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The Macroeconomic impact of crime

A stocktaking of evidence-based approaches

By: Aida Caldera Sánchez and
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ABSTRACT/RÉSUMÉ

The Macroeconomic impact of crime: A stocktaking of evidence-based approaches

Crime imposes significant economic and fiscal costs through its effects on productivity, investment, public finances, and institutional trust. While the macroeconomic consequences of violent crime are increasingly documented, less attention has been paid to the effectiveness of policies aimed at reducing crime and improving public safety. This paper provides a policy-oriented review of evidence-based crime reduction strategies across OECD and Latin American countries. It first discusses the main channels through which crime affects economic outcomes and reviews recent trends in homicides, drug trafficking, money laundering, and cybercrime. The paper then develops a policy framework structured around three complementary pillars: control, prevention, and rehabilitation and reintegration. Drawing on OECD country desk inputs and a review of impact evaluations, it assesses which interventions have proven most effective in reducing crime and recidivism. The analysis highlights the importance of integrated approaches combining targeted law enforcement with social prevention and rehabilitation measures. It also underscores the growing relevance of cybercrime and digital resilience for macroeconomic performance and public policy. The paper concludes that systematic evaluation and stronger integration of crime-related risks into macroeconomic analysis can help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public spending on security and crime reduction.

Keywords: Crime; organised crime; homicide; cybercrime; public security; crime prevention; rehabilitation; policing; public expenditure; productivity; institutions; Latin America.

JEL codes: D74; H56; K14; K42; O17; O54

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L'impact macroéconomique de la criminalité : un bilan des approches fondées sur des données probantes

La criminalité engendre des coûts économiques et budgétaires importants à travers ses effets sur la productivité, l'investissement, les finances publiques et la confiance dans les institutions. Si les conséquences macroéconomiques de la criminalité violente sont de plus en plus documentées, moins d'attention a été accordée à l'efficacité des politiques visant à réduire la criminalité et à renforcer la sécurité publique. Ce document propose une revue orientée vers les politiques publiques des stratégies de réduction de la criminalité fondées sur des données probantes dans les pays de l'OCDE et d'Amérique latine. Il examine d'abord les principaux canaux par lesquels la criminalité affecte les résultats économiques et présente les tendances récentes en matière d'homicides, de trafic de drogues, de blanchiment d'argent et de cybercriminalité. Le document développe ensuite un cadre d'analyse structuré autour de trois piliers complémentaires : contrôle, prévention, réhabilitation et réinsertion. En s'appuyant sur les contributions des bureaux pays de l'OCDE et sur une revue des évaluations d'impact, il évalue les interventions qui se sont révélées les plus efficaces pour réduire la criminalité et la récidive. L'analyse met en évidence l'importance d'approches intégrées combinant des politiques ciblées de maintien de l'ordre avec des mesures de prévention sociale et de réhabilitation. Elle souligne également l'importance croissante de la cybercriminalité et de la résilience numérique pour les performances macroéconomiques et les politiques publiques. Le document conclut qu'une évaluation plus systématique et une meilleure intégration des risques liés à la criminalité dans l'analyse macroéconomique peuvent contribuer à améliorer l'efficacité et l'efficience des dépenses publiques consacrées à la sécurité et à la lutte contre la criminalité.

Mots-clés : Criminalité ; criminalité organisée ; homicide ; cybercriminalité ; sécurité publique ; prévention de la criminalité ; réhabilitation ; maintien de l'ordre ; dépenses publiques ; productivité ; institutions ; Amérique latine.

Codes JEL: D74 ; H56 ; K14 ; K42 ; O17 ; O54

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The Macroeconomic impact of crime: A stocktaking of evidence-based approaches

Aida Caldera Sánchez and Alberto González Pandiella[1]

1. Introduction

Crime rates have risen in several OECD countries in the last decade, heightening concerns among citizens, businesses, and policymakers. Beyond its direct human and social toll, crime undermines investor confidence, raises the cost of doing business, weakens public finances, erodes trust in institutions, dampens tourism and fuels outward migration, thereby weakening growth prospects. At the same time, crime leads to increasing fiscal pressures as governments need to increase spending on law enforcement, security, and the social and health services associated with crime. Taken together, these channels make rising crime a macro-relevant challenge, as its effects extend well beyond public safety, shaping a country's investment climate, labour market dynamics, fiscal sustainability, and growth prospects. However, the scale and nature of these effects vary widely across countries, reflecting differences in crime levels, institutional capacity and economic structure. In particular in Latin America, high crime levels have become a structural constraint on economic development. However, the nature and economic transmission channels of crime differ across contexts. While violent crime, especially homicide, tends to dominate in high-violence settings, in many OECD countries the crime burden is increasingly associated with non-violent forms such as fraud, cybercrime, and organised economic crime. The impact of these less violent forms tends to be through more indirect channels, including institutional trust, business confidence, labour market participation and digital resilience. Cross-country comparisons and aggregate cost estimates should be interpreted with caution, given differences in reporting, legal definitions and enforcement capacity. The macroeconomic impacts of crime are increasingly well documented. Recent work by the IMF, the IDB and the World Bank has highlighted the links between crime, productivity and investment ((Bisca et al., 2024[1]), (Perez-Vincent et al., 2024[2])). Much of this literature focuses on violent crime,

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reflecting data availability and cross-country comparability, but a growing body of evidence points to the significant economic costs of non-violent crime, including digital and financial offences, particularly in advanced economies. However, less attention has been paid to the related and equally important question of which strategies are effective in reducing crime and which ones deliver the greatest value for public resources.

This paper addresses the gap by providing a policy-oriented review of international evidence on what works to reduce crime. Drawing on OECD country desk inputs and a review of impact evaluations, it synthesises evidence on interventions across three broad pillars: control, prevention, and reintegration. The focus is on strategies for which there is credible evidence of effectiveness. While the evidence reviewed is international, the paper places particular emphasis on experiences in Latin America, where innovative approaches have emerged alongside persistently high crime rates. At the same time, the analysis highlights lessons relevant for lower-violence OECD countries, where crime may have smaller direct impacts but can still affect economic outcomes through trust, labour market participation, business perceptions and digital vulnerabilities. Where relevant, the discussion highlights how the effectiveness and applicability of policies may vary across different crime profiles, distinguishing between high-violence environments and lower-violence settings where economic and cybercrime play a more prominent role.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 sets out a conceptual framework for understanding how crime affects economic outcomes. Section 3 discusses key measurement challenges and Section 4 reviews recent trends in crime across countries and regions, including homicides, drug trafficking, money laundering and cybercrime. Section 5 examines public expenditure on security and anti-crime policies across countries. Section 6 presents a policy framework for national crime strategies, drawing on the specialised literature and structured around three pillars: control, prevention, and rehabilitation. Section 7 applies this framework to assess anti-crime policies implemented across OECD countries, summarising the evidence on what works to reduce crime. Section 8 concludes.

2. How crime affects economic outcomes

Crime imposes substantial economic costs that extend well beyond its direct and human toll, impacting a wide range of economic outcomes, from public finances to long-term growth. By increasing uncertainty, weakening institutions, and diverting public and private resources away from productive uses, crime can undermine economic growth and development. In addition to these direct effects, crime can also generate indirect impacts through behavioural responses, with fear and perceptions of insecurity amplifying economic reactions to crime-related shocks.

The nature and transmission channels of these impacts vary across crime types and country contexts. While violent crime is often the dominant concern in high-crime settings, non-violent forms of crime, such as fraud, cybercrime, and organised economic crime, can also generate significant economic costs, particularly in lower-violence OECD countries, by affecting firm performance, market functioning, and trust in institutions. From a macroeconomic perspective, crime affects the economy through several interrelated channels:

- **Individuals and households** bear the brunt of crime through direct medical and legal expenses, lost wages and productivity due to injury or job loss, and reduced investment in education and skills. Fear of victimization can also restrict mobility and erode social capital, weakening social cohesion and human development. Exposure to crime can also have lasting effects on mental health and family stability, with consequences that extend across generations. These impacts can impair cognitive development, school attendance and learning outcomes, thereby weakening human capital accumulation over the long term. The magnitude of these effects depends on the prevalence and type of crime and may also operate through perceptions of insecurity. In lower-

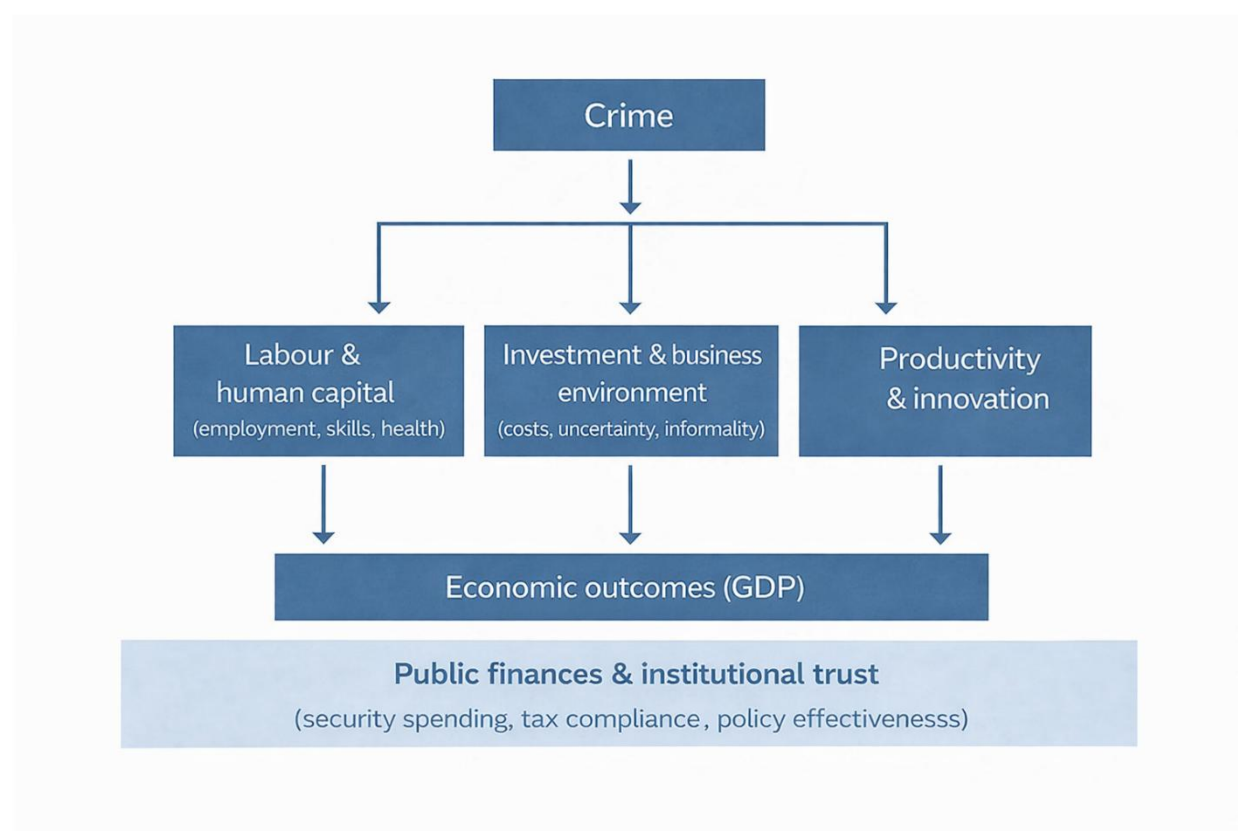
violence settings, non-violent crimes such as fraud and cybercrime can also impose significant financial losses on households and reduce trust in digital and financial systems.

- **Businesses** face higher operational costs than otherwise, as crime undermines property rights and investor confidence. It forces firms to divert resources toward security measures and away from productive investment. This raises the cost of doing business and hampers job creation and innovation. In addition, economic and cybercrime can disrupt operations, compromise data, and increase compliance and insurance costs, affecting productivity even in contexts where violent crime is limited. In Latin America, for example, the total direct cost of crime is estimated at 3.4 % of regional GDP, and private business security spending accounts for nearly half of those costs (Perez-Vincent et al., 2024[2]). These effects are often particularly pronounced for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which typically have more limited capacity to absorb security costs or invest in risk mitigation. In some contexts, especially where organised crime is prevalent, firms may also face direct competition from criminal networks operating outside the regulatory framework. This can distort market functioning, undermine fair competition, and discourage formal business activity.
- **Government and public finances** are strained by the need to fund police forces, court systems, and prisons, often at the expense of growth-enhancing areas such as education, and infrastructure. In high-crime settings, public security spending often approaches or exceeds 2% of GDP, contributing to fiscal pressures and crowding out other growth-enhancing investments. At the same time, crime weakens tax revenues, both directly, through illegal and informal economic activity that escapes taxation, and indirectly, by dampening economic growth. Governments also bear the costs of supporting victims and rehabilitating offenders ((Bisca et al., 2024[1]), (Perez-Vincent et al., 2024[2])). Moreover, persistent crime undermines trust in institutions and the rule of law, with broader implications for governance and the investment climate. In advanced economies, addressing cybercrime and complex financial crime may also require significant public investment in regulatory, supervisory, and digital enforcement capacities. Crime can also fuel corruption by weakening governance, distorting public decision-making and facilitating rent-seeking, thereby affecting resource allocation and economic performance. However, the link between crime and corruption falls outside the scope of this paper and would merit dedicated analysis in its own right.

Taken together, these channels hinder economic performance and living standards (Figure 1). High levels of crime are generally associated with lower productivity, reduced human capital accumulation, and weaker competitiveness, especially by deterring domestic and foreign investment and constraining innovation. Crime also reduces international attractiveness, with direct impacts on tourism, business climate perceptions, and talent retention. Over time, these effects can compound, significantly reducing a country’s GDP and long-term growth potential.

Estimating the macroeconomic cost of crime is complex, as it involves both direct expenditures (security services, justice systems, incarceration) and indirect losses (reduced investment, lower tourism, weaker human capital). While methodologies differ, reviews of the literature indicate that the economic cost of crime can range from 2% to 14% of GDP across diverse country contexts (see Annex 1). These costs encompass not only immediate fiscal outlays and property losses but also longer-term impacts on productivity and potential growth associated with a persistently insecure environment. The estimates can vary widely depending on methodology, country context and the types of crime considered, and should be interpreted as indicative.

Figure 1. Crime is a macroeconomic challenge



Source: Own elaboration.

Crime can also influence inflation dynamics. High crime acts as a negative supply shock, increasing firms' production costs and fuelling cost-push inflation. Businesses face elevated expenses for insurance, security, and extortion payments, which are ultimately passed on to consumers. While this channel is most evident in high-violence contexts, other forms of crime, such as fraud, counterfeiting, and cyberattacks, can also increase costs and disrupt supply chains, contributing to price pressures. For example, crime against producers has led to significant price increases for essential goods in countries such as Mexico (Stolkin, 2023[3]). Organized criminal activity along transport routes and logistics corridors further disrupts supply chains and inflates freight costs, exerting additional upward pressure on prices.

Taken together, this evidence highlights that crime is not only a public safety priority but also a potentially relevant economic policy challenge, underscoring the importance of identifying crime reduction strategies that are both effective and fiscally sustainable.

3. Measuring crime

Measuring crime is inherently challenging. Crime is often underreported and legal definitions can vary across countries. Administrative data reflect not only criminal activity but also reporting behaviour and law enforcement capacity. These challenges are particularly relevant for cross-country comparisons and for crimes such as organised crime and cybercrime, which are deliberately concealed and difficult to detect. These measurement challenges also have implications for assessing the economic impact of crime. Underreporting and differences in enforcement can bias estimates of crime-related economic costs,

including effects on productivity, investment and tax revenues. As a result, cross-country comparisons and links between crime indicators and macroeconomic outcomes should be interpreted with caution.

For these reasons, this paper relies on a combination of indicators to analyse crime trends and patterns across countries. These include homicide rates, which are less subject to underreporting and differences in legal definitions, and are therefore widely used as the most reliable proxy for cross-country comparisons of violent crime.

Recent efforts led by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have sought to harmonise crime statistics through the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS). The ICCS provides a common framework for classifying crimes based on observed behaviour rather than the specific legal statute, improving international comparability. Endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission, it is now widely used by researchers and organizations, including in this paper.

The ICCS distinguishes between 11 broad categories of crime, ranging from violent acts (homicides) to property crimes and drug-related offenses, which helps policymakers understand the scope of the issues and to understand the multifaceted nature of crime. The 11 broad categories are:

1. Acts leading to death or intending to cause death.
2. Acts leading to harm or intending to cause harm to the person.
3. Injurious acts of a sexual nature.
4. Acts against property involving violence or threat against a person.
5. Acts against property only.
6. Acts involving controlled psychoactive substances or other drugs.
7. Acts involving fraud, deception or corruption.
8. Acts against public order, authority and provisions of the State.
9. Acts against public safety and state security.
10. Acts against the natural environment.
11. Other criminal acts not elsewhere classified.

