



**UNODC**

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

# GLOBAL STUDY ON HOMICIDE

2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



TRENDS / CONTEXTS / DATA





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through the filter of data from the global to the sub-national level, the *Global Study on Homicide 2013* gives a comprehensive overview of intentional homicide across the world. As homicide is one of the most comparable and accurate indicators for measuring violence, the aim of this study is to improve understanding of criminal violence by providing a wealth of information about where homicide occurs and with what intensity, about who is most at risk, why they are at risk and exactly how their lives are taken from them. Additionally, homicide patterns over time shed light on regional differences, especially when looking at long-term trends.

As the international community looks towards the post-2015 development agenda, the connection between violence, security and development, within the broader context of the rule of law, is an important factor to be considered. Since its impact goes beyond the loss of human life and can create a climate of fear and uncertainty, intentional homicide (and violent crime) is a threat to the population. Homicide data can therefore play an important role in monitoring security and justice.

Likewise, homicide data can enable the international community to gain a better understanding of the complexity of homicide and the different ways it affects the population, which is why this study delves deeply into the very nature of intentional homicide. In so doing, it posits a unique typology of homicide: homicide related to other criminal activities; interpersonal homicide; and socio-political homicide. The influence of cross-cutting and enabling factors, such as killing mechanisms and the use of psychoactive substances (alcohol and illicit drugs), is also examined in

order to gain a better understanding of the role they play in lethal violence.

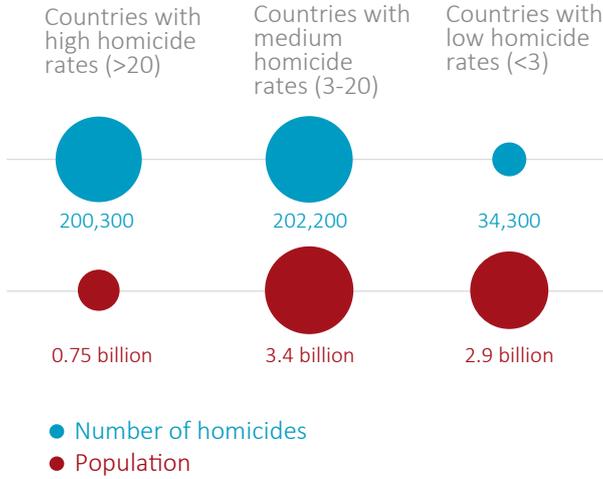
This analytical framework will help governments to develop strategies and policies for protecting those most at risk and addressing those most likely to offend. To that end, the criminal justice response of countries to homicide is also analysed here for the first time, as is violence in countries emerging from conflict, where violence related to crime and interpersonal issues can be just as devastating as violence relating to the conflict itself.

The increasing availability of sub-national data has also broadened this study's capacity to show variations, which are often marked, in the intensity of homicide within countries and to enable the identification of homicide "hot spots", which warrant further monitoring, both within countries and sub-regions. Indeed, as this study shows, the study of intentional homicide is, to a large extent, the study of contrasts. For example: almost half of all homicides occur in countries that make up just over a tenth of the global population; some 95 per cent of homicide perpetrators at the global level are male; males also account for almost 8 out of every 10 homicide victims; two thirds of the victims of homicides committed by intimate partners or family members globally are female; and half of all global homicide victims are under 30 years of age.

### The polarization of homicide

Intentional homicide caused the deaths of almost half a million people (437,000) across the world in 2012. More than a third of those (36 per cent) occurred in the Americas, 31 per cent in Africa and 28 per cent in Asia, while Europe (5 per cent) and Oceania (0.3 per cent) accounted for the lowest shares of homicide at the regional level.

**Homicide victims and population, by countries' level of homicide per 100,000 population (2012 or latest year)**



Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013).

