnerability rather than recovery. In such contexts, the absence of prevention systems transforms manageable risk into persistent insecurity.

Democratic Legitimacy and the Prevention Imperative

Human security implications extend into the political sphere. While elections across the Caribbean remain largely peaceful and constitutional, declining participation and uneven engagement signal quieter forms of legitimacy strain. Where citizens experience insecurity alongside limited influence over decision-making and weak service delivery, disengagement becomes a rational response. This does not necessarily produce immediate instability, but it raises longer-term prevention risks by weakening democratic connection and collective problem-solving capacity.

Where citizens experience insecurity alongside limited influence over decision-making and weak service delivery, disengagement becomes a rational response.

Healthy governance, social cohesion, and violence prevention are therefore deeply interconnected.

Societies in which institutions are trusted, inclusive, and capable of delivering safety and opportunity are better positioned to prevent violence before it escalates. Where these connections weaken, violence becomes both a symptom and a driver of deeper insecurity.

Strategic Implications

The implications are clear. Addressing crime and violence in the Caribbean requires moving beyond narrow security responses toward integrated prevention-orientated human security approaches that strengthen households, communities, and institutions simultaneously. Prevention and resilience are not secondary to enforcement; they are essential conditions for its effectiveness and sustainability.

This framing also reinforces the necessity of regional prevention coordination. Many of the drivers of violence – arms trafficking, organised crime networks, climate stress, migration, and economic volatility – transcend national boundaries. Building human security and resilience therefore requires collective solutions that align data, policy, financing, and institutional learning around shared prevention goals.

This regional prevention-oriented approach also aligns with the wider direction of evolving United Nations policy frameworks on sustaining peace and prevention. In particular, the Secretary-General's policy brief, *A New Agenda for Peace* (2023), calls for a shift toward nationally owned prevention and sustaining peace strategies that address the underlying drivers of violence and insecurity through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. This direction was further reinforced through the *Pact for the Future* (2024)³⁷, including Action 18 on sustaining peace, which emphasises addressing the root causes and drivers of violence, strengthening resilience, social cohesion, inclusive institutions, human rights, and preventive approaches that link peace and security with sustainable development. Together, these evolving frameworks increasingly position prevention, resilience, social cohesion, and institutional legitimacy not as secondary social objectives, but as central pillars of sustainable peace and development. In this regard, the Caribbean public health and prevention-oriented approach outlined in this Diagnostic reflects broader international efforts to reposition

prevention and sustaining peace at the centre of development policy and governance.³⁸

In this sense, crime and violence represent both a profound challenge and a strategic entry point. Addressed through integrated, prevention-orientated governance, they offer an opportunity to strengthen human security, restore trust, and reinforce development resilience across the Caribbean.

Social and Economic Costs of Crime and Violence – Global Picture

A comprehensive assessment of the costs associated with crime and violence requires an examination of both direct and indirect expenditures. Direct costs include tangible outlays such as healthcare expenses and law enforcement salaries. Indirect and intangible costs, on the other hand, encompass reduced productivity, lower levels of investment, and psychological trauma, all of which undermine social cohesion within affected communities, families, countries, and regions.

Besides these direct and indirect economic costs, additional effects must also be considered, such as the broader economic and social gains that can be achieved when public resources are reallocated from sunk costs, such as long-term incarceration with no psychosocial support, toward more socially beneficial and sustainable investments leaning towards prevention.

In this regard, Vision of Humanity based on the 2025 Economic Impact of Violence report estimates the total cost to the global economy reached approximately \$19.97 trillion (in Purchasing Power Parity terms) in 2024, representing roughly 11.6% of global GDP.³⁹

According to this source, the global economic impact of violence in 2024 was overwhelmingly driven by expenditures related to security and militarisation. Military expenditure constituted the single largest component, amounting to approximately USD 9 trillion and representing 45 per cent of the total economic impact of violence worldwide. This underscores the scale at which resources continue to be allocated to military responses as a means of addressing insecurity.

Internal security expenditure was the second largest contributor, accounting for 29 per cent of the total impact, or an estimated USD 5.7 trillion. Together, military and internal security spending comprised more than 73 per cent of the global economic impact of violence, highlighting the predominance of reactive and enforcement-

oriented approaches.

Expenditure on private security represented the third largest category, making up eight per cent of the total economic impact. This category increased by 1.3 per cent compared to the previous year, reflecting continued reliance on private security measures by individuals, businesses, and institutions.

Homicide constituted the fourth largest component, accounting for six per cent of the global economic impact of violence, or approximately USD 1.1 trillion.

Suicide was the fifth largest component, representing four per cent of the total economic impact. While smaller in relative terms, its inclusion underscores the significant economic and social costs associated with self-directed violence, which continue to affect communities and public health systems globally.

These figures show how the global economic impact of violence is primarily driven by expenditures on security responses rather than investments in prevention and social resilience.

The dominance of military, internal, and private security spending reflects a reactive approach that consumes substantial resources while failing to address the underlying causes of violence. Redirecting resources toward evidence-based prevention, psychosocial support, and inclusive policies can reduce violence and yield significant social and economic benefits. Addressing violence should be viewed as a strategic investment in sustainable development, social cohesion, and long-term economic stability.

Direct Economic Costs (Health)

Economic Cost of Violence in Caribbean (Health)

The economic burden of crime and violence in the Caribbean is substantial. Regional estimates indicate that direct and indirect costs consume approximately 3–4 per cent of GDP annually, driven by health expenditures, criminal justice costs, private security spending, productivity losses, and foregone investment. These figures place violence among the most significant structural constraints on development and fiscal space, comparable to major macroeconomic shocks.

Firearms-related violence places a heavy burden on national health systems. In 2024, the average cost of treating a single gunshot injury far exceeded annual per capita health spending – by approximately five times in the Bahamas, three times in Barbados, and eight times in Jamaica. In parallel, productivity losses linked to firearm injuries were estimated at USD 72 million in the Bahamas, USD 19 million in Barbados, and USD 135 million in Jamaica. Together, these pressures absorb limited public resources that could otherwise be directed toward prevention, education, and broader development priorities. [3]

Indirect and Long-Term Costs (Productivity, Investment, Social Cohesion)

The economic consequences of crime and violence are both tangible and intangible, with the costs of crime estimated to consume 3.8% of GDP annually, diverting crucial resources from social and economic investments. These costs include human capital losses, private security expenditures, and public spending on prevention and criminal justice systems. In Caribbean-specific contexts, policing services alone can consume ~0.94% of GDP, with prison administration at ~0.24% and criminal justice services at ~0.06%.⁴¹ With so many nations' economies tied heavily to tourism and remittances the region's economic vulnerability is stark and prone to shocks caused by frequent natural hazards.

Comparative Healthcare Resource Costs by Injury Type

Healthcare resource	The Bahamas			Barbados			Jamaica		
	Firearm	Sharp weapon	Other	Firearm	Sharp weapon	Other	Firearm	Sharp weapon	Other
Ambulance	408	408	408	104	104	104	67	79	61
Hospital stay ^b	5,313	2,628	1,431	1,237	1,000	419	827	828	1,246
Consultations ^c	4,569	2,270	1,574	N/A	N/A	N/A	420	159	228
Examinations/tests	711	331	269	818	376	411	201	76	79
Surgery	4,149	3,116	1,353	813	550	550	1,662	770	633
Medications ^d	236	148	27	101	120	79	172	171	69
Blood transfusions ^e	44	0	0	24	8	35	1,101	523	0
Total	15,430	8,902	5,062	3,098	2,158	1,598	4,450	2,606	2,316

Notes:

Totals may not add up due to rounding. N/A = not available. Figures set in red indicate the weapon category that accounts for the highest average medical costs in each country sample.

^a These figures are for non-fatal and fatal injuries combined.

^b Hospital stay comprises daily ward charges in all three countries with the addition of registration costs in The Bahamas and Barbados.

