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on Crime Prevention and  
Criminal Justice**



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**Comprehensive strategies for crime prevention  
towards social and economic development**

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**Working paper prepared by the Secretariat**

*Summary*

The present working paper addresses crime prevention in the context of social and economic development and highlights the use of comprehensive strategies for the prevention of crime and victimization and the importance of evidence-based approaches in this regard. The paper describes measures taken by Member States to prevent and reduce crime in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goal 16. Specific attention is focused on effective strategies to prevent crime affecting children and youth and urban crime.

\* [A/CONF.234/1](#).



## I. Introduction

1. Socioeconomic conditions and social inequality play an important role in influencing whether or not certain individuals engage in criminal behaviour. In the Doha Declaration on Integrating Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice into the Wider United Nations Agenda to Address Social and Economic Challenges and to Promote the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels, and Public Participation, adopted by the Thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, Member States expressed their commitment to implementing comprehensive policies and programmes that foster socioeconomic development, with a focus on the prevention of crime, including urban crime, and violence. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes numerous crime- and violence-related targets, which points to the importance for social and economic development of reducing crime and violence.

2. Following the Thirteenth Crime Congress, Member States adopted several resolutions that drew attention to specific aspects of crime prevention. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2016/18, entitled “Mainstreaming holistic approaches to youth crime prevention”, adopted in 2016, urged Member States to mainstream crime prevention strategies aimed at children and youth into all relevant social and economic policies and programmes, including those addressing education, health, civic participation, socioeconomic opportunities, information and communications technology and public safety and security, in order to protect children and youth from social marginalization and exclusion and to reduce their risk of becoming victims or offenders.

3. Two years later, the General Assembly adopted resolution [73/185](#), entitled “The rule of law, crime prevention and criminal justice in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals” in which it encouraged Member States to implement comprehensive crime prevention policies based on an understanding of the factors that contribute to crime and to address such factors in a holistic manner. In the same resolution, the Assembly stressed that social development and the promotion of the rule of law, including the fostering of a culture of lawfulness, should be integral elements of strategies to foster crime prevention and economic development. It also encouraged Member States to promote crime prevention and social inclusion programmes and employability schemes for vulnerable members of society, including victims and those released from prison. Building on the above-mentioned resolutions, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, at its twenty-eighth session, in 2019, adopted resolution 28/1, entitled “Strengthening the engagement of all members of society in crime prevention”, in which it specifically called for the integration of crime prevention considerations into national plans towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and emphasized the role of the private sector and civil society in crime prevention, as well as in programmes to assist victims of crime and reduce recidivism, including those involving non-custodial measures.

4. In its resolution 74/170, entitled “Integrating sport into youth crime prevention and criminal justice strategies, adopted in 2019, the General Assembly expressed its conviction about the importance of preventing the involvement of children and youth in criminal activities by supporting their development and strengthening their resilience to antisocial and delinquent behaviour. In that regard, the Assembly encouraged the wider use of sports-based activities to promote primary, secondary and tertiary prevention of youth crime.

5. In the discussions at the regional preparatory meetings for the Fourteenth Crime Congress,<sup>1</sup> it was underlined that a comprehensive crime prevention strategy was key to social and economic development, and the importance of evidence-based strategies, as well as cross-sectoral and inter-agency cooperation, was highlighted. During the discussions, the need for social and economic inclusion, together with educational,

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<sup>1</sup> See [A/CONF.234/RPM.1/1](#), [A/CONF.234/RPM.2/1](#), [A/CONF.234/RPM.3/1](#), [A/CONF.234/RPM.4/1](#) and [A/CONF.234/RPM.5/1](#).

recreational and employment opportunities, in particular for young people, to prevent crime was repeatedly stressed, as was the need to involve citizens in prevention through community-based policing and other measures. Attention was given to practical initiatives that equip children and youth with the knowledge, values and skills necessary for them to contribute to building peaceful, just and inclusive societies, and the use of sport was mentioned in that regard. The need for a gender-sensitive approach to crime prevention was repeatedly raised, as was the need to empower women in order to address sexual and gender-based violence and domestic violence. Moreover, attention was drawn to the evolving nature of urban crime, which requires specialized and targeted prevention approaches with a focus on youth and gang violence. Participants also identified environmental factors that could have an impact on crime rates in specific urban settings.

6. Against this background, the present working paper is aimed at contributing to the deliberations of Member States at the Fourteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice by further exploring the above-mentioned topics.

## II. Crime prevention and social and economic development

7. The relationship between crime and economic and social development presents several dimensions. Crime is often considered a major impediment to economic growth and development, as it tends to increase economic uncertainty, discourage long-term investment and new employment opportunities and erode the rule of law. At the same time, lack of economic growth in connection with high economic and social inequality tends to increase levels of crime and violence. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) *Global Study on Homicide 2019*, for example, draws attention to the links between youth unemployment and levels of violence and homicide.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, crime places a heavy financial burden on the criminal justice system and results in high costs to victims, as well as hidden costs to society at large, such as costs relating to health and lost productivity.

