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Mapping of Homicide Prevention Programs in Latin America and the Caribbean

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1. Introduction.

Latin America and the Caribbean stand out for the high incidence of lethal violence. With only 8% of the world's population, the region accounts for 33% of all homicides worldwide, followed by Africa with 31%, Asia with 8%, and Europe with 5%. Indeed, just four Latin American countries – Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela – account for 25% of all homicides

worldwide.

The region holds a worrisome position not only in absolute terms but also in terms of its recent evolution. In contrast to what has happened elsewhere, the Americas region has seen an increase in violence from 2000 to 2012, moving from a rate of 15.2 homicides per 100,000 population to 21.5 per 100,000.

2. Objective.

The objective of this study is to identify and analyze homicide prevention programs in Latin American and the Caribbean for the purpose of offering policymakers and civil society a critical overview of the options available for taking action to stop homicides.

The study considered programs for which redu-

cing homicide is an explicit goal as well as security-related initiatives that have had a proven impact reducing homicides even when that was not their original intention. The selection did not take into account whether the projects had or had not been successful or which public actor implemented them; it included initiatives of both the authorities and civil society.

Q CASE STUDIES



3. Methodology.

First, Internet searches were performed using a series of keywords to identify the programs with the previously defined profile. Second, emails were sent to more than 500 contacts for consultation and interviews were conducted by videoconference to explore new initiatives and request materials related to those already identified. Based on the information collected, the main characteristics of the programs were codified in a template, which made it possible to analyze their profile and prepare a typology. When the same project was identified in several countries it was counted once for each country. This is the case of Project CeaseFire, which is promoted

by international financing and was recorded in nine different countries.

In a second phase interventions were selected that represented those types, and case studies were carried out based on field visits with the objective of learning more about how the various programs worked in practice, their main characteristics, and their advantages and limitations. In the field visits interviews were conducted with policymakers, members of civil society, academics, and other relevant actors, and when possible the programs' facilities were visited. .

4. General Results.

In all, 93 programs that met the criteria for inclusion in the study were analyzed. The first conclusion that stems from the analysis is that relatively few interventions focused on homicides. General programs for preventing violence and crime in which homicide is treated just as an extreme expression predominate in the region. The link of homicides to other forms of violent crime can basically take one of three forms:

- a) homicide resulting from causes that are common to other violent behaviors;
- b) homicide determined by other violent behaviors (for example, in the case of robbery followed by homicide); and
- c) homicide representing the maximum intensity of a continuum of violence associated with a general phenomenon (for example, femicide and gender violence). The international organizations

that have played a lead role in the area of prevention and security tend to endorse this generalizing perspective.

In other words, prevention policies focus very little on homicides in Latin America and the Caribbean, despite the dramatic levels of lethal violence. Ultimately this study is part of an effort to encourage such a focus. Until now, the homicide rate has generally been used as a tool, but only as a general measure of violence and/or as a criterion for selecting territories for intervention.

As Table 1 illustrates, the frequency of homicide prevention programs tends to be greater in the countries with a high incidence of lethal violence – as in the Northern Triangle of Central America, Colombia, and Brazil – and smaller in areas with relatively low rates, such as the Andean and Southern Cone countries.

TABLE 1. Homicide prevention programs in Latin America and the Caribbean by region, country, and homicide rate per 100,000 population

REGION	COUNTRY	HOMICIDE RATE PER 100,000 POP. (2014)	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS (%)
Mexico		15.7	4 (4%)
Northern Triangle	El Salvador	64.2	6 (7%)
	Guatemala	31.2	6 (7%)
	Honduras	74.6	6 (7%)
Central America and the Caribbean	Belize	34.4	2 (2%)
	Costa Rica	10.0	2 (2%)
	Jamaica	36.1	4 (4%)
	Panama	17.4*	7 (8%)
	Puerto Rico	18.5	1 (1%)
	Dominican Republic	17.4	2 (2%)
	Trinidad and Tobago	25.9	2 (2%)
Venezuela		62.0	5 (5%)
Colombia		27.9	10 (11%)
Brazil		24.6	14 (15%)
Andean Countries	Bolivia	12.4*	3 (3%)
	Ecuador	8.2	3 (3%)
	Peru	6.7	4 (4%)
Southern Cone	Argentina	7.6	3 (3%)
	Chile	3.6	4 (4%)
	Paraguay	8.8	3 (3%)
	Uruguay	7.8	2 (2%)
TOTAL		93 (100%)	93 (100%)

Source: Homicide rate with data from UNODC Statistics. Last year available: Panama (2013) and Bolivia (2012).

