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GLOBAL STUDY ON HOMICIDE

Executive summary

2019

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME
Vienna

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2019

UNODC
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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PREFACE

The *Global Study on Homicide* is a search for solutions. By bringing together the available data, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime seeks to shed light on different phenomena, from lethal gang violence and the role of firearms to links with inequalities and gender-related killings, and in this way support targeted action. I hope that the research and analysis contained in the study are used in this spirit – not to designate "murder capitals" but to learn, understand and strengthen prevention.

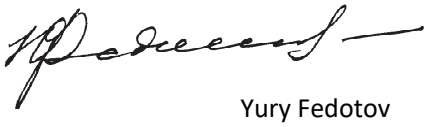
Criminal activity is responsible for many more deaths worldwide than armed conflict and terrorism combined. Unless the international community takes decisive steps, targets under Sustainable Development Goal 16 to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates by 2030 will not be met.

The Americas continue to report high homicide rates. Young men are especially at risk, with a homicide rate for men aged 18 to 19 estimated at 46 per 100,000 – far higher than the risk faced by their peers in other regions. Firearms are also involved far more often in homicides in the Americas than in other parts of the world.

By contrast, Europe has seen a decline in the homicide rate by 63 per cent since 2002 and by 38 per cent since 1990. The rate in Asia has fallen by 36 per cent since 1990. Data collection overall has improved since the previous *Global Study on Homicide*, but there remain serious gaps in the availability of reliable data for African countries. There are also indications that homicide is underreported in the official statistics in Pacific countries.

This study offers particular insights into the gender-related killing of women and girls. "Femicide" represents just a small percentage of the overall number of homicides, but our analysis indicates that the drivers of this type of lethal violence require tailored responses. Killings carried out by intimate partners are rarely spontaneous or random, and should be examined as an extreme act on a continuum of gender-related violence that remains underreported and too often ignored.

The *Global Study on Homicide 2019* also documents successes in preventing and addressing lethal violence. In particular, the study offers examples of effective community-based interventions in settings afflicted by violence, gangs and organized crime. These accounts show that with targeted interventions backed by sustained engagement and trust between communities and law enforcement, bringing down homicide rates is possible.



Yury Fedotov

Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCEPT OF INTENTIONAL HOMICIDE

Intentional homicide is the ultimate crime and has ripple effects that go far beyond the original loss of human life. For homicide also blights the lives of the victim's family and community, who may therefore be described as "secondary victims". It creates a violent environment that has a negative impact on society, the economy and government institutions. Homicide is not limited to people living on the margins of society; rather, it can affect all people, irrespective of their age, sex, ethnicity and socioeconomic background. Since homicide has an impact on people from all walks of life, all facets of homicide need to be analysed.

The study of intentional homicide is relevant not only because of the gravity of the offence, but also because intentional homicide is one of the most measurable and comparable indicators for monitoring violent deaths. Because of its lethal outcome, homicide is particularly amenable to temporal (longitudinal) and cross-national (geographic) comparisons: it tends to have greater definitional specificity than other crimes in different historical and national contexts.[1] Homicide is an act that meets with virtually universal condemnation, and homicide statistics are accordingly considered to be relatively reliable and valid – both at the national level and for longitudinal and cross-national comparisons.[2] As a readily measurable indicator, homicide is both a reasonable proxy for violent crime and a robust indicator of levels of violence within States.[3]

When attempting to measure the scale of homicide it is important to have a clear definition that provides guidance on which specific acts of killing are to be considered intentional homicide. Certain contextual challenges may arise when intentional killings have to be disentangled from other killings during situations of collective violence, such as armed conflict or civil unrest.

The International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS),[4] developed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), provides a framework for the definition and classification of unlawful killings, both in conflict and non-conflict situations. Homicide is defined in ICCS as "unlawful death inflicted upon a person with the intent to cause death or serious injury". This statistical definition contains three elements that characterize the killing of a person as "intentional homicide":

1. The killing of a person by another person (objective element)
2. The intent of the perpetrator to kill or seriously injure the victim (subjective element)
3. The unlawfulness of the killing (legal element)

For recording purposes, all killings that meet the criteria listed above are to be considered intentional homicides, irrespective of definitions provided by national legislations or practices. Killings as a result of terrorist activities are also to be classified as a form of intentional homicide.

ICCS also provides a statistical framework for disentangling homicides from other conflict-related deaths. When applying this framework and aggregating the various forms of lethal victimization perpetrated globally, it transpires that a relatively small share is attributable to conflict deaths. The greatest burden of lethal victimization ultimately stems from homicidal violence.

Among the various forms of violent death, the core element of intentional homicide is the complete liability of the perpetrator, which differentiates it from killings related to armed conflict and war, self-inflicted death (suicide), killings due to legal interventions and justifiable homicide (such as self-defence), and from deaths caused by reckless or negligent actions, which were not intended to take a human life (non-intentional homicide).

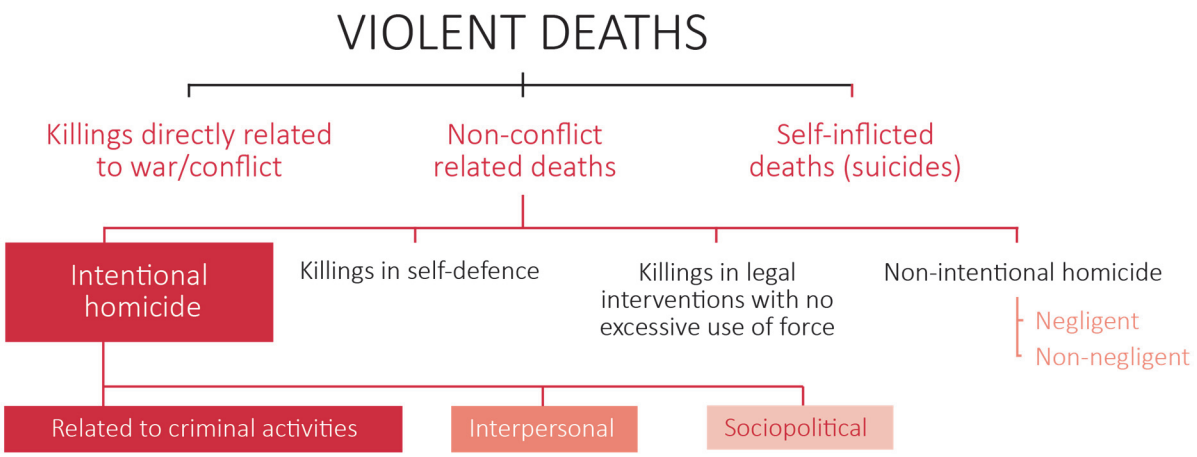
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[1] Johnson, B. D., Van Wingerden, S. and Nieuwbeerta, P., "Sentencing homicide offenders in the Netherlands: offender, victim, and situational influences in criminal punishment", *Criminology*, vol. 48, No. 4 (November 2010), pp. 981–1018.

[2] Marshall, I. H. and Summers, D. L., "Contemporary differences in rates and trends of homicide among European nations", *Handbook of European Homicide Research: Patterns, Explanations, and Country Studies* (New York, Springer, 2012).

[3] UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide 2013* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 14.IV.1).

[4] UNODC, *International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS): Version 1.0* (Vienna, 2015).



Source: UNODC.

Various circumstances, motivations and relationships can act as driving forces of homicide, and they are often overlapping and multifaceted. Although it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between the different elements that drive homicide, the *Global Study on Homicide* uses a classification of homicide into three main typologies: homicide related to interpersonal conflict, homicide related to criminal activities and homicide related to sociopolitical agendas.

By improving understanding of the underlying patterns and trends related to homicide at the global, regional and national levels, this study can support governments in their efforts to address root causes and enhance public health and criminal justice responses to violence. This aim is also enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals, target 16.1 of which reads: "Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere", while the associated indicator 16.1.1 is defined as: "Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age". A summary of the interplay between the Sustainable Development Goals and homicidal violence is provided below.

Summary of the interplay between homicidal violence and the Sustainable Development Goals



Poverty is a risk factor associated with violent crime and victimization at both the individual and national level. At the individual level, people may resort to violent crime as a means of survival. At the national level, a shrinking economy may be accompanied by reduced investment in law enforcement systems, leading to a state of lawlessness, in which citizens are more exposed to violent crime. High levels of violence can also drive property values down and undermine business growth, thus exacerbating poverty, which can in turn lead to further violence. Large-scale violence hinders efforts to reduce poverty.

Target 1.4 …access to basic services, ownership and control over land…

Insecure land tenure and access to land in the context of an inadequate legal framework that does not enforce individual property rights can create disputes and produce a high level of violence.



Homicide is among the leading causes of death among young people (aged 15 to 29) in some countries and, in general, results in millions of years of life being lost annually. High levels of violence, including homicide, put a heavy strain on public health services, particularly in developing countries where resources are already scarce. Moreover, mental health issues are more common in countries with comparatively high levels of lethal violence, which places a further burden on public health services. On the whole, a high level of violence shortens life expectancy significantly.



High levels of homicide and violence in general can have a negative impact on schooling and educational outcomes. Because of the diminished economic opportunities faced by young people who fail to receive a high-quality education, they are more likely to engage in delinquent and violent behaviour, which can ultimately even lure them into organized criminal structures. Education in both formal and informal settings is a key element in reducing violence because it helps to strengthen key life skills that build resilience to crime and victimization, and also to increase employment opportunities, which act as a protective factor against crime and violence.



High and persistent levels of violence are a threat to achieving gender equality. Societies with pronounced gender inequality tend to be characterized by higher levels of interpersonal violence against women, including lethal violence. Conversely, the empowerment of women has been shown to be accompanied by a decrease in the level of intimate partner violence. Greater autonomy and independence, when also combined with a higher social status, help to protect women from the risk of homicide.



Lethal violence results in both direct and indirect monetary costs for society and can impede economic growth. Sustained economic growth can improve economic conditions and access to health and social services, and thus reduce some of the risk factors associated with a higher level of violence. An increase in the proportion of young people who are not economically active (not in employment, education or training) is linked to an increase in levels of homicide.



Countries with greater income inequality are more likely to have higher homicide rates than countries with less inequality. Economic developments that exacerbate income inequality both within and between countries can foster criminal violence. Sociopolitical inequality, notably unequal access to resources, is known to be a root cause of violent behaviour. Marginalized people are more likely to become victims of violence, which makes their efforts to enjoy equal rights even more arduous. Unequal access to education and health services has also been found to be linked to higher levels of homicide, as have higher infant mortality rates.

Target 10.7…facilitate orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people…

There is some evidence pointing to a zero or negative correlation between homicide and migration at the macro level, whereas other findings suggest that they are positively correlated. Migration may therefore increase or decrease levels of crime depending on specific national and subnational contexts, which in turn may either hinder or facilitate the integration of migrants in host countries. For example, migration can sometimes reduce aggregate levels of crime, including violent crime, by increasing labour market opportunities for both native- and foreign-born populations



Although cities provide opportunities, jobs and services for their inhabitants, they are also rife with direct and indirect risks of violence. A poorly managed high population density, high levels of income inequality, high prevalence of mental illness and drug dependence, the potential for anonymity, and the existence of gangs and organized crime groups are among the factors that increase those risks in urban areas. On the other hand, cities can offer protection against violence because they tend to be more affluent, have higher policing levels and provide better access to medical services and educational facilities than non-urban areas. Such protective factors can offset the risk factors mentioned earlier, but it is worth emphasizing that every city, and indeed every neighbourhood, has unique characteristics that shape and influence homicide rates.





Conflict over resources has always been a major driver of violence, both at interpersonal and national level. Climate scientists estimate that changes associated with the global increase in temperatures and other forms of environmental degradation will greatly exacerbate violent conflicts in the future. High temperatures have been independently associated with violent aggression, but potentially more important are the effects that climate change could have on the economy and migration.



There is a clear link between prevalence of the rule of law and levels of homicidal violence. Strengthening the rule of law and making criminal justice systems fairer and more effective can prevent violence by reducing recidivism, serving as a deterrent to violent behaviour, and promoting trust in public authorities and values that increase social cohesion. A high level of homicide can place an additional burden on criminal justice systems with already limited resources, and is one of the factors behind prison overcrowding, depending on specific national contexts. Measures that increase the efficiency of criminal justice systems – notably by improving access to legal aid, eliminating inhuman prison conditions, avoiding excessive and lengthy pre-trial detention, and reducing the degree of impunity of perpetrators – can bring down homicide rates. Conversely, a low homicide rate can help maintain effective and fair criminal justice institutions.

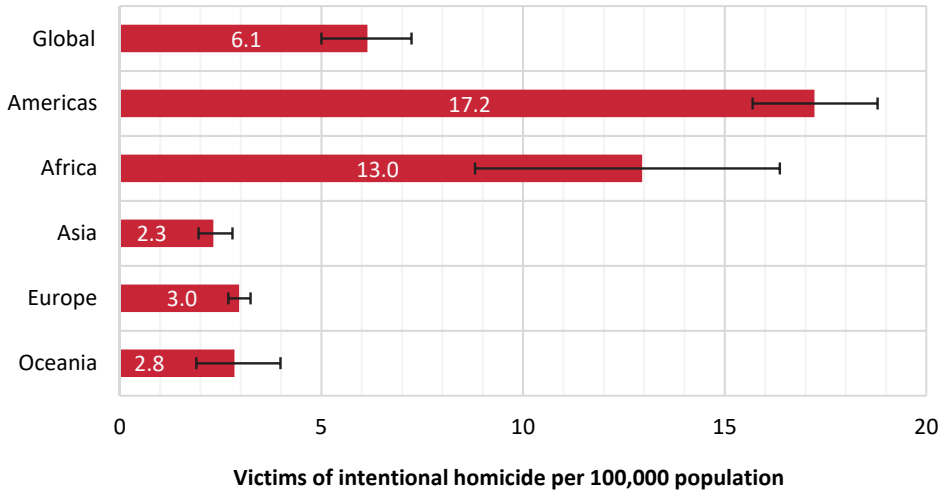
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Latest trends

Homicide rates are falling, but not quickly enough to achieve the relevant targets under Sustainable Development Goal 16

The overall risk of suffering a violent death as a result of intentional homicide has been declining steadily for a quarter of a century. In 2017, there were 6.1 homicide victims per 100,000 population worldwide, compared with a rate of 7.4 in 1993. While gaps still remain in terms of the quality and availability of national data, these estimates are based on the latest and most comprehensive data submitted by Member States to UNODC up to 2017.