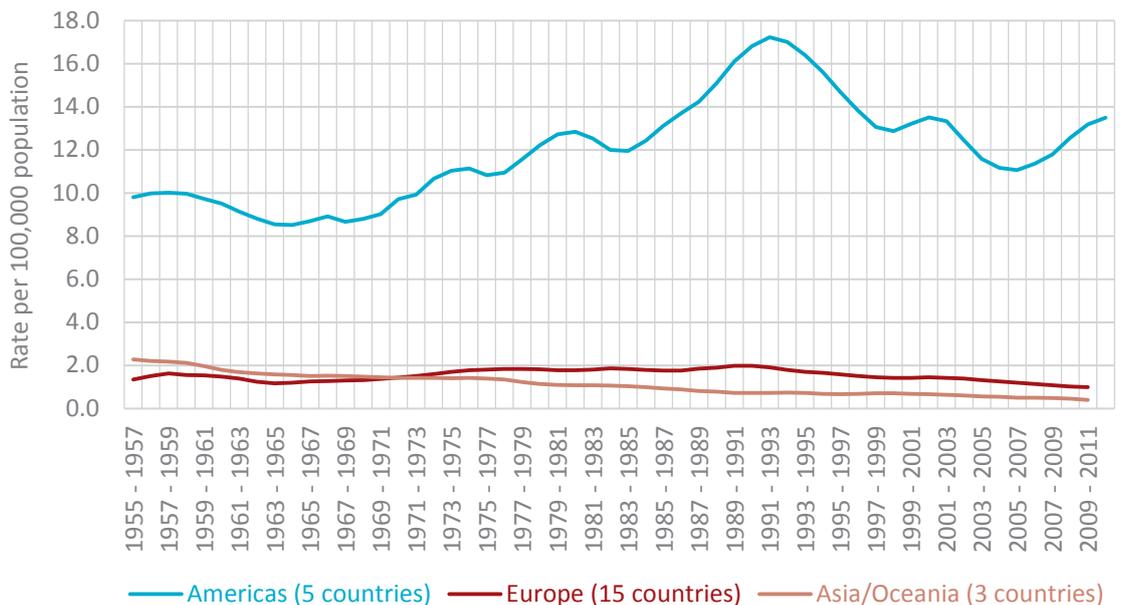
The global average homicide rate stands at 6.2 per 100,000 population, but Southern Africa and Central America have rates over four times higher than that (above 24 victims per 100,000 population), making them the sub-regions with the highest homicide rates on record, followed by South America, Middle Africa and the Caribbean (between 16 and 23 homicides per 100,000 population). Meanwhile, with rates some five times lower than the global average, Eastern Asia, Southern Europe and Western Europe are the sub-regions with the lowest homicide levels.

Almost three billion people live in an expanding group of countries with relatively low homicide rates, many of which, particularly in Europe and Oceania, have continued to experience a decrease in their homicide rates since 1990. At the opposite end of the scale, almost 750 million people live in countries with high homicide levels, meaning that almost half of all homicides occur in countries that make up just 11 per cent of the global population and that personal security is still a major concern for more than 1 in 10 people on the planet.

A widening gap in homicide levels exists between countries with high homicide rates and those with low homicide rates. There are also notable disparities in homicide within regions and sub-regions, as individual countries follow different paths over time. For example, homicide rates in the southern part of South America are closer to the relatively low rates recorded in Europe, while the rates in the north of the sub-region are closer to the relatively high rates recorded in Central America. Likewise, at the sub-national level, the most populous city in the vast majority of countries generally records higher homicide rates than elsewhere, with notable exceptions being certain countries in Eastern Europe.

Certain regions and sub-regions have experienced sustained high levels of homicide. This is particularly notable in the Americas, where homicide levels have been high, and in some cases increasing, over the past decade. But this is not a new

**Homicide rates, selected regions (1955-2012, three-year moving average)**



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

pattern, as the Americas have had homicide rates five to eight times higher than those in Europe and Asia since the mid-1950s. The continuing high levels of homicide in the Americas are the legacy of decades of political and crime-related violence, which has hindered a decline in homicide levels in certain countries. However, homicide levels in some countries in the Americas, such as Brazil, are now stabilizing, albeit at a high level, while in other regions, countries with historically high homicide rates, such as South Africa, Lesotho, the Russian Federation and countries in Central Asia, are managing to break their own cycle of violence and have recorded decreases in their homicide rates.

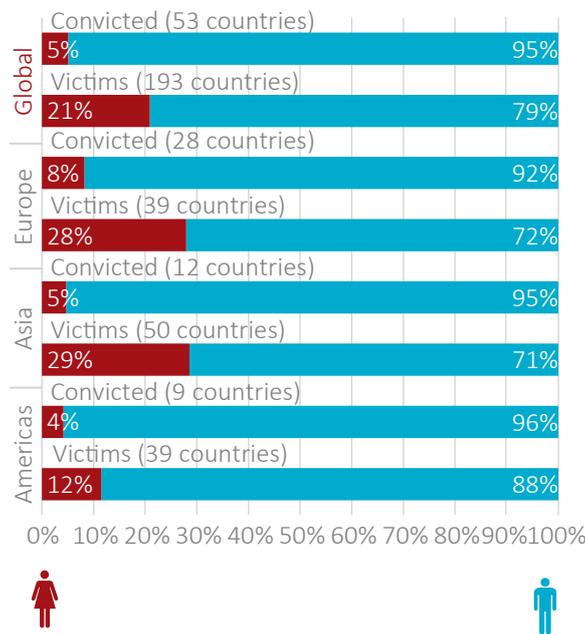
At the opposite end of the spectrum, in countries with some of the lowest homicide rates in the world, mostly located in Europe and Eastern Asia, homicide levels continue to decline. Many of those countries had low levels of homicide in 1995 and have subsequently recorded continuous decreases in their homicide rates. On the other hand, a worrying development is that homicide levels in Northern Africa are rising, probably as a result of political violence, which may in turn foster lethal violence related to criminal activities, and should be monitored. The same can be said for parts of Southern Asia and Eastern Africa.