Most of these programs are led by national and regional governments, though civil society has also played a significant role. Two-thirds of the programs have national coverage. It should be noted that the local governments do not have much of a presence in such programs, though this may be due in part to the greater difficulty in detecting local programs, which are less visible. In at least one-third of the programs we find the participation of international organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Central American Integration System (SICA), in addition to international development aid agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

As shown in Table 2, more than half the homicide prevention programs can be characterized as being about tertiary prevention, that is, aimed at individuals and groups who have been perpetrators or victims of violence to avoid recidivism and revictimization. Next, we find interventions for secondary prevention, geared to persons who are at high risk of becoming victims or perpetrators. The least frequent ones are primary prevention projects, designed for the whole population. This outcome, which is exactly the opposite of what one finds regarding general violence prevention programs, appears to confirm that preventing homicides requires a much greater focus on the profile of the benefi-

ciaries. Youths, victims and witnesses in criminal proceedings, and women are the three most common

target groups of these interventions.

TABLE 2. Homicide prevention programs in Latin America and the Caribbean by type of prevention

TYPE OF PREVENTION	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS	%
Primary	14	15
Primary and Secondary	4	4
Secondary	10	11
Secondary and Tertiary	15	16
Tertiary	33	35
Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary	17	18
TOTAL	93	100

5. Typology of homicide prevention programs.

Despite their relatively small number, homicide reduction initiatives are striking for their variety and multiplicity of perspectives. The programs may be classified into six different strategies or thematic areas: (a) controlling protection or risk factors; (b) promoting cultural changes; (c) protecting at-risk groups; (d) making improvements in the function-

ing of the criminal justice system; (e) implementing programs for reinsertion, mediation, or negotiation aimed at perpetrators; and (f) adopting integrated violence reduction strategies. Next we present the 14 types of programs identified, grouped under these six strategies..

STRATEGY I. Controlling Risk Factors or Protection Factors. This strategy seeks to alter the incidence of factors that have proven to be associated with a lesser or greater risk of homicides. Accordingly, it is not a systemic approach to all the possible elements that could impact on lethal violence, but rather involves specific interventions to address certain factors.

TYPE 1: Control of Firearms

Firearms are the principal vector of lethal violence in the world, but their weight is even greater in the Americas. Different approaches are available for controlling firearms:

a) *Reduce the stock of firearms in circulation*, for example through programs for turning in or exchanging weapons. The region has a long tradition of such programs, though in general it is not possible to determine their impact on the stock of weapons.

b) *Restrict weapon carrying*. In this case, the objective is not to eliminate the weapons but to prevent them from being carried in public places, and thereby reduce the likelihood that they will be used. Rigorous evaluations have been carried out on some of these initiatives, such as those in El Salvador, Bogotá, and Cali, that attest to a moderate yet significant impact on homicide reduction (Cano, 2007; Villaveces et al., 2000).

c) *Control armed incidents in certain areas or within institutions.* In Costa Rica, for example, there is an initiative that attempts to control armed inci-

dents in the schools and that offers guidance on how to act if such situations should arise so as to reduce possible harm.

TYPE 2: Controlling Alcohol Consumption

Alcohol is associated with interpersonal violence in everyday conflicts that can lead to fatal results. Accordingly, in many countries the incidence of homicides increases on holidays and weekends, when alcohol consumption is also high.

Controlling alcohol consumption may entail campaigns for awareness-raising and increased monitoring, as well as restrictions on the days and times

when establishments may dispense alcoholic beverages. Bogotá (“La Hora Zanahoria”) and Diadema (in Brazil) are among the best-known cases in the region of cities that restricted alcohol sales as part of their security policies.

 **CASE STUDY A:** The “Dry Law” (“Lei Seca”) In Diadema, Brazil

TYPE 3: Situational Prevention in Public Spaces

Situational prevention has a long tradition in Latin America, mainly entailing recovery of deteriorated public spaces that are associated with the presence of violence or, more commonly, with a perception of insecurity. These initiatives are generally framed

in broad violence prevention plans, but on an exceptional basis they may be set forth within a strategy for reducing homicides, or have a proven effect of actually reducing homicides.

