

STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING SAFETY IN URBAN AREAS

2020 Urban Learning Brief for USAID Staff



This Urban Learning Brief was written to inform USAID Mission staff about trends and developments in urban programming and is now being distributed to a wider audience. The content of this brief is based on learning from the 2020 World Urban Forum (WUF). WUF is a biennial meeting of UN Habitat focused on city-action for the 2030 sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Globally, cities are grappling with public security challenges such as street violence, gang violence, and political violence that undermine citizens' well-being. Additionally, **cities' economic development prospects suffer when public safety is lacking**. In extreme cases, the breakdown of urban public safety can drive cities to fragility, as insecurity erodes public trust in governance systems.

Drivers of urban insecurity such as economic inequality, social and spatial exclusion, and ineffective policing are interconnected. City governments will **need integrated solutions to respond to the challenge** effectively. The experience of cities around the world shows that violence in urban areas can stem from lack of social cohesion, poor design of urban spaces, ineffective justice systems, inadequate service delivery, and lack of consideration of safety needs of women and children in urban planning.

Security policies that improve law enforcement are necessary but insufficient to address the challenges. **Long-term change also requires interventions targeting the socio-economic and political drivers of urban violence.**

KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What are the safety and security issues in your city and for whom? What specific groups are uniquely vulnerable to safety and security issues? What specific threats do women and girls face?
2. What opportunities exist to mainstream public safety issues in cities' urban development strategies?
3. How can formal law enforcement entities and civil society actors collaborate to enhance public safety outcomes in cities?
4. To what extent do climate-related shocks (e.g. flooding) create new security challenges for cities? What improvements to urban planning are needed for cities to respond effectively to such challenges?
5. How do migrant communities in urban areas face unique vulnerabilities to crime and violence? What supports can governments provide to help mitigate them?
6. How can city governments leverage technological tools to strengthen safety outcomes for urban residents?

HEADLINES FROM THE WORLD URBAN FORUM 2020

Ensuring safety in cities is a development priority that can enable or constrain other outcomes. Global development agendas, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include calls for promoting peace and providing access to justice for all. Despite commitments, global trends on homicide, trafficking in persons, and violence against women and girls showed modest upticks according to a 2019 assessment. Further, without addressing the prevalence of crime and violence in urban areas, progress on inclusion of women and girls and economic growth will be stifled. Reducing the incidence and fear of violence requires integrated policy approaches to urban safety that link national and local action.

Achieving safe cities requires a focus on women, girls, migrants, and other vulnerable groups. Achieving safety requires an inclusive approach to urban planning and consultation with sub-populations. Cities must also create a culture that promotes safety by implementing public education on violence and discrimination, improving reporting systems, and proactively addressing hot spots through enforcement. New mobile technology platforms that facilitate reporting in real-time can support public safety strategies.

The design of the built environment in cities – public spaces, streetscapes, and infrastructure – matters for public safety. Addressing social and economic inequality is also important – crime is concentrated in “hot spots”. Safe public spaces and streets offer many co-benefits related to health, economic growth and social cohesion.

“The most effective approaches to urban safety and security address the multifaceted causes of crime and different forms of violence, including gender-based violence and sexual harassment, and apply both social and technological measures in response.”

- United Nations Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements (2020)

RESOURCES

United Nations System-wide Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements (2020),
United Nations

Framework for how local governments should respond to the challenges of delivering urban safety. Places emphasis on participation of the community and inclusion of all residents.

<https://unhabitat.org/united-nations-system-wide-guidelines-on-safer-cities-and-human-settlements>

Peace in Our Cities Campaign

Collaborative effort launched in 2019 including mayors, civil society, and governments to halve urban violence by 2030. Focused on sharing evidence-based methods for reducing urban violence and promoting city-to-city collaboration.

[@PlusPeaceCo](https://www.peacebuilding.live/core-campaigns)

Safer Cities for Girls Program

Plan International

Partnership with Women in Cities International and UN-Habitat to “build safe, accountable, and inclusive cities with and for adolescent girls (aged 13-18).”

<https://plan-international.org/ending-violence/safer-cities-girls>

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Peace Prize

Annual prize to recognize innovations by local governments in fostering peaceful development.

<https://peaceprize.uclg.org/>

Contact: Peace.Prize@VNG.NL

Handbook for Gender Inclusive Urban Planning (2020), World Bank

Includes practical approaches, activities, and design guidelines to implement a participatory and inclusive design process that explores the experiences and uses of the city from the perspective of all citizens: women, men, and sexual and gender and other minorities.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/publication/handbook-for-gender-inclusive-urban-planning-and-design>

MOVING THE NEEDLE IN YOUR MISSION

Identify the Issue by Investigating Gender-Focused Urban Resources

Today, the focus on safe cities is intrinsically linked to gender considerations. To that end, staff should consider how their sector (transport, energy, governance, etc.) incorporates elements of gender empowerment, inclusion, and equity. To better understand the issues from a gender perspective, staff should reach out to their Mission gender advisor (if one exists) or contact the Corinne Hart of the Gender Development Office in E3 at cohart@usaid.gov. Urban-Links has many [gender-focused urban resources](#) that explain how Missions can integrate gender considerations into their programming.

Understand the Policy and Enabling Environment

The next step is to reach out to the staff in Democracy and Governance (whether in the Mission or in Washington) to gain a better understanding of the underlying governance structure in the country which impacts how cities are able to address everything from provision of city services to citizen participation. Rules and regulations about the use of public spaces, policies about public transportation, and considerations that regulate interactions between men, women, boys, and girls may have profound impacts on how to address gender inequalities. From an urban perspective, there are several ongoing USAID projects that focus on safe cities and impacts of decentralization, in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Contact the Agency's Urban Team

A final step is to conduct an initial analysis of the issues, underlying conditions, and prospects for affecting change. Contact USAID's Urban Team by emailing urban@usaid.gov where they will provide expertise and solutions to issues related to safe cities. This will include an exploration of key topics, mechanisms, and facilitate connections with relevant technical and regional bureaus within USAID as well as throughout Missions.



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For more information about urban programming at USAID:

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