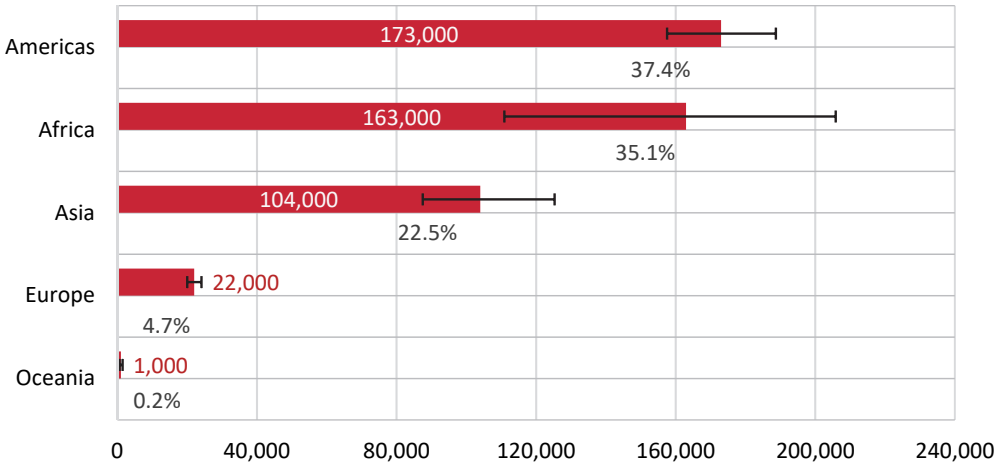
Homicide rate (victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population), by region, 2017



Source: Estimates based on UNODC homicide statistics.
Note: Error bars represent the regional/global sum of lower and upper estimates at the national level.

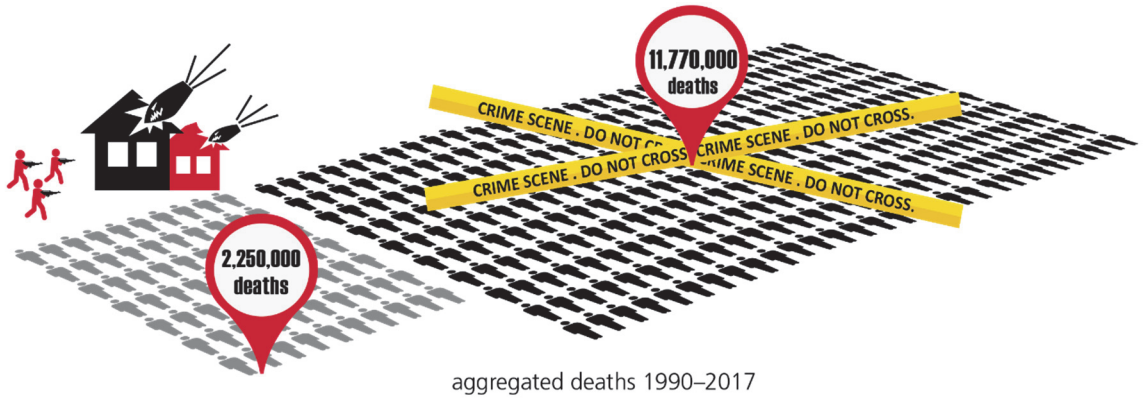
However, the global homicide rate is calculated as a proportion of the population and it has declined only because the global population has risen. This means that the increase in the global population has been higher than the increase in the overall number of homicide victims recorded worldwide. The overall number of people killed in homicides increased from 362,000 in 1990 to 464,000 in 2017.

Total number of homicide victims, by region, 2017



Source: Estimates based on UNODC homicide statistics.
Note: Error bars represent the regional sum of lower and upper estimates at the national level.

Crime kills far more people than armed conflict



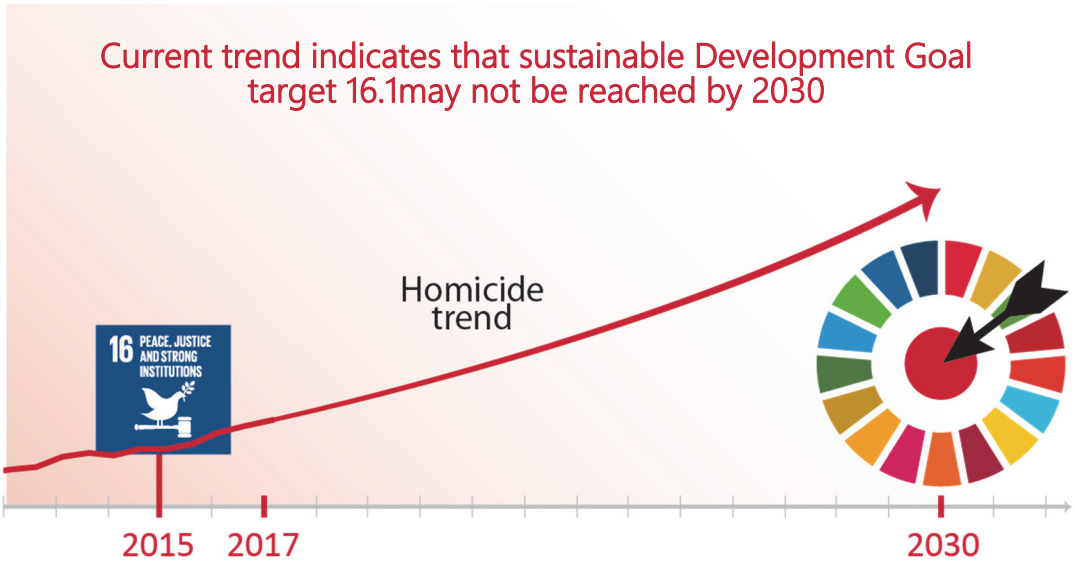
aggregated deaths 1990–2017

Criminal activity causes many more deaths than conflicts and terrorism combined. The 464,000 victims of homicide surpass by far the 89,000 killed in armed conflicts and the 26,000 fatal victims of terrorist violence in 2017. Organized crime alone can be a significant source of lethal violence; since the start of the twenty-first century, organized crime has resulted in roughly the same number of killings as all armed conflicts across the world combined. It is estimated that an average of roughly 65,000 killings every year were related to organized crime and gangs over the period 2000–2017, and that up to 19 per cent of all homicides recorded globally in 2017 were related to organized crime and gangs.

Organized crime kills as many people as all armed conflicts combined



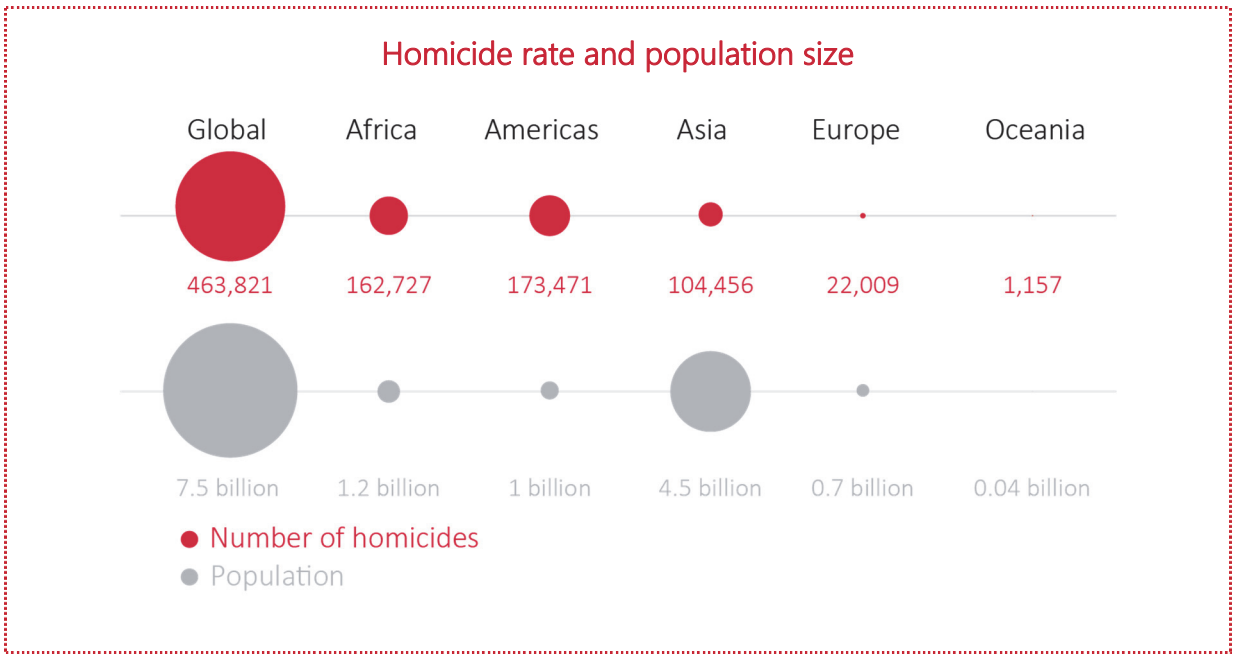
Between 2015 and 2017 the total number of homicide victims worldwide increased by 4 per cent, or around 19,000 victims. If this trend continues, target 16.1 (“significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere”) under Sustainable Development Goal 16, which was set in 2015, will not be met by 2030.



Risk of becoming a victim of homicide varies widely according to region

The 2017 global homicide rate masks dramatic regional variations. Countries in the Americas reported 173,000 victims of intentional homicide – 37 per cent of the global total in a region that accounts for only 13 per cent of the world's population. The homicide rate of 17.2 victims per 100,000 population in the

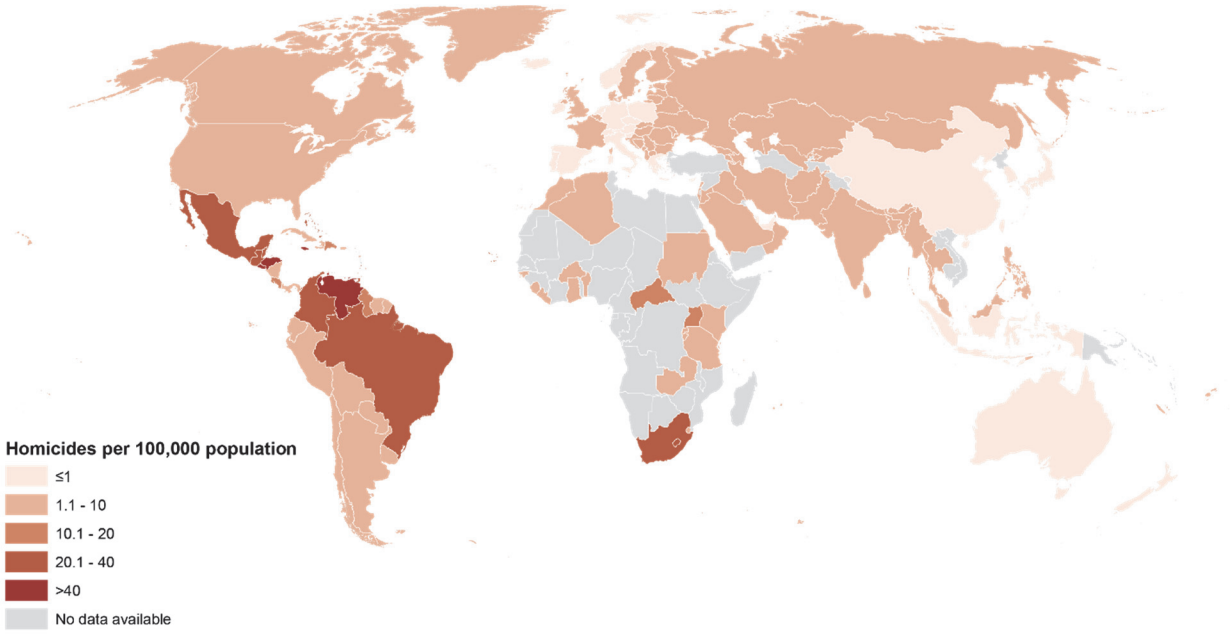
Americas was the highest recorded in the region since reliable records began in 1990. Africa was the only other region with a homicide rate exceeding the global average, with 13.0 victims per 100,000 population, or 163,000 victims in total.



Source: Estimates based on UNODC homicide statistics.

By contrast, the homicide rate in Europe was 3.0 per 100,000 population. There were 22,000 homicide victims in Europe, 5 per cent of the global total in a region accounting for 10 per cent of the global population. The lowest regional rate of homicide in 2017 was reported in Asia, with 104,000 victims representing a rate of 2.3 per 100,000 population. Asia, which contains 60 per cent of the global population, accounted for 23 per cent of total homicide victims worldwide.

Homicide rate, by country or territory, 2017

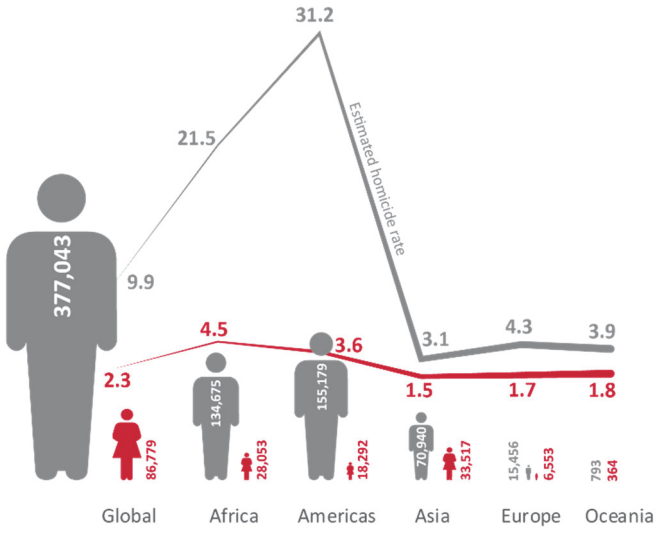


The boundaries and names shown and the designation used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dashed lines represent undetermined boundaries. The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. The final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.

Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

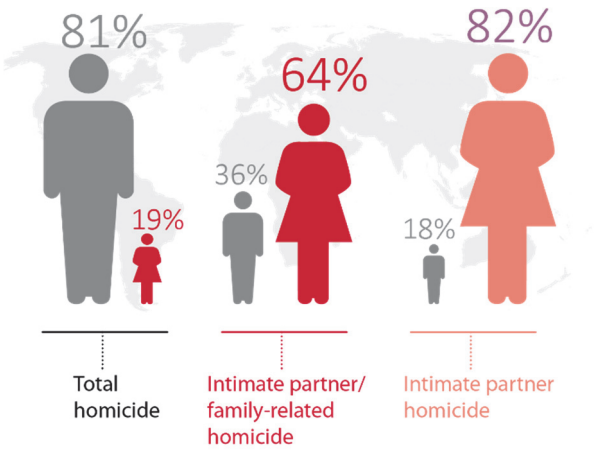
Killing of women by intimate partners or family members is rising

Homicide victims, by sex and region (rates and counts), 2017



Some 87,000 women and girls were intentionally killed in 2017, a decrease from 2012. The share of women killed by intimate partners or other family members, however, rose from 47 per cent of all female homicide victims in 2012 to 58 per cent in 2017, and the overall number who lost their lives to this type of homicide rose from 48,000 victims in 2012 to 50,000 in 2017. The home remains the most dangerous place for women, who continue to bear the heaviest burden of lethal victimization as a result of inequality and gender stereotypes.

Although women and girls account for a far smaller share of victims of homicide in general than men, they bear by far the greatest burden of intimate partner/family-related homicide, and intimate partner homicide.



Number of children killed in homicides has remained stable for a decade

Children aged 14 years or under make up a small share of the total number of homicide victims recorded worldwide. Thus, in 2017 some 21,540 children in that age group were killed in homicides, which is less than 5 per cent of the global total for that year. The trend appears to be broadly stable, with data from the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems suggesting that roughly 21,000 children in this age group have lost their lives in homicides each year since 2008.

Globally, the risk faced by children aged 14 years or under of falling victim to homicide has not changed significantly: the homicide rate for girls stood at 0.9 per 100,000 in both 2008 and 2017, while the rate for boys fell from 1.3 in 2008 to 1.2 in 2017.

In Europe, the risk faced by children has decreased considerably in recent years – for boys aged 14 or under, the overall rate dropped from 2.0 in 2008 to 1.4 in 2017, while for girls in the same age group it fell from 1.2 to 0.8 over the same period. Notably, the homicide rates for both boys and girls aged 0 to 14 years recorded in Europe were higher than the global average.

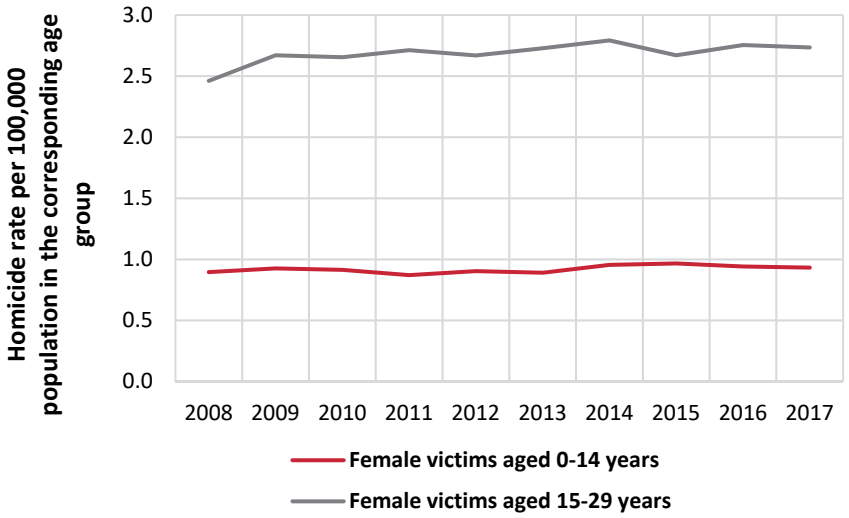
In the Americas, a slight increase in the homicide rate for boys aged 14 and under was recorded – from 1.6 in 2008 to 1.7 in 2017. For girls in the same age group, the homicide rate in 2017 was 1.0, the same level recorded in 2008.

Homicide rate of males aged 0–14 years and 15–29 years, worldwide, 2008–2017



Source: Estimates based on UNODC homicide statistics.

Homicide rate of females aged 0–14 years and 15–29 years, worldwide, 2008–2017



Source: Estimates based on UNODC homicide statistics.

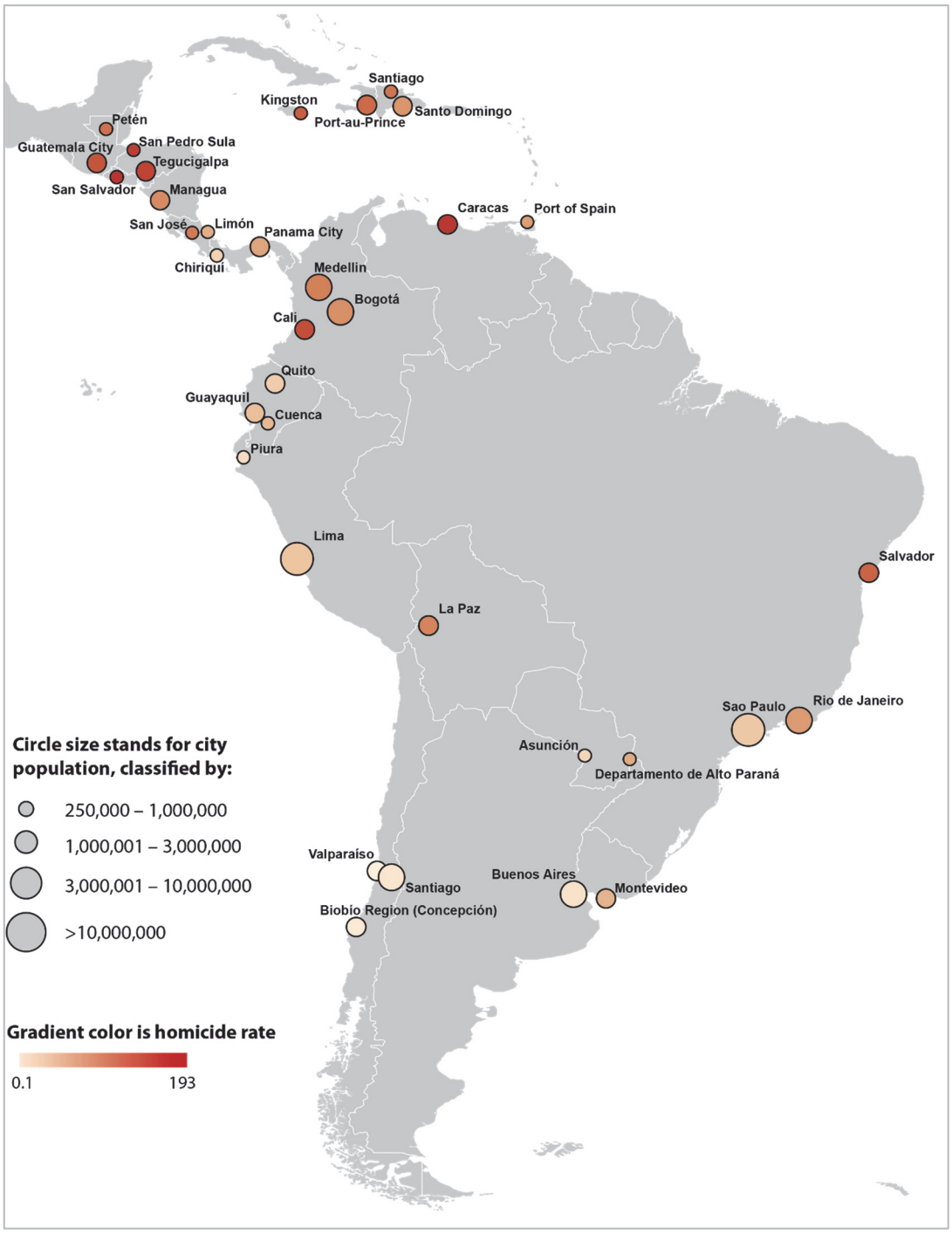
Some cities in the Americas have registered falling homicide rates even though national rates have risen

UNODC analysis of trends in 68 cities across 66 countries shows an average 34 per cent drop in homicide rates between 2003 and 2016 in those cities, compared with a 16 per cent decrease in the corresponding national rates. In the Americas, the difference in trends between urban and national homicide rates is even more striking. Over the same period there was an average drop of 29 per cent in the 17 largest cities, while national homicide rates rose by 2 per cent. These figures suggest that the increases in homicidal violence reported in some countries in the Americas have happened outside the big cities.

Journalists are increasingly targeted outside conflict zones

The number of journalists killed each year between 2007 and 2017 fluctuated from a low of 46 in 2008 to a high of 124 in 2012, according to estimates by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The vast majority were local journalists and most of the killings took place in countries experiencing armed conflict. However, more than half of the 80 journalists killed in 2017 lost their lives in countries not affected by armed conflict as such.

City homicide in Central America and South America



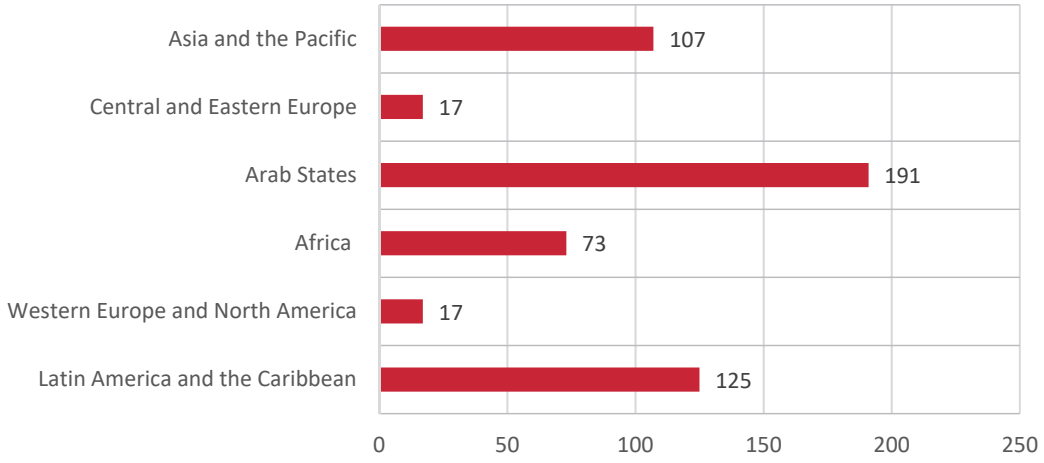
Cities with a population smaller than 250,000 are not displayed on the map. The boundaries and names shown and the designation used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

Reflecting the recent shifts in war zones, the largest share of killings in 2017 was recorded in Asia and the Pacific, which accounted for 40 per cent of the total. In 2016, the most dangerous geographical area for journalists had been the Arab States, where 34 per cent of that year's total number of victims lost their lives. Those States include Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, all three of which were experiencing armed conflicts in 2016 and 2017. Overall, the UNESCO figures show that journalists faced a slightly lower risk in the period 2015–2017 than they did in the period 2012–2014. Fourteen fewer journalists were killed in the period 2015–2017 than in the earlier three-year period – a drop of 5 per cent. This contrasts with the situation for aid workers, who faced a slightly increasing risk between the same two periods. Data from

the Aid Worker Security Database show that the number of aid workers killed rose by 1 per cent from 2012–2014 to 2015–2017.

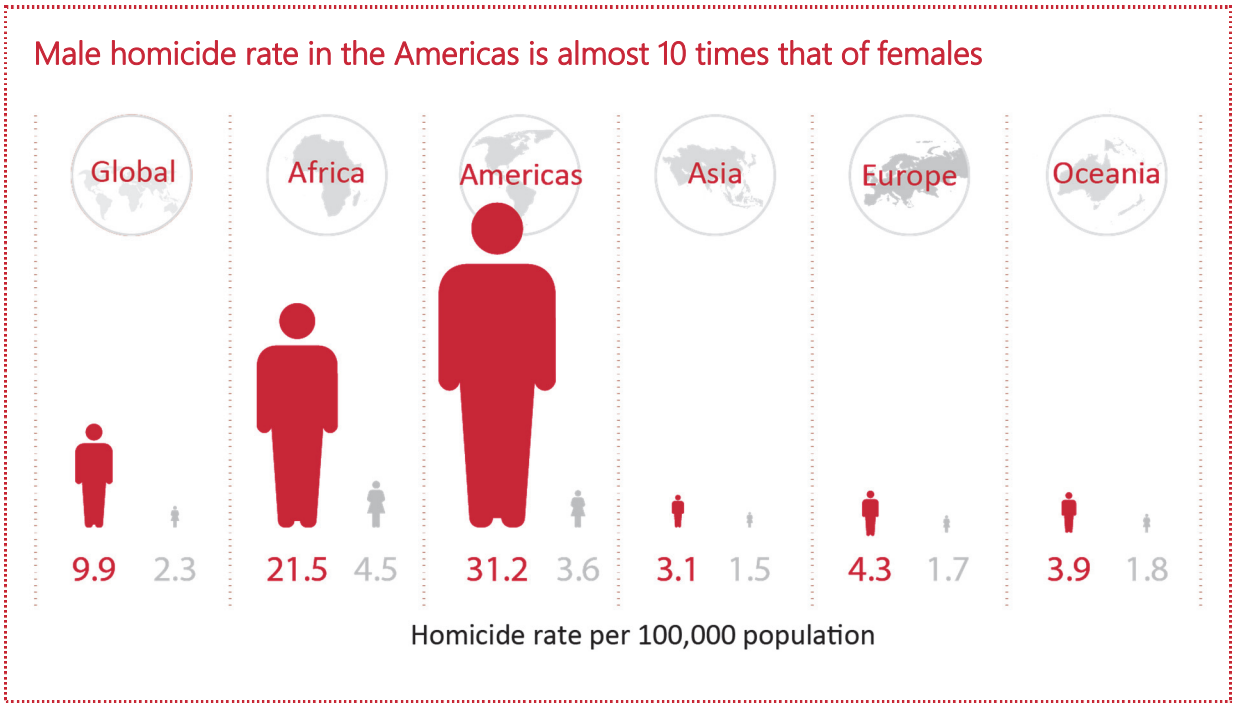
Number of journalists killed, by region, 2012–2016



Source: UNESCO and University of Oxford, *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: 2017/2018 Global Report* (Paris, UNESCO, 2018).

