



Executive Summary

IN THE YEARS since the *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011* was published, different forms of violence, instability, and conflict have erupted in places such as the Central African Republic, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Ukraine. Waves of criminal violence have continued to sweep across Honduras, Venezuela, and other parts of Latin America. Armed violence continues to claim lives, undermine the stability of states and communities, and threaten the achievement of sustainable human development.

This edition of the *Global Burden of Armed Violence* charts and analyses some of these developments while maintaining the ‘unified approach’ to armed violence introduced in the previous edition.¹ By relying on data from a large variety of sources—including public health, law enforcement, and criminal justice authorities as well as independent observatories, human rights organizations, and international agencies—this approach allows for the monitoring of changes and trends in the levels of armed violence at the local, national, regional, and global levels. Its focus is broad enough to capture interpersonal, political, criminal, economic, and conflict violence—some of which regularly overlap and fuel each other.

This volume presents analysis of comprehensive data for the period 2007–12 as well as assessments of more recent trends and dynamics in lethal violence in both conflict and non-conflict settings. Thanks to marked improvements in the collection and reporting of disaggregated lethal

violence data in many countries, its chapters are able to offer more robust and simultaneously more nuanced assessments of changes in various aspects of lethal violence over time, including the use of firearms and gender-based victimization. In proposing a new calculation method for estimating the global economic cost of homicide, this edition also takes a significant step towards quantifying the costs of armed violence.

In view of the post-2015 development framework negotiations, the report keeps in focus the negative impact of violence and insecurity on development and weighs the potential benefits of integrating a peace and security goal in the new development agenda. In this context, it emphasizes that violence and insecurity affect societies in ways that extend well beyond the immediate costs of deaths and injuries: people migrate or are displaced, businesses close, investments dwindle, tourism rates plummet, and institutions lose their legitimacy.

‘Lethal violence’—in all its forms—could serve as a viable indicator with which to measure and monitor progress towards a goal on peaceful societies and related targets, should they be adopted as part of the post-2015 development agenda. To capture the manifold manifestations of violence that are recorded and observed around the world, however, such measuring and monitoring efforts would need to draw on as many sources as possible, while also engaging with researchers, specialists, and practitioners in a variety of disciplines and sectors, including

economics, criminology, development, conflict studies, and public health. Put another way, the process of tracking progress against development goals must be able to offer policy-makers, donors, and activists a comprehensive picture of how patterns of violence are evolving—and of how and why that matters for the achievement of sustainable development—if it is to inform effective policies to reduce levels of lethal violence.

Key findings of this volume include the following:

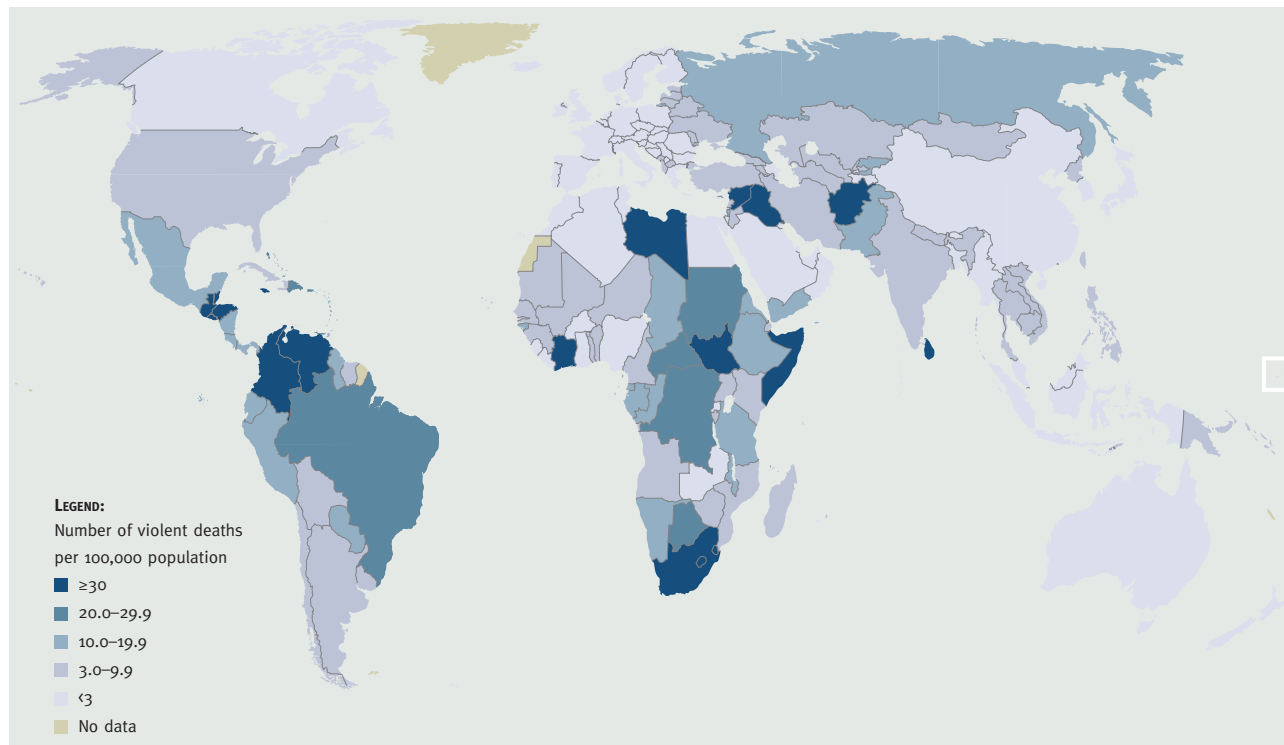
- Estimates reported in successive editions of the *Global Burden of Armed Violence* show a continuous drop in the average annual number of violent deaths worldwide: from 540,000 violent deaths for the period 2004–07 and 526,000 for 2004–09, to 508,000 for 2007–12.
- Although the total number of violent deaths per year decreased over the above-mentioned periods, the annual number of direct conflict deaths increased significantly: from an average of 52,000 deaths, to 55,000, to 70,000—with a large proportion of the latter deaths due to armed conflict in Libya and Syria.
- In addition to the 70,000 direct conflict deaths per year, the period 2007–12 also saw an annual average of 377,000 intentional homicides, 42,000 unintentional homicides, and 19,000 deaths due to legal interventions.
- For the period 2007–12, the average global rate of violent deaths stood at 7.4 persons killed per 100,000 population.
- The 18 countries with the highest violent death rates are home to only 4 per cent of the world's population but account for nearly one-quarter (24 per cent) of all violent deaths in the world.
- Globally, firearms are used in 46.3 per cent of all homicides and in an estimated 32.3 per cent of direct conflict deaths. That means that

firearms are used in 44.1 per cent of all violent deaths, or an annual average of nearly 197,000 deaths for the period 2007–12.

- On average, an estimated 60,000 women worldwide became victims of homicide every year from 2007 to 2012, accounting for 16 per cent of intentional homicides.
- If the homicide rate between 2000 and 2010 had been reduced to the lowest practically attainable levels—between 2 and 3 deaths per 100,000 population—nearly USD 2 trillion of global homicide-related economic losses could have been saved. That amount is equivalent to 2.64 per cent of the global GDP in 2010.

The data for 2007–12 reveals that the majority of countries and territories—137 of the 189 under review—exhibit very low or low rates of lethal violence (below 10 deaths per 100,000 population) (see Map 2.1). Among these countries, the average rate of lethal violence is decreasing, confirming that when levels of violence are already very low, they tend to remain low or continue to decline. A comparison of data available for the periods 2004–09 and 2007–12 indicates that, globally, deaths due to intentional homicide declined by almost 5 per cent, with the Americas being the only region to witness a significant increase in homicide (nearly 10 per cent).