^c Consultations include doctors' consultations – data for which was most complete for The Bahamas and not available for Barbados.

^d Medication costs are hospital medications required during the initial visit.

^e These figures are under-estimates for Barbados, as only costs for some materials involved in transfusions were included.

Table 1 - Estimated average medical costs by bottom-up costs of instrument and resources used (USD) during initial visit, in-country samples⁴⁰

Distributional Impacts and Vulnerable Populations

As in other regions of the world, crime and violence do not affect the Caribbean population uniformly; they act as a regressive tax on the most marginalised, entrenching cycles of poverty and trauma. Vulnerability is concentrated in specific geographical "hotspots" and among groups facing systemic stigma, including women, children, LGBTI persons, people living with HIV, people who use drugs, persons with disabilities, and migrants. From a public finance perspective, this reinforces a central prevention insight: investments in early childhood development, family support, and violence prevention at the household level are among the most cost-effective mechanisms for reducing long-term expenditure on policing,

incarceration, emergency health care, and social recovery systems.

The Institutional Trust Deficit and "Double Victimization"

A defining barrier to justice is the erosion of trust between vulnerable communities and the state. For example, in high-violence Caribbean cities, only 1 in 5 victims file reports with the police.⁴² This is largely driven by a fear of reprisal and a profound lack of confidence in institutional protection.

For historically marginalised groups – particularly LGBTI persons, sex workers, and people who use drugs – distrust is rooted in a history of "moral policing." This leads to a fear of "double

victimisation," where the act of seeking help from authorities results in further harassment, outing, or legal targeting the state.

On the other hand, migrants often face a triple threat: targeted crime, xenophobia, and the fear that reporting a crime will lead to deportation or detention, effectively granting perpetrators total impunity.⁴³

Women and Girls

Traditional gender roles and economic inequality intersect to leave women and girls uniquely vulnerable to domestic and societal violence, poverty and exclusion.

Unemployment for young women in the Caribbean is approximately 30%, compared to 22% for young men. This economic gap reduces women's autonomy and often forces them to remain in violent environments due to a lack of financial alternatives. Also, for example, in Guyana, alcohol consumption is a documented factor in 55.2% of physical or sexual IPV cases, highlighting the intersection of substance abuse and domestic insecurity⁴⁴.

Children: The Intergenerational cost of "Toxic Stress"

One of the most enduring costs of crime is the neurological and social damage inflicted on the next generation. In the Caribbean context, where violence against children (VAC) remains widespread and underreported, these patterns represent not only a social protection failure but also a long-term economic liability, as early exposure to violence systematically increases future demand on health, education, justice, and social protection systems.

Under the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) framework, children exposed to violence are 4 times more likely to engage in criminal behavior or suffer substance abuse as adults. Similarly, chronic exposure to "toxic stress" in violent communities alters neurological development, specifically reducing impulse control and making youth more susceptible to recruitment by organised crime networks.⁴⁵

A further regional concern relates to the early criminalisation of children through justice systems that continue to operate with very low minimum ages of criminal responsibility and extensive reliance on detention, including pre-trial detention, for children accused of minor or non-violent offences. In several Caribbean jurisdictions, the minimum age of criminal responsibility remains between approximately 7 and 12 years, below the standards encouraged under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which has increasingly called for a minimum age of at least 14 years.

From a prevention perspective, early exposure to criminal justice systems during critical developmental periods can itself function as a violence-amplifying pathway. Children drawn into police contact, court proceedings, detention environments, or custodial settings at a young

age may experience further trauma, educational disruption, social stigma, family separation, and increased exposure to violence and criminal networks. International evidence consistently shows that detention, particularly pre-trial detention and detention for non-violent offences, is associated with higher rates of reoffending, long-term social exclusion, poorer mental health outcomes, and escalation into more serious forms of violence over time.

A public health and prevention-oriented approach therefore requires child justice systems that operate fundamentally differently from adult justice systems in both purpose and design. Consistent with international human rights standards, including CRC General Comment No. 24, deprivation of liberty should function strictly as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time. Prevention-oriented child justice systems instead prioritise diversion, restorative approaches, family and community-based interventions, psychosocial support, educational continuity, and rehabilitation pathways designed to reduce long-term harm and interrupt intergenerational cycles of violence.

LGBTI Persons: The Crisis of Mental Health and Stigma

Stigma renders LGBTI persons frequent victims of "hate-motivated" violence while simultaneously isolating them from mental health support.

The Barbados National LGBTI Survey⁴⁶ found that nearly 70% (68.6%) reported suicidal thoughts. Suicidal ideation rises to over 90% for trans and non-binary individuals, with 62.2% reporting actual suicide attempts – nearly three times the rate of cisgender respondents. Similarly, the Jamaica Being LGBT in Jamaica Survey⁴⁷ found that 69% of respondents contemplated suicide, and 43% attempted it, while 100% of transgender men and 79% of non-binary youth reported suicidal ideation, directly linked to a lack of safe housing and the absence of police protection.

Persons with Disabilities

These groups face a "hidden" victimisation crisis characterised by high abuse rates and institutional invisibility. At least one research study⁴⁸ shows that adults with developmental or cognitive

disabilities face a risk of physical or sexual assault 4 to 10 times greater than the general population. Specifically, the rate of violent victimisation for persons with cognitive disabilities is approximately 6.7 times higher than for those without.

The lack of accessible reporting mechanisms and the pervasive stigma that these victims are "unreliable witnesses" contribute to extreme levels of impunity for perpetrators.

Migrants

Migrants in vulnerable situations may face overlapping risks, including exposure to violence, labour exploitation, and limited access to protection mechanisms, depending on their legal status, economic conditions, and social positioning.

Xenophobia and Physical Targeted Violence

Migrant populations often become scapegoats for local economic strain or rising crime rates. This rhetoric manifests in physical attacks, communal violence, and extortion. In transit and host countries like Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and The Bahamas, migrants are frequently targeted for robbery and assault because they are known to carry cash (due to banking barriers) and are unlikely to report crimes to the authorities⁴⁹.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Human Trafficking

Migrant women and girls are at an exponentially higher risk of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, sectors such as construction, agriculture, and domestic work, migrant workers face forced labour and physical intimidation from employers who use the threat of "calling immigration" as a tool of control.^{50, 51}

The "Deportation Deterrent" and Institutional Impunity

The most significant barrier to safety for migrants is the fear of the state itself.

While the regional reporting average is 1-in-5, for undocumented migrants, reporting rates are near zero. The fear that seeking police help will lead to detention or deportation effectively grants perpetrators impunity⁵². The lack of Firewall policies (which separate police services from immigration enforcement) ensures that migrants remain in a permanently victimisable class.

Regional Mandates and Policy Landscape

Alignment and Consolidation

Needham's Point Declaration (2023)

Adopted at the CCJ Academy for Law's Seventh Biennial Law Conference in October 2023 with the support of the PACE Justice project⁵³, the Needham's Point Declaration is a collective commitment by Caribbean leaders to address the most pressing issues in their criminal justice systems. It acknowledges that crime is not just a legal problem but a social and economic one, hampering peace, order, and development in the region. The declaration aligns with a holistic approach to criminal justice reform, rejecting piecemeal solutions in favour of comprehensive, interconnected strategies.⁵⁴

Key Aspects of the Declaration recognised crime as a public health emergency and called for holistic criminal justice reform strategies, including the strengthening of criminal justice institutions through judicial reform; modernisation of laws; and a focus on rehabilitation and reintegration, and victims' rights and support.

George-Bridge Declaration (2024)

The George-Bridge Declaration (2024)⁵⁵ emerged from the 2nd CARICOM Regional Symposium On Crime And Violence As A Public Health Issue, where The Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) met in Georgetown, Guyana with regional experts, members of regional correctional and law enforcement agencies, and with CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS), the Regional Security System (RSS), and the Caribbean Public

Health Agency (CARPHA), focused on a regional approach on crime and security.