The ICCS framework is further disaggregated into detailed subcategories (over 230 specific categories at the most detailed level), and recent improvements in crime statistics have included improved data collection systems and expanded victimization surveys. These developments have enhanced accuracy and coverage, helping capture crimes that previously went unreported. Overall, they provide a stronger basis for analysing global crime trends and evaluating the impact of policies but some gaps remain, particularly for complex and transnational crimes such as organised crime and money laundering.

This paper focuses on crime in general, as defined under the ICCS framework, rather than exclusively on organized crime. Organised crime typically refers to structured groups engaged in serious criminal activities for financial or material gain, often operating over sustained periods and, in some cases, across borders. Although organised crime and conventional criminality are closely linked, most notably through activities such as drug trafficking, a macroeconomic perspective requires a wider analytical lens. The economic costs of crime are not confined to criminal networks but extend to households, firms, and public institutions. Offences such as property crime, interpersonal violence, and fraud erode social trust, disrupt labour markets, and distort economic behaviour, thereby generating substantial macroeconomic costs even in the absence of organised criminal structures.

A broader focus on crime is also justified by data and evidence considerations. Measurement challenges and definitional ambiguities make cross-country comparisons of organized crime particularly difficult, limiting the availability of internationally comparable indicators. This constrains empirical analysis and international benchmarking. By contrast, a general crime lens allows the analysis to draw on a wider and

more robust evidence base, as much of the academic literature and programme evaluation focuses on common forms of crime and related policy interventions.

Accordingly, by adopting a comprehensive view of crime, this paper can draw on cross-country benchmarking and provide an evidence-based assessment of strategies that help reduce crime. At the same time, the growing transnational reach and economic footprint of organized crime remain a pressing policy challenge, warranting separate and more detailed analysis in its own right (OECD, 2025[4]).

4. Crime trends across time and regions

OECD countries face a broad range of criminal activities, including homicides, property crime, drug trafficking, and, more recently, a rapid expansion of cybercrime ((Fijnaut and Paoli, 2004[5]), (Kuzior et al., 2024[6]). The prevalence and evolution of these crimes vary significantly across countries and regions. This section reviews recent trends in major criminal activities across OECD countries, focusing on changes over time and key regional patterns. In addition to commonly studied offenses such as homicides, it also considers emerging but increasingly prevalent illegal activities, including money laundering, cyber-related crime, and extortion (see Box 1).

Crime patterns vary significantly across OECD countries, with certain types of crimes more prevalent in specific regions. Drug production and homicide rates tend to be higher in parts of Latin America and Asia, whereas cybercrime is more widespread in Central European and North American countries. Recent literature highlights that criminal organizations have increasingly diversified beyond traditional violent activities, such as drug trafficking, into activities that rely less on direct violence, including cybercrime and money laundering and extortion ((Albanese, 2021[7]), (Feldmann and Luna, 2023[8]), (Fijnaut and Paoli, 2004[5]), (Muharremi, 2016[9]), (Parra, Feldmann and Luna, forthcoming[10])). To capture both persistent and emerging threats, this section examines trends in four offenses: intentional homicide, drug trafficking, cybercrime, and money laundering.

Box 1. Extortion, a growing threat in several OECD countries

Extortion is a predatory crime in which offenders coerce victims into paying money under threat of harm or in exchange for "protection." Victims may face threats of violence, property damage, or other reprisals if they do not comply. Criminal groups often target small businesses and individuals through phone calls, online messages, or in-person demands, forcing regular payments.

From an economic perspective, extortion can be understood as a form of informal and illegal taxation. It tends to be highly regressive, as it disproportionately affects small businesses and lower-income individuals with limited capacity to absorb such costs or access protection. These payments act as a direct drain on income and profits, discourage formalisation, and distort resource allocation.

Despite its impact, few extortion incidents reach official statistics, as they remain significantly underreported. Victims often fear retaliation or lack confidence in the authorities, so only a fraction of incidents are captured in official statistics. In Mexico, for instance, it is estimated that 95–99% of extortion cases go unreported.

Even with limited data, extortion is clearly expanding, as criminal groups attempt to diversify their portfolios of illicit activities and increase their sources of income (Bergman, 2018[11]). In Mexico, reported extortion cases rose by 7% in the first half of 2025 compared to the same period in 2024. Analysts now describe it as the country's fastest-growing crime. Similar trends are visible in other OECD countries, such as Colombia where insurgent groups use extortion as one of its primary revenue sources. It has also surged sharply in recent years in Peru, particularly in Lima.

Policy responses are also evolving. Mexico is discussing legal changes to define extortion as a high-impact crime. This would allow authorities to initiate investigations *ex officio*, without requiring a formal complaint. Several Mexican states are also expanding victim-centred measures, such as anonymous reporting hotlines backed by police follow-up and protection protocols. For example, in Baja California, coordinated anti-extortion units and 24/7 helplines have provided quick responses to reported cases preventing most victims from making payments.

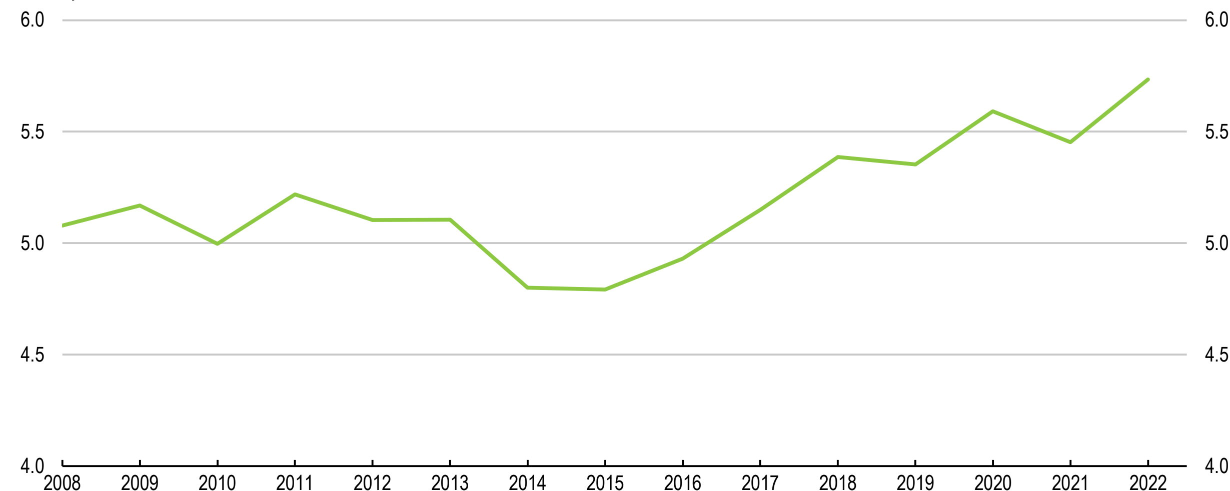
4.1. Intentional homicides

Homicide rates are the most widespread indicator to study crime. This can be partly explained by the much better data availability and reliability compared to other types of crime, especially cross-nationally and over time (Harrendorf, 2018[12]), (Huang and Wellford, 1989[13])). In addition, intentional homicides have been traditionally used as a proxy for the existence of crime in general. This is because it is assumed that in places where illicit activities operate, it is more likely that episodes of violence, and in their most drastic demonstration, homicides, will increase.

The average intentional homicide rate has risen across OECD countries over the past decade (Figure 2). Since the pandemic, homicide rates have risen in 22 of the 38 OECD member countries (Figure 3), with a particularly sharp increase in several Latin American countries (Costa Rica, Chile, and Mexico), the United States, and parts of Europe (France and Belgium and modestly in Spain and Sweden). At the same time, homicides have been stable in several countries (Netherlands, Poland, and the UK) and have fallen in a few countries (Lithuania, Estonia, Denmark) (see also Annex 2).

Figure 2. Homicide rates have trended up in the OECD

Rate per 100,000 inhabitants



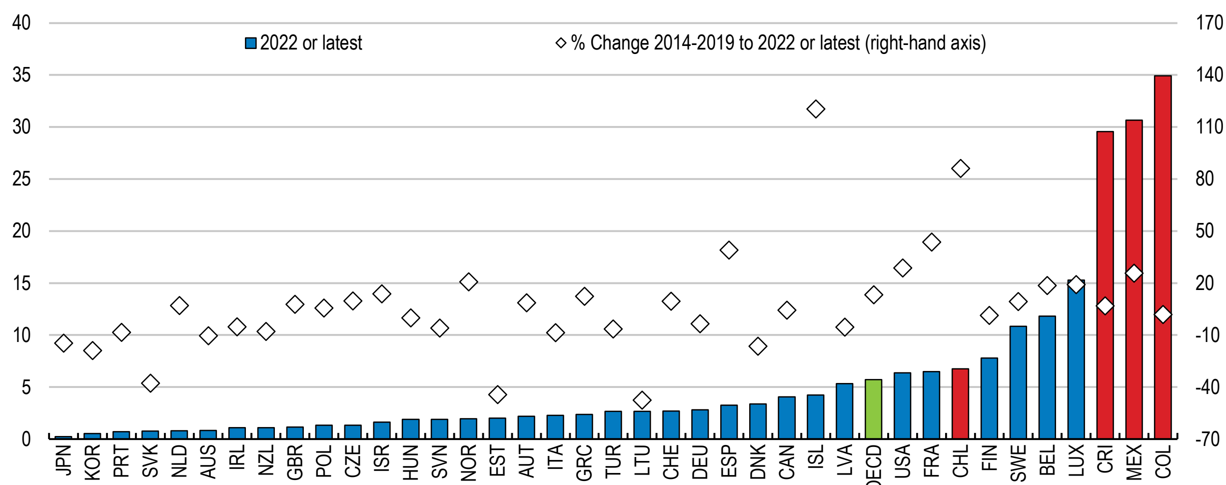
Note: The indicator is calculated as the total number of victims of intentional homicide and attempted intentional homicide recorded each year divided by the total resident population in the same year, multiplied by 100,000. OECD is a simple average of OECD members.
Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Latin America stands out for consistently high homicide rates, particularly in certain countries (Figure 4). Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico have consistently had some of the highest homicide rates in the world driven largely by drug cartels, organized crime and gang violence (UNODC, 2023[14]). Colombia has made significant strides in reducing homicide rates since the height of the cartel and guerrilla conflicts but still faces challenges in rural areas, while Brazil saw a slight decline since 2018 thanks in part to enhanced policing and crime control strategies in urban centers, although regional disparities are significant (Bisca et al., 2024[1]). Chile and Costa Rica had some of the lowest homicide rates in the region, though both

have seen an uptick in recent years, which can be attributed to transnational organized crime ((Bergman, 2018[11]), (Feldmann and Luna, 2023[8]), (FiscaliaNacional, 2024[15]), (InsightCrime, 2024[16])). Argentina and Peru have moderate levels of violence, with regional hotspots of higher crime, particularly in areas linked to drug trafficking ((InsightCrime, 2025[17]), (InternationalCrisisGroup, 2025[18])).

Figure 3. Evolution of crimes in OECD countries

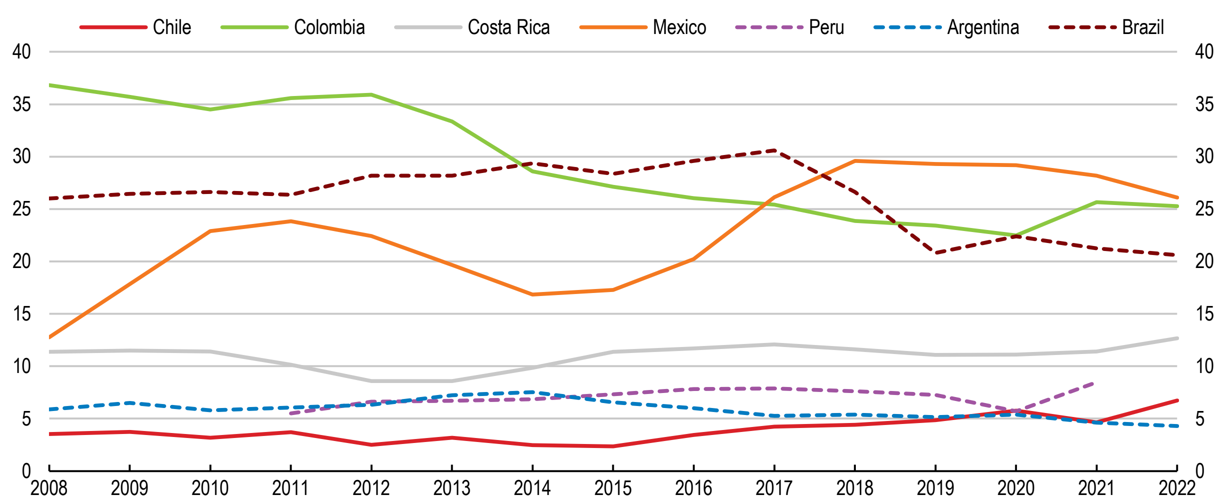
Homicide rate, per 100,000 inhabitants



Note: OECD is a simple average of OECD members. Data refer to 2021 for Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom (England and Wales only), For the analysis of change for 2014-2019, 2019 is used only for Colombia due to a break in series. The analysis for Iceland and Luxembourg is based on a small number of cases, resulting in unstable figures.
Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Eurostat, and Organization of American States.

Figure 4. Homicides in Latin America, selected countries

Homicide rate, per 100, 000 inhabitants



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

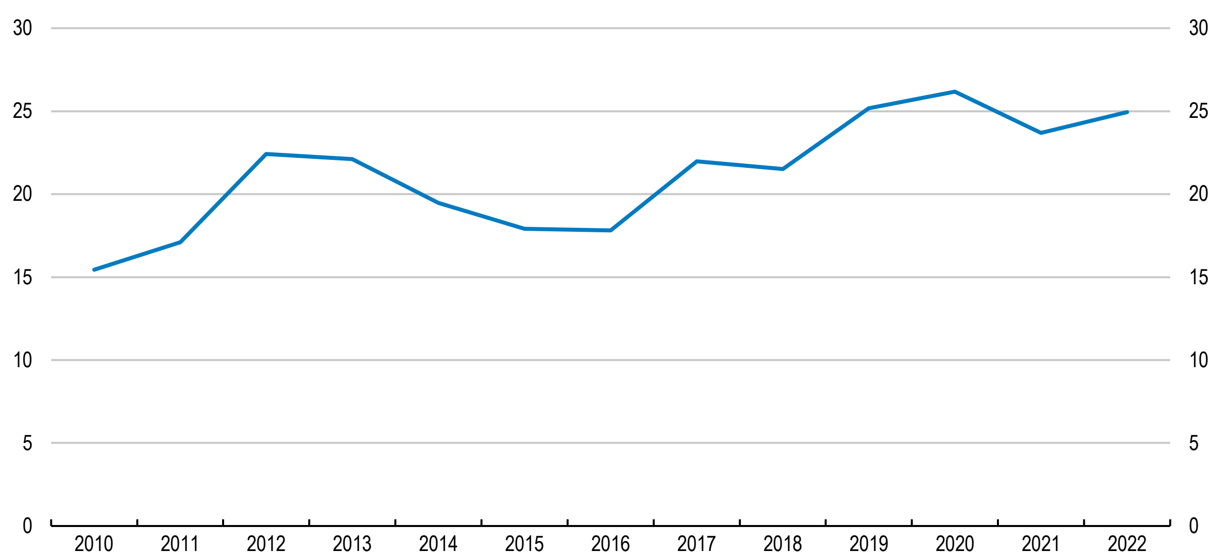
4.2. Crimes related to drug trafficking

Drug-related crimes are highly prevalent and play a central role in shaping patterns of violence and criminal activity. The rapid growth of drug markets and changing patterns of supply and demand (Bergman, 2018[11]) have fueled a range of offenses, including drug trafficking, production, distribution, and possession of

drugs. These crimes not only contribute to violence, including homicides, but also facilitate financial fraud, money laundering, and the growth of criminal organizations, allowing them to expand into other illicit activities ((Feldmann and Luna, 2023[8]), (Reuter, 2014[19]) and (UNODC, 2019[20]). According to the World Drug Report 2024, global drug markets have expanded rapidly, driven by the emergence of new synthetic opioids and an unprecedented supply and demand for other drugs (UNODC, 2024[21]). Cocaine production has tripled in 10 years, reaching record levels, with seizures reported in all OECD countries. These developments in drug production and trafficking have intensified competition among criminal groups and contributed to rising violence linked to organized crime, particularly in Latin America and Western Europe (UNODC, 2024[21]). Consistent with these trends, arrests for drug trafficking offenses have increased across OECD countries over the past decade (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Drug trafficking offenses are increasing in OECD countries

Persons Held by Drug Trafficking rate per 100,000 populations, OECD Average, 2010-2022