The comparison also shows that direct conflict deaths surged by 34 per cent between the two periods—while violent deaths in all other categories declined. A large portion of these direct conflict deaths resulted from armed conflict in Libya and Syria. Meanwhile, lethal violence rates in some countries that are not experiencing armed conflict—such as Honduras and Venezuela—have been rising, reaching levels characteristic of countries at war.

MAP 2.1 Average annual violent death rates per 100,000 population, 2007–12

SOURCE: Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2014)

The post-2015 debate

Although the Millennium Declaration of 2000 refers to ‘peace’ and ‘security’, such language was not included in any of the Millennium Development goals, targets, or indicators (UNGA, 2000; Millennium Project, n.d.). The inclusion of a goal on ‘peaceful and inclusive societies’ in the post-2015 development framework—as proposed by the UN’s Open Working Group in its August 2014 report on the Sustainable Development Goals (UNGA, 2014)—would thus represent a leap forward. It would explicitly encourage states—all of which deal with some form of insecurity—to aim for and to track their progress towards that goal and its associated targets.

In fact, a great deal of progress has already been made since the adoption of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development in 2006 and the subsequent report to the UN Secretary-General, *Promoting Development through the Reduction and Prevention of Armed Violence* (Geneva Declaration, 2006; UNGA, 2009). Language around ‘armed violence’ and ‘violent deaths’ has been integrated in many international forums, policy papers, and in the above-mentioned proposal for the Sustainable Development Goals. One of the most important shifts since the Millennium Declaration and the 2004 report of the UN High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (UNGA, 2004) has been the move away

from a narrow focus on conflict-related violence and insecurity, towards a more holistic understanding of armed violence in all its forms.

In line with this shift, several analyses have drawn attention to the advantages of a unified approach to armed violence and endorsed a ‘violent deaths’ indicator as a plausible way to track progress in the reduction of violence. The violent deaths approach can capture a range of acts that may otherwise be missed in more narrowly focused data, maximize comparability across countries, avoid undercounting, and remain feasible. Indeed, the approach stands to become more reliable and comprehensive if countries continue to enhance their capacities to collect, disaggregate, and report data on lethal violence—especially in regions where such practices are still absent or nascent.

In a field cluttered by a range of concepts and definitions (such as fragility, state collapse, conflict-affected and fragile settings, and criminal violence), a holistic focus on the violent act is a comparative strength. Such an approach has also been deemed ‘collectable’ by a variety of authoritative actors. As the Task Team on the post-2015 Development Agenda concluded:

much progress has been made in measuring violence and insecurity, particularly regarding the indicator [on] the number of violent deaths, comprising the number of conflict-related deaths and the number of homicides (UNTT, 2013, p. 35).

Yet while the growing agreement and support of states and organizations for the inclusion of a goal on peaceful and stable societies within the post-2015 development framework is promising, it should be noted that the reduction of violence and insecurity is not only a means of achieving development goals, but also an invaluable development objective *in itself*.

Chapter highlights

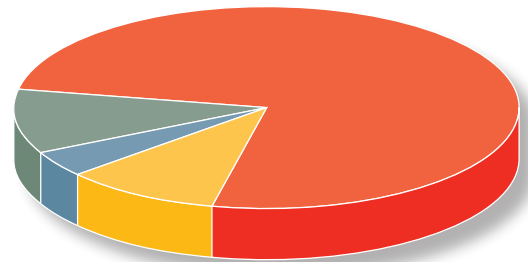
Chapter One (Violence, Security, and the New Global Development Agenda) provides an overview of the evolution of the debates around the inclusion of a goal for achieving ‘peaceful and inclusive societies’ in the post-2015 global development framework. The chapter summarizes the state of play (up to late 2014) regarding the integration of such a goal into the post-2015 development agenda and provides an overview of the various efforts to develop specific goals, targets, and indicators dealing with security, safety, and armed violence. Particular attention is devoted to the measuring and monitoring of lethal violence, which would serve as a more comprehensive indicator than ‘homicide only’ or ‘conflict deaths only’ for tracking progress towards any peace and security goals and targets.

