

BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELDS:

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO HALVING GLOBAL VIOLENCE IN OUR HOMES, STREETS, AND COMMUNITIES

FLAGSHIP REPORT OF THE HALVING GLOBAL VIOLENCE TASK FORCE

PATHFINDERS
FOR PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

**Center on
International
Cooperation**



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FOREWORD

The United Nations (UN) 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda recognizes that peace and development are intrinsically linked. It further acknowledges that attaining peace requires we significantly “reduce all forms of violence.” This means addressing not only the violence that appears in the headlines but the often-overlooked violence found in the home and on the streets.

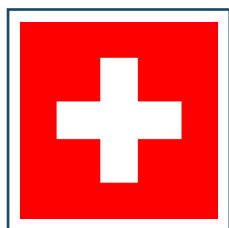
Violence has existed throughout human history but is not inevitable. It can indeed be reduced, but the path to do so is not always clear. The costs of violence, both human and economic, are staggering but often poorly understood. This report is committed to shedding light on these fundamental challenges. It results from a collective effort spanning several years by officials, experts, and activists committed to reducing violence in all its insidious manifestations.

Through the Halving Global Violence Task Force, we have worked together to show that significant violence reductions can be achieved with sufficient political will and investment in evidence-based approaches. This report represents the efforts of those committed to reducing violence by better understanding **how** and **where** it manifests, its **costs**, and the **most effective ways** to reduce and prevent violence.

We call on all countries and champions from across all sectors to join us in creating a more peaceful world by addressing violence in all its forms. Together, we can show that halving global violence is not simply a talking point but an achievable goal to make a reality.

THE HALVING GLOBAL VIOLENCE TASK FORCE

The Halving Global Violence (HGV) Task Force is an initiative of the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies—a multistakeholder partnership that brings together United Nations (UN) member states, international organizations, and civil society to accelerate delivery of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets for peace, justice, and inclusion.



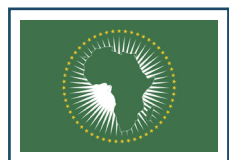
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4.2. “Local dynamics of organized crime:” Antonio Sampaio, on behalf of the Global Initiative on Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC).

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4.3.2. “Tools and instruments to prevent the proliferation and misuse of small arms:” Laurie Mincieli, on behalf of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violence is a universal challenge. Although commonly associated with conflict zones or marginalized sectors of society, violence is present in all regions, and its effects impact people of all demographics. 80 to 90% of all violence happens outside of armed conflicts, and has a direct impact on the daily lives of people around the world. Communities everywhere expect their leaders—local, national, and international—to reduce violence and create conditions for peaceful co-existence. Too often, however, these leaders fail to deliver on the promise of creating peaceful societies.

Violence impacts people in a variety of ways and poses a challenge to development goals in communities worldwide. It is not only an issue of men killing men. For each homicide, there are thousands of instances of assault; up to 1 billion children will experience violence in their lives, and one-third of all women will suffer violence at the hands of an intimate partner. In fact, by some estimates, the share of women who are victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) is higher than the share of the total population that is a victim of assault or homicides. In addition to the loss of human lives and physical suffering, violence manifests itself by making people feel unsafe in their homes, fearful on their streets, vigilant in schools and public spaces, and unable to access markets, the workforce, economic development opportunities, or social services and healthcare. The impacts of violent crime and interpersonal violence have intergenerational dimensions and victimization as a child can lead to consequences throughout a lifetime. Against this backdrop, **violence reduction is a cornerstone of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.1** directly calls for the reduction of all forms of violence, and thirteen other targets also refer to it—recognizing that violence must be prevented and reduced wherever it exists. The SDG targets are an acknowledgment that violence—especially against women, children, and marginalized groups—is not inevitable and that achieving substantial and measurable progress is possible.

Imbued with this confidence, **the Halving Global Violence Task Force was set up to outline the ways leaders across the world can achieve significant reductions in the most serious forms of violence.** While armed conflict understandably receives a substantial amount of the world's attention and investment, the work of the Task Force is focused on interpersonal violence—violence between people in the home and on the streets—which is too often overlooked.

