

Report of the Webinar “Local Authorities and the Challenge of Urban Violence”

*On the 14th of May 2020 from 3:00 pm to 4.30 pm CEST, **The Development Partners Network on Decentralisation and Local Governance (DeLoG)** and **VNG International** conducted a webinar on pathways for local authorities to deal with protracted urban violence. The goal of this webinar was to connect various initiatives in this field, to inform participants of the opportunities associated with these initiatives, and to inspire local authorities to enhance or develop their approaches to countering urban violence. The urgency and worldwide spread of this topic, is reflected in the participants of this webinar, as over 140 people from 37 different countries registered. Speakers in the webinar included representatives of VNG International, UN-HABITAT, the Colombian city of Palmira, Mexico City, DEMOSPAZ, UNDP, and Barcelona Provincial Council. This report provides you with a summary of the webinar.*



This map shows the spread of registrations for the webinar around the world.

Introduction by Daan Stelder, Project Manager at VNG International

While violence is a global phenomenon that is not limited to urban areas, there are particularities about violence in cities that require a distinct conversation. The wave of urbanisation in which we find ourselves, is likely to contribute to the relevance of this discussion.

The context and degrees of urban violence differ across the planet, yet in the dynamics behind it and the actions that local governments take to counter and prevent urban violence, we can find similarities. This makes it worth exploring these dynamics as well as learning from successes and failures of local authorities that are often working in highly challenging circumstances. Through this webinar, we aim to connect the various initiatives that our speakers are involved in. We hope to inspire local authorities to enhance or develop their approaches to reducing urban violence and to inform you all on the opportunities associated with these initiatives.

Juma Assiago, Coordinator for the Safer Cities Programme at UN-HABITAT

Globally, each year, half a million people are murdered, 25 million women are raped, and up to 1 billion children are victims of violence. The annual costs of this violence are estimated at trillions of dollars. In 2015, leaders from all over the world agreed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The commitment to reduce violence and violent crimes is contained in SDG16. This

means that we have a global imperative to reduce the rates of urban violence by the year 2030 by half.

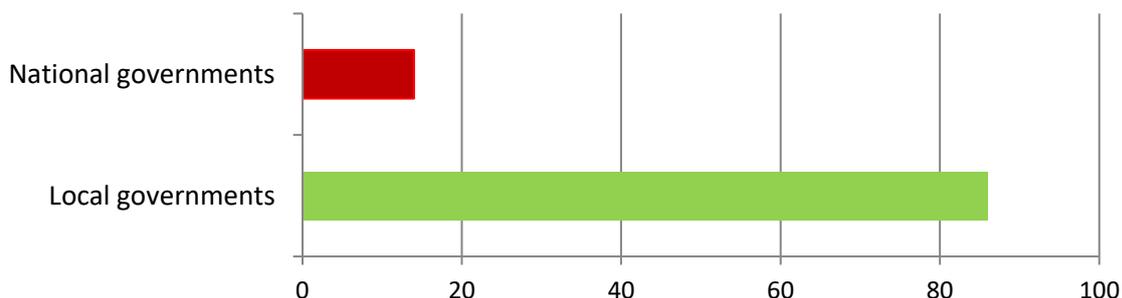
At UN-HABITAT we have been providing local governments with technical support to develop plans and strategies that prevent violence in cities. We envisage the role of local governments as complementary actors to the functions of public security institutions that are mandated to address urban violence.

The approach of UN-HABITAT to effectively prevent urban violence, is an evidence-based approach that aims to find out what the causation of urban violence is. This type of approach has been seen to promote innovative practices. It stresses the damage to human life and damage to cities' economies, but also how the damage can be reduced by making relatively small transformations. Local authorities need to learn about what has worked and what not. This means they need to measure progress and outcomes in terms of reduction of victimisation and increase of economic activities.