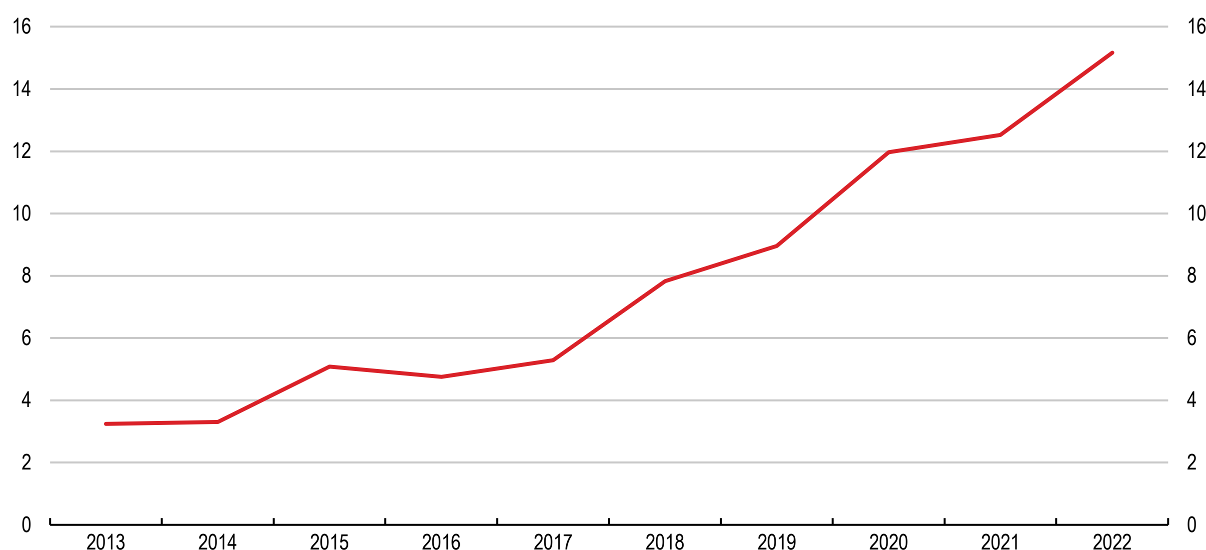
Note: This indicator refers to persons held in Prisons, Penitentiary Institutions or Correctional Institutions. It uses the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS), its unit of computation being the individual person. The data provided on persons held in prisons and under other types of supervision reflect the total number (the “stock”) of persons held at a specific cut-off date, usually December 31 of the reference year.
Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

4.3. Money laundering

Money laundering has become a pervasive issue across OECD countries, enabling organised crime by allowing illicit proceeds to be integrated into the formal economy. The United Nations defines money laundering as the process of converting or transferring assets while knowing they originate from criminal activity, with the intent to conceal their illegal source or assist those involved in crime. Estimates suggests that money laundering represents a substantial share of economic activity in some countries, underscoring its role in sustaining and expanding organized crime ((Schneider, 2008[22]), (Ferwerda et al., 2013[23]) and (Argentiero, Bagella and Busato, 2008[24])). Beyond its direct criminal implications, money laundering plays a fundamental role in the evolution of organized crime, facilitating its expansion into both legal and illegal sectors (Barone and Masciandaro, 2011[25]). In line with these concerns, money laundering rates have consistently increased in OECD countries since 2013 (Figure 6). Money laundering rates have increased in 22 of the 31 OECD countries with up-to-date information. European countries tend to show higher rates of money laundering due to their advanced economies, high trade volumes, financial secrecy provisions,

and in some cases institutional challenges, including corruption and inconsistent enforcement ((Achim et al., 2021[26]), (Ghulam and Szalay, 2024[27]) and (Reganati and Oliva, 2018[28])).

Figure 6. Money laundering rates are increasing in OECD countries



Note: This indicator refers to the conversion or transfer of property, knowing that such property is the proceeds of crime, to conceal or disguise the illicit origin of such property or of assisting any person who participates in the commission of the predicate offense to evade the legal consequences of his acts, as well as the concealment or disguise of the true nature, source, location, disposition, movement or ownership of rights with respect to the property. This indicator uses the definition of the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS).
Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

4.4. Cybercrime

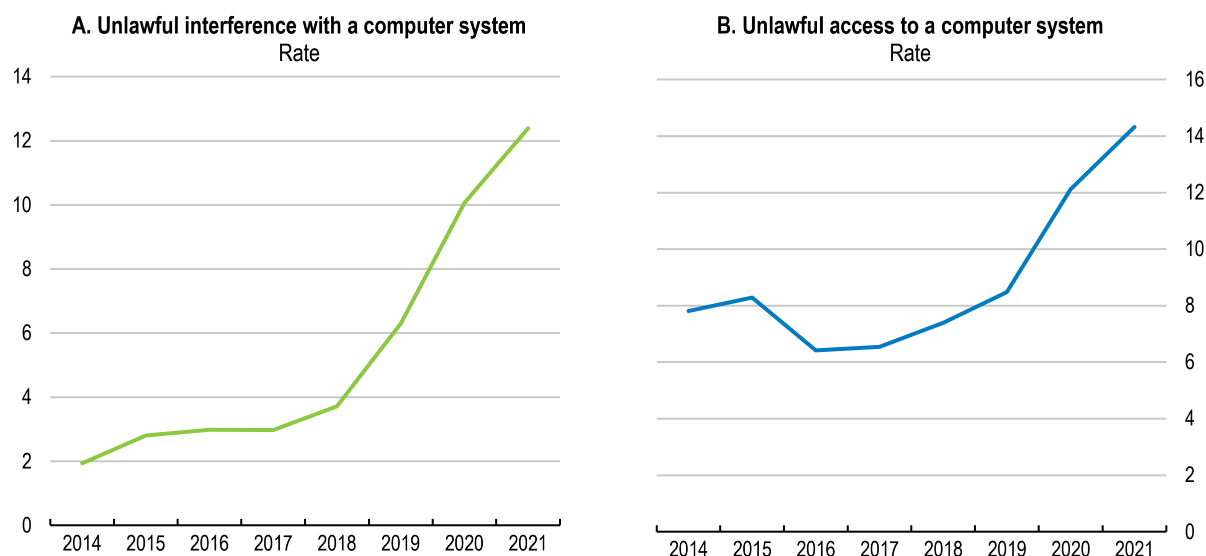
As economic and social activities have become increasingly digital, cybercrime has emerged as a major global threat, affecting individuals, businesses, and governments alike. Cybercrime, or computer crime, is generally defined as criminal activities in which computers or computer networks serve as a tool or target of criminal conduct. It can also be described as the use of information systems and technology to engage in larceny, extortion, identity theft, fraud, and, in some instances, corporate espionage (Oreku and Mtenzi, 2016[29]). Cybercrime manifests in various forms, including online banking fraud (phishing), fake antivirus software, counterfeit error alerts, and other related schemes.

The macroeconomic cost of cybercrime is large. Estimates suggest that it may account for up to 1% of global GDP annually, with some countries experiencing even higher losses (OECD, 2022[30]). According to Anderson et al., cybercrime incurs four types of costs: (i) anticipatory costs, including expenditures on antivirus software, insurance, and compliance measures; (ii) consequential costs, encompassing both direct losses and indirect expenses, such as diminished competitiveness due to intellectual property theft; (iii) response costs, involving compensation payments to victims and fines imposed by regulatory bodies; and (iv) indirect costs, such as reputational damage to organizations, loss of confidence in online transactions by individuals and businesses, decreased public-sector revenues, and the expansion of the underground economy.

Crimes associated with computer systems and digital technologies have been steadily increasing. Illicit acts that interfere with the operation of computer services—such as the damage, deletion, deterioration, alteration, or suppression of computer data without authorisation or legitimate justification—have risen consistently over the 2014–2021 period for which data are available, with rates increasing by more than

10 percentage points (Figure 7, panel A). Unauthorised access to computer systems exhibits a similar upward trend, particularly between 2019 and 2021, when recorded rates grew by approximately 6 percentage points (Figure 7, panel B).

Figure 7. Cybercrime is increasing across OECD countries



Note: The chart depicts unlawful interference with a computer system and unlawful access to a computer system, expressed as rates per 100,000 population. These rates are calculated by dividing the number of offences reported annually by the total population and multiplying by 100,000.
Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

A country-level analysis of cybercrime reveals two main findings. First, most OECD countries have experienced a significant increase in cyber-related offences when comparing pre- and post-pandemic levels. This trend is evident in 16 of the 21 countries with available data. A similar pattern emerges for unauthorised access to computer systems, with 18 of the 25 OECD countries reporting increases—most notably Italy, Finland, and the Netherlands. Other related indicators, such as the interception of computer data and cyber fraud aimed at financial gain, also show upward trends in the majority of OECD countries over the past five years.

Second, cybercrime trends vary considerably across countries depending on the specific type of offence and the institutional capacity to prevent, detect, and prosecute these crimes. While some jurisdictions struggle to contain particular cyber threats, they have managed to curb others. For example, Austria recorded the largest increase in interference with computer systems—through data breaches, deterioration, or deletion—yet achieved the strongest performance in reducing data interception during computer transmission, with an 80% decline when comparing 2021 with the pre-pandemic average (2014–2019). A similar pattern is observable in Spain, where cyber fraud more than doubled over the same period.

These findings underscore the evolving nature of cybercrime across OECD countries. While certain forms of digital offending are escalating rapidly, others are being effectively mitigated through targeted policy responses, which will be examined in the following sections of this note.

5. Public spending on security and crime

The evolution of crime and insecurity has a direct fiscal impact. Periods of high crime often prompt governments to reinforce deterrence efforts, leading to higher spending on policing, and in some cases, military spending. The scale of these fiscal pressures varies widely across countries, depending on crime levels, institutional arrangements and policy choices. In countries, with structurally high crime rates, including several in Latin America, a substantial share of government spending is devoted to public order and safety.

Data from the OECD's Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG) database provide a basis for tracking public spending on security over time and across countries. Under COFOG, spending on *public order and safety* includes expenditures on police services, law courts, and prisons, capturing the core institutions responsible for law enforcement, judicial processing and incarceration, but excludes other anti-crime expenditures implemented through different policy domains. This implies that COFOG-based measures may underestimate the full fiscal costs of crime, particularly where spending occurs through other sectors such as defence. Across OECD countries, average spending on public order and safety amounts to around 1.7% of GDP and has remained relatively stable over time (Figure 8, panel A). Spending is higher in Latin American countries (Figure 8, panel B), where security expenditure represents a larger share of total government spending (Figure 9), around 6% of total spending on average, compared to about 4% in OECD countries overall. These cross-country differences should be interpreted with caution, as institutional responsibilities, accounting practices and the scope of recorded expenditures may differ.

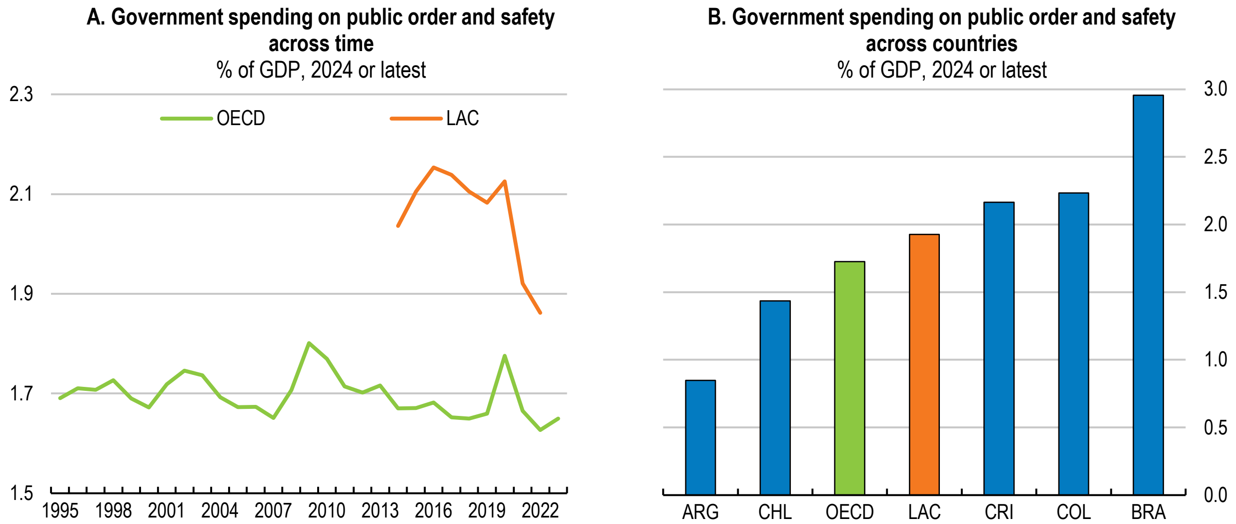
In some countries, these figures may underestimate the full fiscal burden of crime, as they exclude military spending. In contexts where armed forces are involved in internal security operations, more granular information, such as the share of military budgets allocated to citizen security, would be required to fully assess the fiscal costs associated with crime.

The relationship between spending on security and crime outcomes is complex. There is no conclusive evidence that higher levels of spending on security alone lead to lower crime rates (Bisca et al., 2024[1]). Among OECD countries crime and spending levels do not display a statistically significant association (Figure 10). This can reflect, in part, reverse causality and differences in policy effectiveness, as higher spending may respond to higher crime rather than reduce it. In contrast, several Latin American countries with high homicide rates often also display higher levels of public spending on security, reflecting both the scale of the challenge and the fiscal pressures it generates.

The composition of spending also shows paradoxes. For instance, many high-crime countries such as those in Latin America, allocate a larger share of their security budgets to courts and a smaller share to policing, diverging from other OECD countries (Figure 11). Yet, many of these same countries face significant weaknesses in judicial effectiveness, including delays in prosecution and low conviction rates for serious crimes (Bergman, 2018[11]). This suggests that not only the level, but also the allocation and effectiveness of spending are critical in shaping outcomes.

Taken together, these patterns point to the need for regularly assessing efficiency and effectiveness in security spending. As with other major areas of public expenditure, such as health or infrastructure, systematic public spending reviews could help identify inefficiencies, reallocate resources, and improve outcomes. In a context of tight fiscal constraints, directing resources towards the most effective anti-crime strategies and interventions is essential. The appropriate level and composition of spending will depend on country-specific conditions, including crime patterns and institutional capacity. Section 6 and 7 examine what countries are doing, and which strategies have delivered the most promising results.

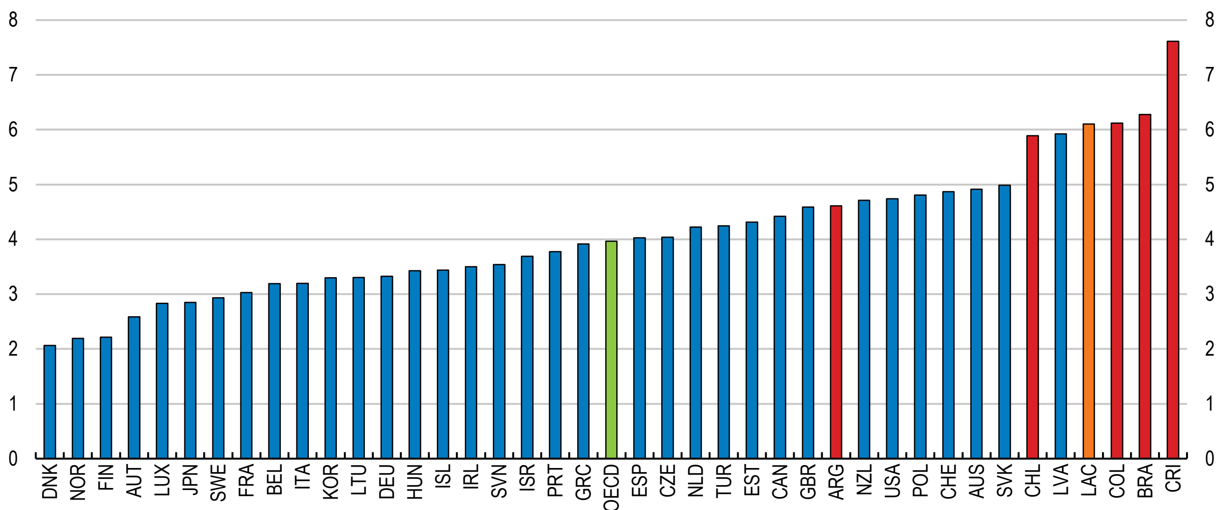
Figure 8. Government spending on public order and security is relatively stable



Note: Data refers to general government for all countries, except for Chile and Argentina (central government). Data for Mexico and Peru were not available in the OECD COFOG and IMF GFS databases. LAC is a simple average of Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Argentina and Brazil. In Panel A, OECD is a simple average of 28 OECD member countries. In Panel B, data refers to 2023 for Australia, Colombia, Korea and 2022 for Costa Rica. OECD is a simple average of 37 OECD member countries.
Source: *OECD Annual Government Expenditure by Function (COFOG)* (database); and *IMF Government Finance Statistics (GFS)* (database).