STRATEGY II. Promoting Cultural Changes. This strategy seeks to reduce homicides by promoting values contrary to violence with the objective of transforming culture.

TYPE 4: Promoting Values against Lethal Violence

Programs of this type focus on disseminating messages and values that can change people so as to build a less violent society. Some initiatives explicitly oppose lethal violence, such as the “campaign to value life” (“Campaña por la valorización de la vida”) in Venezuela or the “Guatemala 24-0” campaign, which promotes

24 hours without a homicide. In general, evaluations that can measure the actual impact on lethal violence do not exist for experiences of this type.

 **CASE STUDY B:** Campaign To Value Life, Venezuela

STRATEGY III. Protecting Groups at Risk. This strategy is aimed at individuals and groups at high risk of becoming victims of homicide, to whom it offers some type of protective measure. In some cases they are very specific groups, while in others they involve broad social categories, such as women.

TYPE 5: Protecting Groups at Risk of Suffering Homicide

The objective of these programs is to protect persons, communities, or social categories at risk of being murdered. The measures of protection may vary, including police custody, removing persons who had been threatened from their usual surroundings, and several forms of economic, psychological, and institutional support for the victims. The beneficiaries of these initiatives include:

- a) *Specific individuals who have suffered death threats* and who are taken in by witness or victim protection programs. One of the largest-scale interventions for minors in the region is the “Program for the Protection of Children and Adolescents facing Death Threats” (“Programa de Proteção a Crianças e Adolescentes Ameaçados de Morte” (PPCAM)) in Brazil.
- b) Members of high-risk professional or political

categories, for example the “Program for Prevention and Protection for Trade Union Leaders and Unionized Workers of the Colombian State” (“Programa de Prevención y Protección a Líderes Sindicales y Trabajadores Sindicalizados del Estado Colombiano”).

- c) *Broad social categories that suffer specific risks.* The clearest example is that of women who suffer a risk of abuse, and, in extreme situations, of death at the hands of their partner or former partner. Several countries of the region have adopted laws and programs for preventing “femicide” (“femicidio”) or “feminicide” (“feminicidio”).

CASE STUDY C: Legislative Changes And Programs To Prevent Femicide

STRATEGY IV. Improvements in the Criminal Justice System. This strategy seeks to increase the efficacy of the justice system when it deals with homicides. The measures proposed may be related to prevention, for example patrolling; investigation, so as to increase the homicide clearance rate; or other aspects, such as reducing the lethality of police interventions, which itself is a specific type of homicide.

TYPE 6: Police Interventions in Areas at Risk

In some countries of the region the authorities have developed innovative police interventions in places with a high incidence of homicides that have the explicit objective of reducing lethal violence or that have actually reduced lethal violence, even though they have broader objectives. Examples of the first type of intervention are the Fica Vivo! (Stay Alive) program in Minas Gerais, and the Pacto Pela Vida

(Pact for Life) program in Pernambuco, while an example of the second type would be the “Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora” (UPP: Pacifying Police Units) in Rio de Janeiro, all three examples from Brazil.

CASE STUDY D: Fica Vivo Program, Brazil

TYPE 7: Other Police Interventions involving Patrolling

This type includes all preventive police programs that do not focus on areas with a high incidence of homicides, and that are aimed at reducing homicides or that have done so in practice. One such example is

the Plan Cuadrante (Quadrant Plan) of the National Police of Colombia, whose evaluations revealed that it had succeeded in reducing homicides in the areas where it was implemented.

TYPE 8: Improving the Investigation of Homicides

These are initiatives aimed at improving homicide clearance rates and convictions rates in homicide cases, such that a higher proportion of perpetrators can be prosecuted and punished. In this respect, one interesting example is Honduras, where the Asociación para una Sociedad Más Justa (Association for a

More Just Society), a civil society organization, carried out a project together with the authorities in an effort to improve homicide investigations.



CASE STUDY E: Paz y Justicia, Honduras

TYPE 9: Reducing Police Use of Lethal Force

Some countries of the region have suffered historically from excessive police use of force, in the case of lethal force, can cause a high number of homicides. Jamaica and Brazil are clear examples. Nonetheless, it is not always perceived as a problem by the governments or even by major sectors of society, who demand tough policies to fight crime that encourage or tolerate such abuses.

Occasionally, some police forces have developed programs to try to reduce police use of lethal force.