### The gender bias

Polarization not only exists in terms of where homicide occurs, but also in the sex of its victims and perpetrators. In the context of family and intimate partner relationships, women are considerably more at risk than men, yet 79 per cent of all homicide victims globally are male. Moreover, some 95 per cent of homicide perpetrators at the global level are also male; a share that is consistent across countries and regions, irrespective of the homicide typology or weapon used.

The global male homicide rate is almost four times that of females (9.7 versus 2.7 per 100,000) and is highest in the Americas (29.3 per 100,000 males), where it is nearly seven times higher than in Asia, Europe and Oceania (all under 4.5 per 100,000 males). This is due in large part to the higher levels of homicide related to organized crime and gangs in the Americas than in other regions. When factoring in the finding that 43 per cent of all homicide victims are aged 15-29, this means that more than one in seven of all homicide victims globally is a young male aged 15-29 living in the Americas.

### Percentage of male and female homicide victims and of males and females convicted of intentional homicide, by region (2011 or latest year)

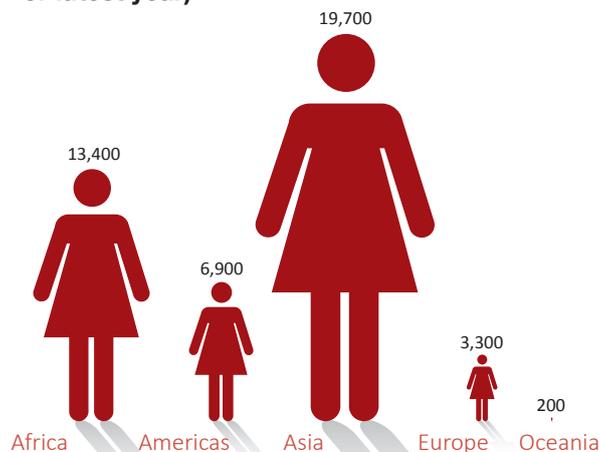


Note: Data on four countries in Africa and Oceania are included in the global total but not shown separately.

Source: UN-CTS.

There is a regional and gender bias towards male victims in homicide related to organized crime and gangs, but interpersonal homicide in the form of intimate partner/family-related homicide is far more evenly distributed across regions and is, on average, remarkably stable at the global level.

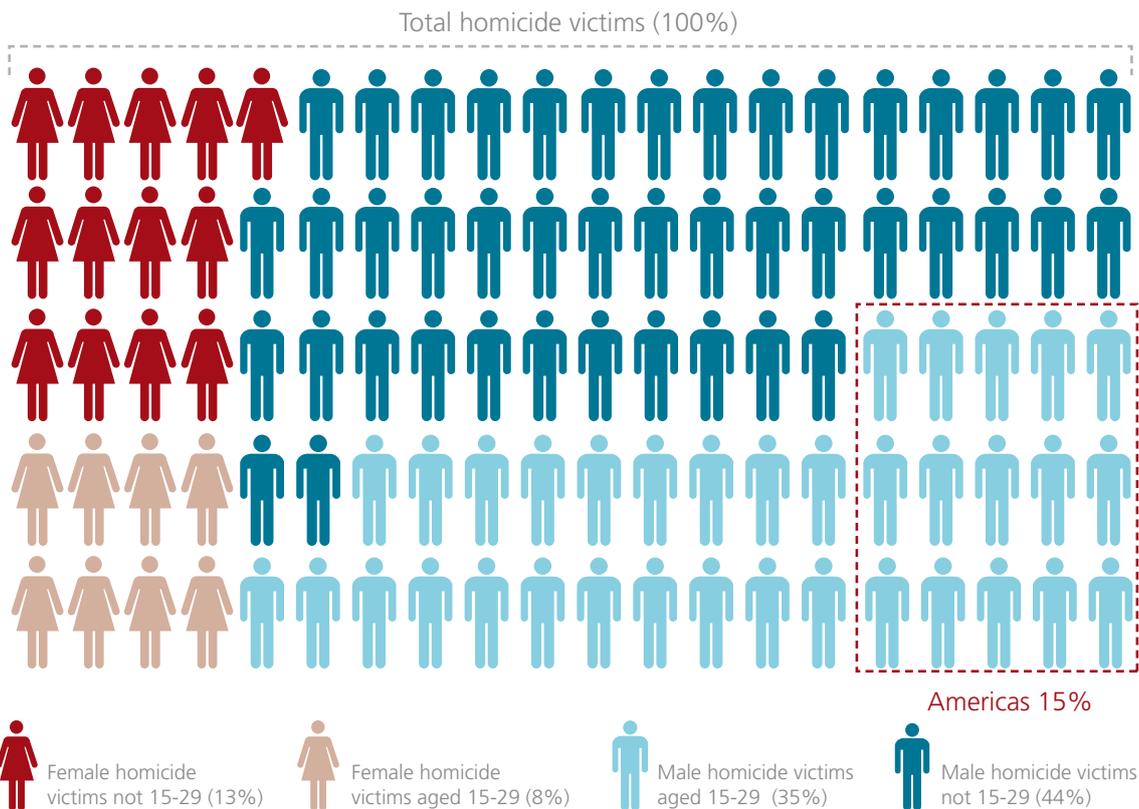
### Number of women killed by intimate partners and family members, by region (2012 or latest year)