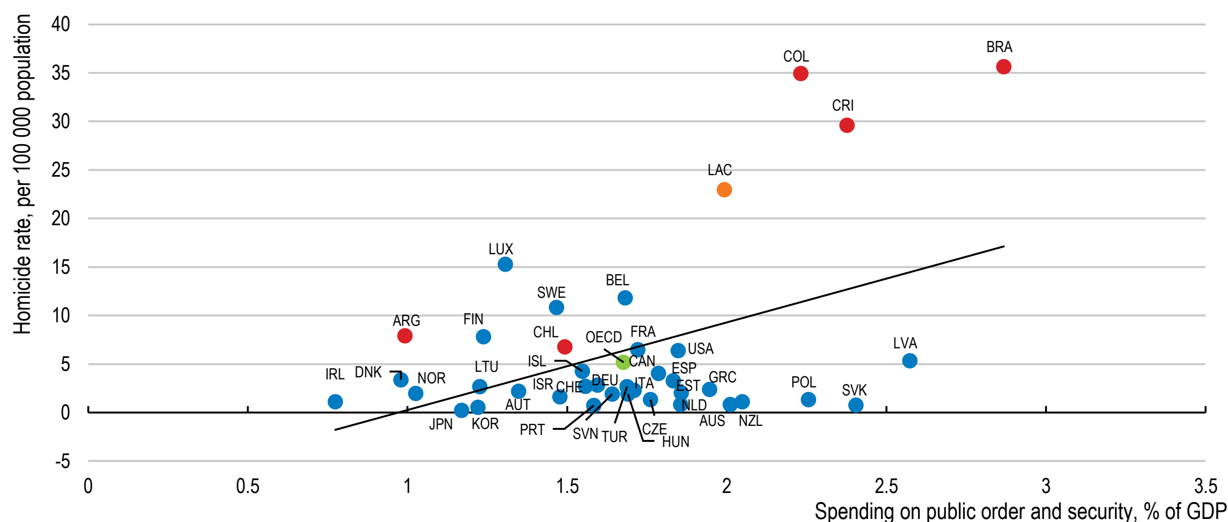
Figure 9. Security is a large part of spending in several OECD countries

Government spending on public order and safety, % of total spending, 2023 or latest



Note: Data refers to general government for all countries, except for Chile and Argentina (central government). Data refers to 2022 for South Korea and 2021 for Costa Rica. Data for Mexico and Peru were not available in the OECD COFOG and IMF GFS databases. OECD is a simple average of 37 OECD member countries. LAC is a simple average of Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Argentina and Brazil.
Source: *OECD Annual Government Expenditure by Function (COFOG)* (database); and *IMF Government Finance Statistics (GFS)* (database).

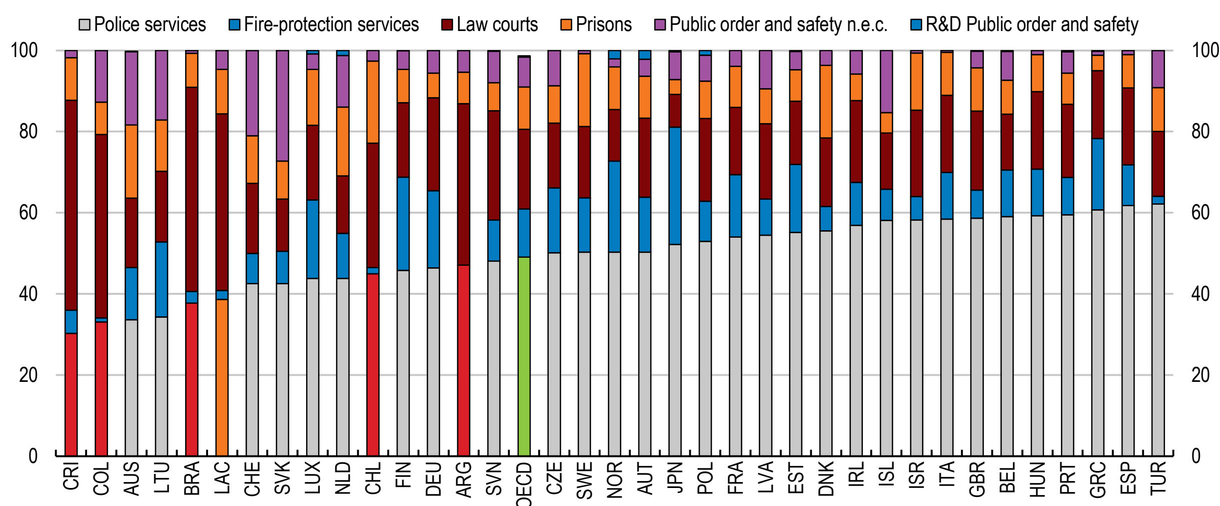
Figure 10. The relationship between the level of spending and crime intensity is complex



Note: Data for homicide rate refers to 2022 or latest, and for spending on public order and security to 2023 or latest. OECD is a simple average of 37 OECD member countries. LAC is a simple average of Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Argentina and Brazil. Data for Mexico and Peru were not available in the OECD COFOG and IMF GFS databases.
Source: *OECD Annual Government Expenditure by Function (COFOG)* (database); and *IMF Government Finance Statistics (GFS)* (database).

Figure 11. The composition of public order and safety spending varies across countries

% of total spending on public order and safety, 2023 or latest



Note: n.e.c. = not classified elsewhere. Data refer to 2021 for Costa Rica. OECD is a simple average of 34 OECD member countries. LAC is a simple average of Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Argentina and Brazil. Data for Mexico and Peru were not available in the OECD COFOG and IMF GFS databases.
Source: *OECD Annual Government Expenditure by Function (COFOG)* (database); and *IMF Government Finance Statistics (GFS)* (database).

6. A policy framework for crime reduction

A large body of the specialized literature suggests that crime reduction policies can be organised around three broad approaches: control, prevention, and rehabilitation and reintegration. While these approaches

differ in their objectives and mechanisms, they are best understood as complementary components of comprehensive crime reduction strategies. Crime itself stems from a complex interplay of social, economic, institutional, and environmental factors. Poverty, educational exclusion, weak governance, and limited access to services can increase vulnerability to criminal involvement, often reinforcing one another. As a result, narrowly defined interventions tend to have limited and short-lived impacts, whereas integrated approaches are more likely to deliver sustained improvements in public safety.

Control measures focus on law enforcement and criminal justice interventions aimed at deterring crime through higher probability of apprehension and punishment of offenders. These include policing strategies, such as hot spots policing, community policing, as well as judicial and correctional measures, including temporary or permanent imprisonment. Such interventions can be particularly important in contexts characterised by high levels of violence or entrenched organised crime, where restoring basic security may be a necessary precondition for broader policy effectiveness. A well-functioning judicial system is also critical for effective crime reduction, as it underpins deterrence, enforcement and the rule of law. However, the design and reform of judicial systems are beyond the scope of this paper.

Prevention strategies seek to reduce crime by limiting opportunities for offending or by addressing underlying social and economic risk factors. They include situational prevention, which modifies physical or social environments to make crime more difficult or less attractive, and social prevention, which targets the underlying social factors contributing to criminal behaviour, through interventions in the areas of education, family support and labour markets. Risk factors such as low educational attainment, youth unemployment, and spatial or social exclusion are strongly associated with a higher likelihood of criminal involvement (Tonry and Farrington, 1995[31]; Farrington, 2007[32]). Preventive interventions, particularly those targeting children and youth, have been linked to sustained reductions in offending. Once criminal behaviours and networks become established, they can be difficult and costly to reverse, increasing the returns to early and preventive interventions.

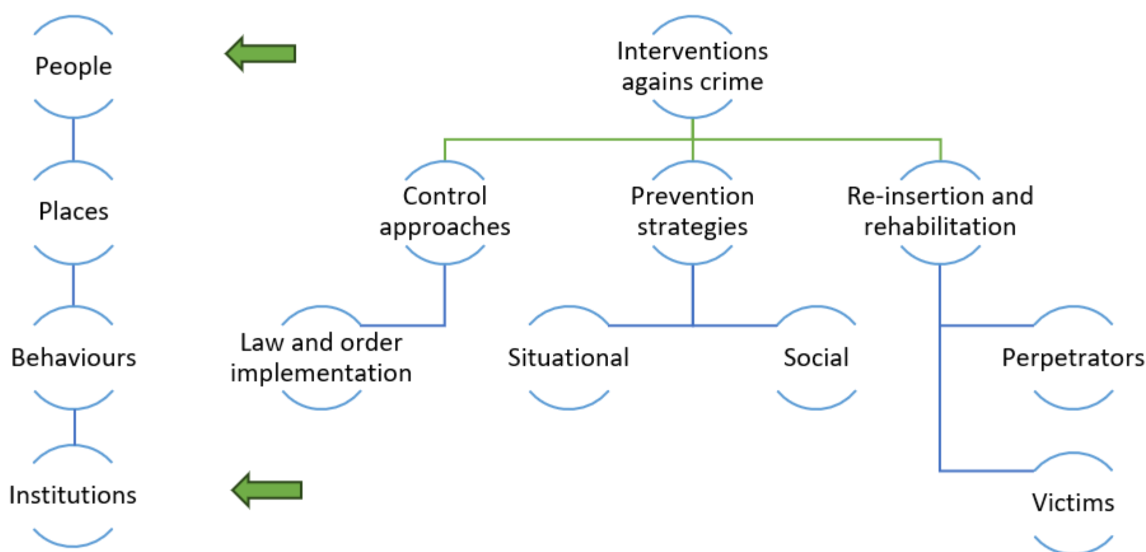
Re-insertion and rehabilitation programs aim to reduce recidivism by supporting offenders successful return to society. These interventions typically focus on education, vocational training, and mental health support, and other services designed to strengthen social inclusion and improve labour market outcomes. In some contexts, rehabilitation efforts also extend to victims and affected communities, helping to disrupt cycles of violence and rebuild social cohesion.

In practice, the boundaries between these approaches are not always clear cut. Certain prevention measures can also have deterrent effects by increasing the likelihood of detection, while rehabilitation programmes may incorporate elements of victim support and community-based prevention. Importantly, evidence from the literature, highlights the limitations of relying on a single approach in isolation (Weisburd, 2016[33]; Braga, 2019[34]; Tonry, 2019[35])). Control strategies may reduce crime in the short term but their effects decay without preventive measures to address root causes. Prevention policies can generate substantial long term benefits but often require enforcement capacity to ensure immediate security. Similarly, reintegration efforts are less effective without adequate protection against reoffending and without broader improvements in underlying social conditions.

Effective crime reduction therefore requires a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach that brings together actors across public safety, education, health, social protection, labour markets, and urban planning. Combining interventions that yield immediate results with those whose impact materialises over time is key to achieving durable outcomes. The appropriate balance between control, prevention, and reintegration will vary depending on each country's institutional capacity, crime profile, and socio-economic context. In environments marked by pervasive violence, strengthening law enforcement may be a necessary first step, whereas in settings with lower crime rates but emerging risks, such as youth delinquency or social fragmentation, early prevention and community-based approaches may deliver higher returns. Institutional coordination is also critical, as effective collaboration across sectors can significantly enhance the design, implementation, and scaling of integrated strategies.

Figure 12 summarises this policy framework and illustrates how control, prevention and rehabilitation interact in effective crime reduction strategies.

Figure 12. A framework for policies to reduce crime



Source: Based on Abt, (2016) and Abt et al. (2019).

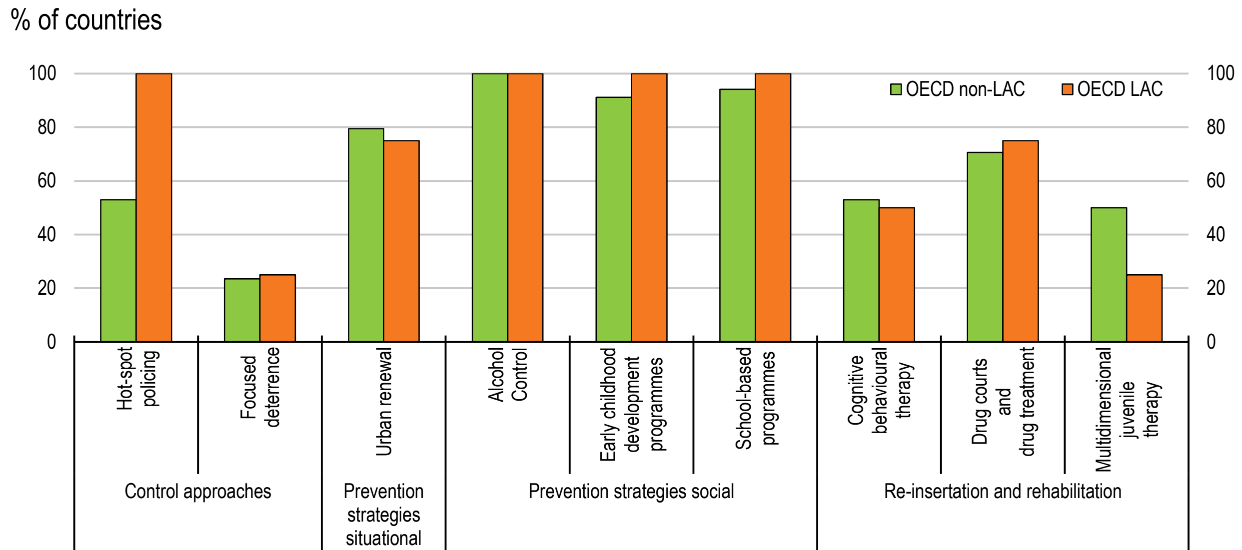
The next section examines these policy approaches in more detail, providing relevant definitions, describing the main channels under which each policy operates and providing country examples where evidence points to promising results.

7. What works: a review of crime reduction strategies

Countries across the OECD and Latin America are using a wide range of strategies to reduce crime. Information collected through the OECD country desks shows that most governments are using a mix of control, prevention, and rehabilitation measures (Figure 13), but with differing emphasis. This is in line with a widely supported view in the literature that no single type of intervention is sufficient on its own and that a sustainable crime reduction demands an integrated policy framework ((Andrews and Bonta, 2010[36]), (Culle and Jonson, 2017[37]), (Sherman, Gartin and Buerger, 1989[38]), (Tonry, 2011[39]), (Weisburd, Farrington and Gill, 2016[40])).

Figure 13. OECD countries use a broad mix of strategies to reduce crime

% of countries



Note: Share of OECD non-LAC and OECD LAC countries which are found to be using each policy based on a review of literature. OECD LAC refers to Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica and Mexico.
Source: Own elaboration.

Drawing on information from a review of impact evaluations and information provided by OECD country desks, this section presents examples of existing policy approaches and summarizes evidence on what works to reduce crime. These experiences can provide valuable insights into designing effective, scalable and fiscally sustainable approaches to enhance public safety and reduce crime.

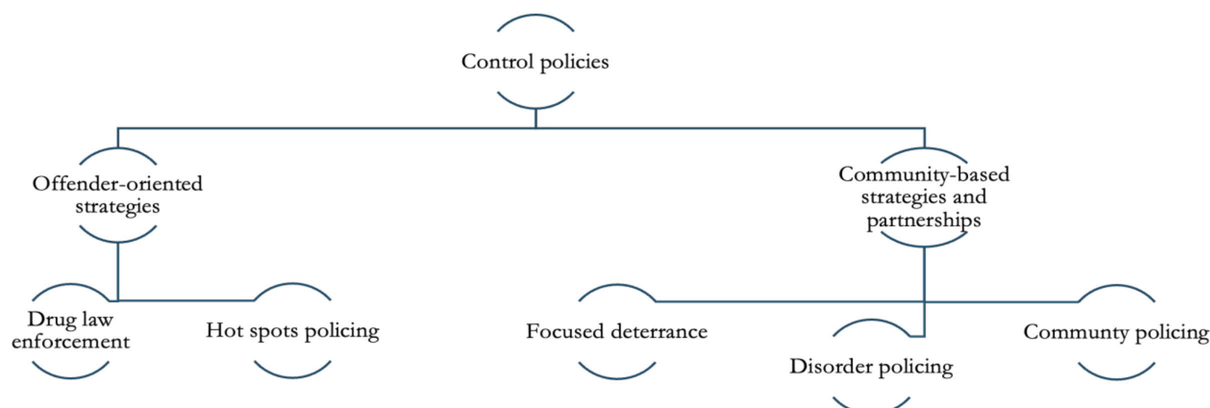
The discussion focuses on interventions for which there is credible evidence of effectiveness. In this paper, effectiveness is defined in terms of measurable reductions in crime or recidivism, documented through rigorous evaluations such as randomised control trials, quasi experiment studies or robust statistical analysis. Wherever available, cost-effectiveness information is also considered. In areas where the evidence base is still emerging, findings are presented as promising but not yet conclusive.

7.1. Control approaches: targeting resources for immediate impact

Control-oriented crime reduction strategies aim to prevent criminal activity by increasing the likelihood of apprehension and punishment. These approaches rely on the capacity of the justice system—law enforcement, courts, and correctional institutions—to deter crime through visible enforcement and credible sanctions ((Gibbs, 1975[41]) and (Braga and Weisburd, 2010[42])). Among OECD countries, control-based strategies are most widely implemented in North America and in Latin America and the Caribbean (see figure A3.1 in Annex 3).