The declaration acknowledged the working definition of Crime and Violence as a Public Health Issue as proposed by the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA)⁵⁶:

"The public health approach to violence and crime is a systemic multidisciplinary evidence-based framework that seeks to understand, prevent, and mitigate violence and crime by addressing their societal, behavioural and environmental determinants. This approach applies public health principles - such as surveillance, risk, and protective factor identification, intervention, monitoring, and evaluation - to reduce the incidence impact, and recurrence of violence and crime.

This approach involves multisectors, including law enforcement, health, education, academia, social services, and community stakeholders working collaboratively to design and implement interventions to reduce harm, enhance public safety and build cohesive communities."

Montego Bay Declaration on Transnational Organised Crime and Gangs (2025)

The Montego Bay Declaration (2025)⁵⁷ emerged from the 49th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM and specifically addressed the accelerating threat posed by transnational organised crime, gangs, illicit firearms, and narcotics trafficking. It committed Member States to strengthening border management, financial investigations, anti-gang strategies, and legislative harmonisation, while reinforcing cooperation with regional and international security partners.

Strategic Frameworks and Roadmaps

Caribbean Firearms Roadmap and Mid-Term Review (2025) Prevention Addendum: Member State Commitments

The fifth Annual Meeting of States of the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap⁵⁸ took place on 11-12 November 2025 in Trinidad and Tobago, bringing together representatives from UNODC, UN Member States, CARICOM IMPACS, UNLIREC, UNDP, OAS, SAS, as well as donors and other partner organisations. The Caribbean Firearms Roadmap and its 2025 Mid-Term Review reaffirmed Member State commitments to reducing illicit firearms flows through legislative reform, improved data systems, border controls, and regional intelligence cooperation. The agreement for a Prevention Addendum expands the Roadmap's focus to include community-based violence prevention, youth engagement, public health approaches to violence, and demand reduction, recognising firearms violence as both a security and social issue.

CARICOM/UNDP High-Level Forum Outcomes (2025)

Outcomes from the CARICOM/UNDP High-Level Forum on Crime and Violence as a Regional Challenge: Integrating, Health, Justice, and Social Policy, reaffirmed a shared commitment to integrated regional programming that bridges security, development, and resilience. The meeting highlighted priorities including data-driven policymaking, prevention-focused investments, institutional strengthening, and coordinated donor engagement to reduce fragmentation and duplication.

IMPACS-UWI-CARPHA: Pathway to Policy (2025)

The IMPACS-UWI-CARPHA Pathway to Policy (2025)⁵⁹ represents a key regional collaboration between CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS), Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), University of the West Indies (UWI) via the George Alleyne Chronic Disease

Research Centre, and the Small Arms Survey. The goal is to shift from research to actionable, evidence-based policies to curb firearm-related violence and trafficking in the Caribbean through the establishment of a structured mechanism to translate research, data, and public health evidence into actionable regional and national policies on crime and violence. It promotes interdisciplinary collaboration, standardised indicators, and knowledge exchange across security, academic, and health institutions.

This pathway strengthens the Programme's evidence base, enabling informed decision-making, impact monitoring, and adaptive policy design.

CARICOM/UNDP Memorandum of Understanding (2022)

The CARICOM/UNDP MoU (2022) provides a formal framework for cooperation on governance, citizen security, resilience, and sustainable development. Signed in September 2022, the MOU, underscores cooperation on governance; climate and disaster resilience, sustainable energy, and natural resource management; citizen safety and security; economic development including the Blue Economy; innovation and digital inclusion of youth; financing for development, and institutional strengthening. It commits both institutions to joint programming, resource mobilisation, and coordinated technical assistance at regional and national levels.

Gaps, Overlaps, and Opportunities for Consolidation

Despite strong political commitment and multiple frameworks, the current landscape is characterised by fragmentation, uneven implementation, and limited cross-sectoral integration. Overlaps exist across security, prevention, and development initiatives, while gaps persist in community-level prevention, data harmonisation, and sustainable financing.

Opportunities for consolidation include:

- Aligning political declarations with a single, results-oriented regional programme and Action Plan
- Integrating enforcement, prevention, public health, and resilience interventions under a human security framework
- Leveraging existing mandates to reduce duplication and improve efficiency
- Strengthening monitoring, evaluation, and learning across institutions
- Creating a unified platform for donor coordination and investment alignment

Why CARICOM's Architecture Supports a Public Health Approach



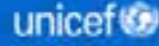








CARICOM's governance model deliberately separates political leadership, functional policy coordination, and technical implementation across security, health, and social development. Security is coordinated through CONSLE and IMPACS, health and social development through COHSOD and CARPHA, while social cohesion cuts across both pillars. This enables crime and violence to be addressed not only as law-enforcement challenges, but as public health and development issues linked to trauma, mental health, substance abuse, inequality, and institutional trust.

This integrated architecture underpins the CARICOM-UNDP partnership, the UNDP-CARICOM Action Plan, and the outcomes of the High-Level Forum on Crime and Violence as a Public Health Threat. It provides a legitimate regional platform for prevention-focused, people-centred, and evidence-based responses.



How the UN System can Support a Public Health Approach

Heat Map: UN Agency Coverage Across Mandate Areas

Mandate Area	 UNODC	 UNDP	 UNICEF	 PAHO / WHO	 UN Women	 UNFPA	 OHCHR	 IOM	 UNHCR	 UNODA / UNLIREC	 UNESCO
Transnational Organised Crime & Gangs	■ ■	■ ■						■	■		
Illicit Firearms & Small Arms Control	■ ■	■ ■			■					■ ■ ■	
Border & Maritime Crime	■ ■	■ ■						■ ■	■		
Citizen Security & Governance	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■	■ ■	■	■	■	■		■
Violence Prevention (Public Health)	■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■				■
Youth & Community Prevention	■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■	■	■				■ ■ ■
Gender-Based Violence & Women's Safety	■	■ ■	■	■	■ ■	■ ■	■				
Human Security & Crisis Shocks	■	■ ■	■ ■	■	■	■		■ ■	■ ■		■
Displacement, Migration & Trafficking	■ ■	■						■ ■	■ ■		
Data, Evidence & Policy Translation	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■	■		■	■	■	■ ■

Note: This mapping is indicative and does not reflect the full scope or depth of engagement of all UN entities across prevention domains

Analysis of the Bilateral Donor Landscape in Latin America and the Caribbean: Development Finance in Transition (also See Annex II)

Over the past half-decade, bilateral development financing to the region has undergone a period of sustained transformation, shaped by global fiscal pressures, geopolitical realignment, and evolving conceptions of security and development. In recent years, traditional bilateral donors – including the United States, Canada, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Japan – have remained important development actors in the region, but the scale, modality, and thematic focus of their engagement have shifted markedly. These changes have had direct implications for financing in the areas of citizen security, access to justice, and peacebuilding, particularly in the Caribbean, where high levels of violence coexist with limited fiscal space and weak institutional capacity.

Quantitative Trends in ODA Commitments and Expenditure

From a quantitative perspective, bilateral official development assistance (ODA) to the LAC region has stagnated and, in some cases, declined in real terms over the past five years. According to OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) data, since the total net ODA to LAC peak in the mid-2010s, resource flows to the region have since been affected by global reallocation of aid toward humanitarian crises, pandemic response, and geopolitical priorities in other regions⁶⁰. Independent analyses suggest that global ODA from major donors could have declined by up to 17 per cent in 2025 relative to pre-pandemic

baselines, with reductions disproportionately affecting middle income regions such as the Caribbean⁶¹.

While overall ODA remains substantial, the composition of financing has shifted. Bilateral contributions are increasingly security linked and often channeled through targeted accounts focused on law enforcement, migration management, and counternarcotics, particularly in U.S. foreign assistance.