Note: Estimates are based on data for 4 countries in Africa, 15 countries in the Americas; 9 countries in Asia; 21 countries in Europe; and 3 countries in Oceania.

Source: Elaboration based on UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013).

**Percentage distribution of victims of homicide, by sex and selected age group (2012 or latest year)**



Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013).

However, intimate partner/family-related homicide disproportionately affects women: two thirds of its victims globally are female (43,600 in 2012) and one third (20,000) are male. Almost half (47 per cent) of all female victims of homicide in 2012 were killed by their intimate partners or family members, compared to less than 6 per cent of male homicide victims. Thus while a large share of female homicide victims are murdered by people who are expected to care for them, the majority of men are killed by people they may not even know.

**Youth at risk**

Something that the majority of male and female homicide victims do have in common is their relative youth. The 15-29 and 30-44 age groups account for the vast majority of homicides globally, with almost half of all homicide victims aged 15-29 and slightly less than a third aged 30-44. The homicide rate for male victims aged 15-29 in South America and Central America is more than four times the global average rate for that age group. The 30-44 age group is, however, at higher risk in some countries in Central America, the Caribbean and all sub-regions in Europe. The impact of this dynamic can be devastating for

security and the economy, as the deaths of males in the 30-44 age group can have a disproportionate impact on families, the working population and perceptions of security.

At the youngest end of the age spectrum, 36,000 children under the age of 15 were the victims of homicide worldwide in 2012. Equating to 8 per cent of all homicide victims, this coupled with the share of victims in the 15-29 age group (43 per cent) means that more than half of all global homicide victims are under 30 years of age.

**The many faces of homicide**

Based on elements including premeditation, motivation, context, instrumentality and the relationship between victim and perpetrator, this study identifies three distinct homicide typologies in order to shed light on different types of lethal violence: homicide related to other criminal activities; homicide related to interpersonal conflict; and homicide related to socio-political agendas.

Homicide related to other criminal activities registers very different levels across the world's regions, but there are currently very high levels of killings of that nature in areas of Central and South America, which are often linked to violence between

organized criminal groups. Overall, organized crime/gang-related homicide accounts for 30 per cent of homicides in the Americas, compared to less than 1 per cent in Asia, Europe and Oceania, but that does not necessarily mean that organized crime or gangs are more prevalent in the Americas than in other regions. Moreover, levels of organized crime/gang-related homicide can fluctuate dramatically, even in the short term, to the extent that they actually drive changes in homicide rates in some countries in Central America and the Caribbean. On the other hand, homicide committed during the course of other criminal acts appears to be more stable across the world, with homicide linked to robbery accounting for an average of 5 per cent of all homicides in the Americas, Europe and Oceania each year.

Not all homicide in the Americas is linked to other criminal activities, however: homicide related to interpersonal conflict also accounts for a significant share of homicides. In Montevideo, Uruguay, for example, the share of interpersonal homicides is higher than the share of crime-related homicides; and in Quito, Ecuador, the shares of those two different typologies are almost identical.<sup>1</sup> Interpersonal homicide accounts for a significant share of homicides around the world (for example, Costa Rica: 47 per cent; India: 48 per cent; Sweden: 54 per cent), and it has completely different drivers to homicide related to other criminal activities, often being a means of resolving a conflict and/or punishing the victim through violence when relationships come under strain. Intimate partner/family-related homicide is one form of interpersonal homicide that affects every country, irrespective of affluence, development and both risk and protective factors, which can mitigate levels of lethal violence. Accounting for 14 per cent of all homicides globally, intimate partner/family-related homicide has the greatest intensity in the Americas, whereas it accounts for a larger share of all homicides in Asia, Europe and Oceania, where those most at risk are women aged 30 and over. Other types of interpersonal homicide, such as property disputes or revenge-type killings, also occur all around the globe.

