

Security Risks Report – South Africa

October 2025

Executive summary

In late September, gang violence erupted in the Cape Flats, continuing into October. This resulted in nearly 500 gang-related shootings in the Western Cape, compared with 270 murders in July and 872 in 2024.

- Hotspots include Hanover Park, Mitchell's Plain, Bishop Lavis, Delft, Elsies River, Grassy Park, and Philippi.

Two main factors drive gang warfare.

- First, established gangs have fragmented, leading to conflicts within and between groups.
- Second, increased firearm availability has empowered lower-tier gang members, making them harder to control.

Gang violence directly impacts low-income neighbourhoods, often involving drive-by shootings that harm bystanders, including children. Indirectly, crimes are becoming more violent, and criminal gangs are expanding into the economy, notably in protection and extortion rackets.

- Criminal gangs are increasingly organised, involved in extortion and kidnappings for ransom.

Widespread gun availability has increased the stakes in abductions, often leading to violent rescue operations.

- For example, a shoot-out occurred during the rescue of a businessman in Alexandra, Johannesburg.
- The perpetrator was involved in multiple kidnappings and wanted in Mozambique, where kidnapping has also risen sharply in recent years.

The South African Police Service (SAPS) has upped efforts to increase the visibility of its policing and thereby seek to strengthen public confidence in law enforcement. However, although SAPS has conducted and publicised several successful rescue operations, kidnapping remains a serious issue, as does crime more broadly.

Another response from SAPS is Operation Shanela, which aims to deter and prevent crime through high-visibility policing – including stop-and-search operations, roadblocks, and raids.

- Despite significant arrests, the impact is mixed. While public perception of police efforts is positive, the operations burden citizens and may undermine community-police relations.
- Moreover, conviction rates are low due to judicial capacity issues and poor evidence gathering.
- Finally, there is a risk that Shanela's focus on "hotspots" may merely displace criminal activity rather than deter it.

SAPS also faces challenges stemming from political turmoil and a scandal involving former police minister Senzo Mchunu. His decision to disband the Political Killings Task Team (PKTT) in December 2024 led to accusations of collusion between senior police officers and criminal syndicates.

- Mchunu was suspended in July, but the Madlanga Commission set up to investigate the allegations has uncovered internal fractures within South Africa's institutions.





Review of recent developments

In late September, gang violence erupted in the Cape Flats and escalated steadily into October. As a result, in September there were nearly 500 gang-related shootings in the Western Cape, many concentrated in Cape Flats, compared with an already high incidence of 270 murders in July and an official total – according to the South African Police Service (SAPS) – of 872 gang-related murders in 2024.

- Specific areas considered “hotspots” include the neighbourhoods of Hanover Park, Mitchell’s Plain, Bishop Lavis, Delft, Elsies River, Grassy Park, and Philippi.

The escalation in gang-related violence has acquired such prominence that for the last two years a specialist international NGO, the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC), has been publishing a quarterly report on the subject, the Western Cape Gang Monitor. This publication contains the results of ongoing field research in the Cape Flats to follow the evolution of gangs and the turf wars within them.

Both GI-TOC and the police authorities have noted two main factors as the primary drivers of gang warfare.

- First is that previously well-established gangs have experienced considerable fragmentation in recent years. One prominent example is a gang called the “Americans”, which is currently fighting its own splinter group, the “Dollar Kids”. In this manner, breakaway groups are fighting both their parent organisations and each other over territory and influence.
- Second is the increased availability of firearms. Prior to the 2010s, according to GI-TOC, gang leaders tended to be the custodians of guns, which they handed out to lower-tier members as required for specific “jobs”, and which were returned when the “jobs” were over. This changed in the early 2010s when a senior police officer, Christiaan Prinsloo, sold at least 2,400 confiscated guns to gangs, creating an underground market and changing the landscape.
- Nowadays, lower-level gang members can obtain guns from a variety of sources, which in turn makes them more independent and less easy to control. One important illegal source of weapons is Namibia, from where not only pistols but also AK-47 automatic rifles are being smuggled into South Africa, upping the stakes further.

