This chapter provides a snapshot of intentional homicide through an increasingly focused lens. Beginning at the global level and ending at the sub-national level, it subsequently looks at homicide from the perspective of age and sex before analysing homicide trends from 1955 to the present. Whether across regions, sub-regions and countries, age and sex groups, and even over time, the picture of homicide it reveals is one of marked contrasts.

The global and regional picture

UNODC estimates that deaths resulting from intentional homicide amounted to a total of 437,000\(^1\) at the global level in 2012. The largest share of those was registered in the Americas (36 per cent) and large shares were also recorded in Africa and Asia (31 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively). Europe (5 per cent) and Oceania (0.3 per cent) accounted for the lowest shares of homicide by region.

Between 2010 and 2012 the number of homicide victims decreased by 11-14 per cent in Oceania and Europe, and increased by 8.5 per cent in the Americas, yet the fact that UNODC’s 2012 global estimate is lower than its previous estimate in 2010 (468,000 victims) is almost entirely due to methodological revisions of the estimation procedure\(^2\).

The total estimated number of homicides in 2012 leads to an average global homicide rate of 6.2 per 100,000 population (see figure 1.2).\(^3\) But disparities in regional homicide rates are large and clearly point to a high intensity of homicidal violence in the Americas, whereas in Asia, Europe and Oceania, homicide rates fall below the global average.

\(^1\) The global count of victims of intentional homicide, based on sources available at the country level, varies between a low estimate of 324,000 victims and a high estimate of 518,000 victims (see Methodological annex for more information on the calculation of estimate intervals).

\(^2\) Due to a lack of national data on homicides in many African countries and a number of countries in Asia, UNODC makes use of estimates produced by the World Health Organization (WHO). Such data result from indirect estimation methods of the number of deaths resulting from all causes, including homicide (see Methodological annex for further information). These methods were substantially reviewed by the WHO to produce the 2012 estimates.

\(^3\) The global homicide rate is provided with an interval estimate, with a low estimate of 4.6 and a high estimate of 7.4 victims of homicide per 100,000 population.
With averages of over 25 victims per 100,000 population, Southern Africa and Central America are the sub-regions with the highest homicide rates on record, followed by South America, Middle Africa and the Caribbean, with average rates of between 16 and 23 homicides per 100,000 population (see figure 1.3). This sub-regional picture has hardly changed since 2011. Likewise, as discussed later in this chapter, the fact that homicide rates are significantly higher in the Americas in comparison to other regions is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, according to available time series since 1955, the Americas have consistently experienced homicide levels five to eight times higher than those in Europe or Asia (see figure 1.17, page 35).

In addition to the entire region of Oceania, sub-regions with relatively low rates of homicide (less than 3 per 100,000 population) include all the sub-regions of Europe (with the exception of Eastern Europe, which has a medium rate of homicide) and Eastern Asia.

Sub-regional averages can, however, hide disparities in homicide rates at the national level. As map 1.1 demonstrates, for example, countries in the southern part of South America, such as Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, have considerably lower levels of homicide than countries further north, such as Brazil, Colombia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Asia are other examples of sub-regions that show large disparities at the national level (see figure 1.5). For example, in the former, though decreasing, the Russian Federation has a homicide rate slightly less than double the sub-regional average (9.2 versus 5.8 per 100,000 population); in the latter, the Philippines has a homicide rate slightly more than double the sub-regional average (8.8 versus 4.3 per 100,000 population).

Countries with high levels of homicide bear a disproportionately heavy burden of homicide, as they are home to only 11 per cent of the 2012 global population yet they account for 46 per cent of all homicide victims (200,000 homicides out of a population of 750 million). This means that three quarters of a billion people live in countries with serious security concerns, all of which are located in either Africa or the Americas (see figure 1.4). Some of those countries actually have very high homicide rates, above 30 per 100,000 population, which are higher than rates of conflict-related killings in some conflict zones. For example, in 2012, the rates of intentional homicide and of civilian casualties were 6.5 and 9.3\(^4\) per 100,000 population in Afghanistan, and 8.0 and 10.0\(^5\) per 100,000 in Iraq, both situations of ongoing conflict. Even when combining these two rates, the levels of killings recorded in both countries in 2012 were well below 30 per 100,000 population.\(^6\)

---


\(^5\) Based on data from United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), Human Rights Division.