### A. Regional differences

8. Although low levels of crime and violence generally have a positive impact on socioeconomic development, for example, by increasing trust and social cohesion, incentivizing private sector investment and facilitating children's continued school attendance, the connections between economic development and crime and violence are not the same everywhere. In countries in Europe and Asia, differences in homicide rates can be explained mostly in terms of the level of socioeconomic development, albeit with some exceptions,<sup>3</sup> but in many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, crime rates have remained high or have even increased, in spite of reductions in poverty and income inequality. Indeed, the contrast between increasing violence and improvements in social equity highlights the complexity of the relationship between economic development and crime and violence.<sup>4</sup> Recognizing that the correlation between inequality and homicide rates is not exact, the *Global Study on Homicide 2019* explains that, while high rates of homicide can have a negative impact on economic growth, rising prosperity alone does not necessarily lead to lower levels of violence, "for if the benefits of economic growth are not evenly distributed, those who miss out may well decide to resort to violent and criminal activities." The study points to increased levels of inequality, coupled in the Americas with the wide availability of firearms and the proliferation of gangs and organized crime groups and in Africa with the existence of armed conflicts and related

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Study on Homicide 2019*.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Chioda, *Stop the Violence in Latin America: A Look at Prevention from Cradle to Adulthood*, Latin American Development Forum Series (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2017).

instability, as a potential explanation for the fact that economic growth in both regions has been accompanied by rising homicide rates.

## **B. Social and economic costs associated with crime and violence**

9. Costs resulting from crime and violence are high, as the health and social consequences take a heavy economic toll on countries, in particular developing countries. The *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development*, for example, showed that the pace of poverty reduction in countries affected by major violence was, on average, nearly one percentage point slower per year than in countries not affected by violence.<sup>5</sup>

10. According to the *Global Status Report on Violence Prevention 2014*, the direct costs associated with violence include those relating to the provision of treatment, mental health services, emergency care and criminal justice responses, whereas the indirect costs relate to economic losses linked to the fact that victims of violence are more likely to experience spells of unemployment and absenteeism, and to suffer health problems that affect job performance. A recent study of the crime situation in 17 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean involved the collection and analysis of data on the social and economic costs of crime, including the costs of victimization in terms of the lost quality of life and the foregone income of the prison population, the costs incurred by the private sector on security services and the costs incurred by Governments in terms of public spending on the police, the judiciary and the prison system. Based on a conservative estimate, the study concluded that the average costs of crime amounted to 3.55 per cent of gross domestic product in the Latin American and Caribbean region. In comparison, the costs of crime in a number of European countries and in Australia, Canada and the United States of America were substantially lower, ranging from less than 1.4 per cent in Germany to 2.75 per cent in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

## **C. Preventing corruption**

11. In the regional preparatory meetings, participants emphasized the need for a comprehensive strategy to prevent corruption, which was considered to be a major obstacle to social and economic development and the upholding of human rights (see [A/CONF.234/RPM.5/1](#)). Corruption reduces the ability of Governments to provide services to citizens. It undermines the rule of law and security and is often instrumentalized by those involved in crime, to further their goals. What is more, corruption hampers the effective delivery of justice, health, education and other social services that are key to reducing, preventing and responding to crime. Accountability and integrity in the criminal justice system, including in law enforcement, has a major effect on community trust, the level of crime reporting by citizens and the ways in which citizens cooperate with the police and can facilitate their work.

12. In its resolution 5/4, the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption highlighted the importance of the development and implementation of effective, coordinated anti-corruption policies, consistent with article 5 of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, and encouraged States parties to integrate anti-corruption policies in broader crime prevention and criminal justice reform strategies and public sector reform plans. In addition to anti-corruption policies, the Convention against Corruption also contains provisions calling for preventive anti-corruption bodies, the application of codes of conduct for public officials and the strengthening of systems for ensuring the integrity of civil servants.

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<sup>5</sup> World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development* (Washington, D.C., 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Laura Jaitman, ed., *The Costs of Crime and Violence: New Evidence and Insights in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington, D.C., Inter-American Development Bank, 2017), figure 2.5.

During the meeting of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on the Prevention of Corruption held from 4 to 6 September 2019, the Working Group reviewed good practices and initiatives related to the development, evaluation and impact of anti-corruption strategies. Participants in the meeting emphasized that national anti-corruption strategies should be ambitious but realistic in what could be achieved during the time designated for the implementation of the strategies. Specific priorities identified for incorporation into such strategies included codes of ethics and strengthening integrity in the public service, value-based education, legislative reform, public procurement, transparency and access to public information, digitalization, open government, anti-corruption academies and training centres, awareness-raising activities, corruption risk assessments, codes of corporate governance and prevention of corruption in the private sector. Sector-specific and stakeholder-specific strategies in relation to education, young people and women were also described (see [CAC/COSP/WG.4/2019/3](#)).

## **D. Crime prevention and progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 16**

13. As underlined in the report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, rising income and wealth inequality threaten to erode social cohesion, entrench insecurity and dampen productivity growth, thereby undermining efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals ([E/2019/68](#), para. 16). Progress towards the targets of reducing violence and crime and ensuring equal access to justice for all under Sustainable Development Goal 16 remains uneven. The report points, for example, to the fact that the global number of intentional homicides per 100,000 people increased from 6.0 to 6.1 between 2015 and 2017; that various forms of violence against children persist; and that there has been an increase in the detection of victims of trafficking in persons, which may point to enhanced efforts by authorities to identify victims but also to a larger trafficking problem ([E/2019/68](#), para. 37). Homicide is both a reasonable proxy for violent crime and a robust indicator of levels of violence within States. UNODC estimates that a total of 464,000 deaths were caused by intentional homicide worldwide in 2017. The largest share of the total (37 per cent) was registered in the Americas, followed by Africa (35 per cent). Asia accounted for less than a quarter (23 per cent), while Europe (4.7 per cent) and Oceania (0.2 per cent) accounted for the smallest shares.<sup>7</sup>