The direct impact of gang warfare is felt in the neighbourhoods where it takes place, which are usually low-income areas infrequently visited by outsiders. Much of the gun violence involves drive-by shootings that impact bystanders as well as the targets.

- For example, several children were among the fatalities of the September shoot-outs.

However, the indirect impact of the weaponised gang environment is that, first, crimes in general are becoming more violent – as Convex has noted in previous reports – and that, strengthened by the use of weapons, criminal gangs are spreading wider into the economy.

This last effect has been evident in the steady expansion of protection and extortion rackets in recent years, as more and more businesses find themselves exposed to criminal demands.

- The so-called “construction mafia” continues to be a major extortion concern, with criminal groups frequently demanding a 30% stake in public contracts, thereby halting progress on South Africa’s infrastructure development.
- Small and micro entrepreneurs are also increasingly at risk. Informal businesses in Cape Town townships (such as Khayelitsha, Philippi and Nyanga) are forced to pay protection fees they can’t afford; many have to shut down their businesses because the extortion fees are unsustainable.
- On 25 September, in the suburbs of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (Gauteng), six men were arrested for extortion. They had allegedly collected money from foreign-owned shops under the guise of “safety payments”. The amount collected in one such operation was over ZAR46,000 (around USD2,600) in six hours; average monthly earnings in South Africa (in the formal economy) are around ZAR30,000 (around USD1,700).
- In late September, in KwaZulu-Natal, SAPS dismantled an extortion syndicate targeting student residence owners and foreign-owned businesses. Three suspects were arrested in raids in Durban and Eshowe.

The reports also show that criminal gangs are also becoming more organised, to the extent that SAPS often talks of “syndicates”. The main business of these syndicates is extortion, but they are also key players in kidnap for ransom, especially where victims are held for an extended period of time – as opposed to “express” kidnappings, which can be carried out by small groups of individual criminals.

- The wide dispersion of guns has upped the stakes in abductions, as these weapons are used not only to abduct the victim but also to threaten or eliminate any potential bystanders who might wish to intervene or call for help.
- Further, rescue operations by SAPS often result in shoot-outs, potentially putting hostages at risk.

One such shoot-out took place – without harm to the victim – during the rescue of a businessman in September in Alexandra, a suburb of Johannesburg (Gauteng).

- The perpetrator, who died during the confrontation, was described as a “kidnapping kingpin”, involved in at least five other kidnap for ransom cases in South Africa and reportedly also wanted for kidnapping in Mozambique.
- The case highlights the transnational kidnapping syndicates said to be operating between South Africa and Mozambique, where kidnap for ransom has also become a serious concern over the last decade.

In recent months, SAPS has announced several other successful rescue operations (with no unintended fatalities), but the number of cases in itself indicates that kidnapping remains a serious and escalating problem in South Africa.

For example, in 2025, the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality (Eastern Cape) has become a focal point of kidnapping activity, with a spate of incidents – at least 13 cases – in the 12 months to August 2025.

- In response, the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation of the South African Police Service (SAPS), known as the Hawks, set up a dedicated 24-hour standby team in the Nelson Mandela Bay area (which includes Gqeberha, formerly Port Elizabeth).
- The Hawks have asked families not to try to handle kidnapping situations on their own, as uncoordinated family involvement hinders the police investigations. Instead, recent successful rescue operations have involved collaboration between the Hawks, families and private security companies hired by the families.
- A recent case was that of a woman kidnapped in Kariega (formerly Uitenhage, Eastern Cape) as she was driving out of her homestead in August. After the ransom was paid and the victim recovered on 16 August, the Hawks arrested two suspects, with other suspects still under active investigation.

The efforts made by SAPS and the Hawks to be seen to be pursuing kidnappers are in line with another initiative, known as Operation Shanela. This is a high-density crime prevention initiative, involving heightened visibility policing: this includes frequent stop-and-search operations, roadblocks, raids, and compliance checks.