\(^6\) Rates of intentional homicide and of civilian casualties are not directly comparable in both Afghanistan and Iraq, since a cer-
tain degree of overlap between the two respective counts may exist (i.e. certain killings can be counted both as intentional homicide and as civilian casualties).

**Fig. 1.3: Homicide rates, by sub-region (2012 or latest year)**

![Homicide rates by sub-region graph](image)

Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013). The bars represent population-weighted homicide rates based on the source selected at the country level, with low and high estimates derived from homicide rates based on additional sources existing at the country level.

**Map 1.1: Homicide rates, by country or territory (2012 or latest year)**

![Homicide rates by country map](image)

Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations 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. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

**Fig. 1.4:** Homicide victims and population, by countries’ level of homicide per 100,000 population (2012 or latest year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Homicide Rates</th>
<th>Number of Homicides</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countries with high homicide rates (&gt;20)</td>
<td>200,300</td>
<td>0.75 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries with medium homicide rates (3-20)</td>
<td>202,200</td>
<td>3.4 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries with low homicide rates (&lt;3)</td>
<td>34,200</td>
<td>2.9 billion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Fig. 1.5:** Homicide rates at the national level, selected countries, by sub-region (2012 or latest year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Rate per 100,000 population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central America</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>90.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Republic of Moldova</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-Eastern Asia</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By almost symmetrical contrast to the situation in countries with high homicide rates, 42 per cent of the global population lives in countries with low homicide rates that account for only 8 per cent of global homicide victims (34,000 victims out of a population of 2.9 billion).

The sub-national picture

Just as regional and sub-regional homicide rates and trends can disguise variations in levels of homicide at the national level, trends in national homicide rates can also mask differences at the sub-national level that are important from a policy and prevention perspective. For example, so-called homicide “hot spots”, which drive increases or changes in overall aggregated rates of homicide, can remain hidden in the overall national rate of homicide, which is why it is also important to bring homicide at the local level into focus.

Known factors that influence levels of lethal violence can have different manifestations at the local level. They include risk factors like unemployment, poor standards of education, the presence of youth gangs and organized crime, poverty and inequality, and accessibility to firearms, but also protective factors that may be enhanced through the implementation of prevention policies. These factors can lead to very different outcomes in terms of violence and crime, since they operate in different areas and in different ways within any given country.

Sub-national data are not available for all countries, but for those countries that do have such data, sub-national variations are particularly visible in the Americas, as well as in countries in other regions, such as India, the Russian Federation and South Africa (see map 1.2).

Accounting for security and justice in the post-2015 development agenda

As their impact goes far beyond the loss of human life and can create a climate of fear and uncertainty, intentional homicide and violent crime represent a threat to civilian security, which is additional to any threat caused by violence stemming from armed conflict. There is increasing evidence that a lack of security, which is often associated with a weak criminal justice system, can block the path to development of countries and their populations. Indeed, statistical evidence indicates that countries with low homicide rates tend to attain higher levels of human development.

After the landmark experience of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) — the global framework for development in the 2000-2015 period — the international community is now engaged in the elaboration of the political and analytical basis for the post-2015 development agenda. The inclusion of security and justice in the new development framework, as seen in the broader context of the rule of law, has been recognized and promoted by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the Rio+20 declaration and the United Nations General Assembly, as well as a variety of other initiatives.

Member States will soon define the political agenda and the goals that will form the basis of the post-2015 development agenda. If security and justice are to be part of the agenda, appropriate metrics are needed to create the evidence-based understanding of trends. To that end, a framework based on a shortlist of targets and a basket of indicators is needed. Those indicators could be selected on the basis of their applicability in international or specific national contexts, data availability and measurability of the relevant indicator, as well as the ability to demonstrate progress in a particular dimension of justice or security. Among existing ways to measure progress in security and justice, intentional homicide indicators could provide an important measure because of their potential for analysis relating to dimensions of security, including armed and gender-based violence, and their high degree of statistical feasibility. Homicide is the most readily measurable, clearly defined and most comparable indicator for measuring violent deaths around the world.


d See, for example, Muggah, R. and G. Milante (2013); and Saferworld (2013).

e For more, see UNODC (2013a). Accounting for security and justice in the post-2015 development agenda.

f For example, in UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013), time series since 1995 are currently available for 106 countries, while time series data for nine African countries from 2004 are available.
Brazil: Stability in the national homicide rate masks disparities at the sub-national level

