



Factsheet #4

# Learning from the past: 30 years of crime prevention and urban security



Much progress has been made in the development of crime prevention and urban security strategies over the last 30 years informed by knowledge sharing and research. Yet, the application of the knowledge base in national and municipal policies and professional practice remains patchy.

Urban security strategies should be informed by the accumulated research and learning about effective interventions and processes that shape their implementation. They should draw on the rich evidence base that provides insights on early intervention, prevention and multi-stakeholder co-design.

**“ We are left wondering why we cannot implement measures that we know will work, reduce crime, and cost less for law and order. ”**

Irvin Waller,  
University of Ottawa



## 01

### The broader conceptualisation of urban security

The past few decades have seen a shift from a narrow focus on crime reduction to a broader concept of community safety, urban security and harm minimisation that incorporates citizens' perceptions of insecurities, and aims at fostering well-being, social cohesion as well as public trust in authorities.



## 02

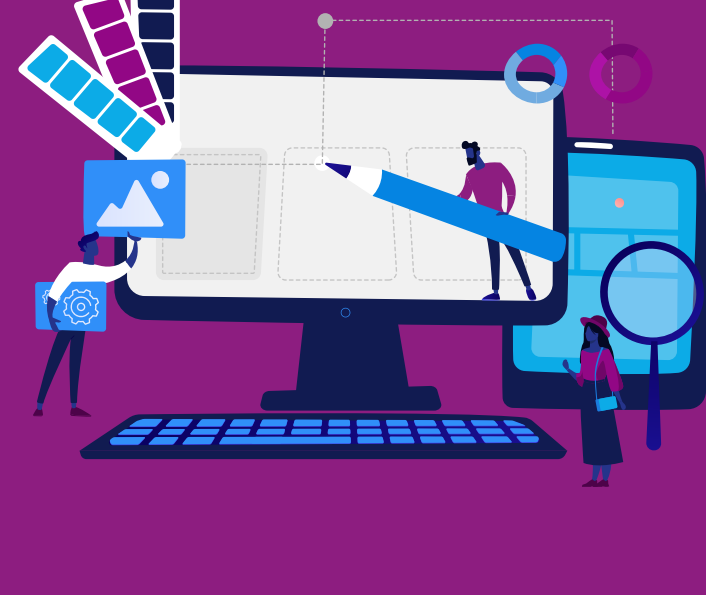
### The paradox of success

Prevention has played a significant role in the decrease in aggregate crime rates in relation to traditional property and public crimes. Despite this 'success', crime prevention remains under-resourced and poorly implemented.

## 03

### Incorporating preventive design

There is growing awareness of 'up-stream' approaches and early interventions that seek to anticipate harm and pre-empt criminal opportunities by effecting social and technological change rather than retrofitting solutions after the event.



Aesthetics and public sensibilities matter, given that security interventions can inadvertently foster insecurity rather than public reassurance.

One of the ironies of such quests for security is that in their implementation they may foster perceptions of insecurities by alerting citizens to risks and heightening sensibilities.

## 04

### The (en)gendering of urban security

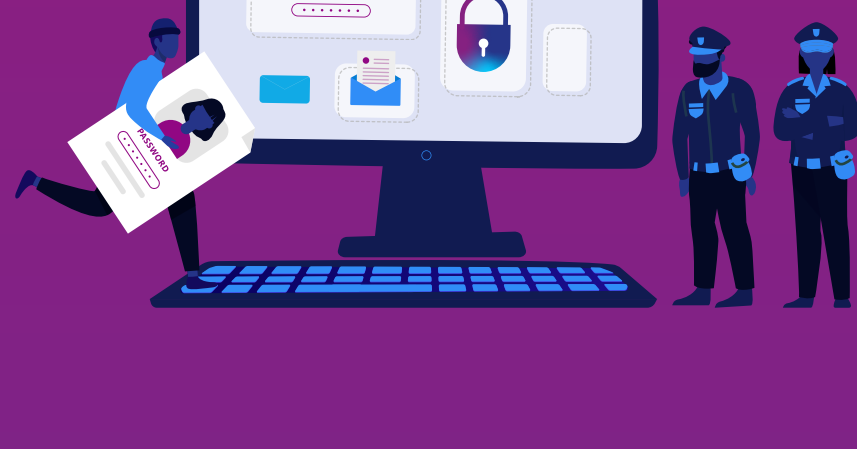
There is growing recognition of the importance of gender in framing urban security in terms of both the lived experiences of security and the production of safety, notably in relation to the use and quality of public spaces and domestic abuse as a community issue. Despite this growing recognition, urban security policies and interventions that are informed by the consideration of gender aspects remain the exception.