More difficult to quantify than the other two typologies, homicide related to socio-political agendas is committed in order to exert influence over power relationships and to advance a particular agenda. This type of homicide can draw a lot of

attention due to its often shocking nature — as in the case of acts of terror leading to death — and can represent a substantive share of total homicides in specific contexts or regions, such as in post-conflict settings or during periods of instability. War and conflict-related killings are also considered socio-political violence, but are not included in this category as they are outside the realm of intentional homicide.

### External cross-cutting factors

A number of factors intervene in the process that leads to the commission of homicide. Ranging from the availability of a weapon (or lack of one) to the use of psychoactive substances, which may act as homicide “enablers”, such elements can shape patterns and levels of homicide, and when they are targeted by prevention policies, homicide can be reduced.

Not all homicides involve them, but weapons do play a significant role in homicide. With their high level of lethality,<sup>2</sup> firearms are the most widely used weapons, accounting for 4 out of every 10 homicides at the global level, whereas “other means”, such as physical force and blunt objects, among others, kill just over a third of homicide victims, while sharp objects kill a quarter.

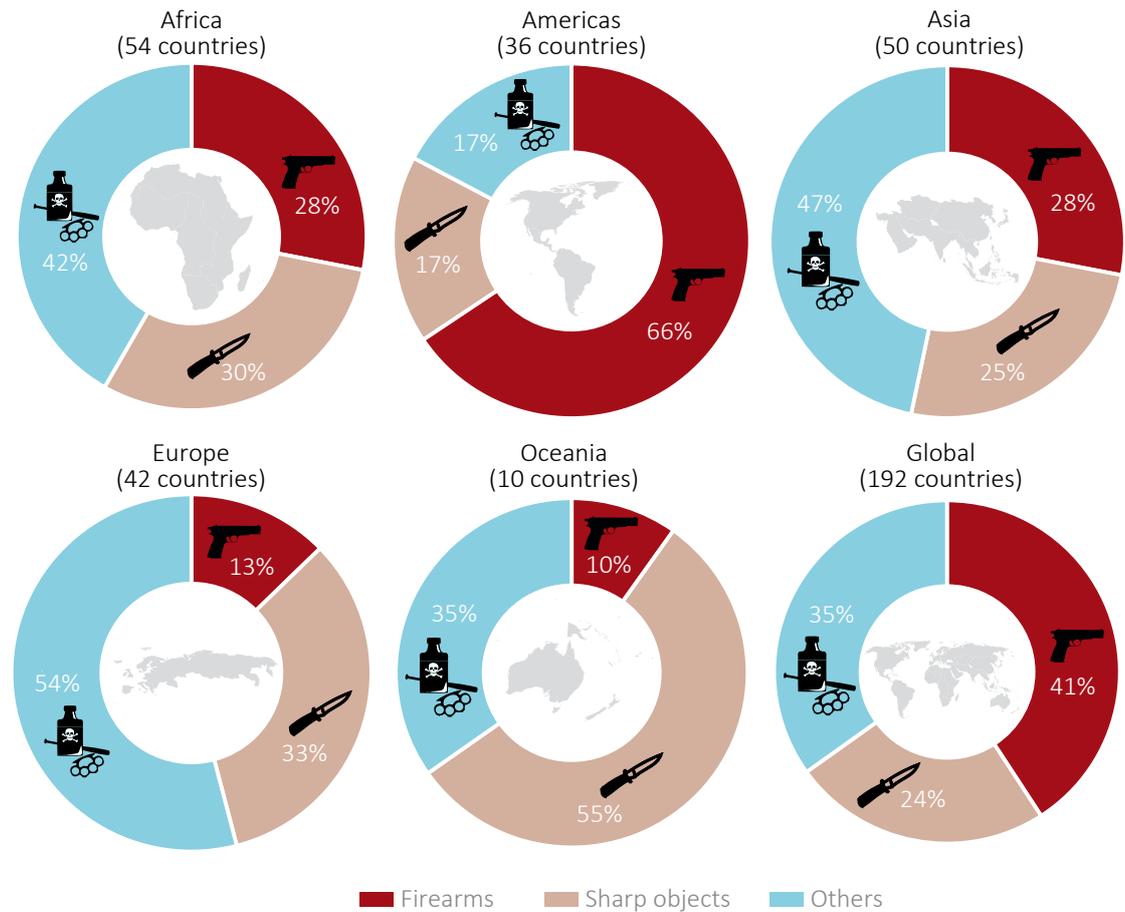
The use of firearms is particularly prevalent in the Americas, where two thirds of homicides are committed with guns, whereas sharp objects are used more frequently in Oceania and Europe. However, not all high homicide areas are associated with a high prevalence of firearm homicide. For example, some sub-regions with relatively high homicide rates, such as Eastern Europe and Southern Africa, have a relatively low share of homicides by firearm, while others, such as Southern Europe and Northern Africa, have lower homicide rates but higher shares of homicides committed by firearm.