A good example of stability in a country’s national homicide rate disguising disparities in homicide rates within its territory is Brazil, where, although the national homicide rate has changed little over the last 30 years, there have been significant changes within its different states. Homicide rates have declined in the States (and cities) of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, but they have risen in other parts of the country, particularly the north and north-east. As homicides in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo States decreased (by 29 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively) from 2007 to 2011, the homicide rate increased by almost 150 per cent in Paraiba and by half in Bahia.* An exception to these trends is the north-eastern State of Pernambuco, which experienced a decrease in its homicide rate during that time period, though it is still at a high level.

Countries in Europe have some of the lowest homicide rates in the world, but sub-national data can paint some interesting pictures within those countries and in certain trans-border regions (see map 1.4). The most significant differences lie in the west-to-east geographical distribution of homicide, as homicide rates increase eastwards across Europe, and there are also higher homicide rates in certain parts of Northern Europe. Available data indicate that this phenomenon is associated with patterns of alcohol consumption (see chapter 3), among other factors.

While homicide rates are generally low in the rest of Europe, certain spots with consistently higher homicide rates over time can be noted. At the national level, they include Albania and Montenegro. Sub-nationally they can be found in the Algarve, the southernmost part of Portugal, which has a homicide rate of 2.5 per 100,000; in the southern tip of Italy, whose homicide rate is attributable to the prevalence of Mafia-related killings (see chapter 2.1); on the French island of Corsica; and in certain more densely-populated urban areas that have higher homicide rates than the rest of their respective countries, such as Amsterdam, Brussels, Prague and Vienna.

Urban homicide
Urban areas tend to have higher rates of homicide than rural areas, even though cities tend to be home to both homicide risk and protective factors. For example, cities can play host to many of the enablers of homicide, such as high levels of income inequality, the potential for anonymity within a dense population and the existence of gangs or organized criminal groups. But cities are also usually home to numerous factors that can help prevent homicide, such as higher levels of policing, better access to services like medical care and educational facilities, and even infrastructural elements such as street lighting and closed-circuit television, which allow for better monitoring of public safety. The presence of certain protective factors can often offset risk factors, but every city, and indeed every neighbourhood, has unique characteristics that can have an influence on homicide.

The urban nature of homicide is particularly noticeable in Central America, the Caribbean and much of Africa. For example, settlements of more than 50,000 inhabitants record a disproportionate number of homicides in countries in Central America. In Guatemala, 68 per cent of all

---

Map 1.4: Homicide rates at the sub-national level, Europe (2012 or latest year)

Homicide rate
- < 1.00
- 1.00 - 1.49
- 1.50 - 2.49
- 2.50 - 6.99
- >= 7.00

Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dashed lines represent undetermined boundaries.

homicides in 2008 took place in such settlements, which housed 58 per cent of the population, while in El Salvador, 63 per cent of all homicides in 2010 took place in such settlements, which housed 51 per cent of the population. In many cities in the Americas, high levels of the aforementioned risk factors converge and, given the concentration of homicide in large cities and particular sub-national areas, there is a resulting need to develop locally-oriented policies to target those risk factors and implement protective factors that specifically address those needs.

By contrast, some countries have higher national average homicide rates than their largest cities (see Statistical annex). For example, in selected countries in Eastern Europe, this phenomenon is also visible as a trend across time. Available data for four countries and their capital cities demonstrate that, from 2004 to 2011, the largest urban areas had homicide rates considerably lower than the national rate (see figure 1.6). An explanation could be that it is an inverted reflection of the situation regarding risk and protective factors in cities, in that rural areas often have lower levels of policing and less access to health and social services than cities. They also tend to be further from emergency and rescue services, and may be disproportionately affected in periods of social and economic change.

The demographics of homicide victims

Globally, 79 per cent of all homicide victims are male and the global average male homicide rate is, at 9.7 per 100,000, almost four times the global average female rate (2.7 per 100,000 females). Both Africa and the Americas have male and female homicide rates above the global average, but the Americas has the highest male homicide rate, while Africa has the highest female homicide rate (see figure 1.7).

As maps 1.5 and 1.6 demonstrate, male homicide rates are consistently higher than female homicide rates in every country across the world. Yet, as discussed in chapter 2.2, some countries in Eastern Asia and Europe are nearing gender parity in terms of the share of victims killed, though many of those countries do have particularly low rates of both male and female homicide.