## 05

### The evolving dynamic of crime and security

The shift and migration of crime from physical space to cyberspace presents new challenges given that potential victims are more abundant (easier to find given the reach of the internet), with law enforcement adapting to new challenges.



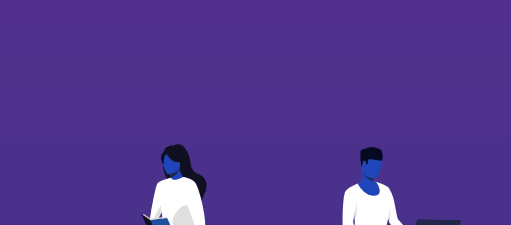
**“ Too few people in policy or practice acknowledge the fact that crime and security are co-evolving in an arms race: they maintain a static perspective and devote insufficient attention to the strategic imperative of out-innovating adaptive offenders against a background of changes in technology, cultural or business practices, etc., which often favour crime and render what works now, ineffective in future. ”**

Paul Ekblom,  
University of the Arts London

## 06

### The stigmatising potential of targeted interventions

Targeted prevention initiatives raise concerns about the stigmatising potential and labelling implications of associating specific people or places with crime. Instead, focusing on universal preventive services for young people justified on the basis of children's existing educational or social needs and problems, rather than perceptions of future risks of criminality or radicalisation leading to violent extremism, benefits society as a whole.



## 07

### Trust in partnerships

Urban security demands collaboration through multi-stakeholder responses in both its design and implementation - the police alone cannot prevent crime. Successful collaborations require inter-organisational and inter-personal trust, as well as public trust in authorities to ensure the effective implementation of urban security interventions.

## 08

### The salience of locality and place

Despite globalisation, locality, 'place' and context have become more, not less, important. Rather than using 'off the shelf' universal solutions, 'process models' of problem-solving methods that tailor responses to the context of local problems and populations are increasingly recognised and valued.



## 09

### Citizens as the co-producers of urban security

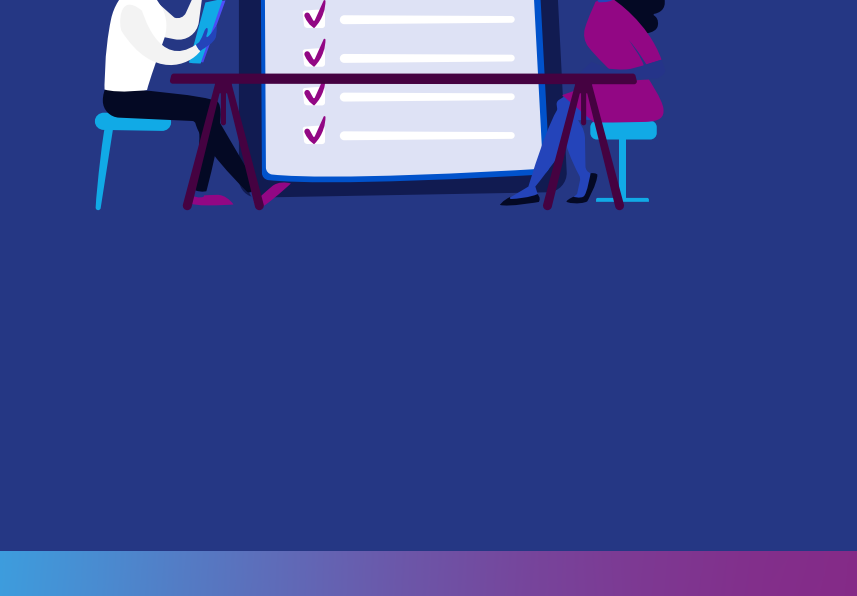
There is considerable value from engaging target populations of interventions as active co-producers and agents of change rather than as passive recipients of services. This is being increasingly recognised through new models of intervention design and delivery.



## 10

### Evaluation for accountability, development and learning

There is an increasing appreciation of the need for rigorous evaluation of interventions, as a mechanism of accountability, to help strengthen institutional development and to inform accumulated knowledge and evidence.



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**Consortium**


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\*This factsheet is based on the IcARUS Review and cross-analysis of urban security.