Control measures vary in their orientation. Some are offender-focused, targeting individuals or groups engaged in high-risk behaviours. Others are community-based, emphasising collaboration between police and residents to uphold local norms, reduce disorder, and strengthen informal guardianship. Figure 14 summarises the main strategies under each orientation.

Figure 14. Control strategies



Source: Own elaboration.

7.1.1. Offender-oriented strategies

Offender-oriented strategies aim to reduce crime by targeting individuals or groups most actively involved in criminal behaviour. These approaches focus on disrupting illicit activities, increasing the likelihood of apprehension, and reducing opportunities for reoffending. Three prominent strategies are:

- **Drug law enforcement**, which focuses on disrupting the production, distribution, and sale of illegal narcotics. The objective is not only to curb drug use, but to reduce the criminality and violence often associated with illicit drug markets—such as turf wars, extortion, and weapons trafficking. Interventions range from street-level enforcement and undercover operations to dismantling trafficking networks. Research suggests that well-designed drug enforcement can have a stabilising effect in areas where drug activity fuels broader insecurity (Mazerolle, Soole and Rombouts, 2007[43])
- **Hot spot policing**, which concentrates law enforcement resources in small geographic areas with disproportionately high levels of crime. Empirical studies have shown that a small number of locations often account for a large share of criminal incidents within a city ((Sherman, Gartin and Buerger, 1989[38]), (Braga and Weisburd, 2010[42])). By focusing patrols, surveillance, and problem-solving initiatives in these “hot spots,” police can significantly reduce crime levels. A systematic review of 65 studies found that hot spot policing consistently reduces crime in targeted areas, with limited evidence of displacement and some evidence of spillover benefits to adjacent zones ((Braga and Weisburd, 2010[42]). A relevant implementation of Hot-spot policing strategies is The Kōban System and Hot-Spot Policing in Japan (Box 2), where its implementation in urban areas has contributed to reductions in street crime and improved perceptions of public safety through sustained police visibility and rapid response mechanisms (Héra, 2024[44]).
- **Intelligence-led policing**, which emphasises the systematic use of data and analysis to identify patterns of crime, detect criminal networks, and guide tactical enforcement decisions. This approach often involves the integration of real-time information systems, crime mapping, and predictive tools to prioritise high-impact targets. In Mexico City, for example, a strategy launched in 2018 expanded investigative and analytical capacity through the centralisation of criminal databases, use of cell phone and biometric data, and the daily mapping of organised crime. These efforts, supported by legal reforms that expanded local law enforcement agencies access to national criminal and biometric databases, enabled more integrated investigations and contributed to a sustained reduction in homicides between 2018 and 2022 (Anderson, 2022[45]).

Box 2. Hot spot policing in Japan

Japan's adaptation of hot-spot policing is deeply embedded in its tradition of community-oriented policing, exemplified by the kōban (urban police boxes) and chuzaisho (rural police posts) system. These facilities, strategically located in areas with high foot traffic and crime concentrations, serve both preventive and responsive functions. Operated around the clock, kōban officers conduct regular patrols, respond swiftly to incidents, and maintain close contact with local communities. Their deployment is informed by crime mapping and local intelligence gathered by the Japanese National Police Agency, ensuring alignment with spatial patterns of offending (Héra, 2024[44]).

A distinctive aspect of Japan's approach is the integration of voluntary crime prevention networks (bōhan), which have expanded significantly since the early 2000s. These networks, supported by national crime reduction policies, include parents' associations, youth groups, retired police officers, and residents. They participate in patrols, awareness campaigns, and crime prevention workshops. For instance, in Tokyo's Tama district, coordinated patrols targeting fraud against older adults combined police officers, community volunteers, and students to address localized threats (Héra, 2024[44]).

Empirical evidence suggests that these strategies have played a role in Japan's significant crime reduction. Between 2002 and 2020, according to Japan's Ministry of Justice total recorded offences dropped from 2.85 million to under one million, alongside increased clearance rates for cases handled by community police officers. While causality remains debated, scholars argue that the continuous presence of community police in high-risk areas, combined with active citizen engagement, has enhanced both deterrence and informal guardianship ((Ellis et al., 2008[46]), (Herber, 2018[47])).

Nevertheless, the model faces evolving challenges, such as declining public receptivity to household visits, staffing shortages in kōban posts, and safety concerns for single-officer stations. These limitations point to the importance of adapting community policing practices to social change and maintaining citizen trust. Overall, Japan's experience demonstrates how localized and community-integrated hotspot policing can produce effective and context-sensitive crime prevention outcomes.

7.1.2. Community-based strategies

Community-oriented strategies aim to enhance public safety by fostering trust, legitimacy, and collaboration between law enforcement and local communities ((Braga, Weisburd and Turchan, 2018[48]). Rather than focusing solely on enforcement, these approaches seek to strengthen informal social control and encourage shared responsibility for crime prevention. Typical strategies include:

- **Community policing**, which involves decentralised decision-making, routine engagement with residents, and responsiveness to local concerns. Officers are assigned to specific neighbourhoods and work closely with schools, businesses, and civil society groups to address public safety issues collaboratively.
- **Problem-solving partnerships**, which bring together police, local government, and community stakeholders to identify persistent problems and implement targeted, often non-enforcement-based responses. These may involve improving street lighting, regulating public spaces, or connecting residents to social services.
- **Disorder policing**, based on the "broken windows" theory, targets visible signs of social or physical disorder (e.g. vandalism, loitering) that may signal lawlessness or encourage more serious crime. When implemented through aggressive tactics—such as zero-tolerance policing—this approach can generate public backlash. However, when rooted in community collaboration and proportional enforcement, disorder policing has shown positive effects in reducing crime and improving perceptions of safety (Braga, Welsh and Schnell, 2019[49]).

One example of community-oriented policing comes from the Netherlands, where community police officers (wijkagenten) are assigned to neighbourhoods to maintain close ties with residents and address local concerns. This model has been linked to improved perceptions of safety and more responsive policing (Terpstra, 2010[50]). In the United Kingdom, the Safer Neighbourhood Teams model has embedded dedicated officers and community support staff within local areas, working closely with residents to identify and address specific safety concerns. Evaluations have found that this approach enhances police visibility, strengthens public confidence, and facilitates more targeted interventions (Innes, 2006[51]).

In the United States, a randomized controlled trial in New Haven found that community-oriented policing, through brief, door-to-door, non-enforcement visits, led to a significant increase in perceptions of police legitimacy and willingness to cooperate with law enforcement (Peyton, Sierra Arévalo and Rand, 2019[52]). Operation Ceasefire in Boston, which combined focused deterrence with youth outreach and community mobilization, was associated with a 63% reduction in youth homicides during its initial implementation (Braga et al., 2001[53]). Follow-up studies found a similar effects in other United States cities adopting the model.

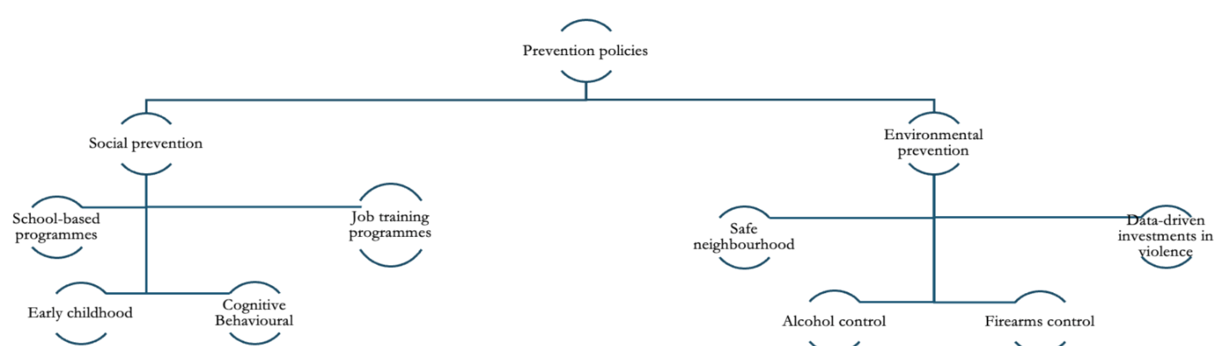
Evidence suggests that the most successful community-based interventions share several features: they are tailored to local contexts, embedded in strong institutional coordination, and emphasise legitimacy, procedural fairness, and sustained dialogue with residents. These approaches are particularly valuable in rebuilding trust in areas with a history of strained police-community relations, and in fostering environments where informal and formal guardianship reinforce one another.

7.2. Prevention strategies: investing in long-term safety

Crime prevention comprises strategies and measures that seek to reduce the risk of crimes occurring, and their potential harmful effects on individuals and society. These interventions are aimed at tackling the multiple underlying causes of crime (ECOSOC, 2002[54]). Among OECD countries, prevention measures are most prevalent in Europe, where school-based programs, early childhood development initiatives, place-specific prevention, and alcohol control policies are widely implemented (Figure A3.2 in Annex 3)..

Crime prevention actions can be classified into two broad categories: (i) social, and (ii) environmental-situational. Figure 15 summarizes the strategies associated with each approach.

Figure 15. Prevention policy strategies according to the focus of intervention.



Source: Own elaboration

7.2.1. Social prevention

Social prevention seeks to reduce the likelihood that individuals or groups will engage in criminal behavior. This is achieved by strengthening informal ties, such as those with family, community organizations, and

peer groups, as well as formal institutional connections, including education, cultural participation, sports, and employment. Four strategies fall under the social prevention umbrella: (i) school-based programs; (ii) early childhood development programs; (iii) cognitive behavioral therapies; and (iv) job training and employment programs.

Early childhood programs have demonstrated strong effects in curbing crime, especially when implemented early in life. For example, high-quality preschool initiatives like the Perry Preschool Project in the United States (Box 3) and the Carolina Abecedarian/CARE programs significantly reduced violent crime and improved long-term socioeconomic outcomes for disadvantaged children ((Heckman et al., 2010[55]), (García, Heckman and Ziff, 2019[56])).

Box 3. The Perry Preschool Project

The Perry Preschool Project, one of the most rigorously evaluated early interventions, providing disadvantaged children with high-quality preschool education to disadvantaged children, resulted in participants having significantly lower arrest rates and better socioeconomic outcomes over the long term compared to a control group (Heckman et al., 2010[57]; Schweinhart et al., 2005[58]). Evidence indicates that such early interventions not only decrease involvement in crime but also generate high social returns by lowering justice system costs and improving long-term wellbeing (García et al., 2020[59]). A cost–benefit estimates that the programme produced net benefits of over USD 80,000 per participant, largely through reduced crime and increased earnings (WSIPP, 2013[60]).

Further evidence from Spain also signals that expanding access to early childhood education can yield long-term crime prevention benefits. Linking administrative education and crime records in Catalonia, (Brutti and Montolio, 2021[61]) found that a one percentage point increase in preschool enrolment reduced criminal activity in later youth and early adulthood by 1.6%.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy helps individuals recognize and alter problematic thought patterns and decision-making, thereby addressing problematic and self-destructive behaviour (Blattman et al., 2023[62]). It is used both preventively and with convicted offenders to reduce recidivism. Key components include anger management, development of moral reasoning, and relapse prevention.

Finally, job training and employment programmes aim to equip individuals with skills enabling their integration into the labor market. By promoting employment and a stable income, such programs reduce the likelihood of criminal involvement. While results have been mixed, demand-driven programs—those aligned with local labor market needs—tend to show positive impacts on both employment outcomes and reductions in arrest rates ((Andersson et al., 2013[63]) (Card, Kluve and Weber, 2018[64]).

7.2.2. *Situational prevention*

The second major approach to crime prevention focuses on environmental or situational factors. These strategies aim to influence the conditions under which crimes occur, particularly by reducing opportunities for criminal behavior. Key strategies include:

- Urban planning and design: ensuring that the environments in which people work, live, and find recreation support effective policing and community guardianship.
- Targeted situational prevention: modifying specific settings (e.g., transportation hubs) to increase the perceived risk and effort of committing a crime while reducing rewards and justifications.

Medellín in Colombia is an example of the benefits of targeting urban upgrading efforts at high-crime neighbourhoods. Investments in infrastructure, public space, and mobility, alongside improved institutional coordination, contributed to notable reductions in homicide and improvements in local safety (UN-Habitat, 2023[65]).While no single component can be isolated as the causal driver, evaluations stress the

importance of coordinated governance, community participation, and physical integration of marginalised areas. Medellín's security-oriented urban investments are often cited as a successful model of multidimensional prevention, though detailed cost-effectiveness studies are still limited.

Community-based situational efforts also show promise. In Brazil, the Fica Vivo (Stay Alive) program in Minas Gerais combined community outreach with targeted prevention workshops for youth in high-risk areas. Quasi-experimental evaluations found that neighbourhoods with the program experienced up to a 50% reduction in homicides, compared to control areas ((Cerqueira and Lobão, 2004[66]), (WorldBank, 2014[67]). The programme operates at relatively low cost (~USD 200–500 per participant annually) and has been cited as a promising example of targeted violence prevention. A similar approach in Canada is represented by Pathways to Education, a long-term intervention providing tutoring, mentorship, and financial support to high-school students in low-income areas. A quasi-experimental evaluation found that the program reduced dropout rates and contributed to improvements in employment outcomes, with statistically significant effects on reducing delinquency and crime (Oreopoulos, Ford and Page, 2019[68]).

Finally, countries are increasingly using data-driven approaches to prevent crime, as governments improve their capacity to collect, analyse, and act based on higher quality information. In the United Kingdom, the development of the Crime Harm Index and the use of predictive mapping by police forces in Kent and London have enabled law enforcement to prioritize resources, based not only on crime frequency but also on the social harm caused (Sherman et al., 2016[69]). In Canada, Statistics Canada's Crime Severity Index, combined with municipal risk modelling, has allowed local authorities to tailor prevention strategies to the specific spatial and social dynamics of crime (Wallace et al., 2021[70]). In Uruguay, authorities have developed geospatial crime analysis tools and integrated GPS-based patrol tracking to identify and monitor high-risk areas in Montevideo. A quasi-experimental evaluation found that reallocating patrols to identified hotspots contributed to measurable reductions in street-level crimes (Chainey et al., 2019[71]). Collectively, these innovations underscore the importance of reliable, granular data in designing more effective and accountable public safety policies.

Together, these examples show how well-designed environmental interventions—especially when data-driven and locally tailored—can contribute to effective, accountable crime prevention strategies.

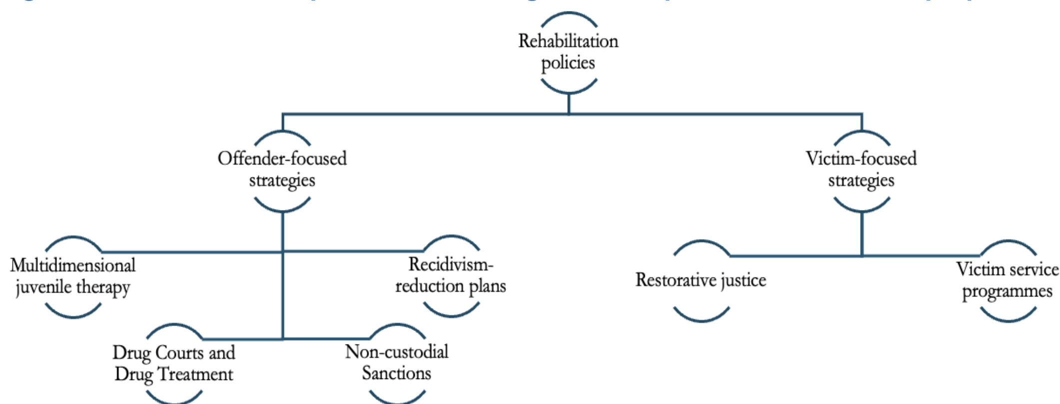
7.3. Rehabilitation and reintegration: reducing recidivism

Rehabilitation and reintegration strategies, when focused on offenders, seek to support desistance from crime through education, vocational training, psychological services, and supervised community reintegration, thereby reducing recidivism. For victims, efforts focus on emotional, psychological, and financial support to aid recovery and promote social reintegration. Figure 16 summarizes the policies according to their primary focus on either perpetrators or victims.

Among OECD countries, Europe has taken the lead in integrating rehabilitation into justice systems. Thirteen member states have implemented multidimensional juvenile therapy, while 18 have adopted drug courts or related treatment-based alternatives (see Figure A3.3 in Annex 3). North America (Canada and the United States) also demonstrates consistent uptake. In Latin America and the Caribbean, progress is more limited but growing, with countries such as Chile and Mexico incorporating both offender- and victim-oriented approaches.