Probably due to regional differences in the prevalence of different homicide typologies, the age-related picture changes across regions. However, the 15-29 and 30-44 age groups account for the vast majority of homicides globally, with 43 per cent of all homicide victims aged 15-29 and 30 per cent aged 30-44.

It is in the Americas that the greatest concentration of victims is aged 15-29, both male and female. At the sub-regional level, the homicide rate for male victims aged 15-29 in South America and Central

---


9 The male homicide rate is calculated based on a population of 100,000 males, while the female homicide rate is based on a population of 100,000 females.
Map 1.5: Male homicide rate, by country or territory (2012 or latest year)

Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations 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. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).


Map 1.6: Female homicide rate, by country or territory (2012 or latest year)

Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations 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. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

America is more than four times the global average rate for that age group, which may be due to higher levels of gang-related homicide in the Americas than in other regions (see chapter 2.1). To put this into perspective, more than one in seven (15 per cent) homicide victims globally is a young male between 15 and 29 years of age living in the Americas (see figure 1.9).

In contrast to the regional average, the 30-44 age group in Central America and the Caribbean is at a higher risk of homicide than other age groups. For example, in El Salvador, Honduras and Jamaica, the male homicide rate in the 30-44 age group is higher than in the 15-29 age group and while the number of victims is greater in the 15-29 male age group, the rate indicates that the homicide risk for males aged 30-44 is higher (see figure 1.10).¹⁰ In Honduras, this means that almost 1 in every 280 males in the 30-44 age group falls victim to intentional homicide every year, compared to 1 in 360 males aged 15-29. The impact of this dynamic can be devastating for security and the economy, as the deaths of males in the older of the two age groups can have a disproportionate impact on families, the working population and perceptions of security.

In Europe, males aged 30-44 and 45-59 have a higher risk of falling victim to homicide than their younger counterparts (see figure 1.11). This difference may be explained by the relatively greater

---

¹⁰ This is due to the population structure of those countries, which have a high proportion of youth aged 15-29, meaning that the denominator is a larger number for the younger age group when calculating rates by age group.
importance of interpersonal homicide than homicide related to other criminal activities in Europe (see chapter 2.2), as well as other risk factors such as alcohol consumption. By contrast, the pattern for female homicide victims remains quite stable throughout the older age groups in Europe, although women aged 30 and above are at a slightly higher risk than younger women. The uniformity of homicide rates for female victims aged 30 and above in Europe may be related to their exposure to the risk of intimate partner/family-related homicide, which disproportionately affects women (see chapter 2.2).

The pattern of older age groups being more at risk of homicide applies to a range of countries in Asia, Europe and Oceania (see figure 1.12). For example, in selected sample countries with available sex and age data, over three quarters of homicide victims are aged 30 and above, which largely holds for both male and female victims. However, within sub-regions there are outliers that have significantly different homicide age profiles from their neighbouring States. For example, over 90 per cent of male homicide victims in Hungary are aged 30 and above, whereas the share in Eastern Europe as a whole is 75 per cent.

At the youngest end of the age spectrum, 36,000 children under the age of 15 were the victims of homicide at the global level in 2012. Equating to...
8.2 per cent of all homicide victims, this coupled with the share of victims in the 15-29 age group means that more than half of all global homicide victims are under 30 years of age.

At the global level, the sex differentials are not as pronounced in the youngest age group as they are in older age groups. At the regional level, homicide rates are fairly similar for boy and girl victims in Asia, Europe and Oceania, whereas some disparities between the sexes are already evident at an early age in the Americas, with boys already being more at risk than girls (see figure 1.13).

The overall trend in the global homicide rate may be a decreasing one, but it is actually an amalgam of very diverse, sometimes even opposing, regional and sub-regional trends. For example, trend analysis of the last five years shows the stability of homicide rates in much of Asia and Oceania, as well as in all of the sub-regions of Europe, with the exception of Eastern Europe, which has experienced a consistent decrease (see figure 1.14). On the other hand, homicide levels have increased in Eastern and Northern Africa, while the decrease in homicide levels in Southern Africa has also suffered a recent setback. In other sub-regions with relatively high homicide levels, the homicide rate appears to have stabilized in the Caribbean, albeit at a high level; in South America it has fluctuated; and the increasing trend in homicide in Central America has come to a halt.