More than its prevalence, what makes interpersonal violence a compelling focus and target for the work of the Task Force is its amenability to change. Cities like Palmira in Colombia, Pelotas in Brazil, and many others around the world have achieved upwards of a 60 percent reduction in violence rates by combining localized action, targeted investments, and the smart use of data. Experts have suggested it is like a disease that can be controlled, managed, and eventually eradicated.

This report reflects the Task Force's substantial efforts over the past three years to better understand the costly nature of interpersonal violence and develop concrete recommendations to address it, and to prove that Halving Global Violence is more than an aspiration or a talking point. It is achievable and an imperative that leaders and policymakers at every level of governance and across sectors can advance.

Failing to act on the evidence makes us complicit in the deaths and suffering that occur and the damage that violence causes both present and future generations. We have the knowledge and tools to achieve radical reductions in violence globally.

VIOLENCE IS UNIVERSAL

The headline figures on intentional homicide, assault, and intimate partner violence (IPV) reveal shockingly high levels of interpersonal violence around the world, regardless of a country's level of development. Contrary to popular belief, violence is not limited to the Global Majority or any particular region or group of people. For example, countries that score high on the Human Development Index (HDI) still have a homicide rate equivalent to two-thirds of that of countries that score low on the index.

Though widespread, violence is not evenly distributed among the world's population. The profile of violence drastically changes across regions and demographics and is often associated with structural inequalities. While people commonly think of violence as a problem associated with young men or with specific regions, the data paints a much more nuanced picture. It shows that different forms of violence touch every society with varying levels of intensity, with marginalized groups often experiencing the highest burdens of violence.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the region with the highest rates of homicides, with 21 homicides per 100,000 people, and men are indeed almost ten times more likely to be victims than women. However, the highest rate of assaults happens in Sub-Saharan Africa, with an assault rate of 15 percent, where women are slightly more likely to be victims than men. South Asia is the region with the highest rates of IPV, with 22 percent of women reporting experiencing violence from a partner in the last year. While murder certainly dominates headlines, incidents of non-lethal assault are much more prevalent, as outlined above. Furthermore, much of the violence is concentrated in cities, with small- to mid-size cities emerging as new hotspots for violence.

VIOLENCE IS COSTLY

Everyone has the right to live a life free of violence. The desire to save and improve lives and safeguard people from the long-lasting effects of violence should be a driving motivator on its own. Nonetheless, too often, violence is viewed as normal or inevitable, especially when its effects fall primarily on marginalized corners of society, which can cause apathy from both leaders and the general population. For this reason, it is worth noting that even though human suffering cannot be quantified, violence has immense financial costs that are often overlooked or grossly underestimated. Beyond a moral imperative to reduce violence, there is an economic incentive.

The costs of violence can be calculated using a range of statistics that include immediately tangible expenses like hospitalization for survivors and public resources allocated to security, as well as more intangible impacts due to factors that range from lost productivity to the psychosocial effects of trauma to decreased tourism. Violence furthermore detracts from other development efforts by both limiting economic growth and consuming public and private resources that could be invested in crucial development efforts.

These costs are staggering. According to the 2023 Global Peace Index (GPI), the global economic impact of interpersonal violence was USD 2.6 trillion in 2022, an increase of USD 35 billion compared to the previous year. The Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies (Pathfinders)' Cost of Violence Studies found that in South Africa, violence costs approximately 9.4 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and that in Switzerland, a country often associated with peace, safety, and violence costs more than 8 percent of GDP.

VIOLENCE IS PREVENTABLE, AND SUCCESS IS POSSIBLE

Despite these sobering figures on the costs of violence, experience has shown that effective and evidence-based solutions indeed exist to reduce and prevent violence.

