

PADF Approach to Addressing Youth Recruitment by Criminal Organizations



REGIONAL EXPERIENCE PREVENTING YOUTH RECRUITMENT

The **Pan American Development Foundation (PADF)** supports efforts to **prevent the recruitment and exploitation of children and adolescents** by organized criminal groups across Latin America.

Through a comprehensive strategy that integrates violence prevention, institutional strengthening, and improved operational readiness, **we help governments and communities disrupt criminal networks and protect at-risk youth**. PADF partners with police, justice institutions, civil society, and communities to deliver measurable improvements in citizen security.

PREVENTING CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION OF YOUTH

PADF's efforts generate long-term impact by reducing the operational reach of organized crime and fostering safer, more resilient communities. By supporting local and national authorities in preventing youth recruitment and strengthening responses across the justice system, we help curb the influence of groups that exploit children and adolescents. **Our interventions also address structural drivers of irregular migration and reinforce institutional capacity** to safeguard public trust and investment.

**10 YEARS
OF HEMISPHERIC
IMPACT**

5,000+

law enforcement officers trained to address complex crime across the region, including youth exploitation and recruitment prevention.

**15,000
participants**

in multi-sectoral efforts to support law enforcement and justice sector responses to insecurity.

**68%
of youth**

reported increased willingness to cooperate with law enforcement on violence and crime prevention efforts

**Real Life
IMPACT**

PADF's subject matter experts have assisted in successful enforcement operations, securing apprehensions and convictions of perpetrators; seizing large financial assets of criminal groups, and disrupting transnational criminal networks.



REGIONAL STRATEGIES TO PROTECT YOUTH FROM CRIME



THE BAHAMAS

Strategy: Community-Based Prevention

Focus: Strengthening police-community trust

Through the U.S. Department of State-funded program, PADF strengthened trust between police and communities by training officers in social crime prevention and creating **youth engagement spaces** such as police camps and mock courts—offering positive alternatives to recruitment by criminal groups.



HAITI

Strategy: Disrupting Gang Control

Focus: Strengthening national police capabilities

With support from the Government of Canada and in coordination with the OAS, PADF is **helping reclaim gang-controlled areas** by rehabilitating police stations, boosting tactical capacity, and supporting security operations in high-risk zones.



JAMAICA

Strategy: Environmental Design for Crime Prevention

Focus: Safer public spaces and youth engagement

PADF is applying Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) to reduce the influence criminal groups exert across five high-crime communities. By transforming public spaces and expanding engagement opportunities, the program **creates safer environments and counters criminal influence over youth**.



ECUADOR

Strategy: Targeted Prevention and Outreach

Focus: Schools, public spaces, and early intervention

PADF leads innovative anti-recruitment efforts under the Comunidades Seguras program. Highlights include the country's **first national assessment on youth recruitment**, the creation of a specialized prevention center, training in 37 schools (with plans to reach 270), and 97 targeted interventions to reduce gang influence and protect youth.



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Strategy: Data-Driven Crime Reduction and Gang Disruption

Focus: Intelligence-led policing and legal action

PADF's RAPP program helped reduce crime in target areas, while the GRACE program supported police in **building prosecutable cases under the Anti-Gang Statute** through intelligence-led investigations. This yielded several charges being brought under the statute during implementation.



COLOMBIA

Strategy: Prevention and Prosecution of Recruitment

Focus: Institutional strengthening and youth-focused policing

PADF supports efforts to **prevent and prosecute forced recruitment** through two major initiatives. Somos Comunidad focuses on youth-centered security strategies and police training in high-risk areas, while TRAILS enhances institutional capacity to investigate and prosecute recruitment crimes and expand access to justice for victims.

HOW WE DO IT

MULTI-COUNTRY EXPERIENCE

Over the past decade, **PADF** has implemented programs across The Bahamas, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Suriname, St. Lucia, St. Kitts & Nevis, and Trinidad & Tobago—demonstrating cost-effective, context-driven approaches to disrupt criminal activities. **PADF's** work spans early intervention in schools, community engagement initiatives, and institutional capacity-building with police and justice sector actors, ensuring locally tailored strategies that respond to the specific risks and dynamics of each country.



STRENGTHENING LOCAL PREVENTION EFFORTS

In **Trinidad & Tobago**, PADF established Crime and Violence Prevention Committees and enhanced police effectiveness across five communities. In **Colombia**, we co-developed local security plans that prioritize the prevention of youth recruitment by addressing key risk factors. In **Ecuador**, we work with schools, parents, and police to detect early warning signs of youth recruitment and strengthen protective factors within school communities. **Across all countries, we reclaim public spaces, create safe community hubs, and promote locally led solutions.**

DISRUPTING CRIMINAL NETWORKS

In **Jamaica**, PADF supports law enforcement in countering cyber-enabled youth exploitation by enhancing digital investigative capabilities. In **Trinidad & Tobago**, PADF worked with police to conduct intelligence-led investigations and apply the Anti-Gang Statute using informant networks. In **Colombia**, PADF enhanced the capacity of the National Police and Attorney General's Office to investigate and prosecute forced recruitment crimes.





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PROVEN APPROACH. TRUSTED PARTNER



Evidence-Based Methodologies

Our interventions are grounded in international law enforcement best practices and refined through field-tested tools, continuous analysis, and strategic planning.



Training That Delivers Results

PADF strengthens police and justice institutions with effective, context-specific training programs that improve performance in prevention, investigation, adjudication, and response.



Strong, Multi-Level Partnerships

We collaborate with national governments, law enforcement agencies, and local security actors to ensure operational coordination and long-term sustainability.



Adaptive Management

Our flexible program design allows us to respond to evolving threats while maintaining a focus on long-term goals: disrupting criminal networks, strengthening institutions, and protecting at-risk youth populations.

STRATEGIC OUTCOMES THAT SET US APART

Safer Environments

PADF creates secure public spaces that reduce opportunities for gang control and criminal activity.

Disruption of Criminal Networks

Our targeted interventions weaken gang recruitment structures and reduce the influence of organized criminal groups.

Operational Gains for Law Enforcement

PADF enhances the capabilities of police and justice institutions to respond effectively to complex threats.

Coordinated Government Action

We promote interagency collaboration and alignment across local and national actors for lasting security solutions.

Sustainable Change

PADF combines institutional reform with community engagement to ensure long-term reductions in violence.

