THE DATA REVOLUTION: FROM INFORMATION TO ACTION AND TRANSFORMATION OF CITIZEN SECURITY

Authors: Gloria Manzotti and Marcela Smutt

This policy brief focuses on citizen security as a human right and people-centred public good. The aim is to contribute to addressing the causes and expressions of insecurity, in order to positively influence public agendas, policy design, interventions and the transformation of institutions, to promote peaceful coexistence and better quality of life for the population. The initial premise is that quality information management is central to meeting these objectives because it shows what the real needs are.

To illustrate the decisive role information has in citizen security, it draws from the Analysis on Innovation in Citizen Security and Human Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean and as an example it refers to the work of INFOSEGURA, a regional project of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

This policy brief offers lessons learned, methodologies and innovative practices on information management as a necessary condition for transparent and people-centred institutional action for citizen security.

Main findings

» The role of citizen security is central to the sustainable development of the countries of the region, strengthening or weakening their democracy and the quality of their governance, as well as protecting or affecting citizen rights.

» Citizen security is linked to political, economic and climate crises, human mobility, as well as violence against women and girls, and other risks that directly affect people.

» It requires an integrated approach, incorporating traditional crime data, analysing victimization, rounded off with citizen perceptions of the state of insecurity and institutional responses.

» While homicides have been declining steadily since 2015, enormous challenges persist for there to be changes in the trends in Central America. For instance, evidence shows that the rate of femicides in Central America and the Caribbean was 1.52 per 100,000 women in 2020.

Key recommendations

» Evidence is more useful in public policy decision-making to the extent that data is disaggregated, and supplemented with information that provides a broad view of the state of violence in a given territory.

» Strengthening institutional knowledge, practices and capacities for managing quality information has an impact on the quality of public policies, and enhances the capacity to report and monitor progress towards the SDG 16 targets in the countries.

» When information management is informed by a multidimensional, intersectional, intergenerational and gender perspective, it provides a broader understanding of the phenomena of violence, the causes and consequences and this allows for intervention strategies to be redesigned taking into account the most vulnerable populations, especially indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, women, girls and the LGTBIQ population.

1 Regional Adviser for Rule of Law, Justice, Security and Human Rights at UNDP Latin America and the Caribbean.
2 Coordinator of the INFOSEGURA Regional Project.
Implementing improvements along the information management chain, as well as enhancing its impact on citizen security policies and programs. Strategic planning and information management are fundamental to building safer societies.

Developing innovation and digitization processes, such as automated digital tools and integrated databases, using big data and real-time analysis. This is key for a renewal in the culture of information management.

Promoting open data policies in the institutions in charge of citizen security and justice by developing their portals and websites and systematically uploading data.

Inclusive citizen participation in spaces for collaborative construction of solutions enhances the capabilities of public and private organizations for information management, ecosystems, innovation and data science, interoperability, and open data portals, optimizing their capacity for decision making in the areas of security, justice and social cohesion.

Introduction

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has long endured the world's highest rates of violent crime, such as homicides and gender-based crimes. The recent Regional Human Development Report Trapped: High Inequality and Low Growth in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Analysis on Innovation in Citizen Security and Human Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean confirm a well-known condition in the region: With only 8% of the global population, the region accounts for 33% of the world's homicides, and 17 of the 20 countries with the highest homicide rates are Latin American.

Figure 1. Homicide Rate per 100,000 Inhabitants in LAC 2017–2018

While homicides have been declining steadily since 2015, enormous challenges persist for the trends to change in Central America. For instance, from 2010 to 2020 the number of femicides dropped steadily in Central America and the Dominican Republic, as shown in Figure 2. Nevertheless, a look at the country-level detail reveals cases such as El Salvador, Honduras and Belize, where homicide rates remained at more than 20 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2020 (See Figure 3).

Figure 2. Number of Homicides of Women in Central America and the Dominican Republic

Figure 3. In El Salvador, there has been a steady decline in the homicide rate since 2015, but the challenge remains...
population in LAC feels the least safe when going out on the street. Delving deeper into the intersectional analysis of the data, it becomes clear that there is a differentiated impact on women’s lives: Of the fifteen countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world, eight are in LAC. Furthermore, LAC has the highest rates of sexual violence worldwide when this crime is committed outside the couple and the second highest rate when the partner is responsible.

**Figure 4: Fear of becoming a victim of crime in Latin America 2007–2018**

![Fear of becoming a victim of crime](image)

Source: PNUD (2020) Análisis sobre innovación en seguridad ciudadana y derechos humanos en América Latina y el Caribe

Added to this is the use of violence as a political or public policy tool, especially in the context of elections, in addition to punitive discourse that was thought to have been obsolescent in our region. This situation severely limits sustainable development in the countries of the region, weakening their democracy and the quality of their governance. It is understandable, then, that citizen security is one of the priority issues on the regional agenda, as well as one of the main challenges for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals on the 2030 Agenda, particularly after the extensive crisis caused by the pandemic.