United States: Retrenchment and Security-Driven Realignment

The United States has long been the largest bilateral donor in the region, having provided over USD 104 billion in foreign assistance to LAC between 1946 and 2022⁶². However, its aid architecture has undergone a profound shift over the past decade where U.S. assistance has increasingly prioritised counter-narcotics, regional law enforcement cooperation, and migration management. These priorities are reflected in the continued prominence of the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) account and the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), which alone has received nearly USD 1 billion in appropriations since 2010⁶³.

Critically, however, the 2025 dissolution of USAID as a standalone development agency and the absorption of its functions into the State Department marks a substantive and dramatic turning point. The institutional weakening of USAID has resulted in material and substantive cuts in funding not only for the coordination infrastructure of USAID, but for the major projects such as those under the CBSI and other initiatives. In Jamaica alone over 50 million in financing was under threat or cancelled. These cuts have diminished the development-centric orientation of U.S. foreign assistance and undermines long-term programming in citizen security and access to justice, particularly in the Caribbean, where USAID has historically supported youth violence prevention, community-based programming, and institutional reform⁶⁴.

Canada and the EU: Strategic Continuity and Multilevel Engagement

In contrast, Canada has maintained relatively

stable support for governance, justice, and gender-responsive development programming in the Caribbean. Global Affairs Canada continues to prioritise access to justice, legal empowerment, and institutional reform, with funding aligned to the rights-based and inclusion-oriented vision of citizen security. Notable contributions include long-standing support for the Caribbean Court of Justice, youth crime prevention programmes, and gender equality in justice reform efforts⁶⁵.

The European Union has similarly deepened its engagement, evolving from fragmented bilateral support into comprehensive regional programming under the 10th and 11th European Development Funds (EDFs). These programmes have focused on judicial efficiency, border security, transnational crime prevention, and gender-based violence⁶⁶. EU efforts to integrate human rights, cybercrime prevention, and inclusive justice – as seen through the Spotlight Initiative and PACE Justice – further illustrate a commitment to SDG-aligned approaches.

Retrenchment Among Traditional Donors

The United Kingdom and Japan, once active bilateral donors in governance and justice, have gradually reduced their direct bilateral engagement in citizen security and access to justice in the Caribbean. The UK has seen major reductions in ODA due to fiscal consolidation post-Brexit, with its programming increasingly routed through multilateral or trust fund mechanisms⁶⁷. Japan's aid in the Caribbean has focused more on disaster resilience and infrastructure, with limited recent justice-specific funding. This retrenchment reduces the diversity and flexibility of bilateral sources supporting institutional justice reform.

Emerging Financiers: New Resources, Diverging Priorities

Recent years have also seen the emergence of new sources of external financing. Investment vehicles from China, the United Arab Emirates, and other Middle Eastern countries have increased their presence in the LAC region. Platforms such as the China-LAC Cooperation Fund offer significant capital flows, but these are overwhelmingly oriented toward infrastructure and commercial investments rather than governance, justice, or citizen security. These donors operate with distinct governance norms and accountability

frameworks, raising questions about alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Strategic Implications for the Caribbean and SDG 16

The Caribbean is navigating a more fragmented, security driven, and geopolitically complex donor environment than it faced a decade ago. While total bilateral aid remains significant, much of it is increasingly tied to short-term security and enforcement outcomes rather than the long-term institutional reforms needed to strengthen justice systems, promote accountability, and foster inclusive development. The reduction in flexible, development orientated financing – especially following the closure of USAID – has left a gap that is not easily filled by infrastructure-focused or commercially-oriented financiers.

For Caribbean states seeking to implement sustainable justice sector reforms, the outlook is challenging. The region will need to more actively coordinate among remaining bilateral and multilateral donors, leverage emerging sources of finance while advocating for greater SDG alignment, and ensure that citizen security and access to justice are not deprioritised in regional development agendas. Without such alignment, the achievement of SDG 16 and broader 2030 Agenda targets may be significantly delayed or compromised.

Development Banks – Priorities and Challenges in Financing Citizen Security and Access to Justice

Development Banks in the Regional Security Finance Landscape

Development banks play a crucial role in financing structural reforms in the Caribbean and Latin America, particularly in sectors where bilateral ODA has contracted or shifted toward security cooperation. Unlike short term project grants, development bank financing offers medium to long-term, large-scale capital, technical assistance, and institutional partnerships that can underpin sustainable justice sector reform and crime prevention strategies. Within this space, two institutions stand out for their impact and breadth: the InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB) and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB).

The IDB operates across Latin America and the Caribbean with a dedicated focus on citizen security and justice reforms, backed by a growing portfolio and recent high-level commitments to expand support. The CDB, as the sole regional development bank headquartered in Barbados and owned by Caribbean states alongside nonregional partners, has more modest but strategically relevant engagements that intersect with justice and security outcomes.

InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB): Leadership in Citizen Security Financing

The InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB) is widely recognised as the principal multilateral development bank in the Western Hemisphere addressing citizen security and justice system strengthening. The Bank has institutionalised

security as a development priority, notably through its Citizen Security and Justice Division, the first such specialised unit within an MDB. This division integrates technical assistance, lending, and regional cooperation frameworks to support national reforms and multicountry initiatives.

In 2025, the IDB announced a historic expansion of its security financing portfolio with a commitment of USD 2.5 billion over three years to strengthen citizen security across Latin America and the Caribbean. This commitment was paired with the launch of a Rapid Response Task Force to support countries facing sudden spikes in violence, trafficking, or institutional vulnerabilities, enabling quicker delivery of advisory services and technical cooperation.

The scale and ambition of this recent commitment reflect several strategic shifts in the IDB's approach over the past 3–5 years:

From diagnostic research to operational financing: Earlier IDB work, exemplified by its Crime and Violence technical note series for countries such as Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, focused on generating empirical evidence and diagnostic frameworks for lawmakers and practitioners.

Towards integrated, multipillar programming: Recent actions embed violence prevention, institutional strengthening, and illicit financial flows disruption within cohesive operational frameworks, as demonstrated by the Alliance for Security, Justice, and Development – a regional initiative that brings together governments, MDBs, and development partners to coordinate largescale responses.

Regional crisis response tools: The Rapid Response Task Force reflects an evolution in financing modalities toward flexible, timely support that complements longer-term infrastructure or reform loans.

Financially, the IDB's expansion of citizen security portfolios signifies a material increase in MDB engagement in fields traditionally dominated by bilateral security cooperation. While precise disaggregation of Caribbean specific lending figures is not always published in consolidated form, the Bank's regional commitments – including specific operations such as a US\$20

million loan to The Bahamas to reduce crime and violence among at-risk youth – illustrate a tangible focus on justice systems, youth opportunities, and conflict mitigation in small island contexts.

Beyond financing, the IDB has also acted as a knowledge leader in the region. In collaboration with entities such as the World Bank and CAF, the institution colauded efforts to generate policy research and technical guidance across Latin America and the Caribbean, recognising that violence and organised crime present entrenched development obstacles that require evidence based policy responses.

Strategic Priorities Over the Past 3–5 Years:

From a priority perspective, the IDB's evolving agenda emphasises three interconnected thrusts relevant to citizen security and justice:

1. **Institutional resilience:** Support for police reform, prosecutorial effectiveness, judicial case management systems, and digital data infrastructure.
2. **Community protection:** Investments in violence prevention at the community level, youth engagement, and socioeconomic inclusion to reduce drivers of crime.
3. **Illicit financial flows:** Targeted efforts to disrupt the financial underpinnings of organised crime through enhanced forensic capacities and regulatory frameworks.

This strategic orientation aligns with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by expanding the scope of development bank financing beyond physical infrastructure and economic growth toward social and institutional infrastructure essential for prevention-driven sustainable peace.