In addition to weapons, the consumption of alcohol and/or illicit drugs increases one’s risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence. In Sweden and Finland, for example, over half of all homicide offenders were intoxicated with alcohol when they committed homicide. In Australia, recent data suggests that nearly half of all homicide incidents were preceded by alcohol consumption

1 Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (2013).

2 Lethality of a weapon depends on the type and calibre of firearm. Whether or not a victim survives a gunshot wound is often dependent on other factors, such as the availability and efficiency of health care systems. For more, see Alvazzi del Frate, A. (2012). *Small Arms Survey, Moving Targets: chapter 3*.

**Homicide mechanism, by region (2012 or latest year)**



Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013) and IHME (2010).

by the victim or the perpetrator, or both. Illicit drugs can affect homicide levels in different ways, but the psychopharmacological effects of certain illicit drugs, such as cocaine and amphetamine-type stimulants, are more linked to violence than others and can have an impact on homicide similar to that caused by alcohol, as indicated by data from some countries.

As well as violence associated with the consumption of illicit drugs, violence associated with the functioning of illicit drug markets can also drive homicide levels, often due to competition between involved parties. Studies and available data indicate that the cultivation, production, trafficking and sale of illicit drugs may be accompanied by high levels of violence and homicide. However, this relationship does not hold in all situations because the modus operandi of organized criminal groups, as well as the response by State authorities, can determine actual levels of homicidal violence involved in drug trafficking.

**Homicide, violence and conflict**

In countries emerging from conflict, it is often difficult to disentangle lethal violence that is an after-effect of conflict, or a lower-intensity continuation of conflict, from violence of a different nature, particularly if the conflict has not been fully resolved. Reducing violence in countries emerging from conflict goes beyond the need to address the roots of the conflict, to include the prevention of surges in violence resulting from organized crime and interpersonal violence, which can flourish in settings with weak rule of law.

This study presents findings from selected countries based on the availability of data, which show that crime is an important component of violence in countries emerging from conflict, and that violence related to crime can become a significant factor in the overall security situation in such countries. The analysis is based on the situations in Afghanistan, Haiti, Iraq, Liberia, Sierra Leone and South Sudan, which have all had different experi-

ences in the years following conflict on their soil, yet all struggle with crime and its enablers.

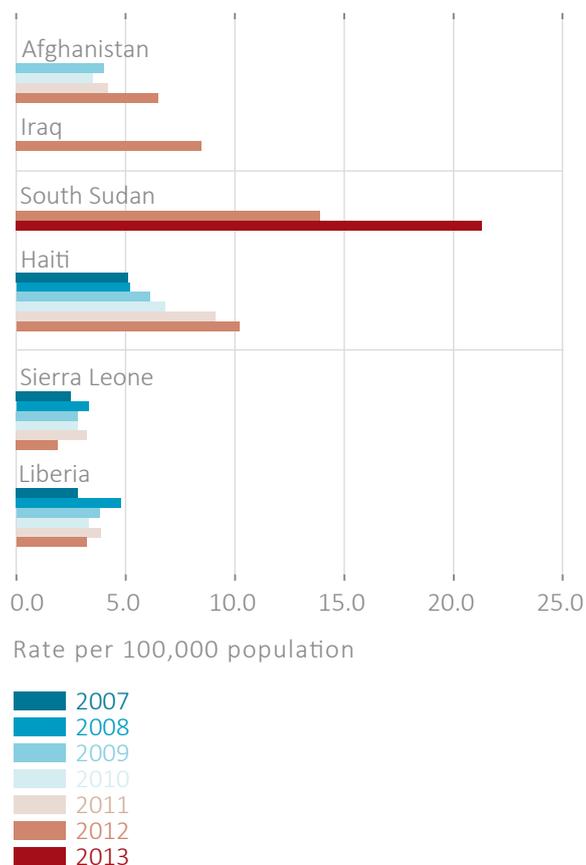
In Afghanistan and Iraq, the conflict may be facilitating other types of violence, or masking the differences in the violence perpetrated by non-parties to the conflict. In Afghanistan, civilian casualties related to the conflict have been decreasing since 2010, while homicides have been increasing. Iraq, which had an estimated homicide rate of 8.0 per 100,000 population in 2012, has been experiencing a surge in conflict-related violence since early 2013, with most of the resulting deaths being of civilians.