Firstly, leaders need to understand the specific characteristics of the violence that they are targeting and how it manifests within their communities. Violence takes shape differently between and within countries and regions in terms of their nature, demographics, and scope, and it is crucial to have accurate, updated, and disaggregated data to form a comprehensive picture of the profile of violence in society. For example, according to the Pathfinders' *Cost of Violence Study: Switzerland*, the most onerous and prevalent form of violence is domestic violence, which overwhelmingly impacts women. Interventions implemented to directly address this issue have shown to be the most efficient and cost-effective in that country. In Costa Rica, however, the Pathfinders found that organized crime and the illegal drug trade are responsible for a disproportionate amount of violence, accounting for more than 60 percent of homicides alone. This data indicates that in Costa Rica, both national and transnational efforts to address drug and trafficking-related crime are critical.

Effective prevention strategies are networked—requiring action across sectors (criminal justice, health, education, social protection, etc.) and at different levels (including global and regional action to tackle transnational drivers, with an important role for subnational leaders such as mayors). They are also inclusive, with interventions designed and implemented with the people and communities most affected by violence being those most likely to deliver results.

Initiatives in numerous places, including those often associated with violence, show what is possible when political will, cross-sectoral coalitions, use of data and evidence, and smart investments come together. Their experiences, outlined in this report, show that it is indeed possible to halve violence and offer potential models to help do so.

THERE IS A STRONG BUSINESS CASE FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND REDUCTION AT MULTIPLE LEVELS

The Task Force has identified promising, relatively inexpensive individual and family, community, local, state, national, and international interventions to prevent and reduce interpersonal violence. The table on pages 12 and 13 shows a few select examples with proven results demonstrating that investing in violence reduction can be a low-cost endeavor, especially when compared to the enormous costs of violence to the economy. Some effective interventions cost as little as USD 0.10 per person reached, and an evaluation of a comprehensive violence reduction program in Costa Rica found a return of USD 2.12 for every dollar invested.

INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY LEVEL

At the individual and family level, we see psychology and counseling-based interventions have often been effective at reducing and preventing violence. This includes providing counseling services to couples and families affected by violence, as well as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for individuals who have been involved with violence.

COMMUNITY AND LOCAL LEVEL

At the community level, we see a mix of successful interventions that seek to change how communities approach violence. These approaches often combine law enforcement and community outreach and aim to break cycles of violence. Promising community-level approaches include investing in violence “hotspots” as part of larger development efforts. The “Cure Violence” model, associated with Chicago,

Illinois, in the US, but which has been replicated in many contexts, uses “violence interrupters” from the community to curb and prevent sharp spikes in violence, and it has produced encouraging results in some of its iterations. Another promising approach is “focused deterrence,” which uses targeted law enforcement and outreach to bring violence levels down long enough to bring in other services. Other initiatives, which have invested in transforming spaces to both prevent criminal activity and offer safer communal spaces, have also found success in reducing violence in targeted communities.

STATE AND NATIONAL LEVEL

At the national level, there are examples of effective measures, although many of them have no measurable associated expenses or costs. These are often legislative or policy-focused aimed at factors that can drive or exacerbate violence. For example, policies that limit the proliferation of guns and alcohol routinely surface as quick and impactful ways to reduce violence. In South Africa, limitations on alcohol sales passed during the COVID-19 pandemic were followed by an almost immediate drop in violence. Communications efforts can also be effective and have more measurable investment costs. For example, various state and national-level “edutainment” initiatives have obtained good results in changing perceptions and behaviors around violence, particularly IPV, with costs as low as a few cents for each person reached.

INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

International and multinational actors have also had successes, including by providing financing for successful local and national efforts, as well as through the normative frameworks and playing an advisory role. For example, the Istanbul Convention, which provides a framework for domestic violence reduction, was used in Switzerland to evaluate existing laws. This review process identified critical gaps in Switzerland’s laws surrounding domestic violence, which the legislature acted swiftly to close. Though it is difficult to directly estimate the costs of these efforts, research has shown that these legislative changes are associated with significant declines in the women-to-men mortality ratio.