Caribbean Development Bank (CDB): Regional Mandate and Institutional Role

Unlike the IDB, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the CDB does not operate a standalone citizen security division. Instead, the region's indigenous development bank's contributions to justice and security outcomes are typically embedded within

broader governance, social development, or resilience programmes. Historically, the Bank's strategic priorities have focused on institutional strengthening, youth development, social inclusion, and poverty reduction – development outcomes closely associated with long-term reductions in violence and improvements in access to justice, even if not framed as discrete "security projects."

The CDB's Special Development Fund (SDF) is its principal concessional financing mechanism. In 2025, contributors approved a US\$460 million programme for the 11th cycle (2025–2028), representing a sizeable increase over the previous cycle and reflecting sustained investment in social and economic development across the region. Although specific allocations for citizen security or justice outcomes within this pooled fund are not routinely disaggregated, the scale of the SDF underscores the Bank's capacity to support interventions that may intersect with justice sector strengthening and crime prevention when integrated into broader development frameworks.

CDB's engagement is also shaped by its partnerships and policy leadership. For example, CDB's role as Chair of the Multilateral Development Bank Working Group on Gender demonstrates its influence in promoting gender responsive development practices across lending institutions. Gender equality is an important determinant of safety and access to justice, and such leadership can indirectly shape programming priorities that intersect with SDG 16 outcomes.

Where the CDB has contributed to citizen security and justice more directly – for example, through policy dialogues, capacity support for justice institutions, or governance reforms – documentation tends to be sectorally integrated rather than classified under standalone "security" codes. This reality reflects a broader challenge in regional MDB financing: while justice outcomes may be supported, they are often subsumed within larger portfolios targeted at education, governance, youth opportunity, or social protection.

Aggregate Financial Commitments and Trends

Quantifying the precise financial flows targeted exclusively at citizen security and justice by these banks is inherently challenging because key IDB and CDB operations are integrated into multiple sectoral categories (e.g., governance, social

development). However, the scale and orientation of commitments provide robust indications of their evolving priorities. The IDB's multibillion dollar expansion of citizen security financing, coupled with a specialised division and rapid response mechanisms, positions it as a leading source of MDB finance for these themes. The \$20 million Bahamian operation and similar country specific IDB projects further demonstrate targeted engagement at the national level.

By contrast, CDB's financing flows – including the enlarged SDF and its role in technical and policy leadership – show that justice and safety outcomes are supported primarily through crosscutting investments in governance, youth opportunity, and social capital, with justice elements embedded in broader programming.

Challenges and Opportunities

Both development banks face similar constraints in their security and justice financing:

- **Data granularity:** MDB reporting systems often aggregate citizen security within broader governance or social sectors, making it difficult to extract comparable quantitative metrics across institutions.
- **Thematic framing:** Security is increasingly understood as a cross sectoral development outcome – for example, through youth empowerment, community resilience, or gender inclusion – rather than a siloed “security project,” complicating direct financial attribution.
- **Resource allocation frameworks:** With large portfolios spanning infrastructure, climate resilience, and economic growth, competition for limited capital means justice and violence prevention must vie for prioritisation alongside traditional development sectors.

Despite these challenges, recent MDB innovations – especially the IDB's largescale task force and the Alliance for Security, Justice, and Development – present opportunities to catalyse coordinated, evidence based, and regionally integrated financing for justice and citizen security reform.

The case for an integrated regional approach

Rationale

Building on the political commitments and regional mandates outlined above, this section sets out the rationale and Theory of Change for an integrated regional action plan.

Over the past decade, Caribbean states have undertaken significant national-level reforms across security, justice, social development, and public health sectors. These efforts have produced important gains in specific contexts. However, violence in the region is not driven solely by national policy gaps but by interacting transnational dynamics – including illicit firearms flows, organised crime networks, migration pressures, climate-related shocks, and shared structural inequalities – that exceed the capacity of any single state to manage in isolation.

At the same time, national responses are often constrained by institutional fragmentation within countries. Security, justice, health, education, and social protection systems tend to operate with separate mandates, data systems, and funding streams, limiting their ability to act coherently across the full prevention continuum (See Annex III). This fragmentation allows risk to circulate across sectors and over time, undermining the sustainability of even well-designed interventions.

A regional approach embedded with key regional partners would not replace national responsibility; rather, it strengthens national action by addressing system-level constraints that cannot be resolved domestically. Regional coordination of prevention planning offers a means to align policy logic, frameworks, and institutional learning across countries facing similar risk profiles, while respecting differences in context, capacity, and political economy.

Addressing Transnational Drivers of Violence

Several of the most consequential drivers of violence in the Caribbean are explicitly regional or transnational in nature. Illicit firearms trafficking, organised criminal markets, and maritime and

air transit routes link national violence dynamics into a shared risk environment. Climate-related shocks and displacement pressures similarly transcend borders, amplifying household stress, migration, and vulnerability across the region. Without coordinated approaches, national gains in one country can be offset by spillover effects from another.

A regional action plan enables collective action on these shared challenges by:

- supporting harmonised prevention and risk frameworks;
- strengthening information-sharing and analytical capacity;
- and coordinating engagement with international partners whose actions affect regional risk, including on firearms, finance, trafficking and public health

Reducing Fragmentation and Increasing Coherence

Beyond transnational dynamics, a regional approach to prevention also addresses conceptual and institutional fragmentation that has limited the effectiveness of violence prevention efforts to date. Countries across the Caribbean often pursue similar interventions – community policing, youth engagement, justice reform, social programmes – but with differing theories of change, indicators, and sequencing. This limits opportunities for comparative learning, scaling, and adaptation.

An integrated regional approach provides a shared prevention-orientated logic that helps align national strategies across sectors and prevention levels. By articulating common principles, leverage points, and system functions, a regional action plan can support more coherent national planning while reducing duplication and policy drift.

Strengthening Prevention as a Public Function

A further rationale for a regional approach lies in the need to institutionalise and consolidate prevention as a core public function and in policies, rather than as a collection of projects or pilot initiatives. Prevention requires sustained

investment, long time horizons, and coordination across multiple sectors – conditions that are difficult to maintain without shared political commitment and institutional reinforcement.

Regional frameworks can help normalise prevention within security, justice, and development planning by:

- embedding prevention language and logic into regional policy commitments;
- supporting consistent capacity-building across institutions;
- and reinforcing accountability through shared benchmarks and peer learning.

This is particularly important in a context where enforcement systems face increasing operational pressure. A regional prevention framework reframes prevention not as an alternative to security and rule-of-law responses, but as a means of reducing long-term demand on policing, courts, and correctional systems, thereby strengthening their effectiveness and legitimacy.

Leveraging Regional Institutions and UN Coordination

Finally, the Caribbean benefits from a dense network of regional institutions (i.e. CARICOM IMPACS, CARPHA, RSS, UWI, CDEMA and more) and established UN coordination mechanisms that provide a practical foundation for an integrated approach. CARICOM, regional security bodies, public health institutions, and the UN development system already convene states around shared priorities. What has been missing is a unifying prevention and systems logic capable of connecting these efforts into a coherent whole around human security.

The proposed regional action plan responds to this gap. It provides a vehicle for aligning evidence, policy, and institutional action around a shared understanding of how violence is produced – and how it can be prevented – while remaining flexible enough to accommodate national diversity and political realities.

In this sense, the rationale for an integrated regional approach is pragmatic. It reflects the scale and structure of the challenge, the limits of fragmented responses, and the opportunity to reconfigure existing efforts into a prevention-ready regional system capable of delivering sustained reductions in violence and strengthened human security across the Caribbean.

What a Regional Action plan Could Look Like

The regional action plan envisaged in this document is not a single plan or programme, but a coordinating architecture that aligns prevention, resilience, and human security efforts across national and regional systems. Its purpose is to translate the Theory of Change and guiding principles set out above into coherent action over time, while remaining flexible enough to adapt to diverse national contexts and evolving risk profiles.