Homicide rates remain high in the Americas even as they plummet elsewhere

Homicide rates have been consistently high in the Americas for three decades. The region's average rate remained at more or less the same level between 1990 and 2016, fluctuating slightly from a low of 14.5 to a high of 16.7 per 100,000 people – compared with a global average that varied between 6.0 and 7.4 over the same period. The rate in the Americas jumped to 17.2 in 2017, reaching the highest level since at least 1990.



The picture varies hugely within the region and within individual countries. In Central America, for example, the country with the highest homicide rate in 2017 had a rate of 62.1, more than seven times that of the country with the lowest. In South America, the country with the highest homicide rate had a rate of 56.8, more than 16 times that of the country with the lowest. Within countries, high homicide levels are

clustered, with some local populations facing homicide rates comparable to death rates in conflict zones and others having a negligible risk.

In contrast to the Americas, the homicide rate in Europe has declined by 63 per cent since 2002, and by 38 per cent since 1990. In Asia the rate has fallen by 36 per cent since 1990. The limited data available for African countries suggest a declining trend followed by stagnation at a high level.

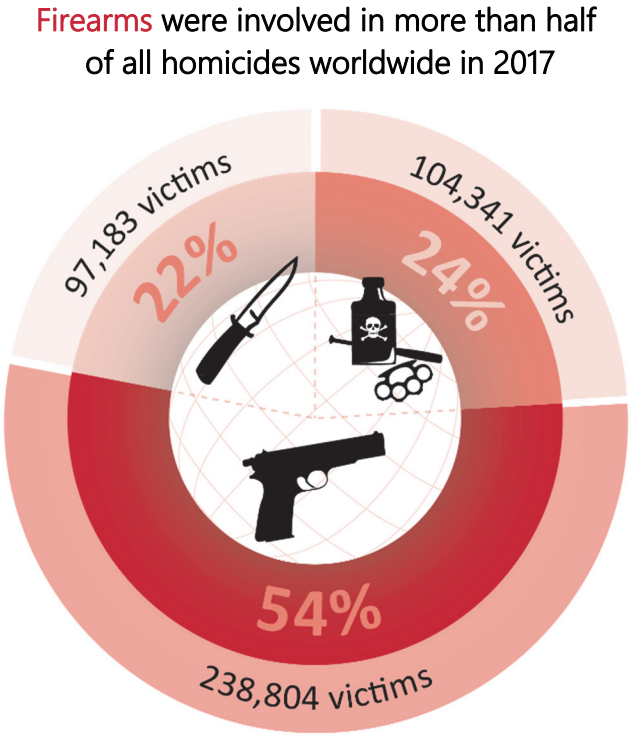
Young men are particularly at risk in the Americas

Older teenagers living in the Americas face a high risk of becoming homicide victims. According to data from 15 countries in the region in 2016, the homicide rate for adolescents aged 18–19 years was 46 per 100,000 – far outstripping the risk faced by people in that age group in other regions and worldwide. Young men aged 15–29 years in the Americas are also disproportionately affected by homicide in comparison to their peers in other regions and worldwide. The estimated homicide rate in 2017 for men in that age group in the Americas was 64 per 100,000.

Firearm-related homicides predominate in the Americas

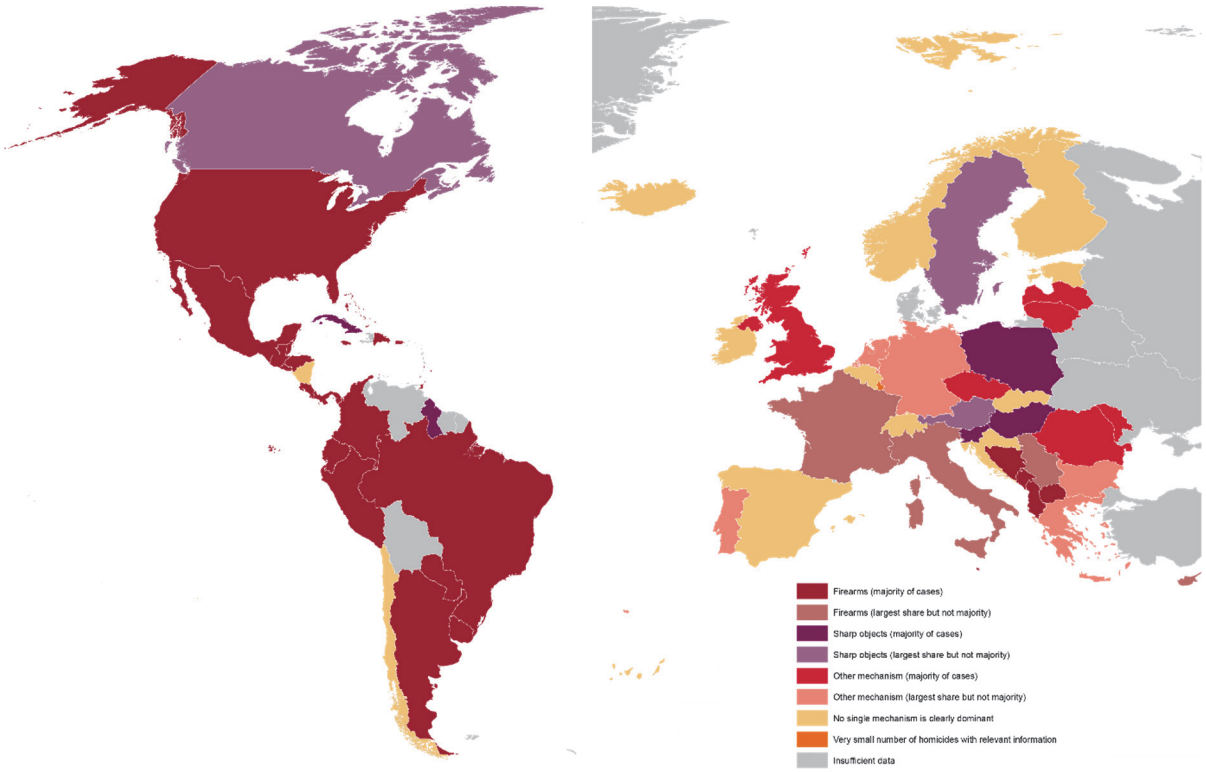
Shooting has long been the most common cause of death in homicide cases worldwide. In 2017, slightly more than half of all homicides were carried out with firearms, whereas only one fifth involved sharp objects.

In the Americas, firearms were involved in roughly three quarters of homicides in 2017, which accounted for more than one quarter of the homicides worldwide that year. Some countries with high proportions of firearm-related deaths tend to have high rates of homicide, which may indicate that firearms and high homicide levels are linked.



Note: The number of homicide victims shown in the infographic above excludes those killed by unknown mechanisms, which amount to roughly 23,500 victims.

Most prevalent mechanism* used in the perpetration of homicide in the Americas and Europe, 2013–2016



The boundaries and names shown and the designation used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and North ern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

*Note: *The calculation presupposes three categories of mechanism (firearms, sharp objects and other); only cases where a reliable breakdown into these three categories was available are considered. The calculation adjusts for homicides of "unknown mechanism".*

Elsewhere in the world, firearm killings are less common than in the Americas – measured both on a per capita basis and as a proportion of all homicides. Still, in Asia firearm-related deaths constitute the largest share of homicide cases, although on a smaller scale overall. The limited data for Africa suggest that firearms are also a prominent mechanism for perpetrating homicide in the region, roughly on a par with mechanisms other than sharp objects and firearms. Countries where sharp objects are the main mechanism of killing tend to have low homicide rates.

Gangs and organized crime drive homicide rates in parts of Central America

As homicide rates are frequently associated with slow-changing social and economic indicators they also change slowly. When there are rapid shifts in homicide rates, the explanation often has to do with organized crime. The relationship between organized crime and violence is complex. There are parts of the world with a high prevalence of organized crime but low rates of homicide. Sudden spikes in homicide rates are often associated with changes in the power relationships between competing organized crime groups. These changes can be brought about by many factors, such as the sudden appearance of a lucrative contraband flow, which can cause the groups involved to come into conflict. This could be observed recently in parts of Brazil, Honduras and Mexico, where an increase in the cocaine flow caused homicide rates to spike in some localities, whereas other areas saw stable or declining homicide rates. Street gangs are a special kind of organized crime group, and conflict with rival groups is often key to the identity of the gang. Parts of the United States have experienced a long-term decrease in gang-related violence, while gangs are a key driver of high homicide rates in parts of Latin America.

Scale of killings in Africa and in the Pacific is not yet fully understood

The scale of homicide and long-term trends are difficult to gauge in Africa because the raw statistics for many countries are not available. Major upheavals such as the "Arab Spring" disrupted data-gathering in some countries, while others have lacked the resources to collect data in the first place.

Although the UNODC Global Homicide Statistics data set covers 202 countries and territories, and 96 per cent of the world population, data coverage is below average in Africa. Some countries have neither reliable criminal justice data on homicide nor accurate mortality statistics that can be used as an alternative.

Official reports of homicides in Pacific countries tend to deviate substantially from information on violence contained in hospital records, suggesting that homicide rates in those countries may be much higher than suggested by the official figures. Police in Papua New Guinea, for example, say it is likely that homicide is significantly underreported. Although this can be partially explained by the extreme isolation of some communities, an important factor is that many people in urban areas are still more inclined to report crime to traditional leaders rather than to the police.

Global data on homicide have improved since the previous edition of the *Global Study on Homicide* in terms of quality and disaggregation, but many gaps still need to be filled if the different types and drivers of homicide are to be fully understood – something that is essential for designing more effective prevention policies.

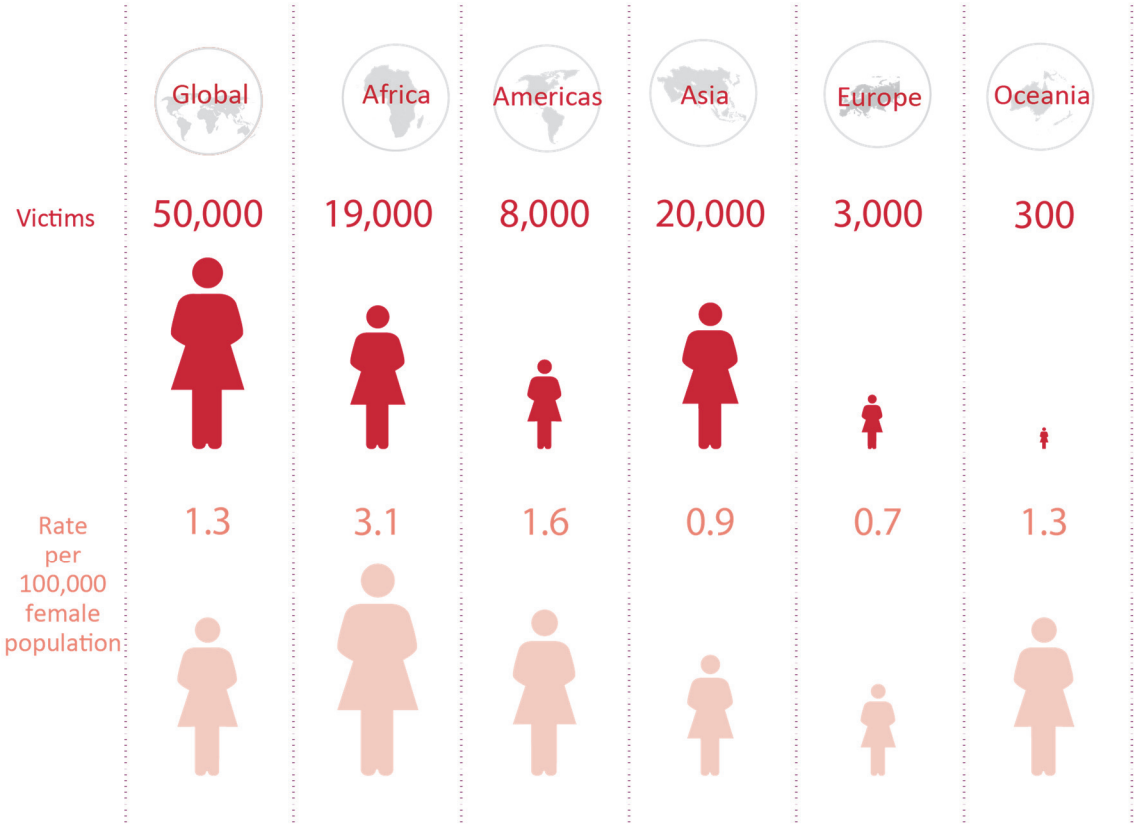
Gender-related killing of women and girls is starting to be understood

In the 1970s, the term "femicide" became widely used to describe the killing of women. However, there is no consensus on the kind of crimes this label covers, how to record such crimes, or whether they can be regarded as "gender related" when the motive is often difficult to prove or is not recorded. These issues make it challenging to compare global or regional data on "femicide", particularly for those killings that happen outside the family. Instead, UNODC relies on data related specifically to women killed by intimate partners or other family members. Although the indicators used do not cover all gender-related killings of women and girls, this category does include most of these killings and the data are comparable across countries. As a result, using this category makes it possible to disentangle such types of female homicide from the rest, and helps construct a global picture of the scale of gender-related killings of women.

The death of those killed by intimate partners is not usually the result of a random or spontaneous act, but rather the culmination of gender-related violence that is rooted in historically unequal power relations between men and women. This gender-based violence is overwhelmingly underreported. Fear of reprisals, economic and psychological dependence, and lack of faith in the police may induce women not to report instances of gender-related domestic violence. This reluctance is particularly widespread in developing countries, where there is often a stigma attached to being a victim of this kind of crime, or it is accepted that domestic violence is a part of everyday life.

