

Violence prevention

Early prevention of outbreaks of social violence

Violence has a negative impact on the development of societies. This applies not only to violent political conflicts, but also to violence that occurs independently of conflict, such as that caused by youth gangs, domestic violence and organised crime.

KfW Development Bank uses integrated approaches to focus on reducing risk factors and strengthening social cohesion.

Context

Social violence often takes the form of domestic violence, youth gangs and organised crime. These are mostly the result of socio-economic disparities and associated abuses of power, and they are primarily motivated by socio-economic factors. These “non-conflict” forms of violence now result in more casualties than all ongoing armed conflicts put together, with 1.4 million fatalities each year. As well as human suffering, they also have huge consequences for economies (high productivity loss, cost of criminal justice, etc.) and in some countries this can make them a significant factor impeding development work. Urban environments are particularly heavily impacted by social forms of violence due to their high population density and complex social, economic and political challenges.

The frequency with which types of social violence emerge varies hugely from region to region. Latin America and southern Africa are especially heavily affected, and they also see particularly violent forms of organised crime such as drug cartels and youth gangs.

The causes of social violence are diverse as well. In major cities, which often experience uncontrolled

growth, many people live in informal settlements without any prospect of education or employment. These are breeding grounds for petty criminality. The influence of criminal youth gangs mainly affects young people who seek a sense of belonging and recognition, as well as security.

In post-conflict countries in which the state institutions are too weak to provide basic services and assert their monopoly on the use of force, conditions favour the emergence of areas that are free from state-enforced law. Criminal organisations acquire particularly strong roots in these lawless contexts and they continue to destabilise fragile environments through corruption and violence, creating a vicious circle which encourages heightened violence in society.

Young men are the main perpetrators of armed physical violence, but they also make up the majority of victims. Women and girls are primarily subjected to sexual and domestic violence, often in a family setting.

In post-conflict countries especially, there is a high risk of an increase in gender-based violence (often accompanied by lower fundamental social and moral values in conjunction with increased impunity).

The KfW development approach

KfW Development Bank carries out many violence prevention projects. The causes of violence are complex. Investment in education, poverty alleviation or employment can reduce the potential for social violence in the long term, but this alone is insufficient to fight the phenomenon effectively. On the contrary, it also requires targeted, integrated (generally multi-sectoral) approaches to prevention that concentrate on reducing risk factors to achieve sustainable effects.

Situational violence prevention measures focus on reclaiming physical spaces. They include formalising informal settlements and promoting the construction of social housing, as well as guaranteeing access to basic services like water, electricity, health care, education and mobility through specific infrastructure measures.

These help to establish the rule of law and create safer environments through “urban upgrading”.

Social violence prevention measures strengthen social cohesion and individual resilience. They include developing social services for women, children and families, as well as employment support schemes for young and unemployed people. KfW focuses on creating and rehabilitating (youth-centric) infrastructure, vocational education and employment support to assist the economic integration of young people, alongside accompanying social measures in areas such as conflict mediation, peace education, health care, sport or art. Gender-specific approaches which look at the individual situations of female victims are considered here.

Institutional violence prevention measures focus on strengthening relevant state and civil society institutions. They include, for example, supporting (in)formal youth initiatives, setting up mediation centres or financing projects by state institutions to encourage the social integration of people in disadvantaged groups (e.g. women's shelters, youth centres, etc.).

A combination of these varied measures – which are applied at multiple levels, signpost economic alternatives for those involved, strengthen the resilience of individuals and institutions and encourage social cohesion – has proven effective in preventing violence. In post-conflict countries, measures to promote non-violent conflict resolution skills are also a priority.

>>>

Contact

KfW Group
KfW Development Bank
Competence Centre for Social Development and Peace
Palmengartenstrasse 5–9
60325 Frankfurt am Main, Germany
Telephone +49 69 7431 69492
Sandra.Oelke@kfw.de



Young people can learn here with modern technology. Source: KfW Group, photographer: Jonas Wresch

Central America – CONVIVIR

The regional project “CONVIVIR – Peaceful coexistence and safe spaces for young people in Central America” in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras creates safe spaces for young people and adults in marginalised districts with underprivileged residents and high levels of violence.

Infrastructure measures that simultaneously improve young people's social and vocational skills and strengthen relevant state institutions and district organisations make marginalised districts safer and improve their self-image. Residents in the chosen communities feel more comfortable in these districts and make more sustainable use of their surroundings. Young people join criminal gangs less often, thanks to their improved employment prospects and income.

The programme, which is rolled out over ten years, helps to reduce the number of incidents of criminal violence in the participating districts.

It is implemented via a self-help approach by the relevant district organisations, with young people directly involved.