A Functional, Not Programmatic, Architecture

Rather than prescribing a uniform set of interventions, the action plan is organised around core system functions – much like a prevention continuum – that must be present and connected for prevention to operate effectively at scale. These functions include:

- Risk identification and assessment, enabling countries and institutions to anticipate violence, prioritise responses, and differentiate between preventive, protective, and enforcement measures.
- Prevention across the life course, ensuring that primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention are aligned rather than fragmented.
- Recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration, reducing recurrence and intergenerational transmission of violence.
- Institutional coordination and governance, aligning security, justice, health, education, and social protection systems around shared human security outcomes.

- Learning, adaptation, and accountability, allowing the system to evolve in response to evidence and experience.
- By focusing on functions rather than projects, the action plan avoids duplication, supports national ownership, and allows countries to pursue context-specific pathways within a shared regional logic.

Illustrative Function-to-Mechanism Operating Model

To support implementation across diverse national contexts, this diagnostic provides an illustrative operating model that demonstrates how the functional architecture can be translated into practical mechanisms, roles, and feedback loops. This is not a prescriptive institutional blueprint, but an example of how functions can be operationalised using existing regional and national capacities.

Different countries may operationalise these functions through different institutional arrangements; the value of the model lies in clarity of function rather than uniformity of form.

Sequencing and Phasing

The action plan is designed to be sequenced and phased, recognising that systems change requires time and that countries start from different baselines.

Early phases should prioritise:

- strengthening shared analytical and risk assessment capacity;
- mapping existing prevention and security efforts;
- and establishing coordination mechanisms across sectors and institutions.
- Subsequent phases would focus on:
 - aligning prevention interventions across the life course;

Core Function	Purpose	Illustrative Mechanisms	Primary Actors / Owners
 <p>Risk identification and early warning</p>	Identify emerging violence risks, vulnerable populations, and spatial concentration of harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum regional data package (health, security, social indicators) • Risk stratification and hotspot analysis protocols • Regional analytical support and synthesis 	National statistics offices; Ministries of Health and Security; CARICOM IMPACS; CARPHA
 <p>Life-course prevention</p>	Reduce exposure to violence risk across childhood, adolescence, and adulthood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence-based prevention "menu" adaptable to context • Targeting criteria linked to risk profiles • Quality standards and workforce development 	Line ministries (Health, Education, Social Protection); local authorities; civil society
 <p>Recovery, protection, and reintegration</p>	Interrupt cycles of repeat victimisation, trauma, and reoffending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victim support and referral pathways • Diversion and re-entry support for justice-involved individuals • Trauma-informed practice standards 	Health and social services; justice institutions; community-based organisations
 <p>Coordination and governance</p>	Align actors, resources, and accountability across sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National multi-sector coordination mechanism • Cabinet-level reporting and oversight line • Regional peer learning and coordination platform 	National governments; Offices of the Prime Minister; CARICOM Secretariat; UN system
 <p>Learning and accountability</p>	Enable continuous improvement and system learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention scorecard or dashboard • Quarterly learning and adaptation cycles • Annual regional review of progress and gaps 	National coordination bodies; regional institutions; development partners
<p>i Note: Mechanisms and ownership will vary by national context. The table illustrates functional translation rather than prescribing institutional form.</p>			

- embedding trauma-informed and recovery-oriented practice within justice and social systems;
- and strengthening community–institution trust.

At the local and community level, the action plan emphasises:

- place-based responses informed by risk concentration;
- engagement with communities as partners in prevention;
- and feedback mechanisms that inform national and regional learning.

Later phases then emphasise:

- institutionalisation of prevention as a public function;
- sustained financing and capacity-building;
- and integration of prevention logic into broader development and security planning.
- This phased approach balances the need for early momentum with the reality that prevention dividends accumulate over time.

Multi-Level Governance and Roles

Effective implementation of the action plan depends on clear but flexible governance arrangements across regional, national, and local levels.

At the regional level, the action plan provides:

- a shared prevention and human security framework;
- mechanisms for peer learning and technical exchange;
- and coordination on transnational risks such as firearms trafficking and organised crime.
- At the national level, governments retain ownership of policy choices and implementation pathways, using the action plan to:
 - align sectoral strategies;
 - strengthen coordination between security, justice, and social systems;
 - and integrate prevention into national planning and budgeting processes.

Data, Evidence, and Feedback

A defining feature of the action plan is its reliance on continuous feedback, rather than static plans. Risk assessment, monitoring, and learning are embedded throughout, enabling institutions to adjust interventions as conditions change.

This includes:

- integrating quantitative and qualitative data sources;
- tracking system performance, not just individual programmes;
- and using evidence to inform sequencing, scale-up, and course correction.
- Such feedback is essential for managing complexity and ensuring that prevention remains effective in dynamic environments.

From Action Plan to Impact

The regional action plan does not seek to replace existing strategies or institutions. Its value lies in connecting what already exists into a coherent, prevention-ready system – one capable of reducing violence sustainably while strengthening resilience and human security.

By providing a shared architecture grounded in systems thinking, risk assessment, and prevention logic, the action plan creates the conditions for national and regional actors to move from fragmented effort to cumulative impact. Subsequent sections outline how this architecture can be operationalised through governance arrangements, financing, monitoring, and sustained political engagement.









Annexes







[Annex I: Development Funded Projects Table](#)





[Annex II: Expert Systems Consultation on Data Availability, Sharing and Governance in the Caribbean](#)










[Annex III: Suggested Impact Indicators](#)

Annex I

Project Name/Title	Donor(s) / Partners	Geographic Coverage	Duration	Project Description	Budget (USD)	Source (URL)
 CarISECURE – Strengthening EvidenceBased Citizen Security	USAID & UNDP	Eastern & Southern Caribbean (810 states)	2016–2021 (Phase 1)	Regional programme to improve crime data collection, analysis, and policy for youth violence prevention through capacity building and crime observatories.	~\$10.5M + extensions	 https://www.undp.org/latin-america/carisecure (UNDP)
 CarISECURE 2.0 – Youth Crime & Human Trafficking Prevention	USAID & UNDP (OECS)	Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, St. Lucia, Trinidad & Tobago	2022–2026	Expanded phase of CarISECURE, strengthening evidence systems, interagency data sharing, human trafficking response, and youth crime prevention.	~\$12.4M+	 https://www.undp.org/barbados/press-releases/carisecure-20-launches-youth-and-citizen-security-project-antigua-and-barbuda (UNDP)
 Opportunities to Advance and Support Youth for Success (OASYS)	USAID/ESC & OECS	Eastern Caribbean (Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines)	2022–2026	Strengthens youth justice systems, skills development, psychosocial support, and family interventions to reduce youth violence.	~\$5.3M	 https://pressroom.oecs.int/oecs-usaid-launch-program-to-improve-youth-justice-systems-in-the-eastern-caribbean (pressroom.oecs.int)
 Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI): Youth & Crime Prevention Projects	USAID & U.S. Government partners	Eastern Caribbean	2023–ongoing	Under CBSI, launches projects targeting youth crime reduction and resilience, including evidence systems and community interventions.	Not publicly disclosed	 https://pressroom.oecs.int/empowering-youth-caribbean-basin-security-

Project Name/Title	Donor(s) / Partners	Geographic Coverage	Duration	Project Description	Budget (USD)	Source (URL)
 Support to Effective Administration of Criminal Justice Systems (11th EDF)	European Union (EU)	CARIFORUM States (regional)	~2021–2027	Modernises courts, case management, and justice institution capacity across the Caribbean, supporting SDG 16 targets.	Part of EU 11th EDF allotment	 https://caricom.org/cariforum-states-continue-to-address-crime-and-security-through-two-11th-edf-funded-programmes/(CARICOM)
 Law Enforcement & Border Security Programme (11th EDF)	European Union	CARIFORUM States	~2021–2027	Strengthens law enforcement capacity, border security, intelligence sharing for crime prevention.	Part of EU 11th EDF allotment	 https://caricom.org/cariforum-states-continue-to-address-crime-and-security-through-two-11th-edf-funded-programmes/(CARICOM)
 PACE Justice Project (Partnership CaribbeanEU on Justice)	EU & UNDP (UNODC, RSS, CEPOL)	CARIFORUM Member States (8)	2023–2027	Enhances criminal justice systems, training, data systems, and rightsbased approaches for police and judiciary.	Multidonor; Not disclosed	 https://www.undp.org/barbados/press-releases/caribbean-police-officers-strengthen-crime-scene-