There are success stories of cities in which actions taken by local authorities have proven to reduce crime by 50 per cent (e.g. Glasgow, Bogotá, Medellín). In these cities, projects that have targeted risk factors have been able to reduce urban violence drastically. It is essential that cities dealing with high rates of urban violence borrow lessons from these success stories and use them as working models to make affordable transformation that can save lives. Evidence is a key aspect of defining a strategy for these cities. Municipalities must identify the roots of the problem and tackle the causes by applying proven solutions that are adapted to their particular local conditions.

The New Urban Agenda (par. 39) confirms that we are shifting from a model that focusses on how to reduce violence, to a model that focusses on how to enhance safety in cities. We are thus shifting from a security conception, to safety conceptions. The challenge for urban violence therefore shifts to how to apply a safety lens onto actions that are mandated for reasons other than those of safety and how to measure through that lens. This enables those outside the safety sector to understand and thus maximise their contribution.

Poll Question: Who should coordinate prevention strategies of urban violence at the local level?



Óscar Escobar, Mayor of the City of Palmira in Colombia

Palmira has joined the Peace in Our Cities Initiative and is part of the Safer Cities Network and finalist of the UCLG Peace Prize 2016. The municipality of Palmira does not believe that urban violence can be managed with more police on the streets, even though this is often asked by citizens. Other alternatives are needed to decrease violence and therefore the municipality has set up a comprehensive strategy of violence prevention.

Palmira has the second-highest rate of homicides in Colombia. This homicide violence in Palmira is geographically concentrated. There are three main hotspots in Palmira where most homicides occur. Very few people generate most of the violence, but the impact on the whole community of Palmira is tremendous. The urban violence mostly affects the youth. However, young men are also often the offenders. To keep homicide rates down, political will is needed, but this is not enough. Local authorities need to act smart and impose evidence-based policies. In addition, justice needs to be brought closer to the citizens. As the rule of law is very weak in Palmira, citizens take justice into their own hands which creates even more violence.

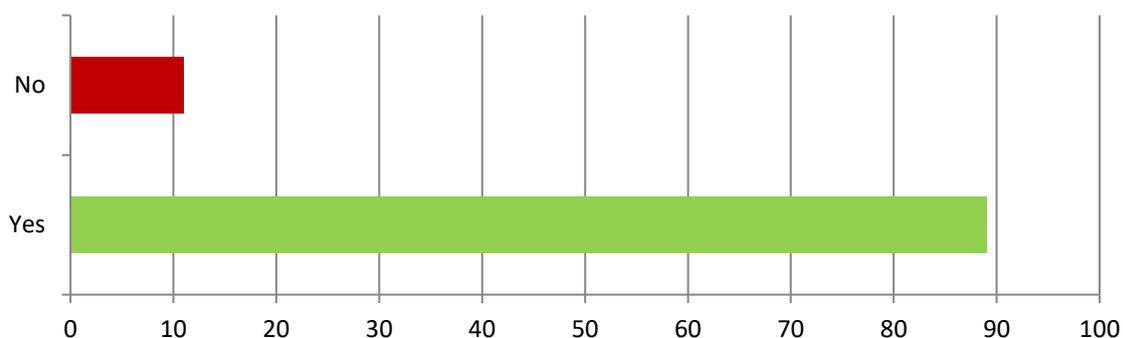
Palmira's municipality aims to design and implement a comprehensive strategy to tackle urban violence in its city using quantitative and qualitative data. It wants to work with people who are most at risk by using innovative and evidence-based approaches. The goal of the municipality is to reduce youth homicide from 80 to 66 per cent with this comprehensive strategy.

The strategy contains four main steps:

1. **Interruption:** delivering actions that contain violent crimes. This is mostly done by working with life-changing references.
2. **Intervention:** providing a way out of criminal life by creating legal life-projects. The local government must provide opportunities for everyone and bring people closer to opportunities by providing job-training for example.
3. **Prevention:** providing wide institutional offers. This implies well-developed social policies of the municipality that offer citizens to better use their free time. Public spaces must be transformed to reach this goal.
4. **Situational prevention:** building safe environments and improving access to justice. Restorative justice is key to ensure reconciliation and better co-existence.