- The first Operation Shanela was launched in May 2023, and Shanela II was launched in June 2025.
- Shanela targets crime hotspots, particularly in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape.
- Week to week in September and October, the scale of arrests under Shanela II was reported to be significant: over 15,000 arrests per week, with around 2,000 of those pertaining to violent and serious crimes – namely, murder, rape and armed robbery.

However, the real impact of Shanela on security risk in South Africa is mixed at best.

- On the positive side, the high visibility of the operation contributes to public perception that the police are making an effort. As well as the arrests, weapons, drugs and vehicle seizures also disrupt gang activity.
- Conversely, the very same high-visibility operations – roadblocks, stop and search, and the like – impose burdens on ordinary citizens and may, paradoxically, undermine communities' relationship with the police.
- Additionally, while the arrests are large in number, conviction rates stand at around 6% owing to a lack of judiciary and capacity and proper evidence-gathering.
- There is also a risk that, by focusing on "hotspots", Shanela merely displaces, rather than eliminates, crime, shifting it to areas not under the microscope.

Moreover, SAPS is operating against a background of political turmoil and scandal, which over time may erode police efficacy.

- On 31 December 2024, a specialised unit established in 2018 to investigate political assassinations, the Political Killings Task Team (PKTT), was suddenly disbanded by then police minister Senzo Mchunu, a member of the African National Congress (ANC).
- In July 2025, KwaZulu-Natal provincial police minister Lieutenant-General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi accused Mchunu and other senior police officers and politicians of collusion with criminal syndicates, alleging also that the disbandment of the PKTT was intended to derail investigations into key criminal associates of these corrupt officials.
- Mchunu was suspended and a public inquiry into the case was opened, known as the Madlanga Commission. Hearings began on 17 September.

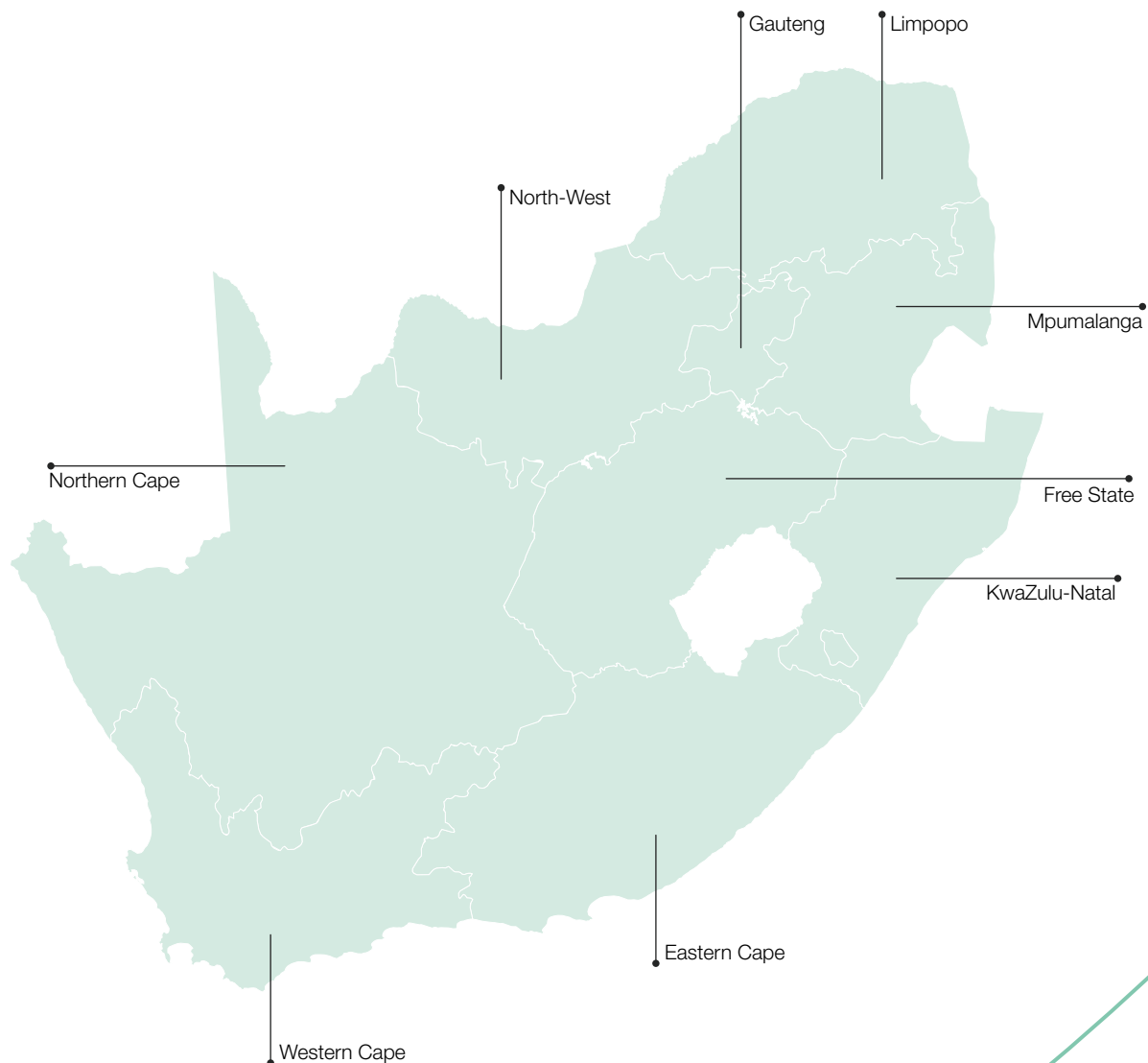
This inquiry has opened the lid not only on alleged police corruption and criminal collusion, but also on the internal fractures within South Africa's institutions – between state and provincial levels, between provinces, and between political and police authorities.