Project Name/Title	Donor(s) / Partners	Geographic Coverage	Duration	Project Description	Budget (USD)	Source (URL)
 Bahamas Citizen Security & Justice Project	InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB)	The Bahamas	2023–2027	Supports crime and violence reduction among youth via education, employment training, and justice system reform.	~\$20M	https://www.iadb.org/en/news/idb-help-bahamas-reduce-crime-and-violence (Early Warning System)
 IDB ONE Safe Caribbean Technical Cooperation	InterAmerican Development Bank (TC)	Caribbean (multicountry engagement)	2023–ongoing	Promotes safer communities, justice system efficiency, and institutional transparency under the ONE Caribbean framework.	Technical Cooperation	https://ewdata.rightsindevelopment.org/files/documents/23/IADB-RG-T4523_twbdjUM.pdf (Early Warning System)
 UNODC Strategic Vision (2022–2025)	UNODC	Latin America & Caribbean	2022–2025	Regional criminal justice and violence prevention support, including GBV prevention, prosecutorial training, and coordinated responses.	Not budgeted publicly	https://www.unodc.org/res/strategy/STRATEGIC_VISION_LATIN_AMERICA_AND_THE_CARIBBEAN_2022_2025_ENE17-EDsigned.pdf (UNODC)
 Spotlight Initiative (Caribbean component)	EU & UN Agencies (UN Women, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA)	Caribbean & LAC region	2017–2025	A large programme addressing violence against women and girls through institutional capacity, legal reform, survivor services, and data systems.	€500M (global, regional suballocations)	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spotlight_Initiative (Wikipedia)

Project Name/Title	Donor(s) / Partners	Geographic Coverage	Duration	Project Description	Budget (USD)	Source (URL)
 UN Women Caribbean Strategic Initiatives on VAWG	UN Women	Caribbean multicountry	Ongoing	Catalyses action on gender equality and violence prevention, including data hub and policy support for justice and protection services.	Not specified	 https://caribbean.unwomen.org/en (caribbean.unwomen.org)
 Judicial Reform & Strengthening Project (JURIST)	Caribbean Court of Justice & partners	CARICOM States	2020–2025	Strengthens judicial institutions, gender responsive service delivery, ADR and restorative justice capacity.	Not publicly disclosed	 https://ccj.org/ (regional reports cited) (ICCLR)
 Improved Access to Justice in the Caribbean (IMPACT Justice)	Global Affairs Canada	MultiCaribbean States	2014–2023	A comprehensive Canadian initiative promoting legal frameworks, ADR, and gender justice; active into early 2023.	~\$19.8M	 Global Affairs Canada project database (via gap analysis) (ICCLR)
 OECS Crime Observatory & Analyst Training Initiative	CARICOM / OECS / partners	Eastern Caribbean	2023–ongoing	Supports regional crime data observatories and analyst capacity – aligned with regional crime data strategy goals.	Not publicly specified	 Gap analysis of programming (ICCLR)
 Community Based Prevention & Reintegration Supports	USAID & UNDP (CBSI linked)	Eastern Caribbean	Ongoing	Youth engagement, psychosocial support, and community reintegration strategies linked to CBSI programming.	Not specified	 OECS releases & donor analysis (pressroom.oecs.int)

Annex II

Expert Systems Consultation on Data Availability, Sharing and Governance in the Caribbean

Purpose and status of this annex

This annex synthesises insights from a high-level expert panel and technical focus group convened during the UNDP-CARICOM High-Level Forum, bringing together senior practitioners and specialists working across national statistics, justice, health, security, digital transformation, civil society, academia, and regional institutions. Participants were selected for their direct responsibility for producing, managing, accessing, or using administrative and social data within Caribbean governance systems. The discussion did not focus on abstract data ideals, but on the practical conditions under which data can – or cannot – be shared, trusted, and used to support prevention, service delivery, justice reform, and evidence-based policy across small island and multi-country contexts.

Why this annex matters for action

The consultation surfaced a consistent finding: the Caribbean does not primarily suffer from an absence of data, but from fragmented governance, weak mandates, limited interoperability, cultural resistance, and institutional incentives that actively discourage data sharing and use. While rich datasets exist across electoral systems, licensing authorities, prisons, probation services, schools, hospitals, and social programmes, access remains slow, informal, and dependent on personal relationships rather than policy frameworks or standard operating procedures. These constraints represent binding implementation barriers for the prevention, public-health, and justice-reform ambitions articulated in regional declarations and action plans. As such, this appendix provides the systems-level conditions that must be put in place for the actions proposed in this document to be feasible, scalable, and sustainable.

How the annex is structured and how it should be used

To support implementation sequencing, the expert inputs have been organised into three clusters: Foundational and Immediate Actions (0–6 months), System-Building and Institutional Strengthening (6–24 months), and Regional Integration and Scaling (24 months and beyond). This sequencing reflects expert consensus that regional integration is not a substitute for national system-building, but its logical extension once minimum governance, technical, and cultural conditions are in place. The actions outlined here are intended to guide governments, CARICOM institutions, and UN partners in prioritising reforms, identifying quick wins, and aligning investments across national and regional levels. They should be read as a practical implementation companion to the Action Document, grounding its ambitions in the operational realities of Caribbean data systems and state capacity.

Three tight clusters: Foundational / Immediate, System-Building / Medium-Term, and Regional Integration / Longer-Term – but the “long-term” is integration and scaling, not fundamental basics.

I. Foundational & Immediate Actions (0–6 months)

Minimum enabling conditions – these need to move first.

1. Establish High-Level Convening and Authority for Data Sharing

Rationale: Data sharing only works when “someone in power” mandates collaboration and convenes ministries; otherwise silos and resistance persist.

Actors: Prime Minister’s Office; Line Ministers; Permanent Secretaries; Heads of Public Service.

2. Conduct a Rapid National Data-Sharing Audit

Rationale: Most ministries lack clear policies, legislation, or agreements for data sharing; key datasets (EBC, licences, inland revenue, etc.) are hard to access and poorly mapped.

Actors: NSOs; Ministries of Planning, Justice, Digital Transformation; with UN technical support (e.g. UNDP, ECLAC).

3. Launch Local-Level Data-Sharing Pilots in High-Value Institutions

Rationale: The discussion emphasises “start at the local level” – prisons, probation, courts, hospitals, education and youth affairs hold rich data but remain unlinked.

Actors: Line ministries (Justice, Health, Education, Youth, Gender); NSOs; prison and probation services.

4. Train Frontline Workers and Deploy Internal Champions

Rationale: Frontline staff see data tasks as “extra work” and often weren’t part of system design; targeted training, involvement, and champions are needed to build buy-in and use.

Actors: Ministries of Public Service; HR units; IT/case-management teams; senior managers in justice, health, education.

5. Identify and Use Trusted Community Intermediaries

Rationale: For sensitive issues (GBV, incest, ethnicity, migrant/Spanish-speaking communities), trust strongly shapes what data can be collected and used.

Actors: CSOs; community leaders; faith-based groups; cultural mediators; local NGOs.

6. Make an Immediate Public Transparency and “Give-Back” Commitment

Rationale: Household and community surveys are often not shared with the public; giving communities something back increases willingness to share data and is essential for public-health approaches.

Actors: NSOs; Ministries of Communications; line ministries commissioning surveys.

II. System-Building & Institutional Strengthening (6–24 months)

Building the national architecture – technical, institutional, and cultural.