Data for Haiti and South Sudan show that volatility caused by the conflict can undermine the implementation of the rule of law and can present opportunities for crime (whether organized or not) to take root. Haiti's homicide rate doubled from 5.1 in 2007 to 10.2 per 100,000 in 2012, much of it driven by high levels of violence and gang activity in the capital, Port-au-Prince, where 75 per cent of all Haiti's homicides occurred. In South Sudan, high levels of firearm availability have increased the lethality associated with cattle raiding, particularly in the Wunlit Triangle, where the homicide rate in 2013 was, at over 60 per 100,000 population, among the highest in the world.

A gradual improvement in security is an encouraging development in Sierra Leone and Liberia, where reconciliation processes and dedicated policies to tackle crime are resulting in a gradually improving security situation. Both countries continue to suffer homicide "hot spots" — particularly in their capital cities — and much of the killing is linked to interpersonal violence. Respondents to recent victimization surveys feared violent crime, but in Sierra Leone, although over 50 per cent of the surveyed population had experienced assault, most felt that the level of violent crime had decreased in the last three years. Liberians surveyed also felt that the Government had been successful in reducing crime, though mob justice was cited as a motivator for 15 per cent of homicides recorded there in 2012.

Addressing crime and homicide in all its forms is crucial for countries emerging from conflict, as crime-related violence can escalate to levels similar to those of violence in times of conflict. Organized criminal groups can exploit power vacuums left when conflict ends and before strong institutions take hold, and impunity for crimes can further undermine the public's trust in justice authorities.

### Homicide rates in selected countries emerging from conflict (2007-2013)



Source: Ministry of Interior Affairs, Afghanistan (2013); WHO (2014); Ministry of Interior, South Sudan (2012); UNDPKO-UNMISS (2013); UNDPKO-MINUSTAH (2013); Sierra Leone Police (2011); UNDPKO-UNMIL (2013).

### Justice and prevention

Analysing the capacity of criminal justice systems to bring perpetrators of homicide to justice is an important element in the assessment of a core responsibility of the State, as well as in the understanding of a factor that contributes to homicide levels and trends. An effective criminal justice system that ensures rigorous investigation and fair adjudication of suspected homicide offenders is a pre-requisite for upholding the rule of law and achieving justice for homicide victims, while, conversely, the impunity of perpetrators can actually contribute to the perpetration of more homicides.

The efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice response can be measured by a number of indicators, such as homicide cases solved by the police, persons arrested for and persons convicted of homicide. These indicators are quantitative, however, and data of this type do not provide information about fundamental qualitative aspects of criminal justice administration, such as the

quality of investigations, the right to legal aid, the fairness of procedures or the duration of trials.

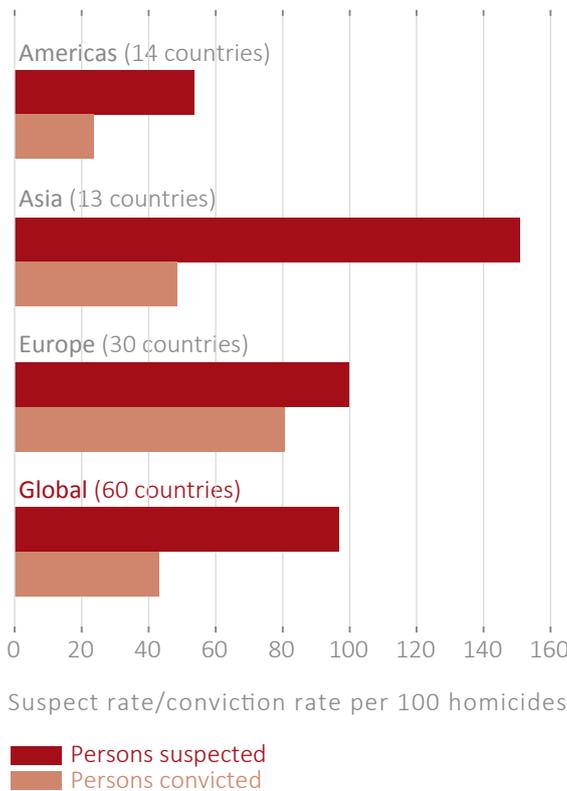
At the global level, police forces tend to respond promptly to homicide offences, to the extent that in a little over 60 per cent of cases they are able to identify and arrest one or several suspects for a particular homicide, allowing the case to be turned over to the prosecution service. Significant regional disparities do, however, exist: 80 and 85 per cent, respectively, of homicide cases are “cleared” in this way in Asia and Europe, and some 50 per cent in the Americas.

An important indication of the criminal justice response to homicide is the conviction rate, which, at the global level, leads to 43 perpetrators being convicted for every 100 victims of intentional homicide. However, disparities across regions are even greater than in the case of the clearance rates mentioned above, with a conviction rate of 24 per 100 victims in the Americas, 48 in Asia and 81 in Europe.