Africa

Data for trend analysis in Africa are only available for a handful of countries and for a relatively short period of time (since 2004). The limited data available for Northern Africa point to a recent sharp increase in homicide in the sub-region, which is a new and alarming trend largely associated with increased social and political instability, and should be closely monitored. Increases in

Homicide trends

![Fig. 1.13: Homicide rates of males and females aged 0-14, by region (2012 or latest year)](image)

![Fig. 1.14: Homicide rates, by sub-region (2008-2012)](image)
homicide rates have also been observed in Eastern Africa, with Kenya and Uganda both showing increases since 2004. Southern Africa has one of the highest homicide rates in the world, but the homicide rate in South Africa decreased steadily between 1995 and 2011 by more than 50 per cent (from 64.9 to 30.0 per 100,000 population), though it experienced a slight increase back to 31 per 100,000 population in 2012 (see figure 1.15). Time series data is only available for a shorter period in other countries, but Lesotho and Namibia have sustained elevated rates of homicide.

**Americas**

The overall regional increase in homicide in the Americas over the past few years has occurred despite diverging trends in the region’s four sub-regions. With the exception of a spike in 2001 caused by the terrorist attacks of September 11, Northern America has experienced a continuous decline in homicide rates that has accelerated in the last five years. South America now has the same homicide rate as in 1995, which is the result of very different trends at the country level. For example, Colombia’s homicide rate has been decreasing since 1996 but remains at a very high level, while the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is the only country in South America that has had a consistently increasing homicide rate since 1995. Other countries in the region have quite stable homicide rates, but at different levels: Brazil’s homicide rate is quite stable and high, while homicide rates in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay are stable and lower, which gives them homicide profiles closer to those of European countries.

Central America experienced a declining homicide rate from 1995 to 2004, followed by a marked increase from 2007, often related to drug trafficking and high levels of organized crime-related violence, which has resulted in one of the highest sub-regional homicide rates in the world (26.5 per 100,000 population). Over the last 12 years, the Caribbean has experienced an increase in its homicide rate, whose fluctuations are also linked to changes in drug trafficking patterns and gang violence. Much of the high rate in these sub-regions can be attributed to very high rates of homicide in the “Northern Triangle” (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras), as well as in Jamaica.11 In terms of addressing the escalating levels of violence in Central America and the Caribbean, recent

---

Homicide rates in Europe have decreased or remained stable at low rates in many countries over the time period in question, with the exception of the 1997 spike in Albania during a period of civil unrest. Significant developments are most notable in the decline in Eastern Europe's homicide rate, driven largely by the rate's decline in the Russian Federation since 2001. The improvement in socio-economic conditions in many Eastern European countries is likely to have contributed to the continuing decrease in homicide rates in the sub-region. This phenomenon can also be seen in Northern Europe, where the Baltic countries have experienced a 50 per cent decline in their homicide rates in the past decade. Homicide rates in other countries in Europe have remained low and steady, and developments include the decline in El Salvador’s homicide rate by 40 per cent since 2012, following a gang truce in that country (see chapter 2.1). Furthermore, Jamaica's homicide rate has also decreased by 35 per cent since 2009, which may be attributable to a significant drop in crime-related homicides.

Asia

The homicide rate in Asia has been steadily decreasing since 1995, with significant decreases in the continent’s various sub-regions. Central Asian countries have seen their homicide rates decline, from comparably higher levels, by one to two thirds in the past decade, but an isolated peak occurred in 2010, which coincided with a period of civil unrest in Kyrgyzstan. In Eastern Asia, the sub-region with the lowest homicide rates in the world, Japan and Hong Kong, China have consistently had rates below 1 per 100,000 population. Southern and South-Eastern Asia have also seen an overall decrease in homicidal violence in countries where data are available. The sub-regional rate for South-Eastern Asia peaked in 2003 due to an increase in Thailand associated with the fight against drug trafficking, while the decreasing trend in the Philippines has also helped drive the decrease in the sub-region’s homicide rate. In Southern Asia, the stability of the homicide rate in the most populous country, India, masks increases in the rates of other countries in the region, notably Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Europe

Homicide levels in Europe have decreased or remained stable at low rates in many countries over the time period in question, with the exception of the 1997 spike in Albania during a period of civil unrest. Significant developments are most notable in the decline in Eastern Europe's homicide rate, driven largely by the rate’s decline in the Russian Federation since 2001. The improvement in socio-economic conditions in many Eastern European countries is likely to have contributed to the continuing decrease in homicide rates in the sub-region. This phenomenon can also be seen in Northern Europe, where the Baltic countries have experienced a 50 per cent decline in their homicide rates in the past decade. Homicide rates in other countries in Europe have remained low and steady, and...
the sub-regions of Western and Southern Europe have very low rates of homicide, of around 1 per 100,000 population.