Prison-based reintegration programs have gained traction. In Chile, the Más R (Más Reinserción) initiative offers incarcerated individuals job training, therapeutic support, and employment placement prior to release. Preliminary data show reduced rates of return to prison within 12 months for participants compared to non-participants (IDB, 2023[72]). Similarly, the Netherlands' Rehabilitation & Reintegration program has shown a 4.5 percentage point reduction in three-year recidivism, with estimated costs between EUR 4,600 and EUR 6,300 per prisoner—well below the projected savings from avoided reincarceration (Totarelli, 2024[73]).

Figure 16. Rehabilitation policies according to the emphasis on victims or perpetrators



Source: Own elaboration.

Drug courts represent another rehabilitative model. In the United States, these courts divert non-violent drug offenders from traditional incarceration into supervised treatment programs. Meta-analyses report recidivism reductions of 10–15% and net savings ranging from USD 3,000 to USD 13,000 per participant, depending on program structure (Mitchell et al., 2012[74]). In Chile, similar courts have been institutionalized since 2011. An evaluation found an 8.8 percentage point drop in recidivism one year after participation and 6.1 points after five years (Morales, Muñoz and Wenzel, 2018[75]). Recommendations to increase cost-effectiveness include modifying admission processes to expand participation, particularly among medium- and high-risk groups.

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is widely applied in U.S. corrections. CBT addresses "criminal thinking"—distorted reasoning and impulsivity—through interventions such as Reasoning and Rehabilitation, Aggression Replacement Training (ART), Moral Recognition Therapy (MRT), and Thinking for a Change. A Campbell Collaboration meta-analysis of 58 studies found CBT reduced recidivism by 25%, with greater effects for high-risk offenders (Lipsey et al., 2007[76]). Programs implemented in states such as Washington and Oregon have demonstrated cost savings through reduced reincarceration and victimization. Critical to success is program fidelity, structured curricula, trained facilitators, and close monitoring (Andrews and Bonta, 2010[77]).

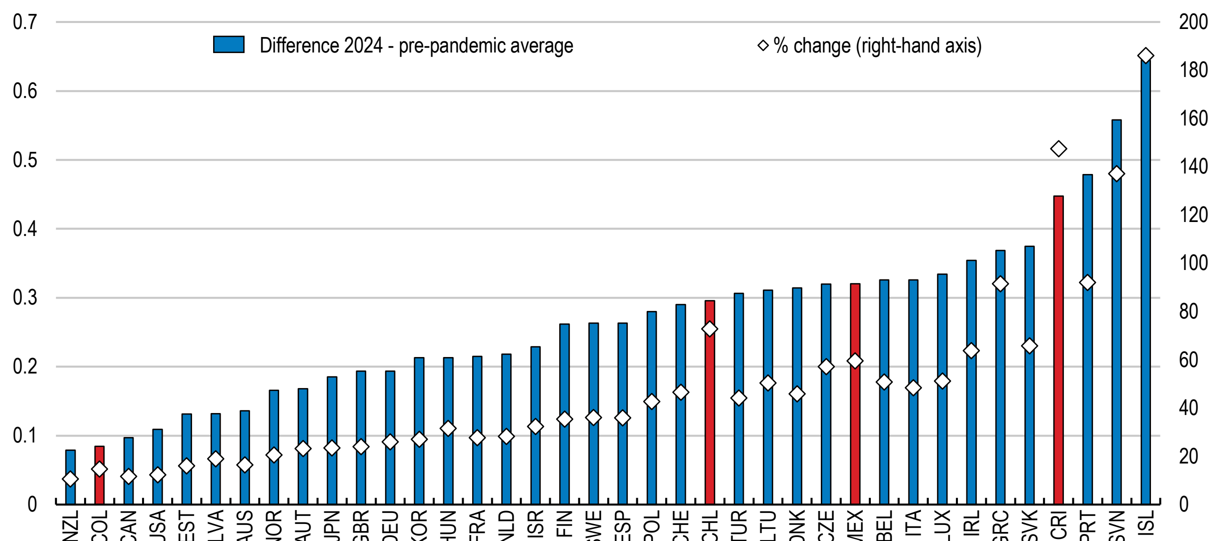
7.4. Anti cybercrime strategies

Cybercrime presents distinct challenges that demand tailored policies and strategies beyond those used for traditional crime. Its transnational, fast-evolving, and highly technical nature requires not only legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms but also specialized capabilities, international cooperation, and robust digital infrastructure. As such, governments must adopt multidimensional approaches that combine prevention, detection, response, and resilience.

One way to assess how countries are meeting these demands is through the Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI), developed by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the UN's specialized agency for information and communication technologies. The GCI measures the level of commitment and progress across five critical pillars: (i) legal measures related to cybersecurity and cybercrime; (ii) technical capabilities such as national and sectoral agencies; (iii) institutional frameworks including national strategies; (iv) training and capacity building through awareness campaigns and education; and (v) international cooperation. The index ranges from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating stronger performance. Most OECD countries have strengthened their cybersecurity frameworks over time, as reflected in broadly improving GCI scores (Figure 17).

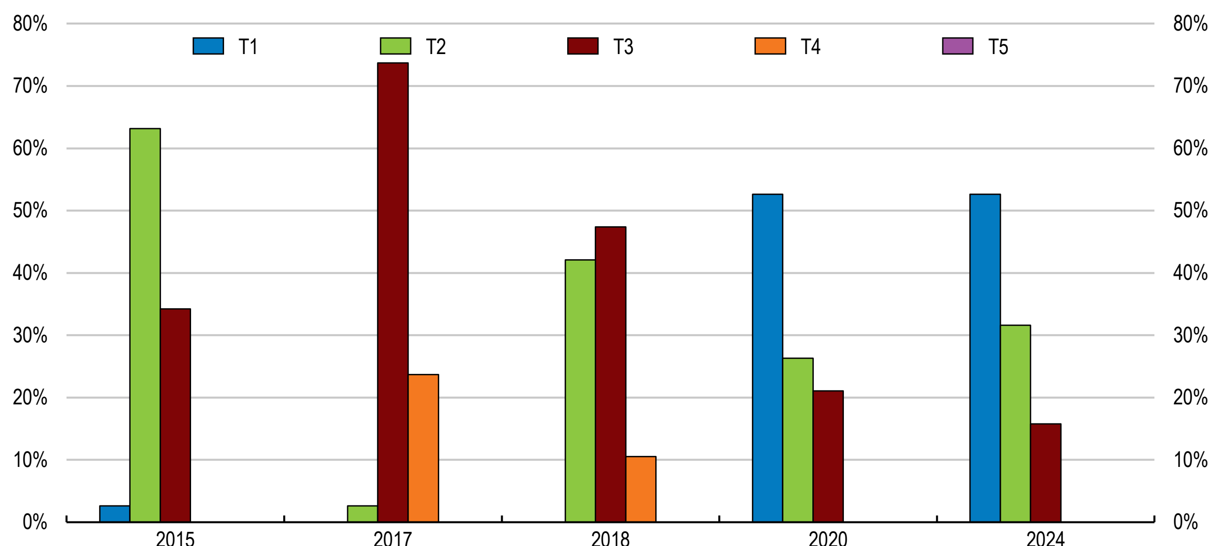
The GCI also groups countries into five tiers according to the maturity of their cybersecurity systems (Figure 18). The number of OECD countries in Tier 1, i.e. those with highly developed legal, technical, and institutional capacities, has steadily increased, reflecting a broad strengthening of cybersecurity governance across the OECD.

Figure 17. Most OECD countries have strengthened their cybersecurity frameworks over time



Note: This indicator measures the level of commitment and progress of 193 member states of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in cybersecurity initiatives. To do so, it classifies information from 82 questions into five pillars: (i) legal measures based on the measurement of laws and regulations on cybersecurity and cybercrime; (ii) technical, which refers to the measurement of the implementation of technical capabilities through national and sectoral agencies; (iii) institutional, which identifies the existence of national and organizational strategies that apply to cybersecurity; (iv) training, which identifies the implementation of awareness campaigns, training, education and incentives for cybersecurity training; and (v) cooperation, which identifies the level of partnership between agencies, companies and countries. The indicator is a range from 0 to 1, where 1 indicates greater commitment and progress with initiatives to combat cybercrime.
Source: Own elaboration based on Global Security Index.

Figure 18. Cybersecurity governance has been strengthened across the OECD



Note The GCI also categorizes countries into five tiers based on their level of progress: Tier 1 (leadership, 0.95–1.00), Tier 2 (advanced, 0.85–0.94), Tier 3 (consolidating infrastructure, 0.55–0.84), Tier 4 (evolving, 0.20–0.54), and Tier 5 (emerging, 0.00–0.19).
Source: Own elaboration based on Global Security Index.

Most OECD and Latin American countries have adopted national cybersecurity strategies, though institutional maturity varies (See Annex 3). Leading OECD countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Estonia have created centralized cybersecurity agencies with clear mandates for prevention and enforcement. Estonia, for instance, has developed one of the world's most advanced cybersecurity systems, combining digital infrastructure protection, cybercrime investigation units, and public education campaigns. The UK's National Cyber Crime Unit collaborates with law enforcement, private actors, and international organizations to combat cyber-enabled crime, including online fraud and ransomware.

In Latin America, countries like Chile, Brazil, and Mexico have also made progress by adopting or updating national strategies, often with support from inter-agency councils and regional initiatives. Chile's 2022 National Policy Against Organized Crime identified cybercrime as a strategic priority, leading to the creation of specialized investigative units, expanded digital forensics capabilities, and improved inter-agency coordination. Nonetheless, enforcement remains constrained by institutional fragmentation and budget limitations. Many countries still lack capacity in areas such as digital forensics, judicial training, and international cooperation.

Although the evidence base is still emerging, a number of promising prevention and enforcement strategies are gaining traction. These include mandatory cybersecurity standards for critical infrastructure, awareness campaigns targeting individuals and SMEs, investments in digital forensics, and real-time information sharing between public and private sectors. While cost-effectiveness studies remain limited, sustained investment in cyber resilience and institutional capacity is essential to minimizing the impact of cyber incidents and improving response capabilities (OECD, 2023[78]) .

There is also increasing consensus that cybercrime requires integrated, forward-looking responses that go beyond traditional policing. Effective strategies must combine legal reform, intelligence, international partnerships, and cooperation with the technology sector to keep pace with fast-evolving threats. Embedding cybercrime prevention and enforcement within broader national crime strategies is critical to ensure coherence and effectiveness.

8. Conclusions

Crime is a significant concern for citizens, businesses and policymakers across countries. Beyond its human and social toll, crime imposes significant economic and fiscal costs through higher public spending on security and justice, lower productivity, and reduced investment, reinforcing the importance of effective and efficient policy responses. While the nature and intensity of crime vary across countries, with violent crime dominating in some contexts and non-violent forms such as fraud or cybercrime more prominent in others, the economic consequences can be substantial across all settings. This paper has reviewed a range of interventions across control, prevention and rehabilitation, drawing on international evidence and OECD country experiences, with particular attention to practices emerging in Latin America.

A key lesson from international experience is the **importance of implementing comprehensive strategies that combine control, prevention, and reintegration measures.** These integrated approaches address the multiple drivers of crime more effectively than punitive measures alone. This holds across different crime profiles, although the relative emphasis of each pillar may vary depending on whether countries face high levels of violent crime or less violent forms of economic and cybercrime. Evidence consistently shows that comprehensive strategies, blending policing with community programs, education, and rehabilitation, are more impactful than those relying solely on repression.

Another common feature of **successful strategies is active community engagement**. Involving local governments, civil society and residents in the design and delivery of crime reduction efforts improves trust and enhances the efficiency of crime reduction efforts. When communities are treated as partners, rather

than as recipients, public safety strategies tend to yield better results and gain broader public support and generate more lasting impacts.

Many of the most **impactful programs deliver their greatest impact over the medium to long term**. This can pose challenges for political support or short-term recognition. Yet such programmes often yield broader social and economic returns that enhance their cost-effectiveness. For example, the Perry Preschool Project in the United States showed no significant short-term gains in academic test scores, but longer-term follow-up showed substantially lower arrest rates and improved life outcomes for participants with an estimated return of USD 16 for every dollar invested (Heckman et al., 2010[57]). Similar patterns have been observed in Latin America, where cities like Medellín achieved significant declines in violence only after sustained, multi-year efforts, combining urban renewal, community engagement, and strengthening of social services.

Focusing efforts on high-risk populations and locations significantly improves the cost-effectiveness of interventions. Crime is often highly concentrated. For example, in Mexico, around half of all homicides are concentrated in just five states, underscoring the importance of geographically targeted strategies. Prioritizing high-risk contexts allows resources to be deployed more strategically, where they are likely to generate the greatest impact. In lower-violence settings, similar principles apply to targeting high-risk groups, sectors or digital vulnerabilities, including in areas such as fraud or cybercrime**.** Advances in data systems, including hot spot mapping, harm indices and integrated reporting tools allow governments to identify location and population groups most affected and tailor responses.

Despite some well-documented examples of cost-effective interventions, many crime reduction programmes are not evaluated systematically in terms of their costs and benefits. This reflects both technical challenges, such as the need to estimate long-term and often cross-sectoral impacts, and institutional gaps in evaluation capacity. Unlike areas such as health or education, the outcomes of crime policies are often difficult to quantify and may materialise over extended timeframes. Nevertheless, in a context of rising public safety concerns and tight fiscal constraints, **improving the efficiency of crime policies through systematic evaluation should become a key priority**. A better understanding of what works, and at what cost, can help governments allocate resources more effectively and build public trust in security institutions.

Finally, crime is evolving rapidly. The rise of cybercrime presents new and complex threats that require specialised capabilities, international cooperation and new types of digital prevention. Countries are increasingly incorporating cybersecurity and digital resilience into their national agendas, recognising that digital and physical security are now intertwined. **Effective crime strategies today must integrate cyber threats** into national and local policy frameworks to remain relevant in the digital age. Public investment in cybersecurity remains relatively low in several countries, but the economic returns from reducing digital vulnerabilities are potentially high, given their impact on revenue collection, digital payments, and business continuity.

Looking ahead, an important priority is to better integrate crime-related risks into macroeconomic analysis. In advanced economies, non-violent crime, such as cybercrime, fraud and money laundering, can affect economic performance through channels that are not yet fully captured in standard frameworks. **Strengthening the integration of crime-related risks, including cyber resilience, into macroeconomic surveillance** could help provide a more comprehensive assessment of economic vulnerabilities.

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Annex A. Annexes

Annex 1. Selected studies on costs of crime

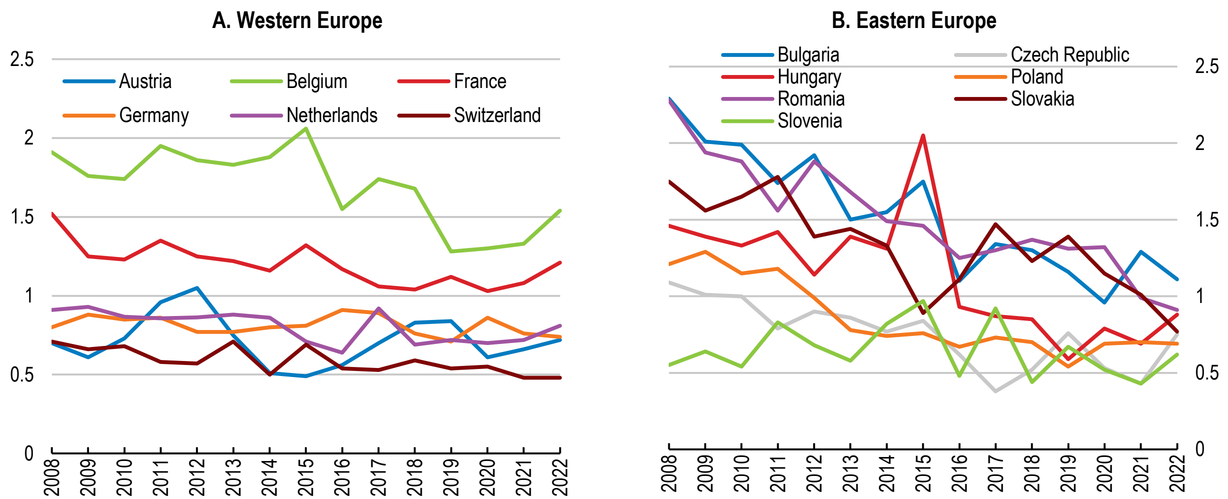
Annex 1 presents results from selected studies for various geographic regions. These studies consider different types of crime and welfare costs, and their main results point at different costs of crime as fractions of GDP.