One example is the Program to Monitor Military Police Involved in High-Risk Occurrences (PROAR: Programa de Acompanhamento de Policiais Militares Envolvidos em Ocorrências de Alto Risco), launched by the government of the state of São Paulo in 1995. More recently, in 2015 the Military Police of Rio de Janeiro instituted the Program for the Management and Control of the Use of Force (“Programa de Gestão e Controle do Uso da Força”), which limits the use of ammunition by each police officer.

STRATEGY V. Reinsertion, Mediation or Negotiation directed at Perpetrators. This strategy addresses real and potential perpetrators as interlocutors and not simply as targets of repression by the state. For that same reason these are the most controversial initiatives.

TYPE 10: Reinsertion or Rehabilitation of Perpetrators of Armed Violence

The objective is reinsertion in society of persons who became involved in armed violence, particularly those who belong to armed groups, promoting their participation in educational, labor, or recreational activities that offer them an alternative to the life they were leading before. Along these lines,

we can mention the Proyecto Alcatraz in Venezuela, in which a private company offers an alternative life through sports, training, and employment to youths who had been members of local criminal groups.

These programs are sensitive from a political and legal perspective considering that some of these

youths may have criminal cases pending. Moreover, in view of the low capacity for re-socialization in the vast majority of the prison systems in the region, if such programs are successful one could potentially attain a more favorable result for society in terms of

reducing homicides than that obtained by traditional criminal prosecution.



CASE STUDY F: Proyecto Alcatraz, *Venezuela*

TYPE 11: Mediation with Armed Groups

In this type of intervention one engages not with individuals but with armed groups as a whole, because the objective is not to demobilize some persons but to bring about a change in conduct of the group as a whole. These initiatives are led by members of civil society or government authorities themselves, in which case the political risks of the process are high, considering the indirect legitimation that the state may provide to criminal or outlawed groups by communicating with them. On the other hand, this approach has the potential to reduce homicides significantly and quickly, especially in a context in which lethal violence is associated with the action of armed groups.

The most common example of this type is the

Cure Violence program, inspired by the experience of CeaseFire in Chicago and implemented by civil society organizations in at least nine countries of the region, generally with financing from international organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In Venezuela a group of mothers of gang members perform this function of negotiating to reduce the violence among the gangs through the “Commissions for co-existence in Catuche” (“Comisiones de convivencia de Catuche”).



CASE STUDY G: Peace Management Initiative, *Jamaica*

TYPE 12: Negotiation with Armed Groups

This is not a case of mediation between armed groups but of negotiation between representatives of these groups and the state with the aim of reducing violence. The best known example is the so-called “gang truce” (“*tregua entre maras*”) in El Salvador in 2012, in which the government improved the prison conditions of gang leaders and allowed them to have contact with their respective organizations in exchange for reducing the homicides among them and of public agents.

These processes entail high political risks, among them the legitimation that the state can give criminal groups, the possibility that they will be strengthened throughout the process, criticism by the polit-

ical opposition, and the possibility that the criminal groups will “administer” homicides as a way to permanently negotiate with government authorities. The case of El Salvador also exemplifies the enormous potential of such strategies to prevent the loss of human life in the short term, especially in the contexts in which armed groups are responsible for a good part of the violence. Accordingly, no one doubts that the homicide rate fell abruptly nationwide, initially, as a result of the “truce.”



CASE STUDY H: The Gang Truce, *El Salvador*

STRATEGY VI. Integrated strategies for reducing lethal violence. These initiatives incorporate a variety of actions with the objective of preventing violence or, specifically, lethal violence. On including various interventions these programs tend to be very hard to evaluate, given the challenge of calibrating the impact of each of their actions, and the practical impossibility of having control groups. In some cases the projects call for violence prevention generally, but with a component focused on homicides. In others, the strategy was designed specifically to reduce lethal violence.

TYPE 13: Violence Prevention Plans that Incorporate a Component on Homicide

These interventions, common in the region, include various convergent actions to reduce violence or promote security. To be included in our study they need a specific homicide-reduction component or goal. One very well-known example is “Todos Somos Juárez” in Mexico, a program that implemented a

broad series of intersectoral measures with the objective of overcoming insecurity and, among other things, reducing the very high homicide rate in Ciudad Juárez in 2009 and 2010.