Asia accounted for the largest number of all women killed worldwide by intimate partners or other family members in 2017, with an estimated 20,000 victims. However, an estimated 19,000 women in Africa also lost their lives in this way. Africa has a much smaller population, meaning that women in Africa run a greater risk of being killed by an intimate partner or other family member than women in Asia.

Even though the largest number of women and girls are killed by intimate partners or other family members in Asia, they run the greatest risk of falling victim to intimate partner/family-related homicide in Africa.



2. Victims and perpetrators

Homicide continues to be a largely male phenomenon

Some 81 per cent of homicide victims recorded in 2017 were men and boys, and the global homicide rate for the male population is roughly four times the rate for women and girls. This broad pattern holds true for each region, although there are variations. For example, male homicide rates are 8 to 11 times higher than female rates in parts of the Americas – a much wider margin than seen in other regions.

While men are more likely than women to be victims of homicide, they are even more likely to be the perpetrators. More than 90 per cent of suspects in homicide cases in 2014, 2015 and 2016 were men. Of just over 133,500 people brought into formal contact with the criminal justice system for intentional homicide in 49 countries and territories in 2016, only 10 per cent were female. The sex ratio of homicide convictions followed a similar pattern: in 74 countries with available data between 2010 and 2017, women made up just 6 per cent of all people convicted of homicide, with the share in Europe (9 per cent) being slightly higher than in Africa (5 per cent), the Americas (7 per cent) and Asia (6 per cent).

Men commit about 90 per cent
of all homicides recorded worldwide



Young men are particularly vulnerable in areas with gang violence and organized crime

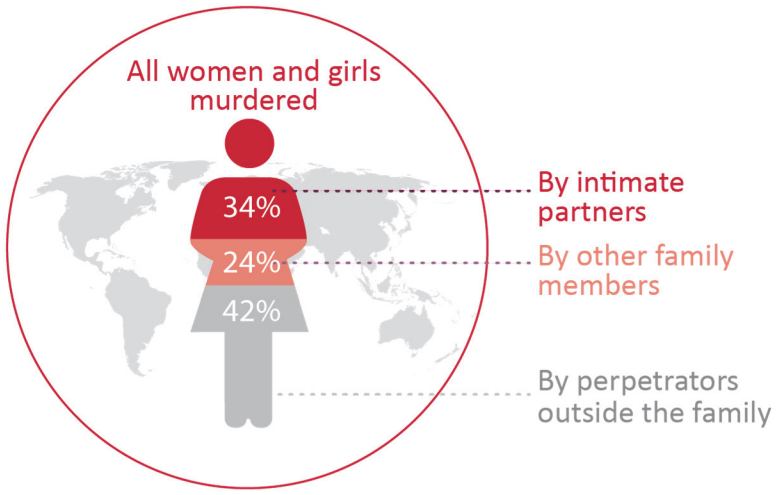
Men and male adolescents aged 15–29 are at the highest risk of homicide globally. This is largely due to the situation in the Americas, where the drivers of homicidal violence are frequently gangs and organized crime, and injuries from firearms are the most frequent cause of death – factors that are known to favour the prevalence of young men as victims and perpetrators.

In other parts of the world, older men run the greatest risk of falling victim to homicide. For example, in Europe, men aged 30–44 are the most vulnerable population group.

Although women generally face a much lower homicide risk than men, the age profile of women and adolescent victims closely follows the pattern for male victims in each region.

Women comprise the vast majority of victims of homicide perpetrated by intimate partners

Women were the victims in 82 per cent of homicides carried out by intimate partners during 2017, which confirms how women continue to bear the greatest burden of victimization in the context of intimate partner violence.



Men who kill their partners have different profiles to other killers

Men who kill their intimate partners have a markedly different profile to men who kill outside relationships, according to studies from several European countries. They tend to have better jobs and enjoy a higher standard of living than other perpetrators, and often have no criminal background. One study found that men who killed their partners were better educated than other homicide perpetrators and had fewer gaps in their employment history.

Researchers have frequently identified the causes of such killings as jealousy, possessiveness, fear of abandonment, and mental illness.

Gender disparities depend on age and the overall homicide rate

In high-homicide countries, males comprise a higher share of homicide victims

Criminologists have understood for almost a century that rising homicide rates almost always go hand in hand with a widening gender gap: the larger the number of killings, the higher the proportion of male victims and perpetrators. This rule still holds true across all regions and countries. It means that a change in homicide rates can usually be explained as a change in rates of male offending.

In Central America, for example, eight times as many men as women were killed in 2017. In one country alone, when the number of murders increased rapidly between 2013 and 2015, over 90 per cent of the additional victims were men and boys. The strongest driver of the increase was gang conflict, in which both perpetrators and victims are highly likely to be male.

On the other hand, in low-homicide countries in Asia, the odds of falling victim to homicide are not strongly affected by gender. Some countries in Asia and Europe have roughly equal numbers of women and men killed in homicides.

This highlights the importance of considering more broadly the differences between male-on-male homicides and those involving women. Homicides involving men tend to be affected to a greater extent by sociopolitical developments, drug markets and other volatile factors that cause spikes in killings. Homicides involving women tend to be determined by long-term issues such as gender roles, social norms, the status

of women in society, discrimination and gender equality. Since these factors are less volatile, the rate at which women are killed tends to be more stable.

Gender disparities among victims start to appear during the teenage years

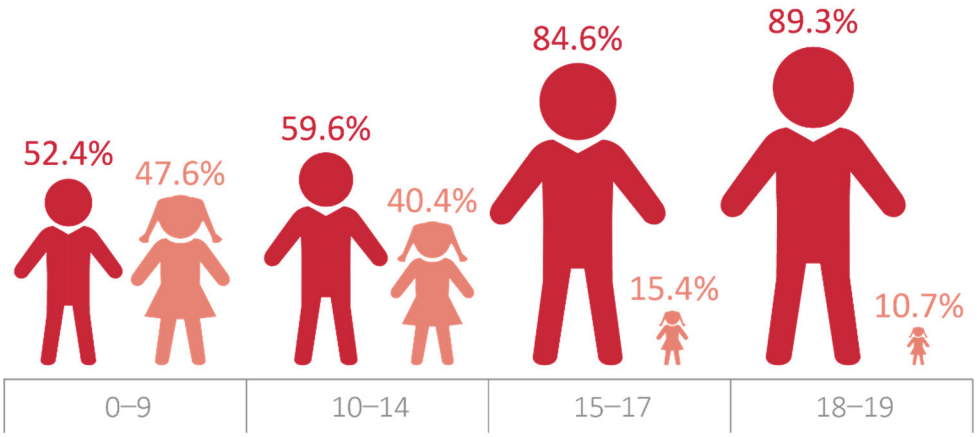
Girls and boys aged 9 and under are killed at roughly equal rates, in marked contrast to all other age groups, in which males make up more than 50 per cent of homicide victims, according to data from 41 countries.

In some developing countries girls run a higher risk of infanticide than boys, or of suffering educational and nutritional neglect. This is linked to cultural and socioeconomic factors that perpetuate son preference and discrimination against girls, causing parents to value girls less than boys.

In economically advanced countries, the killing of boys and girls by their parents remains an important cause of child mortality. Young boys generally run a slightly higher risk of being killed, possibly owing to boys' perceived aggressiveness calling for harsher discipline. In extreme cases, such discipline may have lethal results. In developing countries, child mortality is related to disease, infections and poor nutrition to a much greater extent than in developed countries. Consequently, lethal victimization by parents becomes a more significant cause of child mortality in developed, economically advanced countries.

In all regions, the likelihood of boys becoming victims of homicide increases with age, although this process occurs at different stages. In the Americas, male victims begin to predominate in the 10–14 age group, while in Europe the turning point is the 18–19 age group.

Global shares of children and adolescent victims of homicide, by age and sex, 2016



Young children are at risk of falling victim to homicide but can also be perpetrators

Very young children are more likely to be killed by their mothers, older children by their fathers

Evidence in booklet 6 of this study suggests that while filicide accounts for only a small share of total homicides, in economically advanced countries it can be an important cause of death among young children. In the Member States of the European Union, for example, mortality among children is mainly related to conditions originating in the perinatal period and congenital malformations. As advances in public health systems have made children less vulnerable to disease and infections, external causes of mortality such as homicide have become prominent.

When a very young child is killed by a family member, one or both parents are responsible in an overwhelming number of cases. Long-term trends suggest that the mother is the most likely perpetrator during the first year of the child's life, after which the father is more likely to kill the child. Unmarried young mothers may sometimes kill their newborn because of the social stigma attached to illegitimacy.

This type of homicide can be explained by factors such as violent parental attitudes and the use of harsh disciplinary methods, mental health issues of one or both parents, and social marginalization.

Terrorist and violent extremist groups continue to recruit and use children for combat operations and suicide attacks

Hundreds of children lost their lives as a result of acts of violence carried out by terrorist and violent extremist groups in 2017. Some of those acts involved children operating as suicide attackers. Security officials and policymakers continue to face challenges posed by new strategies adopted by terrorist and violent extremist groups – not least their use of social media as a tool of propaganda and recruitment.

Ageing populations can sometimes be linked to falling homicide rates

Countries with ageing populations tend to have low homicide rates, while high levels of homicide occur in countries with large youth populations. This broad pattern holds true for the ageing societies in Europe and Asia, and for the younger populations in the Americas and Africa.

Statistics tracking the homicide rate from 1950 to 2015 in some countries with ageing populations show a close relationship between the homicide rate and the proportion of the population aged 15–29. As the share of younger people in the population declined, the homicide rate also declined.

However, researchers have long questioned the assertion of a direct causal relationship between the homicide rate and the proportion of young people in the population. Some countries in Asia, for example, have very young populations but low rates of homicide. This suggests that, apart from the number of young people, there are other factors, such as poverty and marginalization, that influence the homicide rate.

Youth unemployment may be a factor in rising homicide rates

There is no clear correlation between unemployment rates and levels of homicide. In fact, most countries with high levels of violence have relatively low unemployment rates. However, even when researchers have found no correlation in large data sets, the stress related to unemployment appears to be a contributing factor to homicide. Indeed, sudden job loss can trigger individual homicide events.

UNODC analysis and other studies have found a link between youth unemployment and levels of violence and homicide, particularly against a backdrop of violence perpetrated by street gangs and organized crime groups.

3. Reasons for killing and drivers of homicide

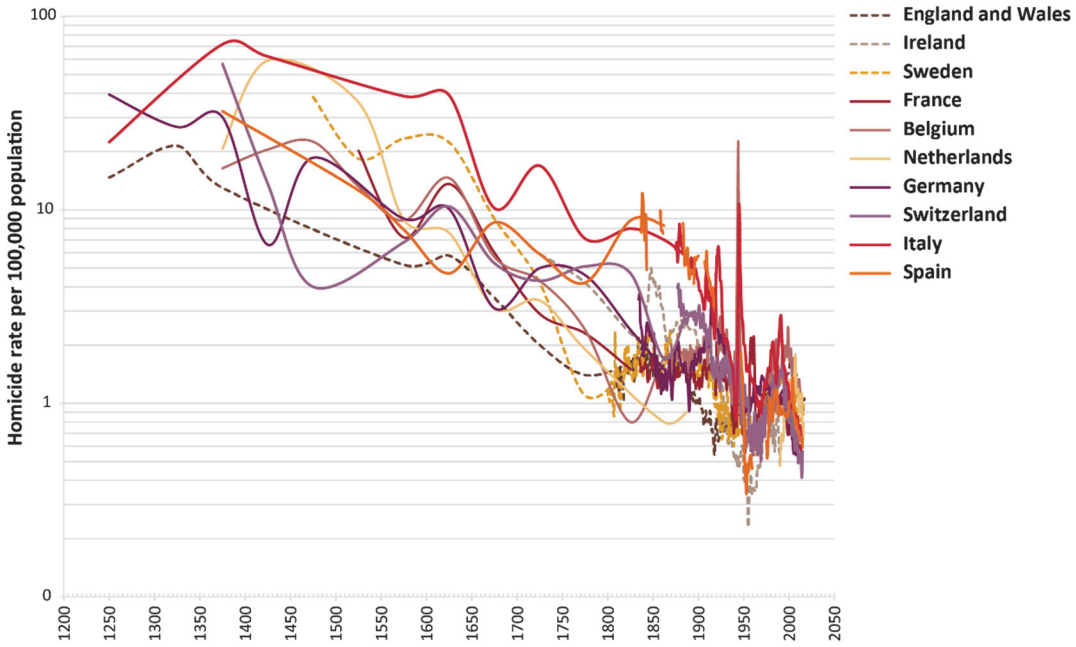
Lessons from history can help to frame strategies for reducing homicide

Homicide rates in Western Europe have broadly been declining for centuries

Much effort has been expended on explaining the decline in crime, including homicide, in affluent societies since the 1990s. Advances in security technology and the transition to cashless societies are among the most popular explanations. However, the study of judicial documents in Western Europe going as far back as the thirteenth century suggests that homicide rates have been declining for more than 600 years. Parts of medieval and early modern Europe experienced homicide levels roughly comparable to those of the most violent places in the world today.

The reasons for this decline are not entirely clear, but probably include the gradual expansion of the State's monopoly on power, the increasing rule of law, the proliferation of schools and literacy, and the promotion of self-discipline.

Homicide rate in selected countries in Europe, 1200–2016



Source: Eisner, M., "From swords to words: does macro-level change in self-control predict long-term variation in levels of homicide?", *Crime and Justice*, vol. 43, No. 1 (2014), pp. 65–134; Eisner, M., "Modernity strikes back? A historical perspective on the latest increase in interpersonal violence (1960–1990)", *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, vol. 2, No. 2 (2008), pp. 288–316.