1. Modernise and Empower National Statistical Offices (NSOs)

Rationale: NSOs exist but are underfunded and weak; they “beg” ministers for support instead of coordinating the system. Strengthening them is preferable to creating new offices.

Actors: NSOs; Ministries of Finance and Planning; ECLAC; CARICOM Regional Statistics.

2. Develop National Interoperability Standards and Shared Technical Protocols

Rationale: Electoral, licensing, revenue, justice, and social datasets exist but are not interoperable; this is the major technical constraint to integrated analysis and service delivery.

Actors: Ministries of Digital Transformation/ICT; Ministries of Justice and Finance; CARICOM IMPACS (technical guidance).

3. Establish Centralised National Data Repositories with Secure National Servers

Rationale: Governments lack a central place where data are collected, curated, and shared; access to EBC, transport and revenue systems is slow and ad hoc, and data sovereignty concerns limit cloud options. Secure national repositories are the backbone for interoperability, privacy, and future regional integration.

Actors: Ministries of ICT/Digital Transformation; NSOs; CARICOM IMPACS (architecture and security standards); Ministries of Finance; development partners (e.g. UNDP, IDB, EU).

4. Introduce Predictive Tools, Proxy Data and Modern Analytics

Rationale: Where direct access is constrained, the group explicitly calls for predictive tools and proxy indicators to inform decision-making and targeting.

Actors: NSOs; Planning units; UNDP and other UN agencies; universities; private-sector data/analytics firms.

5. Institutionalise Culture Change: Incentives, Performance Reviews, and TOR Revisions

Rationale: In the case-management example, adoption only occurred when the performance review system made digital use non-optional, backed by champions and clear consequences.

Actors: Public Service Commissions; HR departments; senior management teams; Ministries of Public Service.

6. Create a National “How to Access Data” Guide and Contact Map

Rationale: Accessing data (e.g. in Jamaica) can involve “lots of running around” because people do not know where datasets live or who controls them; an access map reduces friction.

Actors: NSOs; Ministries of Planning and Digital Transformation; line ministries owning key databases.

7. Formalise CSO Participation in Data Collection, Validation, and Use

Rationale: CSOs are often treated as political actors, especially when they surface uncomfortable findings (incest, GBV), yet they are crucial data collectors and end-users; structured engagement can manage tension and leverage their strengths.

Actors: Social development and gender ministries; CSO networks; UN Women, UNICEF and other UN entities.

8. Develop Safe Community-Level Reporting Standards for Small States

Rationale: In small societies “everyone knows everyone”; publishing hyper-local health or crime data can stigmatise communities (e.g. St Lucia COVID example); aggregate geographic reporting is needed to protect anonymity.

Actors: NSOs; Ministries of Health; data protection/privacy commissions; CARICOM legal and technical bodies.

9. Implement Quick-Win Community Demonstration Projects

Rationale: With limited resources, piloting data-informed improvements in a few communities, and then expanding, helps shift perceptions and norms and builds buy-in (“in two years we’ll be on the pavement”).

Actors: Local government; social ministries; CSOs; UN agencies and donors.

10. Scale Public Communication Using Caribbean Cultural and Media Influences

Rationale: Caribbean arts and media can turn abstract data into something that “matters to you” (e.g. GBV video in T&T); this is key for public understanding and support.

Actors: Ministries of Communications and Culture; CSOs; creative sector; UN communications teams.

III. Regional Integration & Scaling (24 months+)

Once national basics are in place, scale across the Caribbean.

1. Create a Shared Regional Interoperability and Data Protection Framework

Rationale: Countries need a common regional framework only after national systems are strengthened; CARICOM already has strong precedents (APSYS, CaribSecure, IMPACS with EU-level standards).

Actors: CARICOM Secretariat; CARICOM IMPACS; CDEMA; OECS; national NSOs and ICT ministries.

2. Develop Regional Confidentiality and Small-State Privacy Standards

Rationale: The “challenge of smallness” is a systemic regional issue; common standards help

protect anonymity and build public trust in cross-border data use.

Actors: Attorneys-General; CARICOM Legal Affairs; data protection authorities; IMPACS.

3. Build a Regional Training and Capacity Programme for Data Professionals

Rationale: Human resources are a limiting factor everywhere; many officials “did not understand the importance of data” or how to use new systems; a regional training pipeline is needed.

Actors: CARICOM; UWI and other regional universities; UNDP; donors.

4. Integrate Forensic, Security, Social and Health Data into a Cohesive Regional System

Rationale: Forensic data work (Needham’s Point) has already spurred legislation and improved capacities in OECS states; scaling such models across sectors deepens prevention and enforcement.

Actors: CARICOM IMPACS; national forensic and security agencies; justice and health ministries.

5. Establish Regional Coordination Mechanisms to Reduce UN and Donor Survey Duplication

Rationale: ECLAC and other UN entities have supported indicators, but with duplication and poor collaboration; governments want access to all UN surveys and harmonised approaches.

Actors: CARICOM Secretariat; UNCTs and regional UN coordination mechanisms; government planning units.

6. Formalise Engagement with Academia and Private-Sector Big Data Actors

Rationale: The discussion explicitly notes that academics and private-sector actors working with big data could bring new models and business approaches to government data systems.

Actors: Universities (e.g. UWI); regional think-tanks; private tech/data firms; ICT ministries;

UNDP Accelerator Labs.

7. Build a Regional Crime, Violence and Social Cohesion Information System

Rationale: Crime and violence are identified as a regional, “West Indian” problem; CARICOM already runs successful regional security data systems (e.g. APSIS, CaribSecure) that could be expanded to social and justice data.

Actors: CARICOM IMPACS; CARICOM Secretariat; CARPHA; national governments; relevant UN entities.

Annex III

Suggested Impact Indicators

A. System Development Indicators

Measure whether prevention capacity exists

- Existence of national prevention strategy
- Cabinet-level mandate
- Multi-sector coordination body
- Integrated data system
- Dedicated prevention budget lines
- Workforce training coverage

B. Intermediate Outcome Indicators

Measure system performance

- Reduction in repeat victimisation
- Increased reporting of violence
- Improved service access
- Improved trust in institutions
- School engagement in high-risk areas
- Increased use of diversion and non-custodial measures for children and young people
- Improved access to legal aid and referral services
- Survivor satisfaction with justice and protection processes
- Reduction in pre-trial detention rates, including for children and non-violent offences
- Improved perceptions of fairness, safety, and

institutional responsiveness

C. Final Outcome Indicators

Measure societal impact

- Homicide rate
- Non-lethal violence rates
- Gender-based violence prevalence
- Youth offending rates
- Community safety perceptions
- Reduced rates of child detention and custodial exposure
- Reduced use-of-force complaints and improved accountability outcomes

D. Economic Indicators

- Cost of violence as % of GDP
- Prevention spending as % of security spending
- Estimated savings from reduced incarceration/health burden

Endnotes

1. Inclusion in the consultation process does not imply formal endorsement of this Roadmap or its recommendations.
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- alcohol than women (59.3% vs. 21.4%). While purchasing alcohol in Guyana is restricted to persons 18 or older, stakeholder interviews indicate that many youth are asked by relatives to go to shops to purchase alcohol and that retailers are not uniform in turning away youths attempting to purchase alcohol. The 2010 Global Student Health Survey found that among school-attending adolescents age 13 to 15, 79 percent reported having their first alcoholic drink before age 14 and about one in five Guyanese adolescents reported drinking alcohol regularly.
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 66. <https://caricom.org/cariforum-states-continue-to-address-crime-and-security-through-two-11th-edf-funded-programmes/>
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 68. LGBTI: stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons. While it is the most widely recognized term in international human rights, its origins in the Global North mean it may not capture the vast, culturally specific ways individuals define their identities worldwide. Broadly, this umbrella term encompasses anyone whose sexual orientation, gender identity, or biological sex characteristics challenge societal norms regarding gender and binary expectation



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