**Long-term homicide trends**

An additional perspective can be gained by situating levels of homicide within a historical context. The analysis of long-term homicide trends is also useful for identifying patterns which, irrespective of fluctuations in the short-to-mid-term, may point to the different drivers of violence in different countries.

Although not indicative of global trends, available data for a selected number of countries provide important insights into homicide levels since 1955 (see figure 1.17). On average, in five countries in the Americas with available data, homicide rates have been consistently and significantly higher than those recorded in European countries. Today, countries in the Americas with homicide rates significantly higher than the global average are revisiting the region’s previous experience of lethal violence, whereas the countries in Europe with available data have long-term homicide levels in line with those in the few countries in Asia/Oceania for which trend data are available.

In the period under examination, individual countries followed different trajectories. In the Americas, for example, Colombia’s long history of violent political conflicts and struggles with organized criminal groups tended to coincide with periods of high homicide rates, especially in the 1950s and 1990s. But those rates have seen a sharp downward turn in the last decade, largely due to increases in stability and prosperity, as well as the decline in the threat from armed criminal and revolutionary groups. On the other hand, the sudden increase in Mexico’s homicide rate since 2007 has come after a steadily declining trend, from comparably high levels in the mid-1950s.

The long-term experience of many of the countries in the Americas included here, though very different in levels, trends and timing, still indicates that they have rarely recorded homicide rates lower than 10 per 100,000. But one country in the Americas with a different story to tell is Chile, which has never recorded a homicide rate above 5 per 100,000 population since 1955 and, while the country experienced some peaks in homicide in the late 1960s and early 1970s, its homicide rate has never reached levels recorded elsewhere in the region (see figure 1.18).

The period of stability that most European countries entered after the mid-1950s is reflected in stable and low homicide rates (see figure 1.19), which have usually remained at a very low level (below 2 per 100,000). Some notable exceptions exist, both in terms of peaks recorded by individual countries (France: Algerian war around 1960;

---

15 The five countries are Chile, Colombia, Mexico, the United States of America and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.
Italy: years of terrorism and Mafia-related violence in the early 1980s and early 1990s) as well as in the overall trends of individual countries such as Finland and Hungary, two countries that have had parallel homicide trends but for two periods of major political change that affected Hungary (the civil revolution in 1956 and the regime transition in the early 1990s).

The few countries/territories in Asia and Oceania for which long-term data are available have been characterised by very stable social and economic situations, which are reflected in low homicide levels, although there have been some fluctuations in the case of Hong Kong, China and New Zealand, mostly due to low numbers of homicide victims and small population sizes (see figure 1.20).

Fig. 1.18: Homicide rate, selected countries, the Americas (1955-2012, three-year moving average)

Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013) and WHO Mortality Database.

Fig. 1.19: Homicide rate, selected countries, Europe (1955-2012, three-year moving average)

Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013) and WHO Mortality Database.
With no notable fluctuations, the homicide rate in Japan has decreased steadily since 1955 to reach one of the lowest levels in the world. The country’s homicide rate is associated with a stable and prosperous society with low inequality and high levels of development. Young Japanese males now commit only a tenth of the homicides committed by their predecessors in 1955, and the age and sex distribution of victims tend to be uniform across age groups.\(^\text{16}\) This has been attributed by some researchers to, amongst other factors, extremely low levels of gun ownership (1 in 175 households),\(^\text{17}\) a greater chance of detection (according to police data, 98 per cent of homicide cases are solved),\(^\text{18}\) the rejection of violence after the Second World War, the growth of affluence without the accompanying concentrations of poverty common in many highly developed countries, and the stigma of arrest for any crime in Japanese society.\(^\text{19}\)

---


\(^{18}\) This data includes attempted homicides. Ministry of Justice, Research and Training Institute, Japan (2011).