STAKEHOLDERS AT ALL LEVELS CAN PLAY A ROLE IN HALVING VIOLENCE

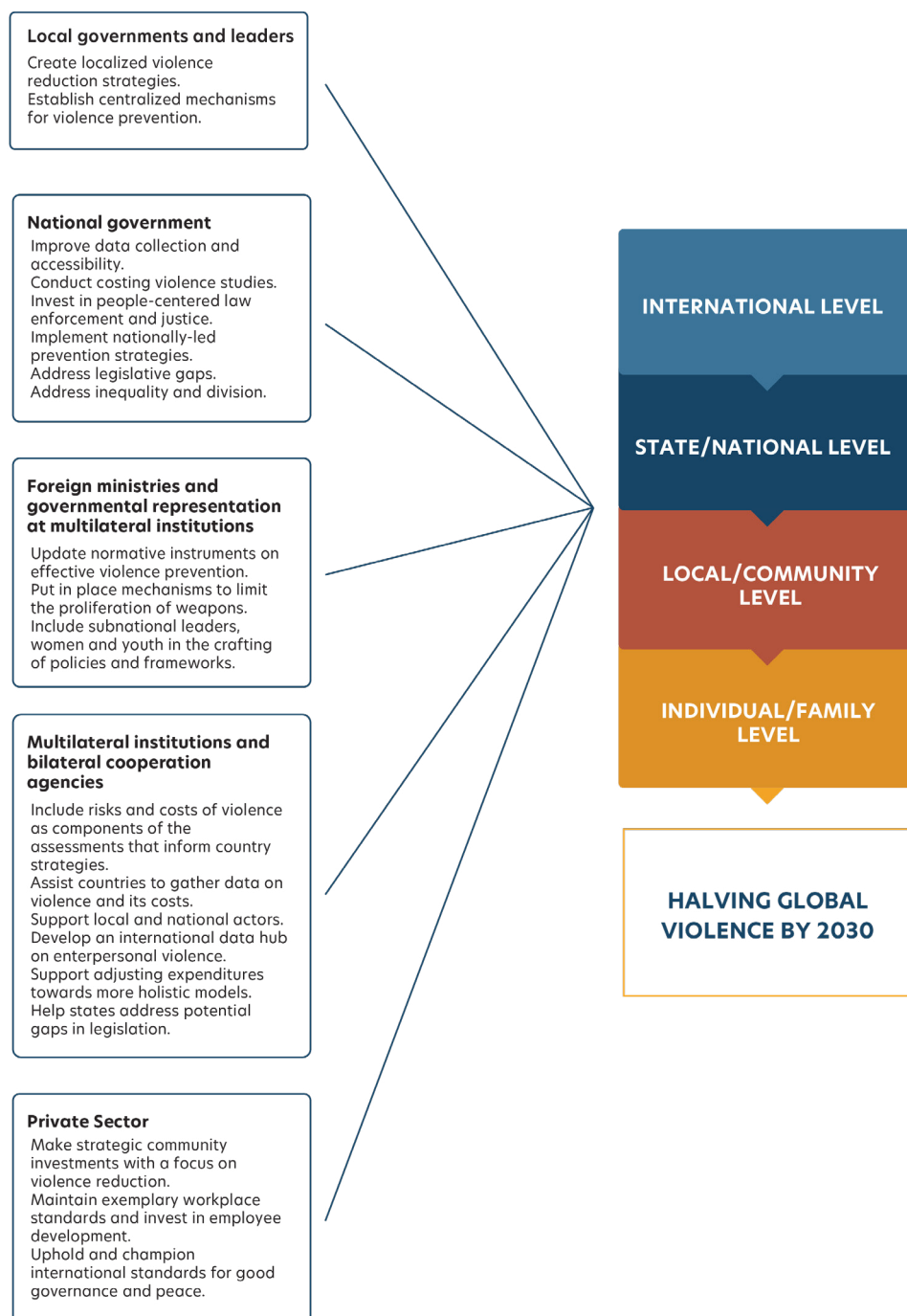
In addition to the recommendations to specific stakeholders outlined below, there are a few critical recommendations that should be heeded by stakeholders at all levels, as highlighted below:

- **Target investments and programs to specific at-risk places, people, and behaviors.** This has been a characteristic of almost every successful approach.
- **Invest in changing norms and behaviors.** This is critical to ensure the durability of changes.
- **Recognize that cross-sectoral partnerships are essential** and must involve local actors.
- **Address gender-based violence as a specific form of violence.** Often, gender-based violence is a unique form of violence that does not respond to broader reduction efforts. Policies, investments, and interventions specifically targeting gender-based violence are needed.
- **Seize the opportunity to obtain quick wins.** It is possible to invest in activities with the potential for immediate impact without taking resources away from longer-term social development policies required for lasting change.
- **Consider law enforcement as one element of a larger, holistic violence reduction plan.** Heavy-handed tactics that focus exclusively on law enforcement are ineffective and can escalate violence in the long term. Law enforcement is most effective when combined with social development efforts and when viewed as a component of a holistic violence reduction plan.

- **Promote collaboration among those working on different forms of violence.** Although the nuances of each different type of violence justify some level of specialization, there are many advantages to working across silos and finding an integrated approach to curb violence.

There are critical actions that stakeholders at every level can take to reduce interpersonal violence, as outlined in the figure below.

FIGURE 1: INTERVENTIONS BY STAKEHOLDERS



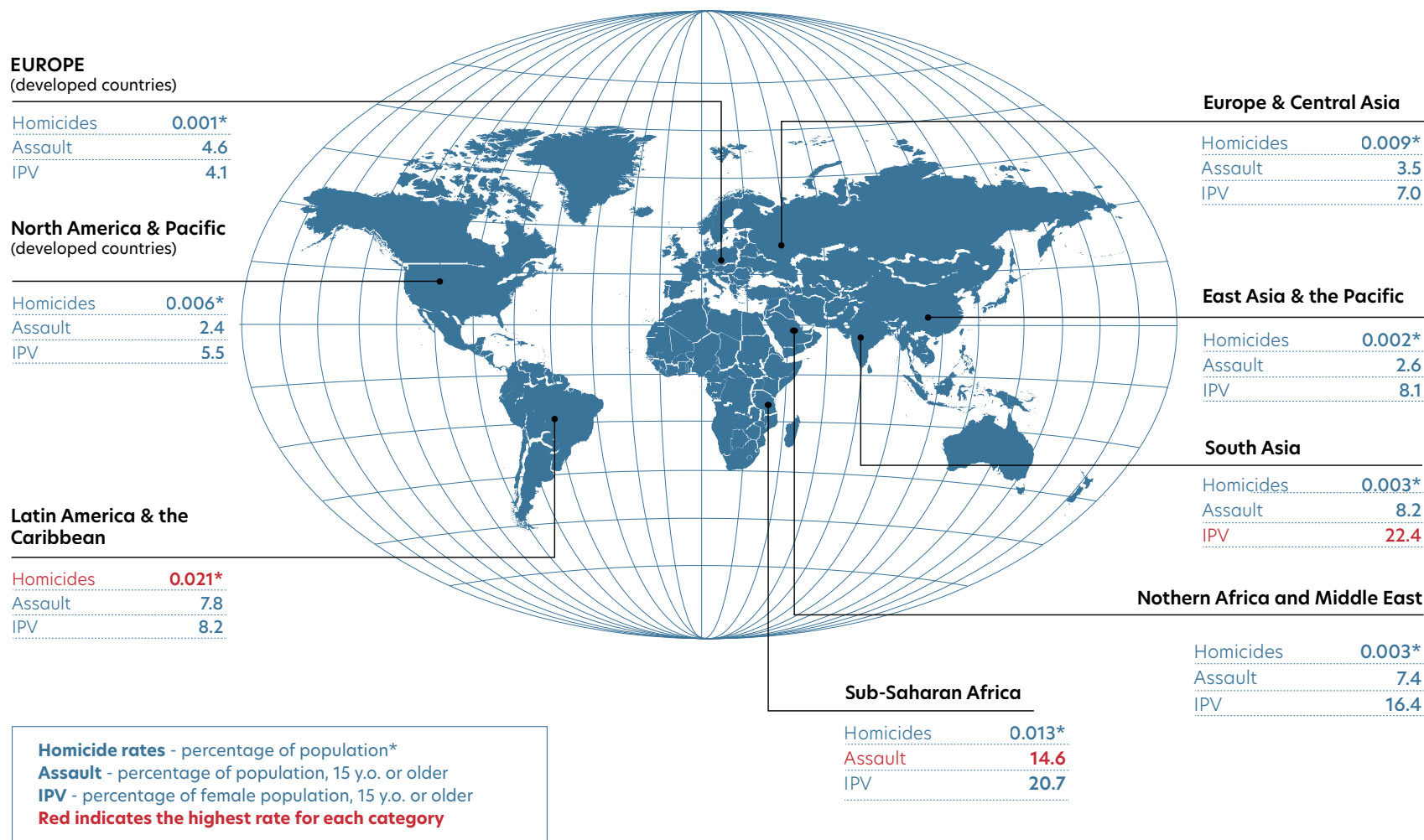
SELECT EXAMPLES OF IMPACTFUL INITIATIVES

Level	Intervention	Description	Impact on Violence	Cost (USD)
Individual and Family	Sustainable Transformation of Youth Program (STYL) Liberia (2009–2011)	A program that provided two experimental interventions to high-risk men and street youth: an eight-week CBT intervention and a cash grant.	Weapon carrying was 7.5% lower for the therapy group and 4.4% lower for the therapy and cash group compared to a 2.8% decrease for the control group.	USD 530 per participant
	Becoming a Man (BAM) United States (2012–2013)	An in-school program for at-risk students, combining sports, youth engagement, positive masculinity training with CBT, and weekly counseling.	Students are 40-50% less likely to be arrested for a violent crime.	USD 1,100 per student
	Violence and Alcohol Treatment Program (VATU) Zambia (2016-2018)	Mental health support program for couples to address depression, anxiety, IPV, and unhealthy alcohol use.	40% decrease in IPV reports by women in participating families.	USD 1,324 per adult client