Currently, the situation in Palmira looks very promising. In the first three months of 2020, the homicide rate was 35 per cent (least violent period in 15 years). Covid-19 is an opportunity to keep the homicide rates low. However, the Covid-19 crisis is also a risk for the city of Palmira, because a lot of people have and will lose their jobs due to the crisis. This loss of employment might increase crime rates. The municipality of Palmira will do its utmost best to prevent this from happening by developing a Municipal Development Plan for the upcoming four years. This plan will serve as a tool to keep violent indications low after social distancing.

Poll Question: Palmira's strategy expects to reduce youth homicide from 80 to 66. Is this goal realistic?



Diana Alarcón González, Chief Advisor and Foreign Affairs Coordinator of Mexico City

The goal of eliminating violence and improving security is at the core of the government programme in Mexico City. One of the root causes of insecurity in Mexico City is the lack opportunities for personal and community development with a strong focus on youth. So, while police is important, it is more important that constitutional rights are in place. An important constitutional right is the right to a life in peace. This is the point of departure to look at questions of security and aggression in Mexico City.

The government of Mexico City has defined five lines of action to deal with this:

1. Attention to the causes of crime to prevent more crimes. This entails a series of programmes across all secretaries in the government providing opportunities for youth. These opportunities can be focused at labour, education, sport etc.
2. Professionalisation of police and greater presence of police in the territories.
3. Improving intelligence and the justice system.
4. Inter-institutional coordination and citizen participation.
5. Improving the legal framework.

One of the core problems of security in Mexico City at this point, is violence against women. The government therefore developed special actions to improve security for women: an alert system to prevent violence against women, having women lawyers in all police precincts, 'Walk Free, Walk Safe' (adequate street lighting), and LUNAS (support centers for women).

Mexico City is going to host the third World Forum on Urban Violence and Education for Peace. This forum is not just an event, but a process in which we reflect on how to build cities and territories for peace in a context of crisis. It is now a great time for this forum, not only because we see an increase of urban violence, but also because there is a re-emergence of solidarity and community participation. It is thus a good time to reflect on the importance of cities for peace. Throughout the year, the organizing committee of the forum organizes many activities to attract people: activities for youth, academics, and policymakers; research and capacity building activities; and online activities (October 5-7). The dates of the Forum in 2021 are to be confirmed.

Beyond the fact that the government of Mexico City has set up a comprehensive programme to deal with violence, we believe that there is no sustainable development without peace and that there is no peace without sustainable development.