14. Well-planned crime prevention strategies not only prevent crime and victimization, but also contribute to sustainable development.<sup>8</sup> Prevention is key to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 in terms of reducing violence, crime and injustice. Effective prevention requires actors in the justice system to collaborate with those in other sectors to address the root causes of disputes and avert conflict, violence and human rights abuses. In relation to crime and violence, this means that it is necessary to move from punitive measures to evidence-based prevention that reduces levels of violence, in particular against women, children, and vulnerable groups.<sup>9</sup> It also means that sectors that interact with offenders and victims, such as social workers, prosecution authorities and defence attorneys, should be included in the implementation of prevention programmes, to ensure that communication is effective and that referrals of individual cases to appropriate service providers run smoothly and are in the best interest of the concerned individuals.

15. Out of the 47 countries that presented the results of their voluntary national reviews at the High-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council in 2019, many reported on the crime

<sup>7</sup> UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide 2019*. For more information on crime patterns and trends, including homicide, see the report of the Secretary-General on the state of crime and criminal justice worldwide ([A/CONF.234/3](#)).

<sup>8</sup> Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime (Economic and Social Council resolution 2002/13, annex).

<sup>9</sup> Task Force on Justice, *Justice for All: Final Report* (New York, Center on International Cooperation, 2019).

situation within their borders, including the challenges they faced in addressing and preventing violence against children and women (E/HLPF/2019/5). As regards prevention, a number of countries presented information on efforts they had undertaken in that area.<sup>10</sup> For example, Chile noted that it had created a dedicated institution for crime prevention and had published a decree concerning an advisory council for coordination on issues related to the prevention and control of organized crime. South Africa reported that one of the policy frameworks for achieving the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 16 included a white paper adopted by the Cabinet of South Africa in 2016 that emphasized the need for an integrated approach to safety, crime and the prevention of violence. The paper proposed a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach and reaffirmed that building safer communities was a collective responsibility. The review by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland highlighted specific prevention efforts, including programmes implemented by the Violence Reduction Unit in Scotland, such as the programmes Medics Against Violence and No Knives Better Lives, as well as Equally Safe, a strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls. Israel highlighted prevention initiatives in connection with efforts to achieve Goal 16, including the establishment of an authority aimed at preventing violence, crime and antisocial behaviour and addressing drug and alcohol abuse. Specific programmes were highlighted, such as those focusing on domestic violence, parent patrols and cooperation between local authorities and police, as well as the use of closed-circuit television. Community policing was mentioned as a component of crime prevention in a number of the reviews, including those of Ghana, Guyana and the United Republic of Tanzania. In addition to community policing, Guyana reported on crime prevention initiatives such as youth entrepreneurship and empowerment programmes, as well as on efforts to promote the social reintegration of offenders, alternative sentencing and the provision of legal aid. Turkey outlined several components of its policy frameworks aimed at advancing Goal 16 whereby prevention was mentioned in connection with the prioritization of preventive and protective security services, as well as efforts to guide young people towards sports, culture, the arts and volunteer activities in order to protect them from violence and steer them away from harmful habits.

### III. Evidence-based prevention

16. Crime prevention comprises strategies and measures that seek to reduce the risk of crimes occurring, and their potential harmful effects on individuals and society, including fear of crime, by intervening to influence their multiple causes.<sup>11</sup> Authorities need reliable data on crime and related risk factors to develop and implement effective prevention strategies, policies and programmes.<sup>12</sup> On the basis of the public health model, a distinction can be made between primary crime prevention (universal measures targeting broad population groups), secondary crime prevention (focusing on population groups at risk of offending) and tertiary crime prevention (focusing on known offenders to prevent recidivism). Prevention can address different institutional and other settings, including families, schools, communities, labour markets, specific places, police agencies and courts and correctional facilities.<sup>13</sup> In the context of the regional preparatory meetings for the Fourteenth Crime Congress, it was stressed that there was a growing need for evidence-based crime prevention strategies and new methodologies for data collection.

17. The call for an increase in the number of evidence-based programmes is not new. The number of crime prevention programmes that are considered “evidence-based” is

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, “Voluntary National Reviews”, Voluntary National Reviews database. Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>.

<sup>11</sup> Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime.

<sup>12</sup> For more information on statistics, data collection and evaluation, see A/CONF/234/8.

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence W. Sherman and others, eds., *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention* (New York, Routledge, 2002).

limited because the rigorous evaluations required to assess the effectiveness of such programmes take time and tend to be costly. As a result, policymakers and service providers may choose to operate programmes or services that have some data supporting their effectiveness but that have not been vetted by clearing houses or undergone the extensive evaluations required to meet a strong evidence standard. Moreover, programmes thus chosen may not be adapted to the specific needs of the population to which they are applied.