Community and Local	The Cure Violence Model Multiple areas	Community mobilization and outreach focusing on high-risk individuals. The intervention focused on training community members to work as violence interrupters and de-escalate potentially violent crimes.	Significant decreases in shootings in Chicago and New York City project sites.	USD 3,500-USD 4,500 for every incident prevented
	Ceasefire Strategies United States (1990s, 2000s, 2010s)	Focused deterrence program aimed at reducing shootings and killings by focusing on social service, community-based, and criminal justice resources.	Significant decreases in gun homicides, nonfatal shootings, and “shots-fired” calls across multiple cities.	Annual budget of USD 240,000 (Chicago)
	Start Awareness Support Action (SASA!) Uganda (2007–2012)	Community intervention to combat the imbalance of power between men and women. SASA! consisted of four strategies: local activism, media and advocacy, communication materials, and training. Community activists were also trained.	Women in intervention communities were 52% less likely to report past year experience of physical IPV compared with women in control communities.	USD 392 per community activist supported per year
	LandCare Program United States (1999–2008)	Initiative to clean and add greenery to vacant lots to reduce space or refuges for criminal activity.	Reductions in assaults and gun violence by about 4% and 9%, respectively.	USD 177 annual cost to maintain one green lot or community garden

Level	Intervention	Description	Impact on Violence	Cost (USD)
State and National	Soul City South Africa (1994–2015)	Educational weekly TV drama series about social problems, including domestic violence and alcohol abuse. The series also promoted new norms and community behavioral responses to violence.	Survey found increased levels of support-seeking and support-giving behavior in response to violence associated with exposure to the series.	USD 0.10 or less per person reached
	Firearm regulations Australia (2002–2016)	A national reform unified and extended local laws around safe-storage, firearm registration, suicide prevention, gun-owner licensing, and introduced a gun buyback program.	Firearm-related mortality fell significantly from 3.6 to 1.2 per 100,000.	N/A
International	Violence Prevention and Promotion of Social Inclusion Costa Rica (2011–2018)	Multilateral bank funded series of initiatives aimed at reducing violent crime in Costa Rica through institutional strengthening and the establishment of Civic Centers for Peace and rehabilitation units.	Surpassed goal for reduction in the robbery rate (764%) and improvement in citizen's feeling of security (107%).	USD 187,752,000 total budget, return of USD 2.12 for every dollar invested
	Istanbul Convention Europe (2014–present)	Treaty of the Council of Europe that sets the standards for the prevention, protection, and prosecution of violence against women and domestic violence.	Changes in national legislation in signatory countries to better address domestic violence.	N/A

