CRIME & VIOLENCE
at a glance

Urban planning & crime

The rapid pace of urbanization coupled with the growth in city size and density is associated with increased crime and violence. Poor urban planning, design and management play a role in the shaping of urban environments that put citizens and property at risk. The fabric and layout of cities impact on the movements of offenders and victims and on opportunities for crime. The new UN-HABITAT report, *Enhancing Urban Safety and Security: Global Report on Human Settlements 2007* looks into crime prevention strategies through environmental design.

■ Results from a survey of 17 Latin American countries indicate that **households located in areas experiencing high levels of growth are more likely to be victimized than those in communities with stable populations**. Therefore, city growth is seen as a very strong indicator of crime rates. The impacts of rapid urbanization also extend beyond direct victimization. People in rapidly growing cities of Latin America have diminished confidence in police officials and the judiciary to resolve problems. Thus, rapid development places increased pressures on the ability of authorities to meet public security and safety demands.

■ **The link between crime and city size** in developing countries can be explained by three factors. First, returns on crime are likely to be higher in larger cities due to the greater concentration of wealthier victims, more opportunities to commit various types of crime, and a more developed second-hand market for the disposal of stolen items.

Second, the chances of arresting a criminal might be lower in larger cities because large cities spend less on law enforcement per capita, or have lower levels of community cooperation with the police, or require more police officers per inhabitant to effect an arrest. Finally, larger cities have a greater proportion of crime-prone individuals/potential criminals.

■ **Poor urban planning, design and management** have increasingly been cited as playing a role in the shaping of urban environments that put citizens and property at risk. Thus, the physical fabric and layout of cities have a bearing on the routine movements of offenders and victims and on opportunities for crime.

■ It has been estimated that **10 to 15 per cent of crimes have environmental design and management components.**

■ **Effective urban planning, design and governance sho**uld seek to manipulate the built environment in ways that are intended to **reduce or even eliminate the opportunity to commit crimes.**
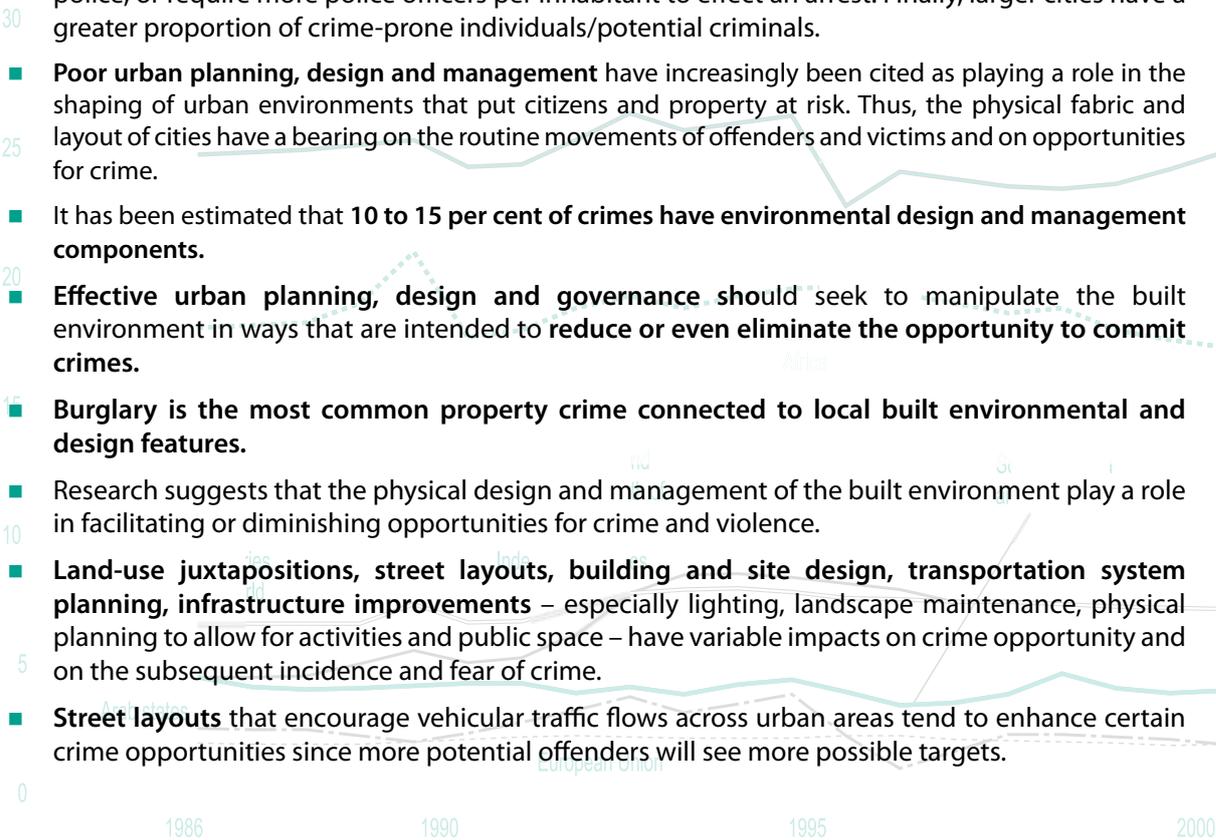
■ **Burglary is the most common property crime connected to local built environmental and design features.**

■ Research suggests that the physical design and management of the built environment play a role in facilitating or diminishing opportunities for crime and violence.

■ **Land-use juxtapositions, street layouts, building and site design, transportation system planning, infrastructure improvements** – especially lighting, landscape maintenance, physical planning to allow for activities and public space – have variable impacts on crime opportunity and on the subsequent incidence and fear of crime.

■ **Street layouts** that encourage vehicular traffic flows across urban areas tend to enhance certain crime opportunities since more potential offenders will see more possible targets.

- From a planning and public policy standpoint, *where* crimes occur and *how* places are designed and managed are at least as important as *who* the perpetrators are.

- **Crime and violence tend to reoccur in relatively limited numbers of places** in cities that provide niches for offending.

- **The lack of integration of crime prevention strategies within comprehensive city planning practices** is a factor in facilitating opportunities for urban crime.

- **The process of enhancing urban safety and security through effective urban planning, design and governance is in its infancy** in many parts of the world, although in some countries such as the UK, the US and Canada it is more advanced. Getting the planning system to regard crime prevention as one of its major objectives in the drive to secure sustainable development requires a "top-down" approach coupled with effective action at the local level. Focusing on the setting of crime, linking crime prevention and reduction to changes in physical design, is most advanced in the developed world.

- The UK has deployed **closed circuit television cameras (CCTVs)** widely during recent years, not just in public places such as shopping centres and car parks, but also in some residential areas. Although their impact is still unclear, CCTV cameras have now become a commonplace part of initiatives against crime and violence in many parts of the world.

- Evidence suggests that the most successful policy responses to prevent and reduce the incidence and impacts of crime and violence are those that take cognisance of the local context, rather than those based on the experience of other places.

- The **policy initiatives at the local level** to address issues of urban crime and violence have been grouped into six broad categories:
  - Enhancing urban safety and security through effective urban planning, design and governance;
  - Community-based approaches to enhancing urban safety and security;
  - Strengthening formal criminal justice systems and policing;
  - Reducing risk factors;
  - Non-violent resolution of conflicts; and
  - Strengthening social capital.