### A. Sustaining and scaling up programmes

18. A 2017 study of systematic reviews in seven areas of crime prevention found that, in the areas of developmental and social prevention, community intervention, situational prevention, problem-oriented policing, sentencing, correctional intervention and drug treatment intervention, there was consistent evidence of practices that work.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the study stressed that not all efforts were effective and that criminologists, practitioners and policymakers must carefully survey the evidence to identify effective programmes. Too often, studies lacked the necessary guidance for practitioners and policymakers on how to sustain and scale up effective programmes and achieve population-level impact. In this regard, it can be argued that more emphasis needs to be placed on integrating qualitative data into systematic reviews to clarify the mechanisms underlying what works and that more cost-benefit analyses need to be conducted.<sup>15</sup> Cost-benefit analyses are key, in particular for policymakers, in determining whether programmes warrant implementation and investment. Nevertheless, although the value of more comprehensive assessments is increasingly recognized in criminal justice settings, they remain rare.<sup>16</sup>

### B. Prevention research in the global South

19. Many crime prevention programmes have been developed and evaluated in high-income countries, often with considerable resources. However, in developing settings, such programmes and experiences may not always be directly applicable to or appropriate for implementation. The number of crime prevention studies from developing countries that use rigorous scientific methods is limited and the research is often largely descriptive or qualitative, and quantitative results that are required to contribute to an evidence base are lacking. More financial and human resources are required to study crime problems and conduct systematic reviews, in order to inform decisions and set priorities for research in developing countries, with a view to bridging the research gap.

20. Fortunately, in recent years there has been a shift in focus from determining what works in crime prevention to understanding how projects work. This has resulted in greater awareness of the need to tailor and adapt prevention strategies to the context of individual countries and regions. The economic and social circumstances of a country, its level of development and its capacity, as well as its political history, are all factors that will influence the needs of that country, the crime problems it faces, and the feasibility and appropriateness of preventive interventions.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> David Weisburd and others, “What works in crime prevention and rehabilitation: an assessment of systematic reviews”, *Criminology and Public Policy*, vol. 16, No. 2 (May 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Jacqueline Mallender and Rory Tierney, “Economic analyses”, in *What Works in Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation: Lesson from Systematic Reviews*, David Weisburd, David P. Farrington, and Charlotte Gill, eds., Springer Series on Evidence-based Crime Policy (New York, Springer, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> *Handbook on the Crime Prevention Guidelines: Making Them Work*, Criminal Justice Handbook Series (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.IV.9).

## IV. Children and youth

21. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development envisions bringing benefits to all people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized. In terms of safety and security, special attention must be paid to children<sup>18</sup> and youth<sup>19</sup> as they are particularly vulnerable to drug use, crime and victimization, including gang-related crime, violent extremism and sexual exploitation. Often, a youthful population, low levels of education and high rates of unemployment, in combination, constitute risk factors in pushing young people into delinquent and violent behaviour, including joining organized criminal structures and becoming involved in collective violence.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, by virtue of their age, energy level and learning abilities, young people are key agents of change in creating a better future and have great potential to advocate on behalf of themselves and their communities.

### A. Developmental prevention

22. In efforts to prevent juvenile delinquency, emphasis should be placed on preventive policies that facilitate the successful socialization and integration of all children and young persons, including their proper personal development.<sup>21</sup> With regard to reducing youth crime and violence against children, experts point to the effectiveness of developmental or early prevention whereby resources are directed towards supporting the healthy development of children and young people, and individuals, families, schools or communities are mobilized to address the conditions that give rise to antisocial behaviour and crime before they appear.<sup>22</sup> Developmental prevention initiatives typically target different levels of the ecology of human development and focus, for example, on parenting and early child support, anti-bullying initiatives, or individual and social skills training.

23. At the regional preparatory meetings for the Fourteenth Crime Congress, participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of education and skills training for young people, including through the use of sport, to make them more resilient to crime.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, life and social skills development programmes help young people increase their self-awareness, regulate their emotions, establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships and empathize with others. Such programmes are aimed at enabling young people to deal constructively with the demands of daily life, stressors and interpersonal conflicts, and have made an impact in reducing aggressive behaviour and violence.<sup>24</sup>

24. As regards measures to prevent and respond to violence against children, the WHO publication entitled *INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence against Children*<sup>25</sup> serves as a useful tool for Member States. The publication, developed with support from UNODC, is based on available evidence and includes seven strategies, several of which relate to developmental prevention, such as changing restrictive gender and social norms, development of safe environments, parent and caregiver support, and education and life skills.

<sup>18</sup> As defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, “children” refers to anyone under the age of 18.

<sup>19</sup> For statistical purposes, the United Nations, without prejudice to any other definitions made by Member States, defines “youth” as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years (see A/36/215, annex).

<sup>20</sup> UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide 2019*.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (the Riyadh Guidelines), (General Assembly resolution 45/112, annex).

<sup>22</sup> Ross Homel and Lisa Thomsen, “Developmental crime prevention”, in *Handbook of Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, 2nd ed., Nick Tilley and Aiden Sidebottom (Abingdon, Oxon, United Kingdom, Routledge, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> See A/CONF.234/RPM.1/1, A/CONF.234/RPM.2/1 and A/CONF.234/RPM.3/1.

<sup>24</sup> WHO, *Preventing Youth Violence: An Overview of the Evidence* (Geneva, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> WHO and others, *INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence against Children*, (Geneva, 2016).

## B. Mobilizing youth

25. Young people are more likely than people in other age groups to be involved in criminal activities, either as perpetrators or victims, which is why effective crime prevention can benefit from the engagement of youth. Empowering youth and utilizing their resourcefulness to create solutions together with decision makers are key for reducing violence in communities. According to the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, young persons should be involved in the development and implementation of plans and programmes aimed towards socialization and integration.<sup>26</sup> More concretely, young people can be consulted by policymakers and practitioners in the design and implementation of specific crime prevention policies and programmes at the national and local levels. Young people can play an active role in community-based initiatives, for example, to address bullying in schools, mobilize crime prevention ambassadors, participate in peer-to-peer engagement programmes or organize neighbourhood drug and crime prevention events and awareness-raising activities. There are cases in which youth have been engaged as volunteers by crime prevention and criminal justice actors such as the police to participate actively in identifying the causes of violence and crime and to collaborate in creating prevention strategies for their communities or to help policymakers identify alternative approaches to interacting with young people.