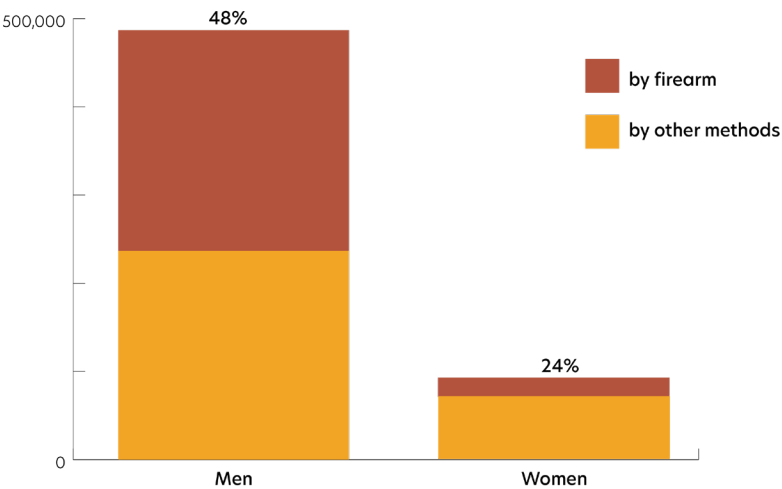
Interpersonal violence in four charts

FIGURE 2: RATES OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE PER TYPE AND REGION



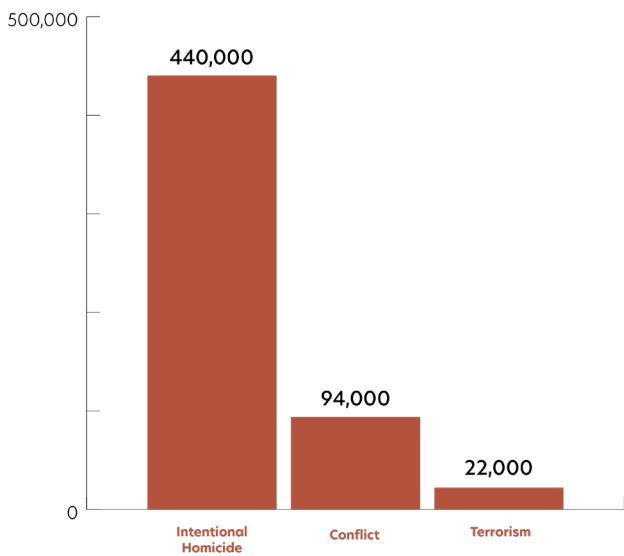
*Although it is standard practice to show the homicide rate per 100,000 people, we chose to convert it to percentage to simplify the comparison with rates of assault and IPV. **Source:** Based on data from UNODC, Gallup's World Poll, and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals database. For more details, see Annex I in the full report on sdg16.plus/peace.

FIGURE 3: VIOLENT DEATHS BY GENDER AND METHOD



Source: “Global Violent Deaths (GVD) database 2004–2021, 2023 update, version 1.0,” *Small Arms Survey*, December 1, 2023, <https://zenodo.org/records/8215006>.

FIGURE 4: DEATHS BY CAUSE, 2019–2021 AVERAGES



Source: “4th Edition Of The Global Study On Homicide 2023,” *UNODC*, 2023, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/global-study-on-homicide.html>.

FIGURE 5:
INTENTIONAL
HOMICIDES BY
PERPETRATOR
AND GENDER



Source: Based on data from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Global Study on Homicides.”



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