Study	Geographic region	Year	Type of crime or expenditure	Main result: Cost of crime as % of GDP
Miller, Cohen, and Rossman (1993)	United States	1987	Rape, robbery, assault, arson, murder	3%
Londoño and Guerrero (1999)	Latin America	1990s	Medical costs, loss output, intangible costs	5% without intangible costs 14% with intangible costs
Brand and Price (2000)	England and Wales	1999–2000	Medical costs, loss output, intangible costs	7%
Mayhew (2003)	Australia	2001–2002	Medical costs, loss output, intangible costs	10%
World Bank (2003a)	Jamaica	2001	Medical costs, loss of output, public expenditure on security	3.7%
Altbeker (2005)	South Africa	2004	Public expenditure on criminal justice	3.1%
McCollister et al (2010)				
Jaitman (2017)	Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)	2014	Government spending, household and business spending, and costs to victims and criminals	LAC: 3.55% (upper bound estimate) Germany: 1.34% Canada: 1.39% Australia: 1.76% France: 1.87% United Kingdom: 2.55% United States: 2.75%
Institute for Economics and Peace (2021)	World			Estimates the global costs of crime at 11.6% of global GDP
World Economic Forum (2023)	World			Highlights the rising costs of organized crime, estimated at USD 2.1 trillion annually.
Biscal et al. (2024)	Latin America		Homicide rates	A 10 % increase in homicides lowers economic activity, by around 4 percent at municipal level. A 10 percentage point increase in the share of crime-related news is associated with a 2.5 percent contraction in industrial production three quarters following the news spike.
Perez-Vicente et al.(2024)	Latin America	2022	Homicide rates	Direct cost averaged 3.4% percent of GDP.

Annex 2. Crime developments across regions

Figure A2.1. Homicides in Western and Eastern Europe, selected countries

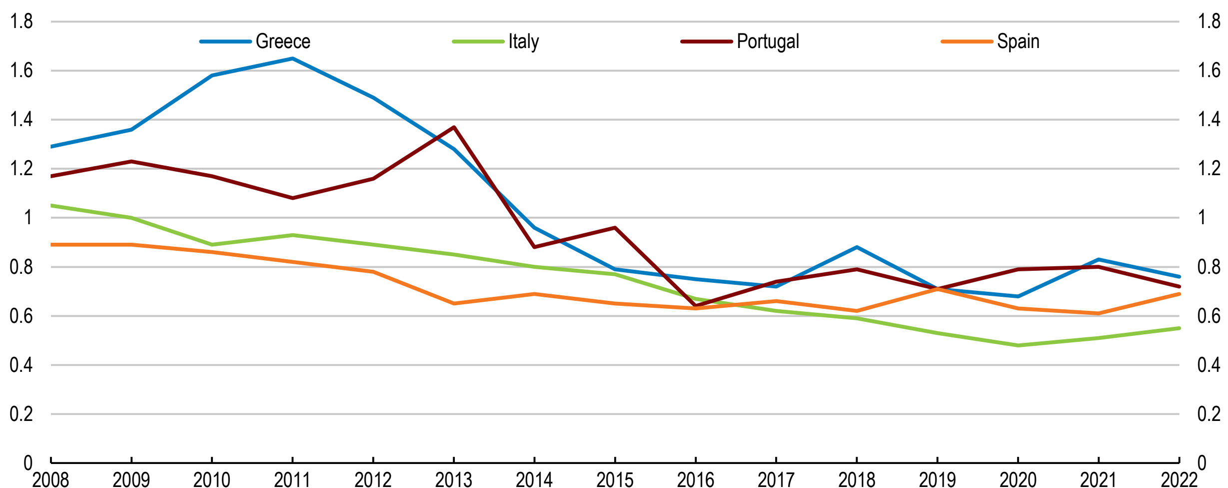
Rate per 100,000 inhabitants



Note: Luxembourg is not included due to the fluctuations in its rate caused by its population size and small number of homicides.
Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Eurostat.

Figure A2.2. Homicides in Southern Europe, selected countries.

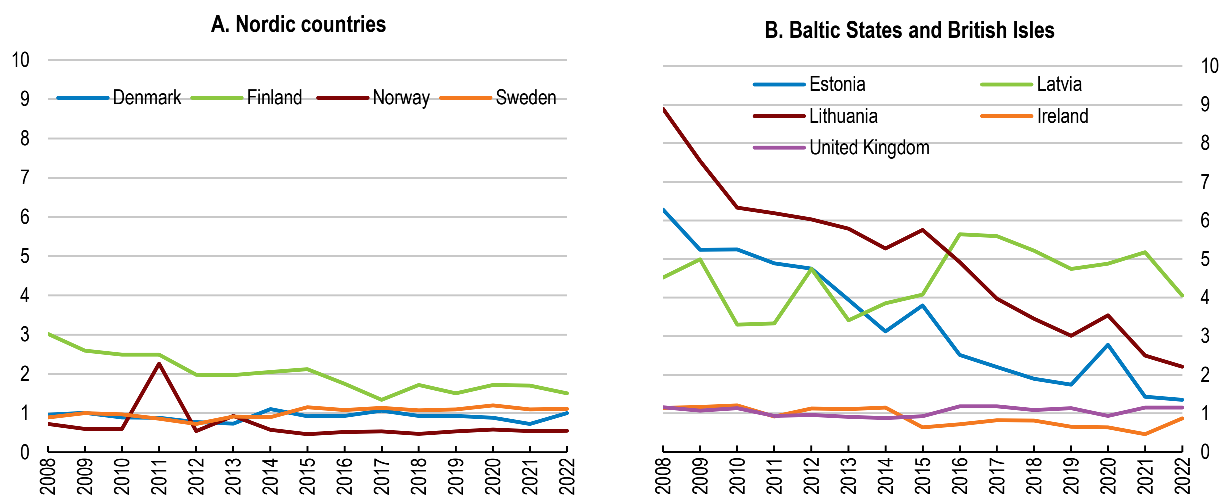
Rate per 100,000 inhabitants



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Eurostat.

Figure A2.3. Homicides in Northern Europe, selected countries

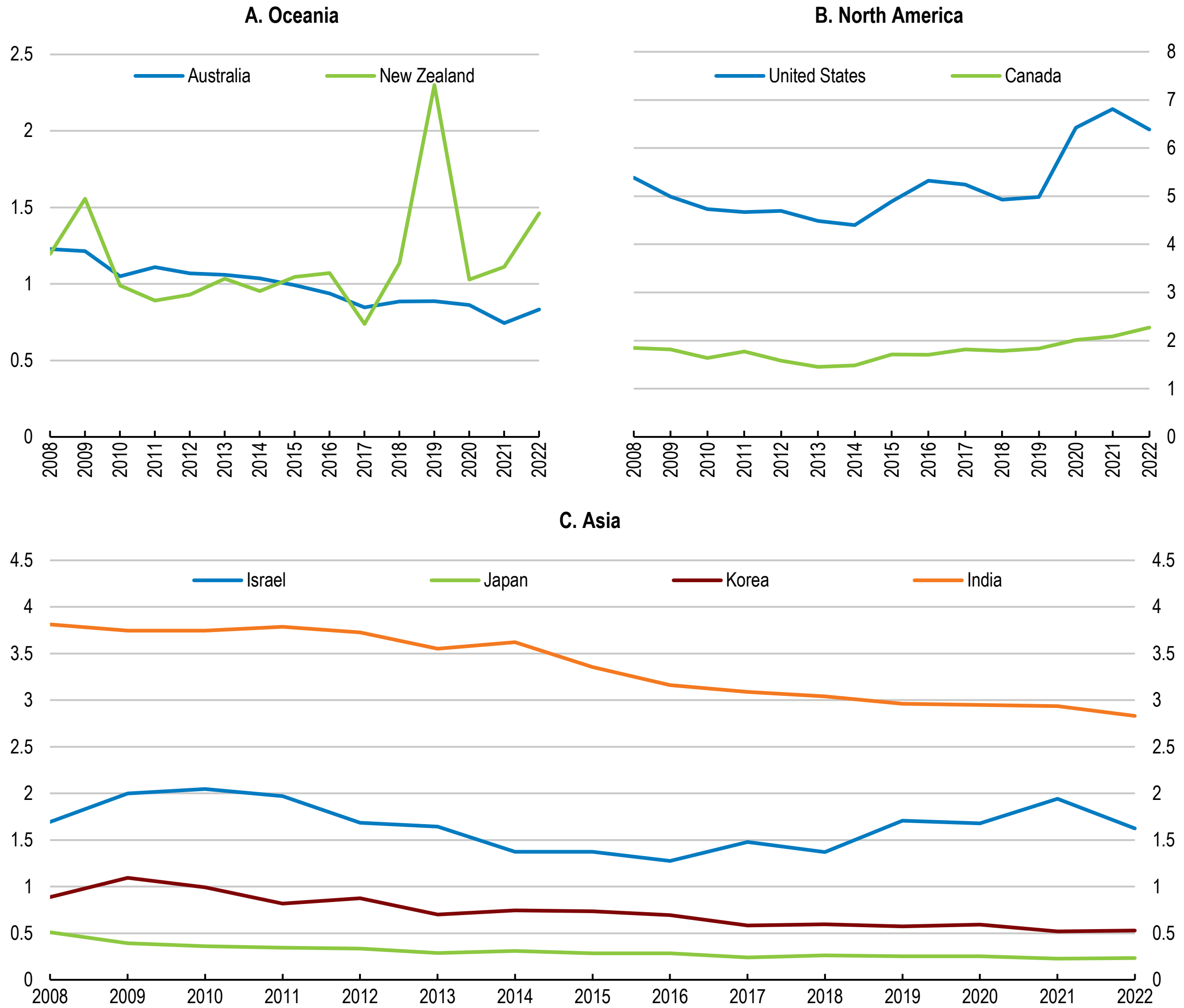
Homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants



Note: Iceland is not included due to the fluctuations in its rate caused by its population size and small number of homicides.
Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Eurostat.

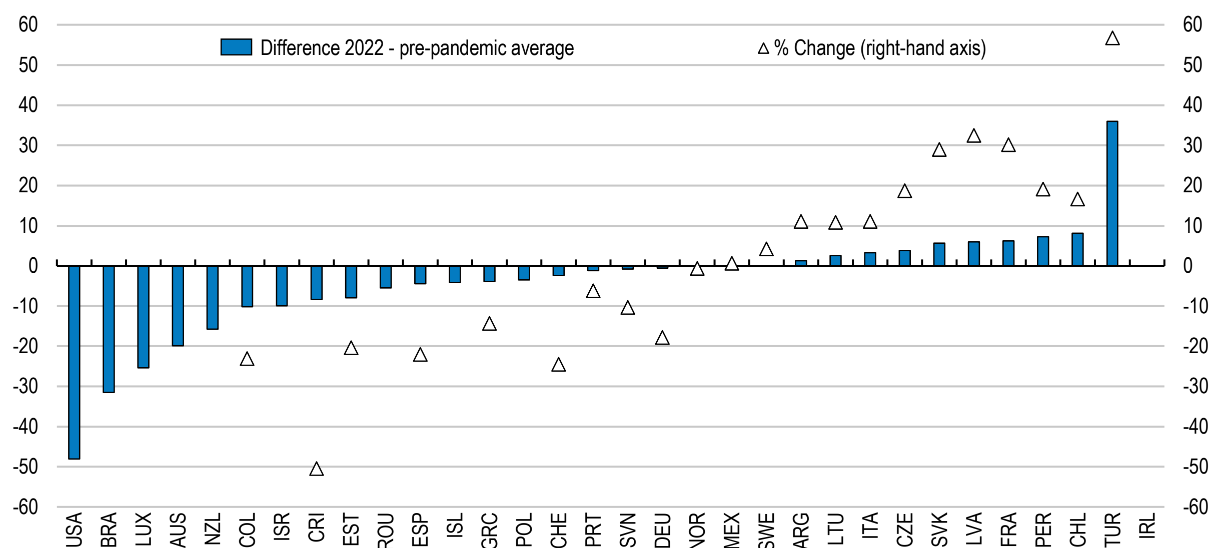
Figure A2.4. Homicide rates across different regions, selected countries

Rate per 100,000 inhabitants



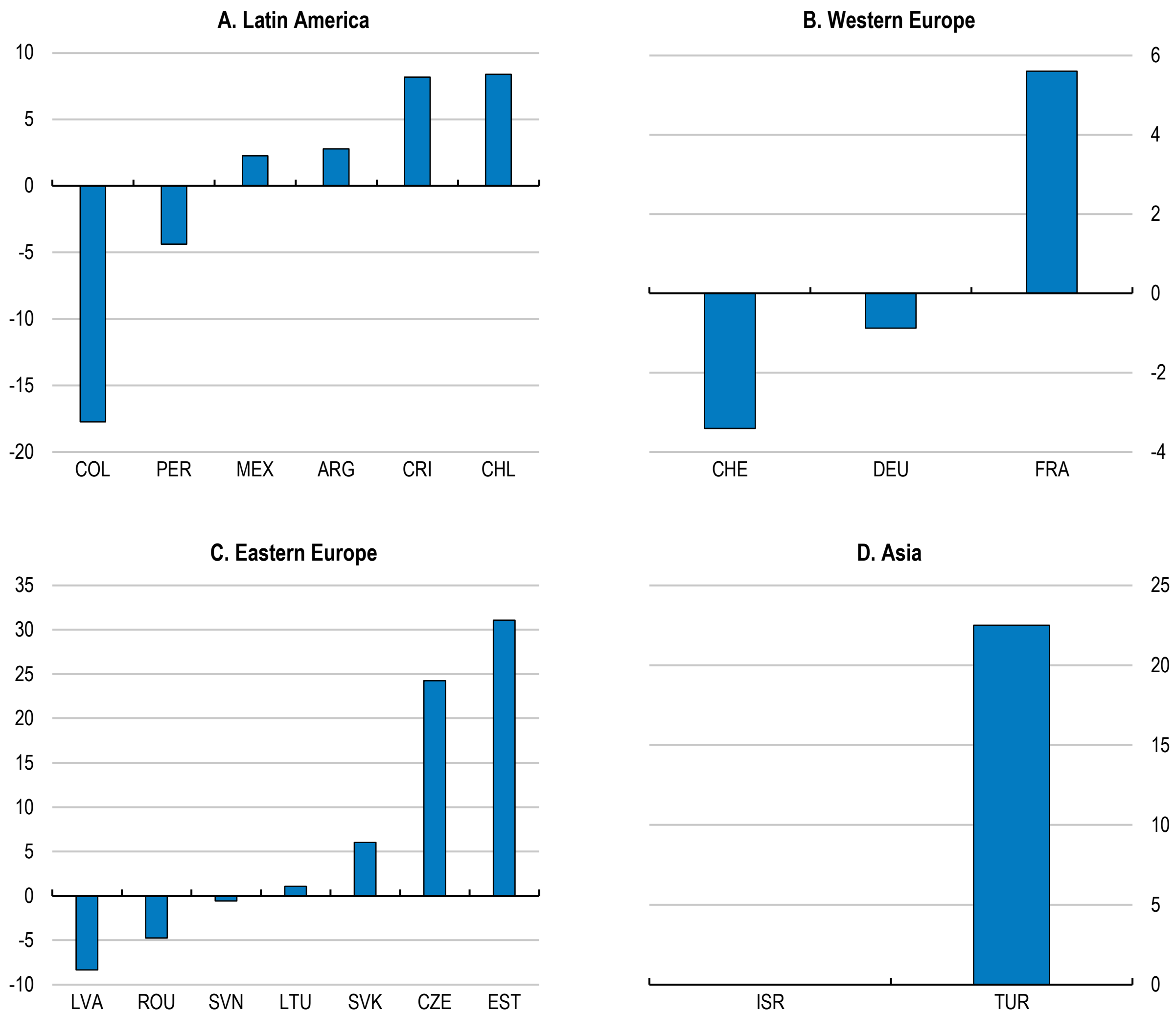
Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and New Zealand Government.