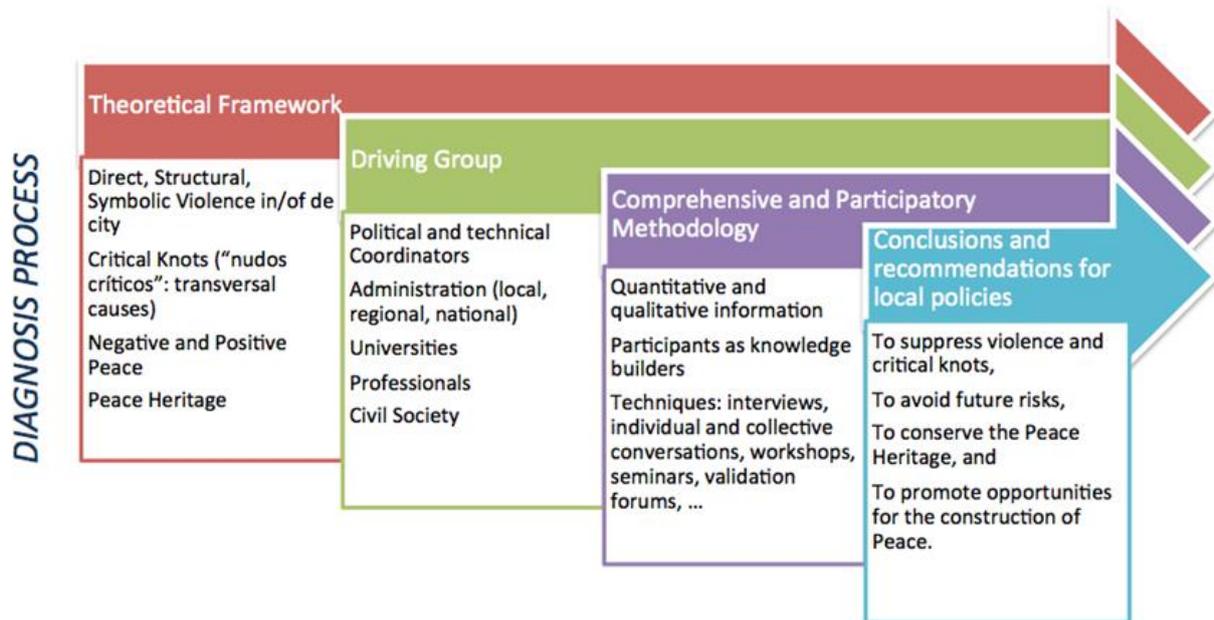
Carlos Giménez, Director DEMOSPAZ

A methodology for the diagnosis of urban violence and construction of peace has been developed in 2017 in Madrid in collaboration with the Spanish Research Association for Peace (AIPAZ) and the Madrid City Council. Afterwards, this methodology has been applied to other cities in the framework of the UNDP-ART project: Montevideo, Praia, and Sucre. The purpose of the study is to have a participatory, broad, and rigorous diagnosis of urban violence that affects citizens. This violence can be direct, structural or cultural.

The study has the following objectives:

1. An overall, systematic and transformative vision.
2. A useful, dynamic and open reference document.
3. A set of proposals and recommendations.

The diagnosis process is explained in the following scheme:



Amita Gill, local governance specialist at UNDP

UNDP has been working on urban violence in a variety of ways at both policy-level and programme-level. UNDP has drawn five main lessons from its work:

1. Any intervention has to be specific and based on local realities. Once municipalities understand the different areas of violence in their municipality and the different interventions that can be used for those areas, they can develop much more effective public policies.
2. Strategies have to be led by municipal governments but have to include multiple stakeholders to foster trust.
3. The reach of law-enforcement agencies needs to be extended to informal institutions. The informal institutions can mainly be useful in areas where institutions do not have a great reach.
4. Rule of law alone does not work, an area-based approach is needed.
5. Effectively addressing urban violence is very long-term process. Many initiatives work, but local governments need to make sure to be able to support them over the long-term.

More information regarding the supporting tool that UNDP is using can be found [here at Infosegura](#).

Pilar Diaz, Deputy Councilor for International Relations at the Barcelona Provincial Council

Local governments are the ones who have to deal with urban violence, identify the causes and implement public policies to ensure safe spaces for citizens. In addition, they are responsible for effective local governance as the key element to reduce inequality, improve relationships between citizens and between citizens and public institutions and promote territories of peace. Also, during the current Covid-19 crisis, we can see how its immediate consequences fall on local governments.

At the same time, we see that the international community has recognised that local governments are key to achieving SDG11 and SDG16, since they can guarantee social co-existence in the territories. Local governments are most close to the citizens and are therefore great promoters of peace and social cohesion.

The Barcelona Provincial Council has traditionally promoted initiatives to foster social inclusion, solidarity, peace, and co-existence both within its own territory and internationally. It is important that local governments can learn from each other by forming alliances. This way, local governments can encourage different initiatives as well as share them. This is needed in order to be the voice of the citizens and to defend the right of its citizens to have a safe and healthy life. The Provincial Council of Barcelona is a member of the technical secretariat of the World Forum on Cities and Territories of Peace as well as a core partner of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Peace Prize. Additionally, it is part of the network Mayors for Peace. The secretariat of the European section of this network is located in Granollers, one of the municipalities belonging to the province of Barcelona.

More information regarding the UCLG Peace Prize can be found on their [website](#).