On the positive side, the approaches to citizen security in the countries of LAC have been shifting for almost three decades. Presently, citizen security is conceived as integral, with an emphasis on prevention, and based in the territories. This has made it possible to introduce the idea of citizen security into the public agenda from a multidimensional, human rights perspective and since it is a public good, it requires quality, transparency, efficiency and adaptation to the standards of a participatory democracy. This has triggered certain positive changes in legislation, institutional designs, policymaking and professional training processes.

**Citizen security as a human right, a public good and a fundamental condition for sustainable development**

Article 3 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* provides that “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”. Essentially, citizen security is a human right. It is also a public good, “with functional implications for security sector policies and institutional arrangements; finally, it is a fundamental condition for sustainable development, that is, an enabler without which it is impossible to sustain successful development strategies.” These three dimensions of citizen security are shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5. Three dimensions of citizen security**

![Three dimensions of citizen security](image)

Source: PNUD (2020) Análisis sobre innovación en seguridad ciudadana y derechos humanos en América Latina y el Caribe

As it is a public good, citizen security must be accessible to all the members of a society, without exception and its enforcement is in the purview of the authorities. This implies that policies and institutions need to be designed to incorporate the perspective of prevention, attention, control and punishment of crime. Influencing the conception of citizen security is key, it is a fundamental condition for sustainable development; that is, it enables development strategies to be successful.

---

4 Ibid
5 Ibid
6 Ibid
Characteristics of citizen security as a public good that must be people-centred

Citizen security as a people-centred public good has the following three distinctive characteristics: It is multidimensional, territorial and intersectoral.\(^8\)

It is multidimensional in that it refers to the complex interrelation of different factors that underlie the problems of crime and violence, and the dynamics that emerge. In short, crime and violence cannot and should not be explained simply as the result of individual attitudes, but as part of broader, more complex and multifaceted processes. Therefore, the issue needs to transcend the sphere of institutions in charge of control and sanctions, such as the police, justice administration systems and the penitentiary sector. Concrete action is required, through in intersectoral work combining the more traditional citizen security policies with other State policies, particularly social policies.

The second characteristic is that it is territorial, and this refers to the spatial conditions that demarcate and affect criminal phenomena. These call for modes of prevention that are anchored in a territorial approach, such as local, community and situational crime and violence prevention. Likewise, local governments, municipal police forces and local representatives of national or federal institutions are the key implementors of national policies.

Finally, security needs to be conceived from an intersectoral approach, so that it is able to bring together the representatives of multiple institutions and social sectors. In this regard, it is worth noting that the role of civil society is growing. This can be seen in the way they present their demands to public authorities, and their active inclusion in decision-making processes, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluating policies and programmes. Based on these elements, information is key to redefining the security services available to citizens so that they are person-centred.

That said, people-centred citizen security stems from the idea of human security, which is based on two components: “freedom from fear and freedom from want.”\(^9\) This means understanding security in two fundamental senses: First, moving from an exclusive emphasis on territorial security to a much broader emphasis on the security of the population; and second, shifting from weapons-based security to security through sustainable human development. In this sense, human security no longer focuses only on direct violence, rather, it is also watchful of the effects of indirect violence and subjective elements, such as the perception of insecurity and fear.

UNDP embraces this perspective of citizen security as a human right and a people-centred public good. In this sense, it is conceived as a process to establish, strengthen and protect the democratic civil order, eliminating or reducing the threats of violence in the population in a way that enables there to be safe and peaceful coexistence.

Evidence for action

It is crucial to strengthen the capacity for managing information on citizen security, justice and social cohesion, as this contributes to the design and monitoring of evidence-based, people-centred public policies with a human rights approach. This particularly includes: (i) strengthening institutional architectures for information management on citizen security from a gender and human rights perspective; (ii) implementing new technologies and innovation in processes and services; and, (iii) strategic communication and knowledge management.

The citizen security information management chain seeks the evolution, institutionalization and sustainability of the processes through four interrelated links that strengthen each other: Data production, multidimensional analysis, data use in public policy and strategic communication, with data as the basic ingredient in the recipe for security and the eradication of violence.

The exploration and implementation of innovation and digitization processes have been central in the effort to renew the culture of information management. Generating information and running analysis have become efficient and effective through the use of automated digital tools and integrated databases. The production of updated information and specialized analysis of citizen security has helped the new authorities to strengthen their information management capabilities and expedite their institutional response, a process that has been accelerated by the situation imposed by COVID-19.

The last decade has seen a decline in the homicide rate in Central America and the Dominican Republic. Between 2015 and 2020, there was a 51% reduction in homicides in the region, 48.5% fewer homicides of women and 51.5% fewer homicides of men. In 2021, the number in homicides in Central America and the Dominican Republic dropped 24% compared to 2019, the previous, pre COVID-19 year. The most significant reductions took place in El Salvador (-58%), Guatemala (-25%) and Belize (-20%). Similarly, there were 29% fewer violent deaths of women and 25% fewer deaths of men across the subregion between January and June 2021 and 2019 (See Figures 6 and 7).

---


9 Ibid. P. 27
This is partly the result of innovation in data collection with new technology-based processes and services. Databases were integrated to improve the multidimensional analysis of violence, some of the most representative examples are the Integrated Information System for Policies of Coexistence and Citizen Security in Honduras, the Integrated Information System for Violence Prevention (SIPREVI) in Guatemala, and the Belize Crime Observatory, among other processes and management tools implemented in six countries, with 45 government institutions and a variety of civil society organizations and academic institutions.