26. In preparation for the Fourteenth Crime Congress, UNODC conducted a short online survey to ask young people about their involvement in crime prevention and promoting a culture of lawfulness.<sup>27</sup> Although only a small number of young people responded, the answers received showed that youth from different regions consider social media platforms and the Internet as useful tools for engaging them in making societies more resilient to crime, providing information on crime and its consequences and consulting them on innovative ways to prevent crime.

27. A similar observation was made during a workshop organized by UNODC and UN-Habitat in October 2019 that brought together coordinators of youth centres and other community actors in Kenya to discuss youth empowerment in the context of local crime prevention efforts. Indeed, social media and the Internet may offer tools to bring youth and government actors, including the police, closer together in prevention efforts and to facilitate the communication of youth perspectives on crime.

28. At the international level, youth forums, including in the context of the Crime Congress, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, provide a platform for young people to engage in a dialogue with United Nations Member States and share ideas on how to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including with regard to the prevention of crime, violence and drug use.

## C. Calls for further action

29. In its resolution 2016/18, entitled “Mainstreaming holistic approaches to youth crime prevention”, the Economic and Social Council highlighted the importance of a multisectoral approach and called for the development of prevention policies that meet the varying needs of young persons and safeguard their well-being, including through cooperation and coordination among all appropriate levels of government and relevant stakeholders within civil society. In its resolution 74/170, on integrating sport into youth crime prevention and criminal justice strategies, the General Assembly called upon Member States to strengthen community-based support measures for youth to address risk factors of crime and violence, and encouraged Member States to provide sport and recreational facilities and programmes. As requested in that resolution, UNODC held an expert group meeting in December 2019 to analyse and

<sup>26</sup> The Riyadh Guidelines.

<sup>27</sup> See also the background paper on education and youth engagement as key to making societies resilient to crime, prepared for workshop 3 of the Fourteenth Crime Congress (A/CONF.234/10).

compile a set of best practices to be presented to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice for consideration at its twenty-ninth session, as well as to the Fourteenth Crime Congress for its information.<sup>28</sup>

30. In preparation for the high-level political forum on sustainable development, held in 2019, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and the International Development Law Organization, in cooperation with the Government of Italy, held a conference on Sustainable Development Goal 16, on the theme “Peace, Justice and Inclusive Societies”, in Rome from 27 to 29 May 2019, which brought together experts to discuss progress towards Goal 16. At the conference, experts concluded that children represented the most vulnerable population and needed special attention, both with regard to inclusion in terms of access to services and with regard to prevention in terms of exposure to violence and exploitation. They stressed that youth should not be treated as a homogeneous group and that decision-making on youth-related policies and programmes should involve the direct participation of young people. In terms of prevention, participants in the meeting highlighted that a life course approach to preventing and ending violence was needed, and that such an approach should include education for a culture of peace and non-violence, and should equip children and youth with conflict resolution and life skills.

#### **D. The work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime**

31. Further to the relevant United Nations standards and norms on crime prevention,<sup>29</sup> UNODC provided advisory services to requesting Member States seeking to develop local or national strategies, policies and programmes to prevent crime and victimization among youth.

32. Following the adoption of the Doha Declaration, which stressed youth participation and recognized young people as important agents for change in crime prevention efforts, UNODC launched a global youth crime prevention initiative under the Global Programme for the Implementation of the Doha Declaration that uses sport as a tool for strengthening the resilience of at-risk youth, including those in marginalized communities. Through partnerships with Governments, sports organizations and civil society, the Office promotes sport-based initiatives that strengthen the social and individual skills of young people and provides them with information about the risks associated with crime, violence and drug use. To that end, a dedicated curriculum has been piloted to train coaches, teachers and others working with youth in the context of sport and sport-based activities. In addition, UNODC is providing support to Member States in their efforts to integrate sport initiatives in crime prevention and safety plans and initiatives, and to non-governmental organizations in their efforts to promote sport as a way to address the risk factors of crime and violence, including violence against women and girls.

33. As part of the Education for Justice initiative under the Global Programme for the Implementation of the Doha Declaration, the Office has developed educational material to promote a culture of lawfulness. The initiative addresses primary and secondary education through the development of materials that promote values such as integrity and tolerance and provides teachers and youth with tools to help advance those values, including games and apps. At the tertiary level, the initiative supports academics teaching in the fields of UNODC-mandated areas, including corruption, integrity and ethics, as well as crime prevention and criminal justice. More than 90 university-level modules are available online.<sup>30</sup>

34. With a view to supporting family and parenting skills, including in low-resource settings, the Office has been implementing initiatives around the globe that not only

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<sup>28</sup> See A/CONF.234/14 and E/CN.15/2020/14.

<sup>29</sup> In particular, Economic and Social Council resolution 2002/13, annex, and General Assembly resolution 45/112, annex.

<sup>30</sup> See also A/CONF.234/10.

focus on drug use prevention but also target risk factors of crime and violence. The initiatives include, for example, the family skills training and school-based life skills training activities supported by the global project on the prevention of drug use, HIV/AIDS and crime among young people through family skills training programmes in low- and middle-income countries.