CASE STUDY I: Todos somos Juárez, *México*

TYPE 14: Integrated Strategies for Homicide Reduction

Unlike the previous type, in which homicide reduction is just a component, in this case we deal with initiatives that incorporate various actions designed specifically to reduce homicides. One such example is the National Strategy against Homicide, drawn up by the National Police of Colombia in 2011. In spite of the short time in which it was in force and the wide variety of measures it included, all of which makes it difficult to evaluate to what extent it had an effective impact, it is still interesting to analyze how a police institution can rethink its approach

with the specific aim of containing homicides. In summary, this type of approach has a maximum focus on homicide reduction, yet it is still difficult to evaluate the impact of the different kinds of simultaneous measures.

The distribution of programs by type can be examined in Table 3; recall that some initiatives may correspond to more than one type.



CASE STUDY J: Estrategia Nacional contra el Homicidio de la Policía Nacional, *Colombia*

Tabla 3. Homicide prevention programs by strategy and type

STRATEGY	TYPE	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS
Control of Risk or Protective Factors	Arms control	8
	Control of alcohol consumption	3
	Situational prevention in public spaces	2
Promoting Cultural Changes	Promoting values against lethal violence	13
Protecting Groups at Risk	Protecting groups at risk of suffering homicides	25
Improvements in the Functioning of the Criminal Justice System	Police interventions in areas at risk	2
	Other police patrol interventions	1
	Improving the investigation of homicides	1
	Reducing police use of lethal force	4
Reinsertion, Mediation, or Negotiation geared to Perpetrators	Reinsertion or rehabilitation of perpetrators of armed violence	4
	Mediation with armed groups	12
	Negotiation with armed groups	1
Integrated Strategies for Reducing Lethal Violence	Violence prevention plans that incorporate a homicide component	19
	Integrated strategies for reducing homicides	3

As can be observed, the vast majority of integrated strategies for reducing lethal violence (19) are general initiatives against violence and crime that have a homicide reduction component. Only three are

strategies specifically developed to address homicides, which further confirms the lack of focus noted above.



6. Evaluating Impact

Only a minority of programs – less than 20% – underwent impact evaluations. This low figure may be attributed, first, to the lack of planning and technical limitations, accompanied by the lack of a culture of evaluation, and second, to the difficulties and challenges faced when it comes to evaluating violence prevention projects. Among the elements that contribute to limiting evaluability, special mention can be made of: (a) lack of valid and reliable data; (b) differentiated effects in the short, medium, and long term; (c) legislative changes or universal programs for which it is impossible to generate control groups; (d) the relative infrequency of the phenomenon of homicide, which makes it difficult to apply statistical significance tests and requires modeling with statistical distributions other than normal (Poisson, etc.); (e) programs without clear objectives or that bring

together a large number of actions simultaneously in a given territory, which makes it almost impossible to evaluate the impact of each one; (f) displacement of criminal violence from the territories subject to intervention to other territories, which makes it difficult to come up with a general impact assessment; and (g) evaluating the work of institutions such as the police in light of the information that they themselves produce, which may compromise the validity and reliability of the data.

In any event, one must insist on the need to invest in evaluating interventions and furthering research on prevention generally. Otherwise, the programs will continue to be designed and evaluated based on evidence extracted from other countries whose realities are very different from those of the region, mainly European countries and the United States.

7. Conclusion.

Some of these programs are simple and do not provoke much resistance, such as campaigns for upholding the value of life, even if there is no specific evidence of their impact. Other initiatives are daring and controversial, and are exposed to various risks, such as pursuing negotiations with members of armed groups. Nonetheless, it is precisely the strategies that directly involve the perpetrators or potential perpetrators that tend to have greater potential to bring about swift and intense reductions in the homicide rate, especially when the violence is inter-group in nature. Another approach that proved capable of significantly reducing homicides in a relatively short time involves making changes to the criminal justice system, whether by patrolling at-risk areas or by improving criminal investigation.

On occasion civil society ends up assuming the

roles that the state has difficulty performing, such as efforts to mediate among rival groups by PMI in Jamaica, or even the task of investigating homicides, as in the case of Paz y Justicia in Honduras. In those situations, civil society tends to be more trusted than the state and also tends to work more expeditiously, pointing out the paths that the authorities should pursue in order to improve their performance.

The fact that most homicide reduction programs appear to be relatively recent, implemented in the last 10 years, may reflect an increased concern with the issue and a change in the trend, to which this effort seeks to contribute. In any event, the region should urgently assign a degree of priority to homicides compatible with the seriousness of the problem we face .