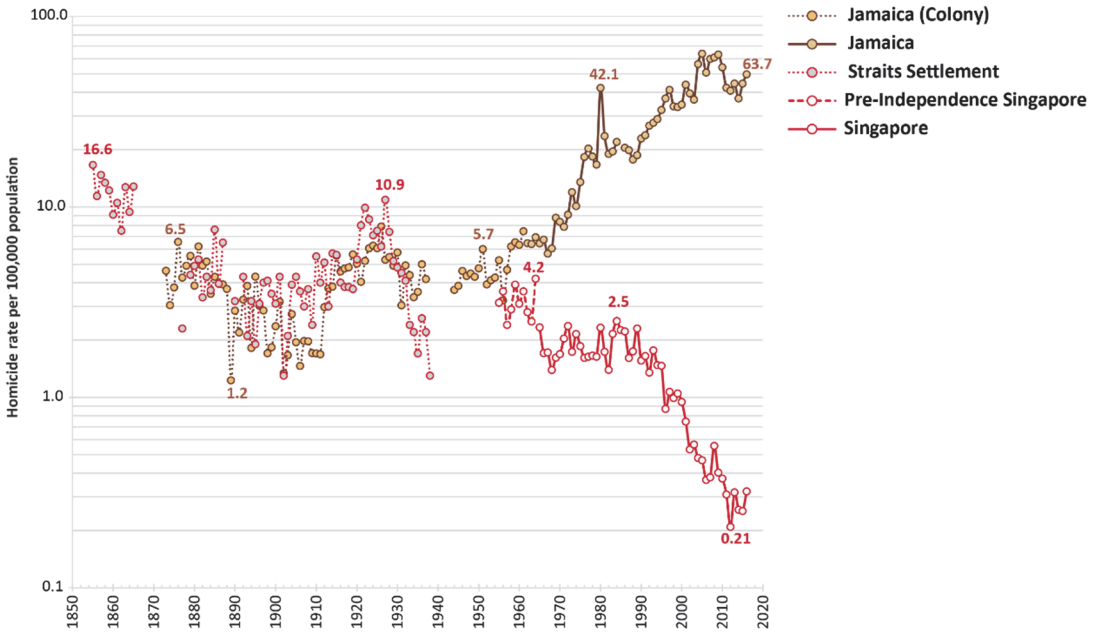
Note: Data until 1850 are estimates based on local and regional studies and averaged for 50-year periods. Data from about 1850 are national homicide rates, based on either police statistics or mortality statistics.

Similar histories can throw up divergent patterns of homicide

An analysis of historical homicide trends in Singapore and Jamaica included in booklet 2 of this study shows that countries with a similar history can display markedly different patterns in homicide. Singapore and Jamaica both went through colonization by the British and experienced similar levels of lethal violence over the greater part of their history. The homicide rate in both countries fell during the second half of the nineteenth century, broadly in line with trends in Western Europe, but then surged in the 1920s. However, from the mid-twentieth century onwards the two countries took divergent paths. While homicide rates in Jamaica increased by an average of 4.4 per cent per year for five decades, Singapore experienced an average decline of roughly 4.2 per cent per year over the same period.

Research suggests that the decline in crime rates in Singapore should be interpreted in the wider context of improvements in education, health care, life expectancy and wealth. In Jamaica, the steady increase in homicide can be traced to the rise of gun and gang violence and feuds between rival political factions. Targeted crime reduction policies, effective policing and the combating of corruption in the police force, along with victim support schemes and rehabilitation programmes, are the key elements of the Singaporean model of governance that helped bring down levels of violence and crime. In post-independence Jamaica, the police force remained politicized and inspired little public confidence, both of which undermined interventions seeking to tackle violent crime.

Long-term trend in homicide rates in Jamaica and Singapore



Sources: Singapore, 1855–1940: Tai, W. S., "Murder and other crimes in the Straits Settlements", MPhil thesis, University of Cambridge, 2010; Singapore, 1955–1964: Ting, S. K. and Tan, K. K., "Post-mortem survey of homicides in Singapore (1955-1964)", *Singapore Medical Journal*, vol. 10, No. 4 (December 1969), pp. 243–247; Singapore, 1965–2016: World Health Organization (WHO) mortality statistics; Colony of Jamaica, 1870–1961: *Blue Book of the Island of Jamaica*, later *Handbook of Jamaica*; Jamaica, 1962–2016: "Crimes known to the police", Jamaica Constabulary Force annual reports.

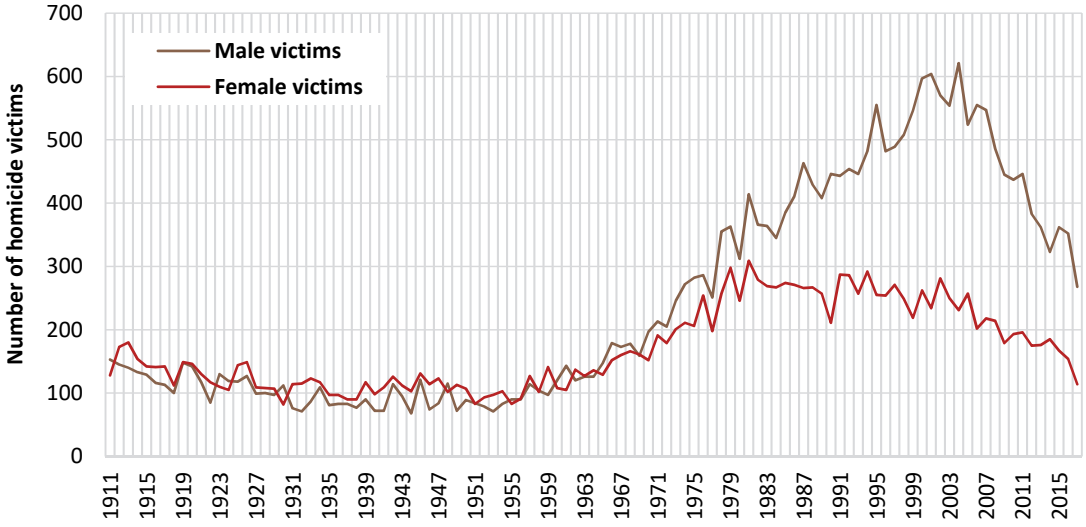
Note: Selected years highlighted with homicide rates.

The male-centric nature of homicide manifested itself globally after the Second World War

Before the Second World War, the risk of becoming a victim of homicide was roughly the same for men and women across the world. Since the 1950s, however, the male risk has either fallen at a lower rate than the female risk or increased at a faster rate.

This is true for all regions, particularly during times of armed conflict when the risk of men becoming victims tends to spike, as seen in France during the Algerian War of 1954–1962, in Northern Ireland during the Troubles in the 1970s, and in Hungary during the revolution of 1956.

Trend in homicide victims, by sex, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 1911–2017



Source: Office for National Statistics (United Kingdom).

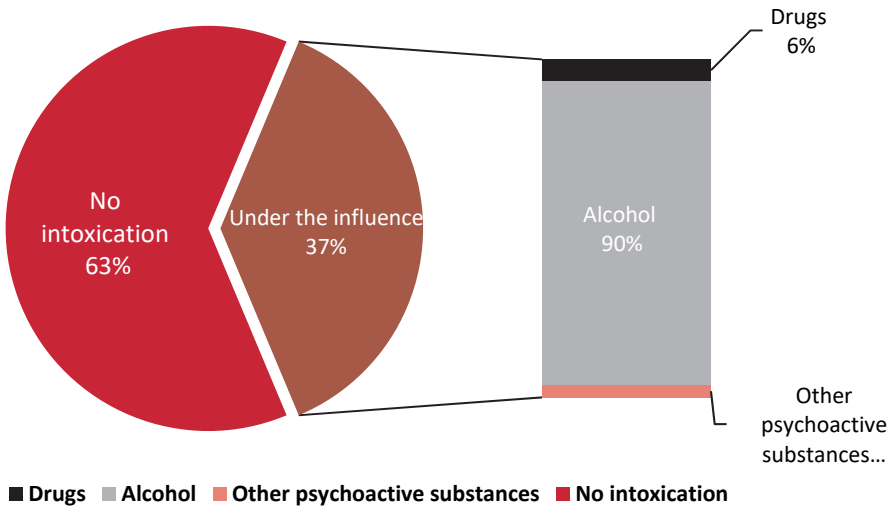
Drugs and alcohol can drive certain types of violent crime

Drugs and alcohol are linked to crime through three well-recognized mechanisms. The "psychopharmacological" mechanism refers to the increased inclination of individuals to commit crime, notably violent crime, while under the influence of psychoactive substances. The "economic-compulsive" mechanism can be observed when individuals who are dependent on substance use engage in acquisitive crime in order to fund their habit.

The relative strength of the association between drug use and acquisitive and violent crimes does appear to reflect in part the known effects of drugs on the brain and their dependence-inducing character. In general, there is stronger evidence for a link between drug use and acquisitive crime; however, it should be borne in mind that acquisitive crimes may also have a violent character.

In the case of alcohol, the connection with antisocial behaviour and crime appears most clearly when consumption is measured in terms of heavy episodic drinking. The "systemic" mechanism is mainly relevant to drugs; it refers to crime linked to the activities of drug traffickers. This mechanism is more complex to describe because it involves developments that disrupt the status quo, such as changes to established routes and the balance of power among the various actors.

Influence of psychoactive substances among homicide perpetrators, 2015 or latest available year



Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

Note: Data from 17 countries yield an estimate of 37 per cent of homicide perpetrators being under the influence of a psychoactive substance, in most cases alcohol, when committing the offence.

Governance and economic development can explain homicide rates

Socioeconomic development explains current homicide levels in Asia and Europe, but in other regions the link is less evident

Differences in homicide rates across countries in Europe and Asia can be explained mostly in terms of their level of socioeconomic development. Policies aimed at achieving improvements in life expectancy, wealth, education and other crucial development areas would be expected to push homicide rates down in those two regions.

In some countries in Europe and Asia, however, there are exceptionally high and low levels of homicide that cannot be explained by socioeconomic development alone. In such instances, factors such as a high alcohol consumption rate or progress on gender equality can explain, respectively, the relatively higher or lower homicide rate that may be observed within a given country.

Socioeconomic development fails to explain differences in homicide rates in the Americas and Africa

The wide availability of firearms in the Americas, along with the proliferation of gangs and organized crime groups, helps to explain why many countries in the region experience a higher level of homicide than one would expect from their development level. Similarly, in Africa armed conflicts are likely to have created an environment that is conducive to lethal violence, given the resulting political instability, erosion of the rule of law, poverty and inequality. Furthermore, in many countries in those two regions the benefits of economic growth in terms of poverty reduction and increased job opportunities have not translated into a reduction in violence. In fact, some countries in Africa and the Americas have experienced rising homicide rates even as their economies have grown.

Income inequality is more strongly linked to homicide than other aspects of development

Countries with large gaps between rich and poor are likely to have higher homicide rates than those with less pronounced income inequality. This relationship explains almost 40 per cent of the variation between countries. The link holds over time, meaning that increased levels of violence correlate with increased levels of inequality, and provides a potential explanation for the fact that economic growth in the Americas and Africa has been accompanied by rising homicide rates. While high levels 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. In fact, economic growth that exacerbates income inequality drives criminal violence even more.

The correlation between inequality and homicide rates is not perfect, however. The evidence for such a correlation is weak in low-income countries, and the relationship is not so pronounced in countries in Asia, suggesting that the cultural context plays a role there, too. Also, research in South America points to a link between high homicide rates and broader indicators of inequality, such as higher infant mortality rates or unequal access to education or health services.

Long-term investment in education policies is associated with a drop in the homicide rate

Education appears to be a key factor in shaping homicide levels in all regions. Several low-homicide countries in Asia have followed strikingly similar trajectories – emphasis on education and training has been accompanied by a falling homicide rate. This suggests that such policies may play a more significant role in reducing interpersonal violence than any specific crime prevention or punishment policy. A study of homicide statistics between 1990 and 2005 from a range of countries similarly shows that homicide was more likely to decline in countries that invested more heavily in education and focused on longer-term policymaking in that area.



A study in Latin America and the Caribbean showed that an increase in the share of high-school graduates by two percentage points was linked to a reduction in the homicide rate by one victim per 100,000 people. Conversely, the “bulging” of the youth population in developing countries can cause challenges for the education system and place additional stress on already overstrained labour markets. The combination of this youth bulge, poor education and high levels of unemployment may push young people to engage in

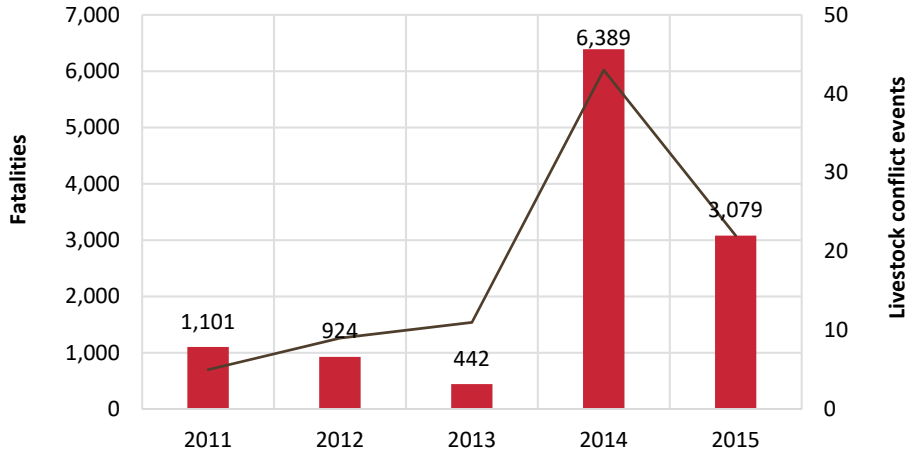
delinquent and violent behaviour and even to be lured into organized crime structures. These processes drive high levels of homicide in some countries.

Environmental changes and competition for resources can drive homicide

There are clear examples in some regions of how resource scarcity can lead to homicidal violence. In Afghanistan, for example, more than 70 per cent of all serious crime, including homicide, is caused by land disputes. This is partly because the authorities do not have the capacity to deal with land-grabbing and cannot enforce land rights. Similar weak enforcement of land rights and scarcity of resources helped to explain killings by cattle raiders in South Sudan, which reached a peak during 2014. In East Africa, climate change has caused the waters of Lake Chad to recede, leading to a decline in fish stocks, the disappearance of arable land, and vanishing opportunities for local people. The African Union has pointed out that these processes are prompting some people to join armed groups as an alternative source of income.