Chapter Two (Lethal Violence Update) analyses changes in the distribution and intensity of lethal violence by comparing newly gathered data for the period 2007–12 with data for 2004–09, which formed the basis of research presented in the 2011

FIGURE 1 The distribution of the global burden of lethal violence

LEGEND:

- Direct conflict deaths (70,000; 14%)
- Intentional homicide (377,000; 74%)
- Unintentional homicide (42,000; 8%)
- Legal intervention killings (19,000; 4%)



SOURCE: Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2014)



edition of the *Global Burden of Armed Violence*. Globally, an estimated 508,000 people died violently each year in 2007–12—that translates into more than 3 million violent deaths during the six-year period. As shown in Figure 1, almost three-quarters (74 per cent) of these deaths were recorded as intentional homicides, while only 14 per cent of the total occurred in conflict settings. This chapter takes advantage of the enhanced availability of refined data—especially with respect to national-level details on firearm homicides—to provide more accurate estimates and analysis.

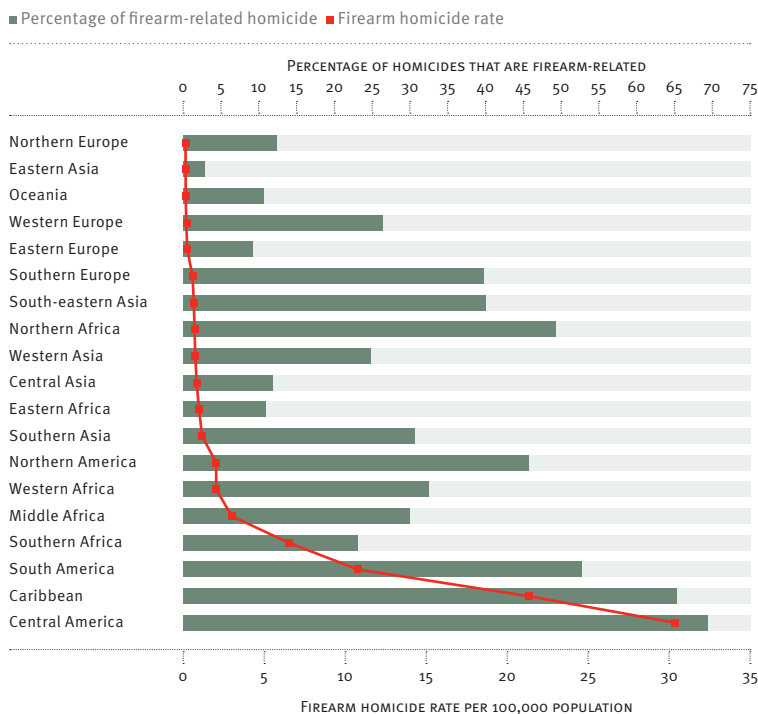
The vast majority of countries exhibit low and decreasing levels of lethal violence. While most of the sub-regions in the world have witnessed

corresponding drops in the number of violent deaths, Northern Africa, Central America, and Southern Africa experienced significant increases in violent death rates per 100,000 population from 2004–09 to 2007–12. Indeed, this volume finds that despite promising reductions of violence around the world, a few countries that are not at war suffer from extremely high levels of violence.

