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Research report

Forum: General Assembly 3

Issue: Improving the Accessibility of Public
Safety Services for Marginalized Communities

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Introduction

Despite the fact that public safety is a basic human right, impoverished communities worldwide usually have unequal or restricted access to safety services, such as emergency medical care, fire protection, law enforcement, and disaster assistance. In areas where there is systematic bias, violence, political instability, or poverty, this lack of accessibility is particularly troublesome. For vulnerable groups, such as women, people with disabilities, refugees, migrants, and ethnic minorities, inadequate public safety services can be the difference between protection and harm.

Increasing accessibility is not only a question of justice, but it is also essential for building confidence between the government and marginalized communities. Ignoring inequalities in public safety erodes social relationships, increases inequality, and feeds cycles of exclusion.

Stability, equity, and sustainable growth are all helped by easily accessible public safety services. In their absence, underprivileged communities are more vulnerable to institutional neglect, criminality, violence, and natural calamities. Communities with limited access to justice and policing are more susceptible to organized crime, gender-based violence, and human trafficking, according to the UNODC. Reducing these differences guarantees that no community is left behind, protects human rights, and fortifies the rule of law.

Definitions of key terms

Public Safety Services

Services provided by the state or local authorities to protect citizens from harm, including police, fire, ambulance, disaster relief, and community security initiatives.

Marginalized Communities

Groups systematically excluded from full participation in society, such as ethnic and religious minorities, refugees, people with disabilities, rural populations, and low-income households.

Community Policing

A strategy that promotes partnerships between law enforcement and local communities to build trust and increase safety.

Emergency Response Systems (ERS)

Networks of medical, police, and fire services designed to respond to crises quickly and effectively.

Inclusive Security

The principle that security policies and services must consider and address the specific needs of vulnerable or excluded groups.

Structural Discrimination

Institutional practices that disproportionately disadvantage certain groups, whether intentionally or not.

UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which supports states in crime prevention, justice reform, and equal access to security services.

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General overview

Historically, different civilizations have had different access points to public safety. While underprivileged groups, like rural villagers, refugees, and ethnic minorities, frequently continue to be underserved, wealthier and urban people generally enjoy the benefits of well-funded police, medical, and fire services. Law enforcement agencies were not created to serve all citizens equally, but rather to safeguard elites in many post-colonial and developing nations. Public safety is still shaped by this history, as there is still mistrust between official institutions and disenfranchised communities.

Globally, significant gaps remain in accessibility. Internally displaced people and refugees frequently do not have legal status, which restricts their capacity to report crimes or seek protection. Emergency services might not be available in rural regions or might take hours. Women who approach the police for assistance may experience stigma or harassment, especially in traditional or patriarchal settings. In emergency shelters, people with disabilities frequently face obstacles to physical accessibility and communication (such as a lack of sign language interpretation).

Inequalities were further brought to light by the COVID-19 pandemic: minority groups and low-income neighbourhoods were frequently disproportionately targeted by law enforcement responses, and marginalized communities were less likely to have access to healthcare. Inequalities are further exposed by climate change and natural catastrophes, as relief often reaches vulnerable people last.

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Major parties involved

Governments

Developed Countries (e.g., Canada, Norway): Often promote inclusive policing and emergency response models that can serve as best practices.

Developing Countries (e.g., Nigeria, India): Face challenges in extending resources to rural and marginalized populations but are experimenting with community-based safety initiatives.

Conflict-Affected States (e.g., Syria, Yemen): Struggle to provide even basic safety services, leaving marginalized groups especially vulnerable.

International Organizations

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC): Supports member states in crime prevention, justice reform, and inclusive security.

World Health Organization (WHO): Works to improve emergency medical systems, particularly in underserved communities.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC): Provides frontline emergency services in humanitarian crises, often filling gaps left by states.

Civil Society and NGOs

Amnesty International & Human Rights Watch: Monitor violations and highlight discriminatory policing practices.

Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders): Provides emergency medical aid in areas where state services are inaccessible.

Local Community Organizations: Play vital roles in trust-building between marginalized groups and official institutions.

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Timeline of Key Events

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| 1948 | Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms the right to life, liberty, and security of a person |
| 1994 | UNDP introduces the concept of <i>human security</i> , shifting focus from state security to individual safety. |
| 2000 | Millennium Development Goals emphasize reducing inequalities in health and basic services. |
| 2010 | Haiti earthquake highlights failures in equitable disaster response for marginalized communities. |
| 2015 | Adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). |
| 2020 | COVID-19 pandemic exposes global disparities in access to health and safety services. |
| 2022 | UNODC launches initiatives on community-oriented policing in Africa and Latin America. |
| 2023 | IFRC and WHO publish joint recommendations on inclusive emergency response for marginalized groups. |

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Previous attempts to solve the issue

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has promoted human security since the 1990s, emphasizing that safety is defined by the presence of inclusive protective institutions as well as the absence of conflict. Adoption was inconsistent and slow, especially in unstable areas, even though some governments included this in their plans.

The UNODC has provided support for community-oriented policing initiatives in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. These initiatives aimed to improve the degree of trust between police and marginalized communities. In countries like Kenya and Jordan, it has been demonstrated that community-police dialogues enhance crime reporting and reduce tension. However, a lack of funding and resistance from conventional security agencies hindered broad success.

Emergency medical response has also been emphasized. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) have partnered to train local responders in underserved communities. During the COVID-19 epidemic, both organizations provided mobile health units to assist areas that were at risk.

At the national level, certain countries have attempted to enact reforms. For example, community policing in Brazilian favelas aimed to broaden the scope of law enforcement's reach, but it was often beset by allegations of abuse of power and corruption. In India, specialized "all-women police stations" were set up to encourage gender-based crime reporting; however, they lacked adequate funding and personnel.

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Possible solutions

In the communal and educational spheres, increasing awareness among communities and service providers is essential. By offering emergency responders, police officers, and firefighters training on gender awareness, disability inclusion, and cultural sensitivity, barriers to trust and access can be reduced. Additionally, community outreach programs can teach marginalized communities about their rights and how to access safety services without fear of discrimination.

From an institutional perspective, governments should prioritize building infrastructure in underserved populations. This includes funding rural police stations, mobile emergency clinics, and disaster preparedness centers in vulnerable communities. Special precautions, such as bilingual emergency hotlines and accessible evacuation shelters, can help ensure that migrants, refugees, and people with disabilities are not left behind during emergencies.

Furthermore, legal structures must be strengthened. Countries should pass anti-discrimination laws that specifically target access to public safety services and establish independent monitoring agencies to investigate violations. Promoting representation and boosting public trust in government organizations can be achieved by hiring officers from underrepresented groups and implementing community policing strategies.

Finally, cooperation at the regional and international levels can hasten progress. Governments can work with the UNODC, WHO, and IFRC to develop inclusive public safety models. Regional partnerships should share best practices, but foreign donors can help finance long-term institutional changes rather than short-term relief efforts.

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Further reading

UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>

UNODC – Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programs

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/justice-and-prison-reform/index.html>

IFRC – Inclusive Disaster Preparedness and Response Resources

<https://www.ifrc.org/disaster-preparedness>

WHO – Disability and Emergency Preparedness Guidance

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241518193>

Amnesty International – Reports on Discriminatory Policing

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/>

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