These isolated cases suggest that violence and homicide can be linked to environmental problems and resource scarcity, although understanding of the processes involved is still at an early stage. Such factors often appear to be part of more complex dynamics involving political exclusion, corruption and unequal distribution of resources, making it difficult to pinpoint causes and effects.

Fatalities resulting from cattle raids in South Sudan, 2011–2015



Source: Gebreyes, Y. A. et al., *The Impact of Conflict on the Livestock Sector in South Sudan* (FAO, 2016).

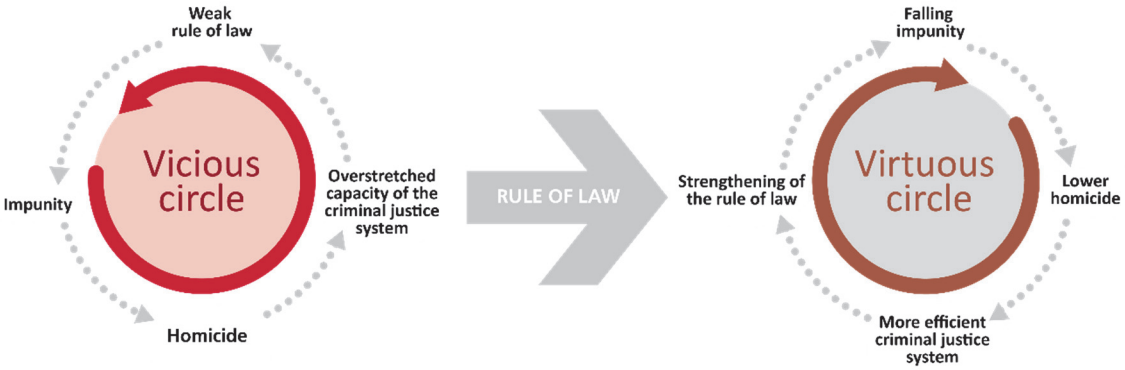
Strengthening the rule of law is central to reducing homicide levels

Homicide cases that are not cleared up by the police, or that do not result in conviction of the perpetrator, fuel impunity. High levels of impunity may be a consequence of high rates of homicide, which stretch the capacity of overburdened law enforcement agencies and prevent them from investigating each case thoroughly. Impunity also varies depending on the type of homicide. For example, killings carried out by gangs or organized crime groups tend to be more challenging to investigate than those perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members.

One way of measuring impunity for homicide is to compare the homicide rate with the rate of convictions for homicide. The gap between high homicide rates and low conviction rates in 2016 was widest in the Americas, where there were only 24 convictions per 100 victims. In Europe, there were 53 convictions per 100 victims, and in Asia there were 47. Between 2007 and 2016 in 43 countries with available data, the number of people convicted per 100 homicides decreased from 47 to 39.

Bolstering the rule of law has been shown to reduce homicide levels. The key indicator of a strong rule of law is the development of an independent judiciary, which can help to boost the legitimacy of governing institutions, provide dispute-resolution mechanisms that discourage recourse to violence, and reassure citizens that individual rights will be protected. In developing countries, where a substantial share of the population is impoverished, a functioning criminal justice system is also essential to protect the poor from violence.

The rule of law: making the vicious circle virtuous



Nations that fail to establish strong security and justice systems, within a framework of respect for human rights, are more likely to suffer spirals of chronic violence and insecurity. Weak rule of law leads to impunity and creates an environment in which criminals can operate more easily.

Sustainable Development Goal 16 commits public authorities to improving the rule of law through measures such as widening access to legal aid, improving prison conditions, and reducing the number of wrongful convictions and the excessive use of pre-trial detention.

Popular theories often fail to explain a complex reality

Urban growth does not seem to cause an increase in homicide

The rapid growth of cities and the consequent mass movement of people from rural to urban areas have frequently been cited as possible drivers of homicide. However, UNODC analysis of data from 68 cities suggests that there is no positive correlation between urban growth and increases in homicide rates. In fact, the population in the sample cities grew by 9 per cent between 2005 and 2016, but the number of homicides decreased by 26 per cent. This relationship holds for all regions, with the strongest diverging trends in Asia, followed by Europe.

On the basis of this analysis it can be concluded that cities and rapid urban growth are not risk factors for rising levels of homicide. As at the national level, it is the presence of organized crime groups, inequality, and poor governance and infrastructure that contribute to the homicide risk in cities. However, each city, and even each neighbourhood, has its own risk factors that need to be addressed through careful policymaking.

Gangs, organized crime and drug trafficking do not always generate high homicide rates

Large-scale organized criminal activities, including international drug trafficking, can take place without much violence as long as the crime is “well organized”. During the 1990s in South-Eastern Europe, for example, the simultaneous shocks of the Yugoslav wars and of transition to a market economy allowed organized crime groups to operate with relative impunity. Despite this, homicide rates in most States in South-Eastern Europe have been low and declining. The average national rate in those States in 2015 was about 1.4 victims per 100,000 people – comparable to the rate in France.

In Western Europe, the Netherlands has a high level of drug trafficking, yet the homicide rate there is comparatively very low. Meanwhile, the authorities in Spain and Italy have reported an influx of migrants from the Americas who claim membership of Latino gangs such as the Latin Kings and Mara Salvatrucha. Although gang members have been implicated in violence and serious crime in those two countries, the effects on the overall homicide rate are unknown.

By contrast, in the Americas membership of organized crime groups and gangs is largely responsible for the high homicide rates in that region. However, the relationship is not straightforward. As argued in booklet 3 of this study, high homicide rates caused by organized crime groups can soar even higher when such groups lose control. An example of this phenomenon is what happened after the crackdown on the

Mexican drug cartels that began in 2007. By 2011, the homicide rate had tripled – a rapid change that cannot be explained by long-term factors. The homicide rate then stabilized until 2015, when the cartels began to fragment and diversify, and the homicide rate started to rise again, resulting in an all-time high of more than 30,000 killings in 2017. Jamaica suffered a similar turn of events during the first decade of the twenty-first century, when drug routes shifted from the Caribbean to Mexico, causing a spike in the homicide rate as organized crime groups imploded.

Law enforcement officials can be the source of lethal violence as well as its victims

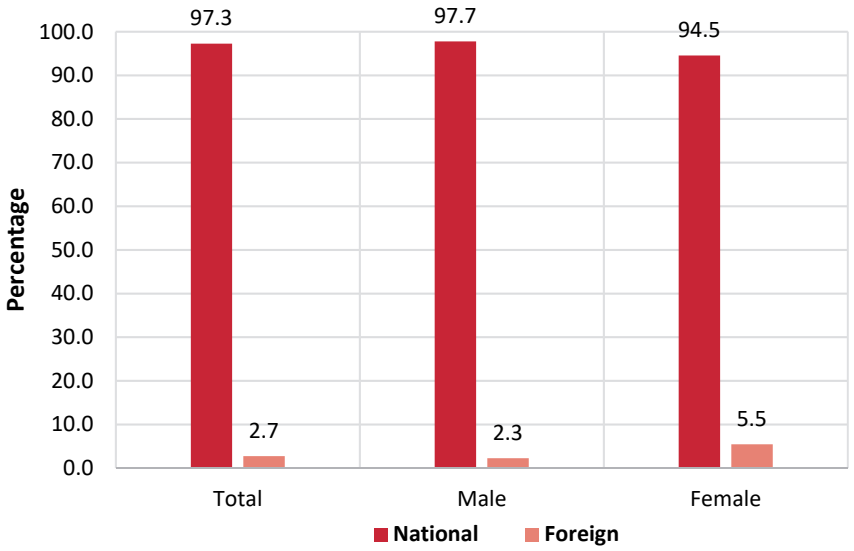
Globally, there is a lack of reliable data on killings of police officers or on the risks they face. Statistics from a small number of countries suggest a diverse relationship between police officer fatality rates and the prevalence of lethal force. For example, in Kenya, during 2015, police officers were killed at a rate of 72 per 100,000 police, whereas there were 5 homicide victims per 100,000 people in the general population. This means that the risk faced by Kenyan police officers was 14 times higher than the average. However, in both Jamaica and Brazil the police were less likely to be victims of homicide than the population at large. In some countries, for every killing of a police officer there are fewer than 10 killings by police, while in others the ratio can be three or four times as high.

Migrants are more likely to be killed by other migrants

The relationship between migration and homicide levels has divided researchers – some have found that levels of immigration have had no effect on homicide rates, others have found a positive correlation. These differences of opinion may result from a lack of reliable data – the way the authorities record the backgrounds of offenders and victims differs between countries.

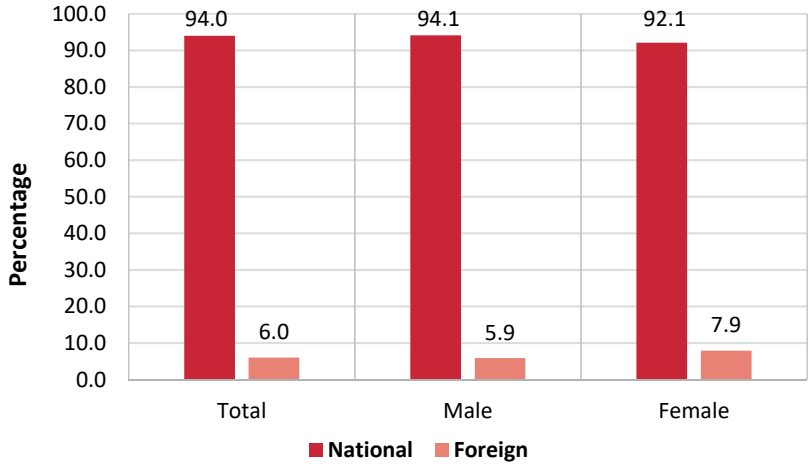
However, if we consider recorded incidents from Western European countries only, the evidence suggests that the victims of migrant offenders are often migrants themselves. Homicides in Western Europe are often perpetrated within communities, among people who share a formal or informal social relationship or are even members of the same family. This link can be seen in countries such as Germany, where the share of foreign victims rose from 20 per cent of all homicide victims in 2015 to 29 per cent in 2016. At the same time, the share of foreign offenders grew from 24 per cent to 31 per cent. Other Western European countries have recorded similar patterns.

Shares of victims of intentional homicide, by citizenship (based on 31 countries), 2016



Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

Shares of suspected perpetrators of intentional homicide, by citizenship (based on 32 countries), 2016

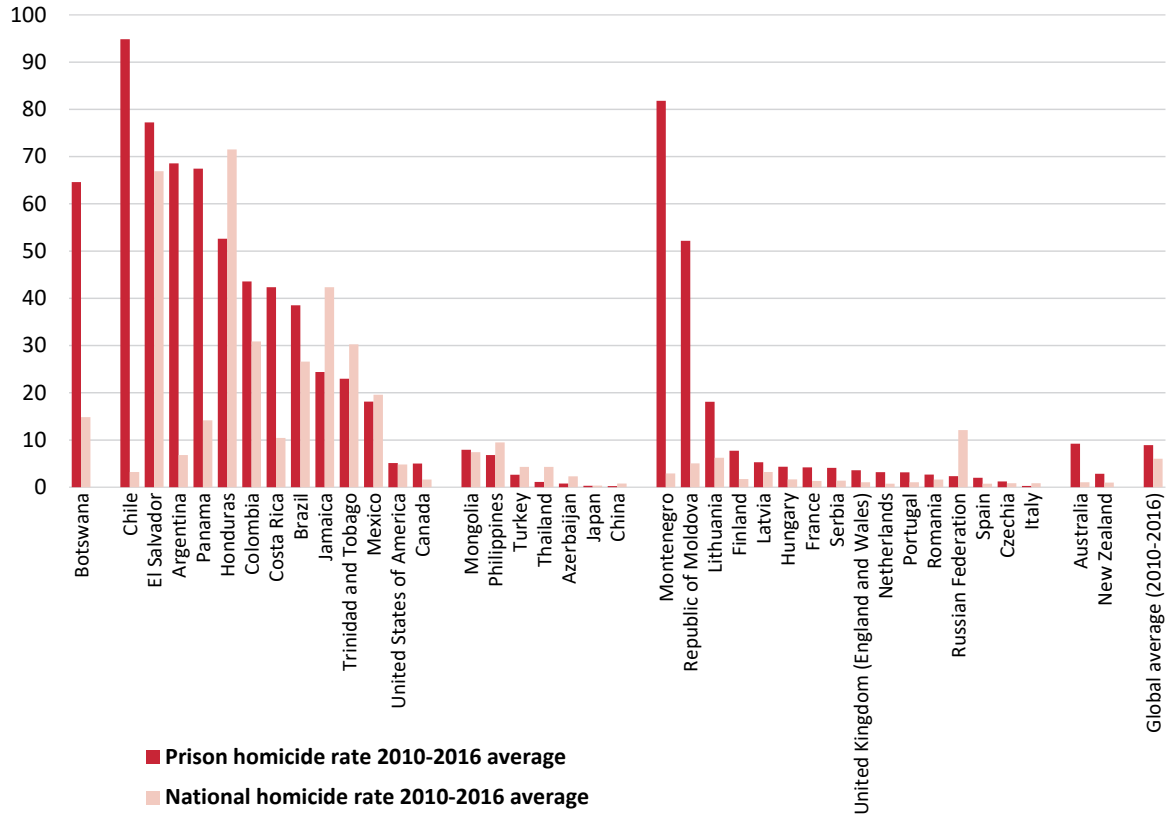


Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

People held in prisons are more at risk of homicide than those outside prison in some countries

Prison populations are reliant on State officials to ensure their security, yet in some countries the homicide rate among prisoners is substantially higher than in the general population. This relationship holds in countries as diverse as Australia, the United Kingdom and Panama.

Homicides in prison per 100,000 prison population, selected countries, average for 2010–2016



Source: UNODC homicide statistics.
Note: Excluding countries that reported no homicides in prisons over the reporting period, or for which data on homicide in prisons were not available.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The information and data presented in the *Global Study on Homicide 2019* illustrate the magnitude of lethal violence worldwide. Even though the number of homicide victims recorded worldwide has been steadily increasing, the global homicide rate has decreased because of an increase in the overall population. The drivers of homicide are manifold, and socioeconomic factors such as inequality, unemployment and political instability can create environments that are conducive to lethal violence. Demographic characteristics, such as the sex and age of an individual, may act as either drivers of, or protective factors against, homicide.