Figure A2.5. Evolution of persons held by drug trafficking, OECD countries



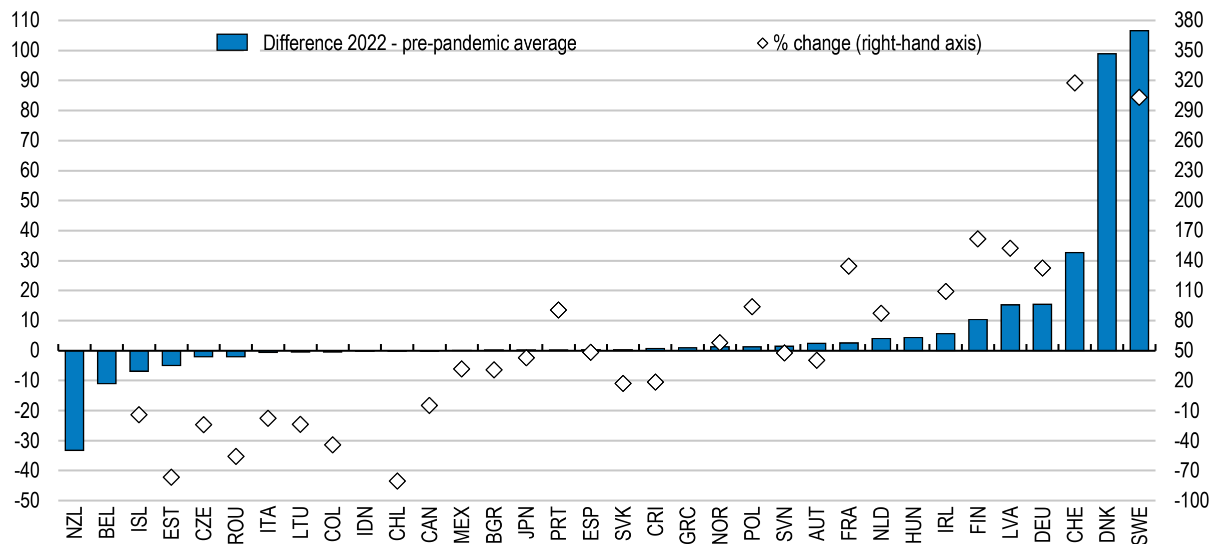
Note: Pre-pandemic average corresponds to 2014-2019 for all OECD countries, except the United States of America, Brazil, Luxemburg, Austria, New Zealand, Israel, Romania, Iceland, and Polonia, which contained a break in its series. OECD is a simple average of OECD members.
Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Figure A2.6. Change in the rate of persons arrested for drug trafficking across different regions, pre-pandemic and 2022



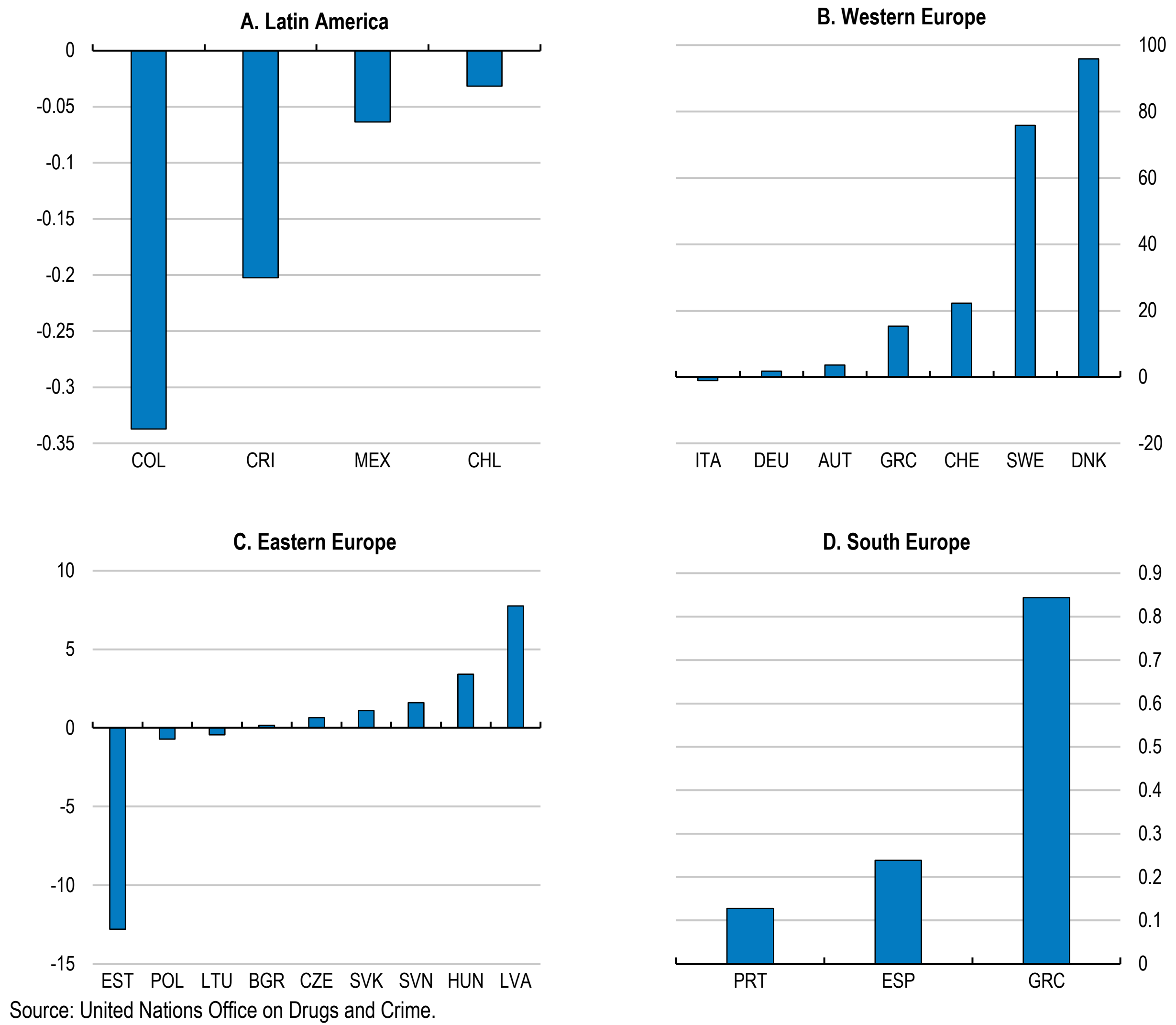
Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Figure A2.7. Evolution of money laundering rates, OECD countries



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

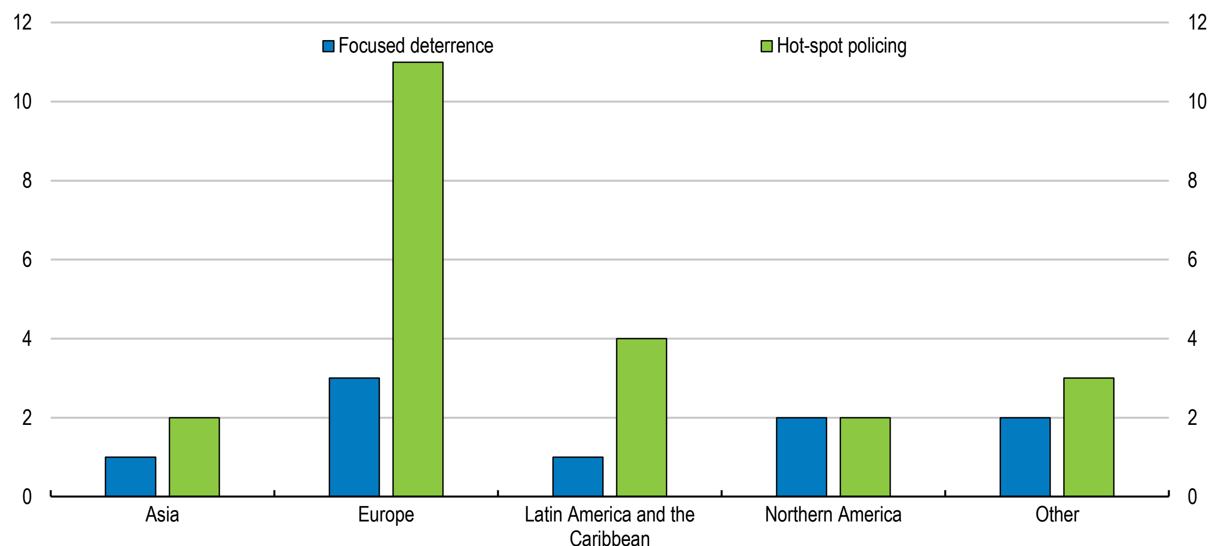
Figure A2.8. Change in the rate of money laundering across different regions, pre-pandemic and 2022



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

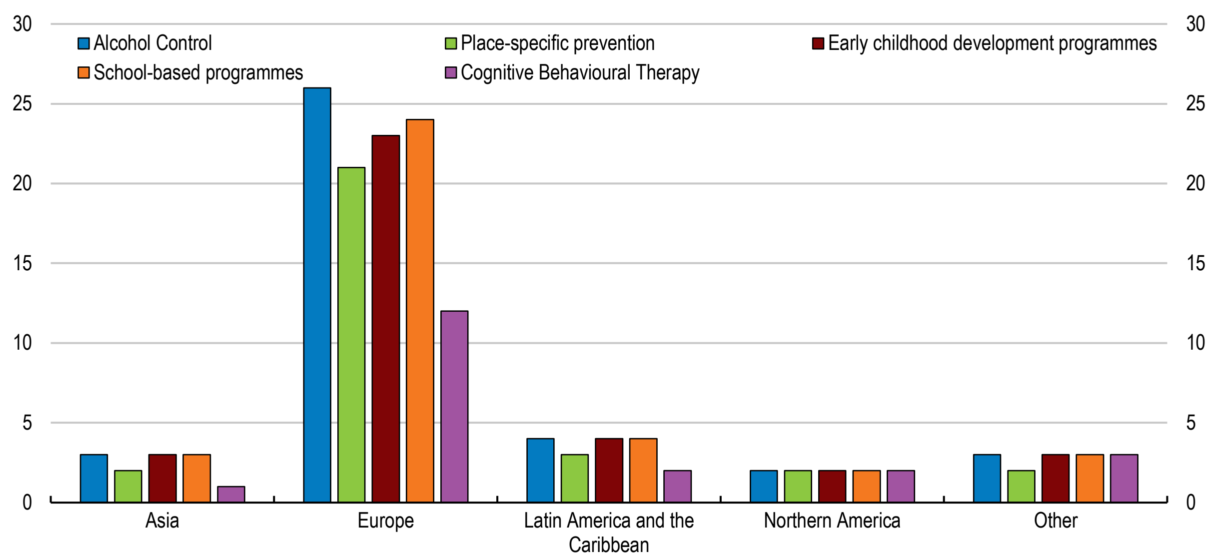
Annex 3. Anti-crime policies by region

Figure A3.1. Control measures by type and region



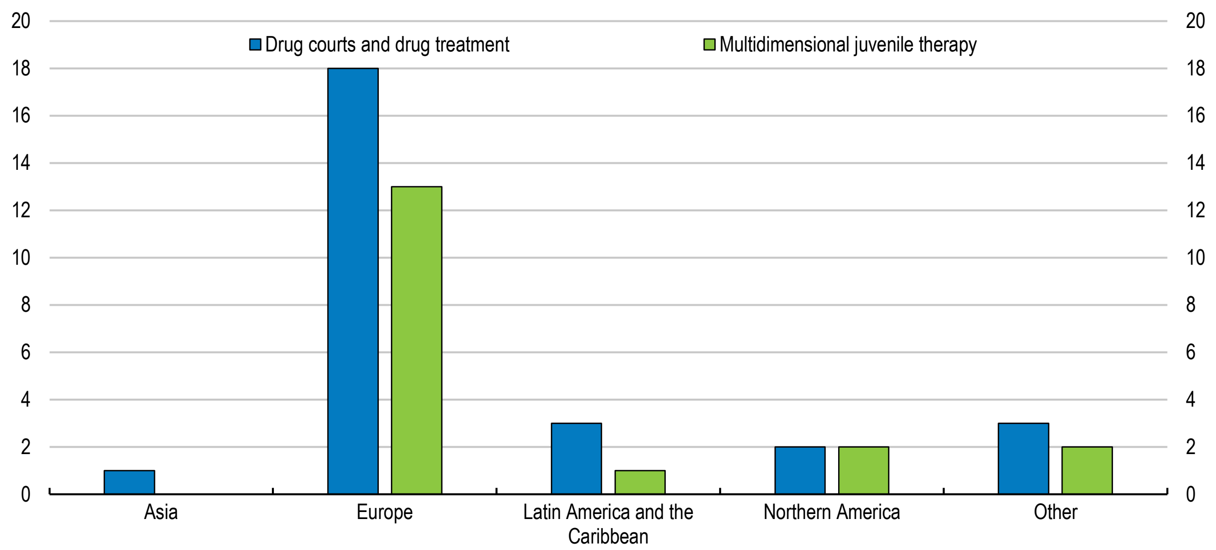
Source: Elaboration from OECD country desks.

Figure A3.2. Prevention initiatives by type and region



Source: Elaboration based on information from OECD country desks.

Figure A3.3. Rehabilitation and social reintegration strategies by type and region



Source: Elaboration based on information from OECD country desks.

Annex 4 Inventory of successful policy approaches and interventions to address crime

Policy approach	Goal	Evidence-based interventions	Type of crime addressed	International examples	Implementation in OECD countries
Law-and-order implementation	Deterring and controlling violence through higher arrest and conviction rates and more severe punishment.	Hot-spot policing	Homicide and assault Property crimes Drug related crimes	**Argentina's** IDB supported programme of Hot Spots Policing. **Japan's** efforts to increase local police numbers from 2001-07.	Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, United Kingdom, and United States.
		Focused deterrence	Homicide Youth Gang-related crimes Drug related crimes	**Sweden's** implementation of "Sluta skjut" (stop shooting) programme and consecutive expansion. **United State's** original Operation Ceasefire used in Boston against gun violence.	Australia, Canada, Colombia, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Turkye and the United States.
Situational prevention	Reducing crime by focusing on the settings of crime.	Alcohol Control	Assault and homicide Property crimes Gender-based crimes	**Germany's** ban on late-night off-premise alcohol sales. **Colombia's** restriction of alcohol sales as part of its security strategies in Cali and Bogota.	All OECD countries
		Place-specific prevention	Property crimes Assault Drug related crimes	**Korea's** Seoul Human town projects that revitalize the supply of housing in low-density neighbourhoods. **Colombia's** social urbanism applied at Comuna 13, Medellín.	Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States.
Social prevention	Preventing crime by reducing individual risk factors.	Early childhood development programmes	Juvenile Delinquency Violent crime Drug related crimes	**UK's** Sure Start Centres to support disadvantaged families and parents from pregnancy until their child starts	Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic,

				school. **United State's** Nurse-Family Partnership that serves low-income mothers and their infants.	Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkye, United Kingdom, and United States.
		School-based programmes	Juvenile Delinquency Gang-related crimes Drug related crimes Gender-based crimes	**Finland's a**nti-bullying programme Kiva, replicated in over 20 countries. **Costa Rica, Belize, and El Salvador** implementation of Gang Resistance Education And Training programmes.	Australia, Austria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkye, United Kingdom, and United States.
Social prevention and rehabilitation for offenders	Preventing crime and recidivism by reducing individual risk factors.	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)	Drug related crime Property crime Assault Recidivism	**New Zealand's** pilot programmes using CBT were successful reducing the frequency and seriousness of violent reoffending. **US and Mexico** extensive application of the strategy with programmes like Choose to Change in Chicago and municipal interventions Chihuahua and Guadalajara.	Australia, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkye, United Kingdom and United States.
Re-insertion and rehabilitation for offenders	Improving the situation of convicts upon release, positioning them for successful reintegration into society and thereby reducing recidivism.	Drug Courts and Drug Treatment	Recidivism Drug related crimes Property crimes	**Chile's** nationwide drug courts and rehabilitation programme has shown positive results in decreasing recidivism. **The Norwegian Drug Court Model** showed that alternative sanctions for	Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, New

				criminal drug addicts is possible and even more effective than imprisonment.	Zealand, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkye, United Kingdom, and United States.
		Multidimensional juvenile therapy	Recidivism Juvenile Delinquency Drug related crimes Property crimes	**UK's** implementation of Multisystemic Therapy (MST) supports its efficacy in reducing recidivism, adding value to current U.K rehabilitation services. **The Netherlands** MST programme has been effective in reducing risky behaviours in young people.	Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States.

1) Countries where evidence of extensive implementation was found. In some cases, empirical evaluations are not yet available.

Annex 5 Inventory of main cybercrime prevention efforts

Policy approach	Goal	International examples
Development of national cybercrime strategies	Protecting individuals, businesses, and national interests from the harmful effects of cybercrime by setting operational and strategic priorities in the areas of capacity building, information sharing, international cooperation and protection of critical infrastructure.	**Belgium's** National Cybersecurity Strategy emphasising, mapping cyber threats, disrupting criminal cyber infrastructures, and developing appropriate defensive and repressive capabilities as cybercrime prevention strategies.
Policies to encourage cooperation and coordination in incident prevention	Encouraging innovation in cybercrime prevention efforts by coordinating the government leading institutions in the field.	**Italy's** establishment of a CERT-PA serving as the coordination hub for managing cybersecurity incidents within the public administration sector.
Cybersecurity awareness and best-practices programmes	Increasing awareness and understanding of cybercrime among the public, businesses, and government entities, encouraging safe online practices.	**Australia's** Stay Smart Online campaign and eSafety Commissioner website provide information to individuals and businesses about how to protect themselves from cybercrime.
Public-Private Partnerships	Enabling participants to share information, good practice and experience on cyber threats, and policy development on cybercrime.	**Israel's** CyberSpark campus has brought together academia, industry, venture capital and government on the same place to collaborate and share ideas on cybersecurity and cybercrime (CyberSpark, n.d.).
Legislation on cybercrime	Enhancing legal frameworks by establishing and updating laws to address new and evolving forms of cybercrime, ensuring that legal systems are capable of prosecuting offenders	Japan, Mexico, and Portugal updated legal frameworks to combat cybercrime. For example, the enactment of laws such as the Act on Prohibition of Unauthorized Computer Access in Japan or Portugal's Cybercrime Law and Mexico's inclusion of hacking in its Federal Criminal Code.

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