35. Through its Global Programme on Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, UNODC supports Member States in the application of the United Nations Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.<sup>31</sup> The Office has been supporting the development of strategies and programmes to prevent violence against children and has developed specialized tools and expertise, including in the area of preventing the recruitment and exploitation of children by terrorist and violent extremist groups. The Global Programme focuses on holistic preventive approaches, working with families, communities and the protection sector to avoid the stigmatization of and discrimination against children. The programme is also aimed at preventing violence against children in conflict with the law, through juvenile justice reform efforts and measures to reduce the use of deprivation of liberty.

36. Further to the priorities outlined in Youth2030: the United Nations Youth Strategy, UNODC, in cooperation with other United Nations entities, seeks to amplify, where possible, the voices of youth to promote a peaceful, just and sustainable world; support young people's greater access to quality education, including non-formal education; protect and promote the rights of young people; and support their civic and political engagement, including to enable them to become catalysts for peace, security and crime prevention.

## V. Urban crime prevention

37. Cities are hubs for innovation and economic productivity and significantly influence global GDP levels and growth, accounting for between 55 and 85 per cent of global GDP.<sup>32</sup> As cities often experience numerous crime and violence problems, including robbery, drug and human trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence, gang-related violence and organized crime, it is important to devote sufficient attention to effective and innovative crime prevention efforts in urban settings. Such efforts should address the most applicable causal factors and the neighbourhoods where those factors are most present.

38. As the *Global Study on Homicide 2019* confirms, rapid urban growth is in itself not a driver of higher homicide rates. However, the presence of organized crime, income inequality, and poor governance and infrastructure in rapidly urbanizing areas does lead to higher crime rates. Other factors include high population density, a higher prevalence of mental illness and substance dependence than in non-urban areas, and the potential for anonymity. An integrated approach to urban crime prevention and, more broadly, to sustainable urban development, requires cities and national authorities to ensure effective governance in urban areas, foster the resilience of local communities and develop outreach strategies that meet the needs of the most vulnerable members of society. Building resilience requires innovative thinking about who may be able to contribute to changing behaviour in and bolstering the intervention capacities of communities. Indeed, cities are well placed to understand the risk factors of crime and violence in their communities, including the risk factors associated with violent extremism, and to develop multi-stakeholder initiatives to address risks and strengthen protective factors.

<sup>31</sup> General Assembly resolution 69/194, annex.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) *World Cities Report 2016: Urbanization and Development—Emerging Futures* (Nairobi, 2016).

39. The importance of an inclusive approach to prevention in the context of cities was highlighted by Member States during the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), in 2016. The New Urban Agenda,<sup>33</sup> adopted at Habitat III, calls for integrating inclusive measures for urban safety and the prevention of crime and violence and for engaging relevant local communities and non-governmental actors in developing urban strategies and initiatives. The New Urban Agenda contributes to the implementation and localization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and provides new impetus for countries and the international community at large to develop inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities.

## A. Place-based interventions

40. Crime and violence in cities tend to disproportionately affect the most disadvantaged urban communities, in particular those in which local authorities and law enforcement agencies experience challenges in fulfilling their public security role. For States to achieve safety at the local level, the delivery of basic public services, including access to justice in all communities, must be ensured. Analysing the related challenges of rapid urbanization, poverty and violence, a recent publication on reducing urban violence in the global South points to the impact of social cohesion and social inclusion on the level of crime and violence in neighbourhoods and the fact that social exclusion and marginalization have been driving an increase in violent youth gangs, for example in West Africa.<sup>34</sup>

41. As observed in the *Global Study on Homicide 2019*, participation in organized crime and gang activities, as well as involuntary exposure to the violence associated with such activities, are important drivers of the crime affecting young people in various countries in Central and Latin America. Gang violence is intensifying in some European cities, and although the overall homicide rate in Europe remains much lower than that observed in the Americas, there are concentrated pockets of violence in urban areas in Europe where the homicide risk among some groups of young people has increased significantly.

42. Because risk factors of crime and violence often converge in specific locations in neighbourhoods, place-based interventions in the context of situational crime prevention may help reduce crime. For such interventions to be successful, local governments need a comprehensive assessment of the situation in communities, drawing on appropriate disaggregated data, and, where available, a knowledge base of good practices and effective interventions. An analysis of the links between crime and other factors, for example, demography, housing, income or social conditions, is required to enhance the understanding of the relationship between location and crime. In terms of crime research and analysis, it is important that quantitative data are supplemented by qualitative data, for example, data acquired from interviews and focus groups, to provide in-depth information about particular crime problems, neighbourhoods or hard-to-reach populations, including information about personal perceptions of safety.

43. In the New Urban Agenda, Member States committed themselves to, inter alia, engaging relevant local communities in developing urban strategies and initiatives, including in relation to the prevention of crime and violence. Crime prevention initiatives that contemplate community-building strategies have traditionally been aimed at empowering citizens and local communities to participate in decision-making and networking. However, crime prevention initiatives that focus only on empowering communities to engage in prevention, without introducing communities and citizens to evidence-based programmes and approaches, are likely to fail, especially in

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<sup>33</sup> General Assembly resolution 71/256, annex.