Analysis of the most recent data also provides a refined global estimate: nearly half of all homicides—46.3 per cent—are caused by firearms. While coverage remains patchy, disaggregated data on the use of firearms in homicide provides useful insight. It reveals, for example, that the sub-

PHOTO ▲ A girl kneels near the graves of victims of a suicide bomb attack by Boko Haram at a church on the outskirts of Abuja, Nigeria, December 2012. © Afolabi Sotunde/Reuters

FIGURE 2.17 Average firearm homicide rate and percentage of firearm-related homicides, per sub-region, 2007–12



SOURCE: Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2014)

regions with the highest prevalence of firearms use in homicides—in descending order, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America—are also the ones with the highest homicide rates (see Figure 2.17).

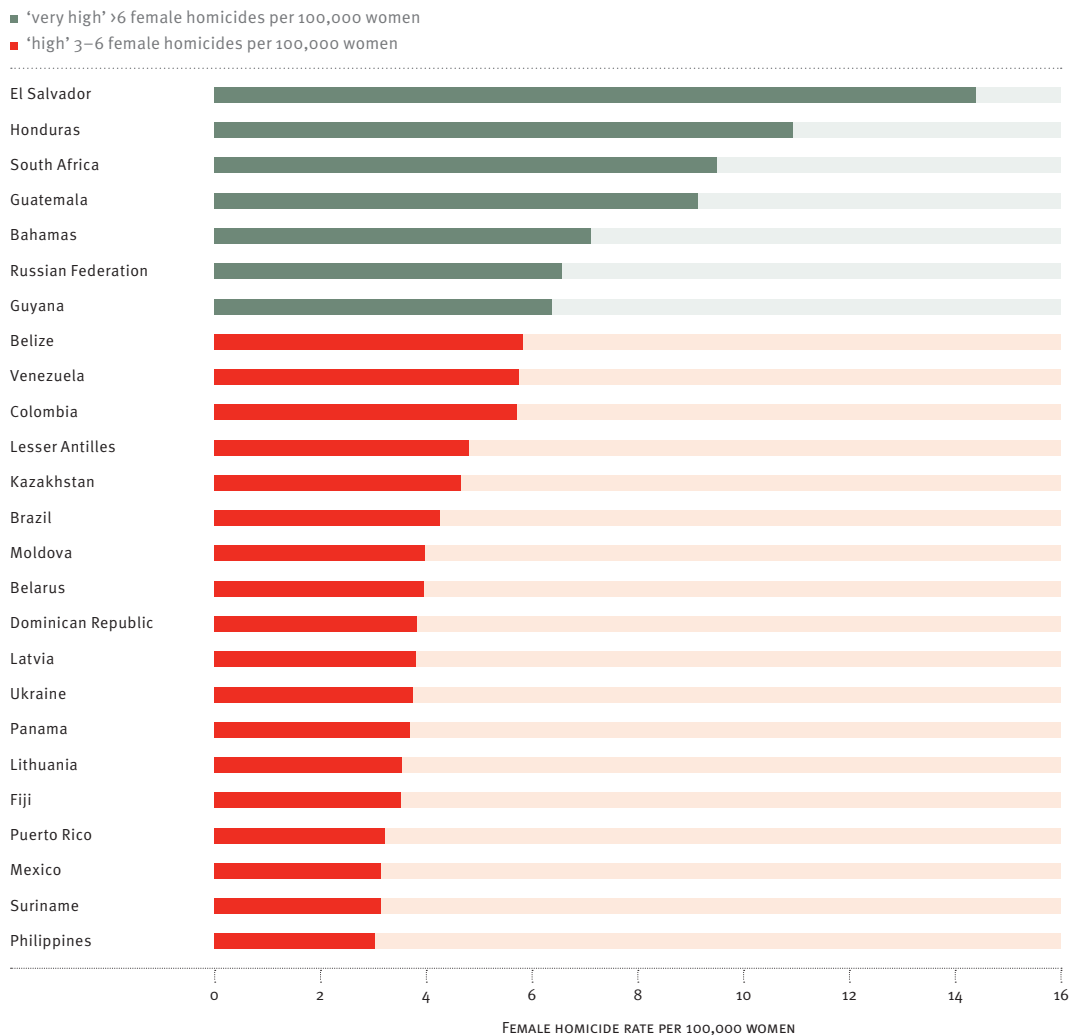
Chapter Three (Lethal Violence against Women and Girls) provides an update on figures and patterns of lethal violence against women. In line with the overall decline in the global number of homicides, the average annual number of female homicide victims also decreased slightly, from 66,000 women in 2004–07 to 60,000 women in 2007–12, which corresponds to a small drop from 17 per cent of all intentional homicides to 16 per cent. Of the 360,000 women killed between 2007