The level of impunity for homicide in the Americas is thus rather high, which may be partly due to the fact that the region’s high intensity of homicide is a drain on criminal justice resources. Moreover, homicides in the Americas are often connected to organized crime or gang activity, which usually have lower clearance and conviction rates in comparison to other homicide typologies like intimate partner/family-related homicide, or other types of interpersonal homicide. The downward trend in the conviction rate in the Americas in recent years is particularly alarming as rising homicide trends since 2007 have not been paralleled by similar levels of convictions, meaning that impunity related to homicide has grown in the Americas in recent years.

Homicide and violence also play an important role in the final stage of the criminal justice process. Irrespective of their different levels of homicide, the share of homicide offenders among the total prison population is not markedly different across regions: in Europe and the Americas it is between 7 and 10 per cent, whereas it is slightly lower in Asia (4 per cent). In terms of overall prison populations, shares of homicide offenders are conspicuous and they pose specific management challenges to prison administrations. For example, in countries with available data in the Americas, the homicide rate per 100,000 prisoners is three times higher than the homicide rate in the general population.

**Persons suspected and persons convicted per 100 homicides, by region (2011 or latest year)**



Note: Data on three countries in Africa and Oceania are included in the global total but not shown separately.  
Source: UN-CTS.

Throughout this study, examples of policy and legislation are offered to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of targeted intervention programmes and strategies for preventing and reducing homicide at various levels. For example, global treaties such as the Arms Trade Treaty, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in April 2013 and aims to regulate and improve the regulation of the global trade in conventional arms in order to prevent, disrupt and eradicate the illicit trade in such weapons, are enacted by the international community to contribute to the prevention of lethal violence.

At the national level, firearm and knife legislation restricting availability, accessibility and use has been implemented in various countries with varying degrees of success in preventing or reducing homicides committed with such weapons. Municipal policies, including those restricting the opening hours of premises licensed to sell alcohol, and others monitoring the victims of intimate partner/family-related violence, have proved effective at

reducing the number of homicides in the areas in which they have been implemented. Furthermore, policing strategies implemented at the neighbourhood level have also demonstrated great success in targeting violence “hot spots” and in improving community safety.

### Data challenges

Policies and prevention strategies like those mentioned above benefit from the collection of reliable data and the analysis of homicide and other crime statistics, which deepen the understanding of the drivers of violence and can inform policymakers about how best to direct limited resources towards tackling violent crime.

The *Global Study on Homicide 2013* is based on the UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013) dataset, compiled from a variety of national and international sources, covering 219 countries and territories. These data are derived from either criminal justice or public health systems, each of which records data on intentional homicide in different ways. As a result, data are of differing validity, accuracy, international comparability and coverage, but this study emphasizes the strengths of both sources.

Since the publication of the *Global Study on Homicide 2011*, there has been an improvement in the availability of data on intentional homicide. The number of countries and territories for which consistent data on the number of homicide victims, as well as the breakdown by age, sex, mechanism of killing and the context in which the homicide occurred, has increased and a longer time series is available in many cases. There is, however, more work to be done to continue this improvement.

Ongoing methodological work to develop the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS) will provide, for the first time, an internationally agreed definition and classification of intentional homicide, and therefore guide the production of homicide data by national statistical systems. At the national level, further efforts will be needed to coordinate and harmonize the production of homicide statistics by all relevant stakeholders, from both the criminal justice and public health sector.

The progress made over the last decade in producing and collecting data on homicide has made it possible for such data to be widely used to monitor security and crime at the global, regional and national levels. Further and focused efforts, espe-

cially in parts of Africa, Asia and Oceania, are now necessary to fill remaining gaps.

### Chapter by chapter

The study is structured into six chapters, as well as two annexes that present the methodology and data, and a comprehensive list of references for each chapter.

Chapter 1 provides a snapshot of intentional homicide from the global to the sub-national level, as well as from the perspective of age and sex, and homicide trends from 1955 to the present day.

Chapter 2 posits a classification of homicide that splits homicide into three distinct typologies in order to shed light on different forms of violent crime: homicide related to other criminal activities; homicide related to interpersonal conflict; and homicide related to socio-political agendas.

Chapter 3 analyses homicide mechanisms and enablers by looking at various weapons and the role of psychoactive substances. It also presents an overview of the systemic violence associated with illicit drug markets.

Chapter 4 looks at homicide and violence in countries with recent experience of conflict so as to provide insight into the challenges associated with the legacy of violence and to understand the role of the different homicide typologies in such settings.

Chapter 5 focuses on the response of the criminal justice system to homicide in terms of cases solved by the police, persons arrested for and persons convicted of homicide. It also looks into homicide in prison settings.

Chapter 6 presents the challenges faced when researching homicide, particularly in relation to the availability, quality and comparability of homicide data.