<sup>34</sup> Jennifer Erin Salahub and others, eds., *Reducing Urban Violence in the Global South: Towards Safe and Inclusive Cities*, Routledge Studies in Cities and Development Series (Abingdon, Oxon, United Kingdom, Routledge, 2019).

high-crime, socially disadvantaged areas, as they do not effectively target the risk factors.<sup>35</sup> In this regard, the “Communities that Care” approach has been referred to as a way to effectively engage local stakeholders, including youth, in prevention and to select, implement and evaluate evidence-based interventions that fit prioritized community needs and resources, and contexts.<sup>36</sup>

## B. Women’s safety in cities and public spaces

44. For women and girls, urbanization is often associated with greater access to education and employment opportunities and safe, voluntary family planning, and increased independence. Yet, all around the world, women and girls continue to face sexual harassment and other forms of violence in urban public spaces. In many cities, a large majority of women and girls have experienced some form of violation, including on buses and trains, on streets, at markets, in parks and in many other places, as highlighted in the context of the Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces initiative of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), which promotes comprehensive approaches to preventing and responding to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls in different settings.<sup>37</sup> As it is women, rather than men, who most depend on public transport to meet their mobility needs, violence against women and girls in transportation constitutes a major concern in many cities because it has an impact on women’s access to health care, education and jobs.

45. Risk factors related to violence against women at the community level include harmful gender norms that uphold male privilege and limit women’s autonomy. Addressing the risk posed by these harmful norms requires programmes that support non-violence, promote women’s empowerment and help men and women better understand and deconstruct unhealthy manifestations of masculinity. Other causal factors in communities include high levels of poverty and unemployment and high rates of crime and violence, as well as the availability of drugs, alcohol and weapons. In order to ensure effective action, women should be fully involved in discussions on the development and implementation of crime prevention policies and programmes, including those aimed at urban renewal and creating safe public spaces, including transportation facilities. Moreover, the training of law enforcement personnel and staff of various public services on gender-related topics in their area of responsibility is key for prevention.

46. UNODC, together with UN-Women and the World Health Organization, took part in the development of the framework entitled “RESPECT Women: Preventing violence against women”. The framework guides policymakers and practitioners in designing, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating interventions aimed at preventing and responding to violence against women.<sup>38</sup> Launched in May 2019, it outlines seven interrelated intervention strategies derived from the word “respect”: relationships skills strengthened; empowerment of women; services ensured; poverty reduced; environments made safe; child and adolescent abuse prevented; and transformed attitudes, beliefs and norms. The framework calls for the strengthening of enabling environments by, inter alia, ensuring political commitment, supporting the work of women’s organizations, strengthening policies, laws and institutions and

<sup>35</sup> Rebecca Wickes, Ross Homel and Renee Zahnow, “Safety in the suburbs: social disadvantage, community mobilisation and the prevention of violence”, in *Australian Violence: Crime, Criminal Justice and Beyond*, Julie Stubbs and Stephen Tomsen, eds. (Sydney, Federation Press, 2016), pp. 210–229.

<sup>36</sup> Communities that Care is a coalition-based prevention system that has been shown to promote healthy youth development and reduce youth behaviour problems community-wide (Abigail A. Fagan and others, *Communities that Care: Building Community Engagement and Capacity to Prevent Youth Behavior Problems* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018)).

<sup>37</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), “Safe cities and safe public spaces: global results report 2017” (October 2017).

<sup>38</sup> WHO, document WHO/RHR/18.19.

promoting gender equality, and through research and capacity-building. This new tool will be instrumental in guiding States' efforts to better prevent gender-based violence and create safer cities for women and girls.

### C. The role of the police in prevention

47. The police and other law enforcement institutions are often seen as key actors in crime prevention, including urban crime prevention. Effective policing requires a gender-sensitive and human rights-based approach to law enforcement, built on consent rather than force. Where members of the public largely agree with the laws in force and trust those appointed to enforce them, they will be more cooperative, which will lead to more effective law enforcement. There are several mutually reinforcing actions to strengthen legitimacy: carrying out law enforcement functions in a fair, effective and non-discriminatory manner and in line with human rights; establishing good contacts with the communities; being responsive to people's and communities' needs and involving them in the establishment of policies and priorities; adopting a problem-oriented approach; and acting with integrity and accountability.

48. Proactive policing strategies, including problem-oriented and community-oriented policing, are aimed at preventing crime and working with the community to reduce crime and violence. Community-oriented policing, which was addressed at all of the regional preparatory meetings for the Fourteenth Crime Congress, can be described as a law enforcement philosophy that involves the local community and includes problem-oriented policing. Although there is no unified approach to this type of policing and countries implement it in different ways, a common feature is that it actively engages citizens in police efforts to define, control and prevent crime and related problems.

49. Research shows that problem-oriented policing has a modest but statistically significant impact on reducing crime and disorder.<sup>39</sup> Systematic reviews of community-oriented policing as such are lacking and therefore its effect on crime reduction is still unclear. However, there are studies that point to a strong correlation between this type of policing on the one hand and the legitimacy of the police and the law-abiding behaviour of the population on the other.<sup>40</sup>

50. With regard to the role of law enforcement in prevention, police-initiated diversion programmes are a promising solution for diverting children accused of committing an offence from the juvenile justice system. Such programmes require close cooperation between the police, community members and other stakeholders such as the protection system and prosecutors. The Halt programme in the Netherlands has shown good results in this regard.<sup>41</sup>

51. Recent advances in technology have made a clear impact on policing in many countries, including in relation to community-oriented and "hotspot policing", whereby enforcement efforts are focused on very small geographical areas in which crime is concentrated. Examples include the use of geographical information systems to map crime patterns and risk factors, closed-circuit television surveillance, body-worn cameras, the use of virtual reality for training purposes and communication with citizens through social media, as well as facial recognition and the use of algorithms to determine potential threats and predict crime.<sup>42</sup>

52. Technological advances have the potential to increase police efficiency and enhance police communication and information-sharing practices and analytical

<sup>39</sup> David Weisburd and others, "The effects of problem-oriented policing on crime and disorder", *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, vol. 4, No. 1 (March 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Lawrence W. Sherman and others, *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising: A Report to the United States Congress* (Washington, D.C., United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Available at [www.halt.nl](http://www.halt.nl).