and 2012, more than half lost their lives in one of the 25 countries with the highest rates of female homicide, with El Salvador, Honduras, and South Africa topping the list (see Figure 3.4). Countries that witness the highest rates of female homicide tend to have the lowest share of intimate partner violence-related homicide. In these countries, the proportion of women who are killed outside of the private sphere—as opposed to the ‘intimate circle’—is greater than elsewhere. Analysis of the data also shows that the proportion of women who are killed by a firearm—as opposed to other mechanisms—is greater in areas that exhibit high rates of firearm homicide.

In addition, the chapter highlights the constancy of intimate partner femicide rates over time and across regions, suggesting that more precisely targeted policies are needed to reduce this type of violence. The global picture of lethal violence against women remains incomplete, however. While some countries have made progress in data collection methods and increased the availability of sex-disaggregated information on homicides, others—particularly in Asia and Africa—still lack the capacity and funding they require to take similar steps.

Chapter Four (Unpacking Lethal Violence) underscores that timely, reliable, and disaggregated data is crucial to informed decision-making processes for developing and implementing practical measures and programmes aimed at preventing and reducing lethal violence. Disaggregated data that provides details on locations, socio-demographic characteristics of victims and perpetrators, instruments used to inflict harm, and circumstances surrounding lethal events can guide effective policy-making and programming, as it can provide insight into the drivers and enablers of lethal violence.

FIGURE 3.4 Average high and very high female homicide rates per 100,000 women, 2007–12



SOURCE: Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2014)

Disaggregated data can also help to reveal sub-national developments that may remain hidden in national-level data. In Brazil, for example, high rates of lethal violence travelled from state capitals such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo to the north of the country and smaller municipalities, yet the national rate remained the same. Data on

such sub-national shifts can help to define priorities for interventions and to identify targets for programmes and assistance where they are likely to be most effective.

Chapter Five (The Economic Cost of Homicide) proposes a method for assessing the global economic burden of homicidal violence. Despite the





reduction in levels of homicide in many countries reviewed in this report, the related economic toll is increasing. The longer, safer, and more productive people's lives become, the higher the aggregate economic cost of homicide. In 2010 alone, the global cost of homicide reached USD 171 billion, roughly the equivalent of Finland's GDP that year. The chapter also highlights that life expectancy in countries such as Colombia, El Salvador, and Venezuela would increase by about 10, 14, and 16 months, respectively, in the absence of firearm-related homicide.

Conclusion

The provision of detailed information on the patterns and dynamics of lethal violence is crucial to a more comprehensive understanding of its causes and consequences, and to the design of effective violence prevention and reduction strategies. The *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2015* benefits from a noticeably enhanced availability of disaggregated data on lethal violence. The multi-source database that provides the backdrop for all analysis and research in this volume includes sex-disaggregated data on victims and information on the use and prevalence of firearms in lethal violence in a large sample of countries. Such details will prove to be of key significance in tracking progress towards peaceful societies—be it within the framework of the post-2015 development agenda, or simply in order to achieve reductions in the human cost of lethal violence per se. 📌

Endnotes

- 1 For a full presentation of the 'unified approach', see Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2011, pp. 44–51).

PHOTO ◀ A coroner examines a body found in an unmarked grave in a clandestine graveyard in Colón, El Salvador, December 2013.
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AFP Photo

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