Implementing this technology helped streamline the exchange of information, promoting regional, joint and intersectoral work to generate multidimensional analysis, regional approaches on issues such as violence against women, multidimensional violence, comprehensive violence and human mobility. This is how we learned that of the fifteen countries in the world with the highest rates of femicide, eight are in LAC. In addition, evidence shows that the rate of femicides in Central America and the Caribbean was 1.52 per 100,000 women in 2020.10

In contrast, more than 819 women’s lives have been safeguarded between 2015 and 2020, exhibiting a downward trend in violence. Between 2018 and 2021, there have been 307 fewer homicides of women, from 838 in 2018 down to 531, in the first half of 2021.

The UNDP contributed to further the analysis of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Central America and the Dominican Republic generating gender-sensitive indicators, undertaking surveys on the prevalence of violence, regular publication of situational analysis, and carrying out specialized studies, such as the regional report on The Hidden Face of Insecurity: Violence against Women in Central America and the Dominican Republic. It was also able to put together a response to the violence against women and girls in the context of the pandemic, through a campaign promoting governmental care services. A campaign for the prevention of violence against women was promoted with the participation of public institutions, universities, the private sector, together with UNDP and other agencies of the System.

In Honduras, efforts focused on strengthening institutional capacities through specialized training programmes in information management on citizen security and gender, where the National Centre for Information on the Social Sector (CENISS) developed and implemented a training programme. Training programme content were subsequently adapted for the Belize Crime Observatory. In addition, an index for multidimensional monitoring of violence against women and girls was developed and a pilot was implemented. Periodic reports on VAWG were conducted to generate knowledge and awareness around this important issue.

A space built around active sharing of knowledge, such as regular analysis of the state of citizen security in the countries of Central America and the Dominican Republic, prepared in coordination with national counterparts, and various studies on the impact of violence on vulnerable populations, spotlighting the Analysis of Human Mobility, Development and Citizen Security, 2020, A look at youth.

---

10 INFOSEGURA (2021) Datos, enfoque de género y seguridad ciudadana in: infosegura.org/2021/03/10/datos-enfoque-de-genero-y-seguridad-ciudadana
exposed to violence in northern Central America from the perspective of vulnerability and human resilience. The hidden face of insecurity: Violence against Women in Central America and the Dominican Republic, these serve as inputs for reflection in the DatAcción webinars, moving from face-to-face to online meetings. DatAcción emerged with three products: DatAcción Webinar, a weekly online webinar with 3 series, 33 episodes, 2137 in attendance, 56% women, 44% men; and 80 high-level panellists. DatAcción Report, collecting and systematizing the information shared during the webinars; and DatAcción Highlight, social media briefs to draw attention to citizen security data. Also, a regional communication campaign to prevent violence against women, with local chapters in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic and Belize.

This has demonstrated the benefits of strengthening national capacities for information management, harmonizing and integrating databases generated by different sources and making them publicly available through open data portals that contribute to transparency and accountability. All this has prompted a shift in the vision of information management, from the view of an observatory to a broader and more complex multidimensional analysis.

Final reflections and recommendations

Work and lessons learned by INFOSEGURA, as well as the recommendations in the Analysis on innovation in citizen security and human rights in Latin America and the Caribbean, published in late 2020, are the basis for the following final reflections and recommendations on the importance of information in citizen security.

1. Investments in indicator development and data and information management require impact analysis and cost/benefit studies. This involves improving results-based management processes and designing minimum standards into public policies.

2. Implementing improvements along the information management chain, and gain deeper understanding of the impact it has on citizen security policies and programmes. A more, people-centred, coordinated and effective institutional framework requires innovations and technology for better data ecosystems.

3. Implementing innovation and digitization processes, such as automated digital tools and integrated databases, using big data and real-time analysis is key in renovating information management culture.

4. Promoting greater and more effective convergence of strategies, policies and actions between the social and citizen security sectors. Opening spaces for the collaborative construction of solutions has been successful.

5. Converting information into action, through practices that have a positive impact on those at the operational level of institutional management.

6. Expanding efforts to promote gender-sensitive security policies, so that they cover the entire public policy cycle, and encompass the members of decision-making bodies and those at the operational level of the security sector. In addition, of the fifteen countries in the world with the highest rates of femicide, eight are in LAC and, in 2020, the femicide rate in Central America and the Caribbean was 1.52 per 100,000 women.

7. Reducing violence and improving citizen security requires a multidimensional approach to address the multiple factors that complexify, reproduce and deepen these social problems. This essentially requires having quality information that has been properly analysed, used efficiently and disseminated in a timely manner within public offices and among citizens.

8. One of the impacts of the pandemic has been exacerbating many of the factors that generate different forms of violence, and fiscal constraints on public policy financing constitute some of the great challenges for the countries in the region. In this context, information is more relevant than ever, accelerating the achievement of the 2030 Agenda goals, in the effort to ensure that no one is left behind.