<sup>42</sup> See also A/CONF/234/8.

capacities. However, some of the new and emerging technologies may also pose challenges, including with respect to privacy and data protection, which seems to suggest that research on the use of new technologies for policing should continue in order to ensure informed decision-making in this area. In addition, policies and regulatory frameworks on the use of technology should be in line with international human rights norms and standards. Moreover, making the public aware of the scale and scope of devices and programmes is important.

#### **D. The work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime**

53. The work of UNODC related to urban crime prevention is steered by the relevant United Nations standards and norms, in particular the Guidelines for cooperation and technical assistance in the field of urban crime prevention,<sup>43</sup> and contributes to the United Nations system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development,<sup>44</sup> which guides how entities of the United Nations system should coordinate their efforts to assist Member States in meeting the challenges of rapid urbanization, with a view to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and other global agendas. The United Nations System-Wide Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements,<sup>45</sup> adopted by the United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme in 2019, constitute a further reference for UNODC assistance in terms of prevention in relation to safety in cities.

54. UNODC assists Member States in developing knowledge-based policies and programmes on crime prevention at the local level, including by supporting participatory governance systems to ensure that the needs of all, including marginalized populations, are not neglected. Through the provision of technical tools and advisory services, the Office supported cities in Latin America, Central Asia and Africa in recent years in conducting local safety audits to generate information on crime, violence, victimization and related risk factors, combining quantitative and qualitative data, including data collected in focus group discussions with community stakeholders. The data collected and analysed subsequently informed the development of local safety and crime prevention action plans and interventions that also reflect the specific safety needs of women. UNODC support for community-based crime prevention efforts, such as its youth crime prevention initiatives, is typically provided in cooperation with city-level authorities.

55. UNODC has supported countries in implementing police reform programmes and has published relevant tools, including to strengthen cooperation between local communities and law enforcement authorities. The UNODC-Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights *Resource Book on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement* provides essential guidance on human rights-based policing and good practices in preventing the excessive use of force.

56. In 2019, the Office launched the Global Programme on Strengthening Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Responses to Violence against Women. Among the outcomes of the programme was the development of an evidence base for use in prevention efforts.

57. In order to strengthen its work on safety in cities, UNODC has developed a new global programme on urban safety and good governance that is aimed at developing holistic, integrated strategies and interventions to reduce crime and violence at the city level, bringing together expertise from different divisions and thematic units of the Office.

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<sup>43</sup> Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/9, annex.

<sup>44</sup> See CEB/2019/4/Add.5.

<sup>45</sup> HSP/HA.1/Res.2, annex.

## VI. Conclusions and recommendations

58. With a view to promoting comprehensive crime prevention strategies in support of social and economic development, the Fourteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice may wish to consider the following recommendations:

(a) Member States should promote the United Nations standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice and develop appropriate mechanisms to establish and implement effective and comprehensive national and local crime prevention strategies involving all relevant sectors, including the education sector, health and social services, and criminal justice institutions, as well as civil society and the private sector;

(b) Member States should strengthen efforts towards social and economic inclusion with a view to preventing crime, including by securing educational, recreational and employment opportunities for young people;

(c) Member States should invest in early and developmental crime prevention programmes aimed at promoting the well-being and healthy development of citizens, with a focus on children and youth;

(d) Member States should develop policies and programmes that empower young people and utilize their resourcefulness to strengthen government efforts aimed at reducing crime and violence;

(e) Member States should invest in the prevention of violence against children as an approach to preventing their future involvement in crime as victims or offenders, and to reduce the costs of crime and violence;

(f) In the context of crime prevention, Member States should develop policies and programmes to increase access to justice for all and to bring criminal justice systems closer to citizens, including through community-oriented policing and by strengthening partnerships with local communities and building trust among them;

(g) Member States should promote the use and scaling-up of evidence-based prevention programmes that are tailored to national or local contexts;

(h) Member States should adopt a gender-sensitive approach to crime prevention to better prevent and reduce forms of crime and violence that affect women in particular, including sexual, gender-based and domestic violence, by ensuring political commitment and leadership, implementing laws and policies that promote gender equality, investing in women's organizations, allocating resources to prevention efforts and addressing the multiple forms of discrimination faced by women;

(i) Member States should promote the responsible use of technology in crime prevention, including by ensuring that the relevant policies and regulatory frameworks are in line with international human rights standards;

(j) To prevent urban crime, Member States should identify and address risk and protective factors related to crime and violence in local communities and engage and empower citizens, including youth, in the design and implementation of evidence-based prevention programmes;

(k) UNODC, through its global programmes dealing with different aspects of crime prevention, including the Global Programme for the Implementation of the Doha Declaration, the Global Programme on Addressing Prison Challenges, the global programme on urban safety and good governance, the Global Programme on Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and the Global Programme on Strengthening Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Responses to Violence against Women, should continue to provide technical assistance to Member States, upon their request, in the areas addressed by those global programmes, for example, by developing technical tools and supporting the implementation of evidence-based programmes focusing on the global South.