Policies aimed at tackling homicide should address drivers of homicide both at the individual level (such as the age and sex of a person) and at the macro level (such as unemployment, inequality, absence of the rule of law, the prevalence of gender stereotypes in society and the presence of organized crime). Targeted and efficient interventions require a comprehensive understanding of the scale of homicide and its various drivers, which is essential for ensuring that Sustainable Development Goal targets related to violence can be met by 2030.

Progress on target 16.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals ("significantly reduce all forms of violence") is not on track; it is necessary to scale up crime and violence prevention programmes in order to achieve that target by 2030, in particular by devoting more attention to combating organized crime

Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015, the number of homicide victims has been increasing. If this trend is not reversed, the target of significantly reducing all forms of violence (target 16.1 under Goal 16) will not be achieved by 2030. To achieve this target, it is necessary to scale up efforts to prevent homicidal violence at all levels: subnational, national, regional and international.

Since the start of the twenty-first century, organized crime has resulted in roughly the same number of killings as all armed conflicts across the world combined. Moreover, just like armed conflicts, organized crime destabilizes countries, undermines socioeconomic development and erodes the rule of law. Unfortunately, the financial resources and political attention currently devoted to this problem at the international level are inadequate. At the United Nations, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, and the General Assembly have increasingly been discussing issues related to organized crime and security, but more is still needed in terms of resources and political commitment.

High levels of homicidal violence are concentrated in geographic and demographic "pockets", so achieving target 16.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals requires interventions within the specific regions, countries, communities and population groups that are most at risk

While in many parts of the world (Europe, Asia) homicide rates have been declining for decades, other regions (the Americas, Africa) are disproportionately affected by (lethal) violence. Moreover, trend data spanning nearly three decades show that this "violence gap" is not narrowing but actually widening further.

Efforts to reduce the global number of homicide victims can be more effective if they target those parts of the world most affected by homicidal violence, particularly certain countries in South and Central America, Africa and Asia. Even in countries with high national rates of homicide, killings are often concentrated in specific states, provinces and cities. Bringing down overall homicide rates depends ultimately on tackling lethal violence in these "hotspots".

Reducing high homicide levels is feasible. The *Global Study on Homicide 2019* documents a series of successful community-based interventions that have successfully curbed homicidal violence in settings where high homicide rates have been driven by general violence, gangs and organized crime. Among the successful ingredients of these programmes are the engagement of communities and the support provided by various local and state-level institutions. Another such ingredient is police reform aimed at bringing the work of law enforcement closer to the community (e.g. through community policing, strengthening trust in the police among the local population, police patrols, and crime prevention measures aimed at young people that are implemented jointly by the community and the police). High levels of violence are strongly associated with young males, both as perpetrators and victims, so violence prevention programmes should focus on providing support to young men to prevent them from being lured into a subculture of violence

(e.g. gangs, drug dealing, criminal lifestyle). Similarly, those who are already mired in such a subculture need to receive help so that they can extricate themselves from it, for example, through social work, rehabilitation programmes and raising awareness of non-violent alternatives.

Certain people are at greater risk of being killed at work because of insecure working environments and, in some cases, also because of the nature of their profession. The role of journalists in promoting inclusive and sustainable societies was recognized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Significantly, one of the targets of Goal 16 is to ensure public access to information, and one of the indicators associated with that target is the number of journalists and other media workers killed, tortured and kidnapped, or who have disappeared or been arbitrarily detained. Journalists will need to receive better protection if this target is to be realized.

While the level of homicide may drop rapidly when organized crime groups or gangs opt for "truces", the only way of obtaining a long-term and sustainable reduction in the homicide rate is by combating impunity, improving the rule of law and governance, and investing in education

There are examples of homicide rates plummeting briefly when organized crime groups or gangs have agreed to a truce or become the dominant group in an area and no longer need to impose control through violence. However, such drops in the homicide rate cannot secure a lasting reduction in violence by themselves.

There is a strong association between high homicide rates and low levels of convictions for homicide. Homicide cases that are not "closed" by means of a lawful conviction and sanctioning of the perpetrator fuel impunity, which in turn can lead to more homicides and overtax the criminal justice system as it struggles to bring perpetrators to justice. By virtue of its nominal monopoly on violence, the State has a duty to protect its citizens from violence and punish wrongdoers. This calls for significant investment in criminal justice resources, particularly in those countries where impunity is rife.

Homicides in prisons are widespread: indeed, in many countries the homicide rate within prison walls exceeds the rate outside them. Since the State is directly responsible for the well-being of persons in its custody, high levels of violence and killings perpetrated within a country's penitentiary system point to a problem that must be addressed at the State level. Efforts should be made to establish a physically and mentally safe environment for inmates in prisons. To that end, prison authorities should ensure that prisoners have access to education, vocational training and adequate health-care services.

High levels of homicide can also be caused by a system that fails to rehabilitate offenders before they are released into society. Accordingly, one of the most efficient measures for curbing levels of crime, violence and homicide outside prison is to focus on reducing recidivism through investment in rehabilitation programmes. Such programmes have often proved effective in encouraging desistance from crime.

Studies of historical trends in homicide rates serve to highlight the vital role played by good governance and the rule of law, as well as by trusted and professional police and justice systems, in reducing crime and violence. Moreover, such studies also point to the strong positive effect of participatory socioeconomic development mediated by policies that promote social cohesion and leave no one behind. As history teaches us, a governance model centred on the rule of law, control of corruption and investment in human development through policies that provide universal education, health care and decent public housing – thereby minimizing social segregation – always succeeds, in the long run, in bringing down the rate of violent crime.

Investment in socioeconomic development is likely to lead to reduced levels of homicide in Europe and Asia, but that is not necessarily the case in the Americas

The link between development and homicide is complex. Investment in socioeconomic development tends to reduce the homicide rate; conversely, low levels of homicide enable socioeconomic development. However, the relationship is not linear everywhere. In Europe and Asia, the different levels of socioeconomic development across countries explain their different homicide rates reasonably well; therefore, development policies in such countries are likely to be beneficial in terms of violence reduction. This is in contrast to Latin American countries experiencing elevated homicide rates that cannot be explained by their level of socioeconomic development alone. In such cases, investment in socioeconomic

development would not be sufficient to bring down the high level of violence. Structural changes in governance and consolidation of the rule of law are more likely to be effective in reducing homicide in Latin America.

Gender-related killings of women and girls can be prevented by means of improved coordination across state-provided services, and also through the engagement of men

Policies that seek to prevent and reduce homicidal violence need to take into account the demographics of victims. Depending on their age and sex, people may be affected by homicide in different ways, and this calls for targeted policy responses.

Gender-related killings of women and girls, as measured by the rate of female victims of homicide who are killed by intimate partners or other family members, have remained stable over the last five years, which suggests that women continue to bear the heaviest burden of victimization as a result of gender stereotypes and inequality.

Killings by intimate partners or other family members predominantly affect women. The levels of such killings appear to be relatively stable over time and show less variation across countries than those of other forms of homicide. Combating this type of homicide requires long-term structural changes that address domestic violence through a holistic approach. This involves fostering changes in attitudes to gender roles, reducing dependency, and protecting women and other vulnerable groups through a policy of zero tolerance to violence. In countries with relatively low homicide rates, and in which women make up a large share or even the majority of homicide victims, reducing homicide rates further will remain an elusive goal unless such policies are successful in reducing killings by intimate partners or other family members.

Policies addressing this form of violence against women should actively engage men in combating intimate partner/family-related violence by disseminating cultural norms and values that promote equality between women and men and the elimination of stereotyped gender roles. Concrete measures to involve men and boys in ending violence against women, and thus the gender-related killing of women and girls, include: providing education to boys and girls from an early age that promotes gender equality; and implementing programmes within local communities aimed at questioning existing gender stereotypes, discussing notions of gender and masculinity, and transforming gender roles.

Killings of women by intimate partners represent the culmination of long-term violence and they can be prevented. Policies need to be implemented to ensure that women have access to a comprehensive range of services provided by the police, the justice system, and health and social care agencies. Training should be given to police and law enforcement officers to sensitize them to the needs of women and ensure they can identify and adequately respond to situations of domestic abuse. Impunity for the perpetrators of domestic violence should not be tolerated. Moreover, there should also be policies that provide easy access to specialized support services, such as shelters and helplines, which can give women the support they need to leave an abusive relationship.

Support should be provided to parents in order to prevent the killing of very young children, and a safer environment outside the family should be fostered to prevent the killing of adolescents and young adults

Children, adolescents and young adults can make up a sizeable share of homicide victims, depending on the factors that drive the level of homicide within a country. Very young children are often killed by those who are supposed to nurture and protect them: their parents. Policies that seek to tackle the homicide of very young children should focus on the health and social support provided to parents, as well as on child protection as such. Providing medical assistance to mothers throughout pregnancy, during childbirth and throughout the first months of an infant's life helps reduce the prevalence of infanticide and other forms of violence against children. Welfare policies can relieve economic stressors faced by families and therefore have a positive impact on the safety and well-being of children.

The risk of children becoming victims of homicide outside the family sphere starts to increase from early adolescence onwards. Significantly, the risk increases more rapidly for boys than for girls, especially in regions with high levels of gang violence and organized crime, which take a disproportionate toll on male adolescents and young men.

Young males are overwhelmingly affected by homicide when high levels of lethal violence are driven by gangs, organized crime and violence in communities. In order to tackle child and youth homicide related to such factors, policies should be aimed at strengthening community programmes that focus on limiting the availability of firearms and building trust between the local population and the law enforcement authorities. There should also be policies to ensure that children and young people are able to continue their education and, where appropriate, pursue vocational training that helps them integrate into the labour market.

Tackling the mechanisms related to homicide, such as firearms, can bring about a significant reduction in homicide rates

Comprehensive data and information about mechanisms that facilitate homicide perpetration can guide policymakers in devising more effective, targeted interventions.

Firearms are crucial enablers of high levels of homicide. Civilian possession of firearms is positively correlated with the homicide rate, even though it may become secondary to other factors of a socioeconomic nature, most notably income inequality. Stricter regulation of firearm ownership, along with efforts to reduce the number of illicitly held firearms, can help lower the rate of firearm-related homicide. However, a noticeable reduction in homicide can be obtained only if other factors are addressed at the same time. While restricting access to firearms may reduce the overall homicide rate, the impact on the overall rate may in fact be lower than on that of firearm-related homicide because perpetrators may start resorting to other methods.

Alcohol and drugs are important facilitators of violence and homicide

In terms of absolute numbers, the role of alcohol in homicide cases appears to dwarf that of other substances. In particular, the frequency of heavy episodic drinking is a predictor of violent behaviour. Policies that promote responsibility and moderation in the use of alcohol (through educational programmes, awareness-raising and restricting access to alcohol at certain hours) can lead to a meaningful reduction in alcohol-related violence.

The link between drug use and different forms of crime is complex, but it emerges most clearly in its association with acquisitive (as opposed to violent) crime. In such cases, an “economic-compulsive mechanism” forces drug users to look for ways of funding their drug habit. However, the psychopharmacological properties of certain drugs have also been linked to an increased propensity for violent crime. Providing evidence-based treatment to people suffering from drug use disorders and dependence is beneficial not only for their health but also because it reduces the risk of their becoming involved in crime. This can have positive ripple effects on their lives and on society as a whole.

There is still a need for comprehensive data to improve understanding of the scale of homicidal violence in Africa and parts of Asia, and for more refined disaggregation of homicide statistics around the globe

Given that there is evidence of widespread lethal violence in many parts of Africa and Asia, the gathering of comprehensive data on intentional homicide – including breakdowns by sex, mechanism and situational context – should be prioritized in those two regions. At the moment, the gathering of such comprehensive data is still beyond the capacity of many countries across the world, and particularly so in Africa.

In the medium to the long term, application of the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS) is an important step towards developing comprehensive and comparable crime statistics, including statistics on intentional homicide. The ICCS classification was developed by UNODC in collaboration with experts in a process involving input from over 75 States Members of the United Nations. ICCS helps national authorities to strengthen their data collection capacities and, consequently, to understand the patterns and drivers of crime better. In the context of homicide, ICCS requires the disaggregation of victims and offenders by a number of factors (e.g. age, sex, citizenship and victim-offender relationship). Moreover, disaggregation by event variables (e.g. the situational context in which the crime was perpetrated and the mechanism of killing) makes it possible to characterize homicides more effectively. The sustained and consistent application of ICCS by more and more countries around the world will yield abundant high-quality data and facilitate more detailed analysis of homicidal violence in its various dimensions.

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Since the publication of the previous edition in 2014, the *Global Study on Homicide* has been expanded into a special six-booklet format, five of which are dedicated to thematic areas relevant to the study of the ultimate crime.

Booklet 1 of the *Global Study on Homicide 2019* summarizes the content of the five subsequent substantive booklets by reviewing their key findings and highlighting a set of policy implications derived from the analyses presented in them. Booklet 2 provides an overview of international homicide counts, rates, trends and patterns, and of criminal justice responses to homicide. Booklet 3 examines drivers and mechanisms of, and contributors to, homicide, and looks at the different homicide typologies. The latter is done in an effort to improve understanding of the contexts in which homicide is perpetrated, as this can inform more effective policymaking. Booklet 4 analyses the relationship between homicide and development with reference to the Sustainable Development Goals by looking in detail at the main pillars of development and their reciprocal relationship with homicide and violence. Booklet 5 gives an overview of the scope of gender-related killings of women and girls. It contains an in-depth analysis of killings perpetrated within the family sphere and also examines forms of gender-related killings perpetrated outside the family sphere. Booklet 6 deals with the homicide of children, adolescents and young adults, and covers different types of child killings within and outside the family.

As in previous years, the *Global Study on Homicide 2019* is aimed at improving understanding of this complex phenomenon and at providing policymakers with an updated dataset of cross-national data that evaluates the scale of homicide globally.

The statistical annex is published on the UNODC website: https://www.unodc.org/gsh/