The affair is also having an adverse impact both within SAPS – as police officers feel demoralised by the interference from above – and outside SAPS – by strengthening the public perception that the police are, at best, ineffective, and, at worst, working with the criminals.



US State Department advice

The US Department of State's Travel Advisory ranks South Africa at *Level 2: Exercise Increased Caution*. This level applies to all of South Africa's provinces. The Travel Advisory lists kidnapping as a main concern, reflecting the steady rise in the incidence of this crime. The State Department's Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) *Country Security Report* includes a specific section on Kidnapping Threat.





Kidnapping and extortion: overview



Perpetrators

- Unlike in other kidnapping and extortion hotspots around the world, in South Africa these crimes do not have a broader dimension other than monetary gain.
- However, the pervasive nature of these crimes and the increase in the rates at which they are taking place add to and perpetuate the high levels of security risk in South Africa.
- Transnational gangs from Mozambique and Zimbabwe are believed to have played an important role in fuelling the rise in kidnapping in South Africa.
- Local petty criminals and gangs are increasingly involved in kidnapping, especially short-term and express kidnapping – often in the course of a carjacking.
- Larger organised crime groups tend to run extortion rackets, occupying specific niches – for example, in the construction sector or the transport sector.
 - Construction mafias – known as “business forums” – use violence and other illegal tactics to disrupt or control access to public sector projects, demanding payment in exchange for ceasing the disruptions. These construction mafias are said to have originated in KwaZulu-Natal but have spread across the country.
 - In Cape Town, nightlife extortion networks are expanding into other types of hospitality – cafés and restaurants, for example – as well as into real estate. Cape Town’s business community now sees extortion as a major chokehold and the city’s primary issue of concern.
 - In Gauteng, there is a rising trend for extortion gangs to rebrand themselves as security companies: in this guise, they run protection rackets among their “clients”.
- The above list illustrates that organised crime syndicates are most prevalent in the Gauteng and Western Cape provinces.



Targets

- Kidnapping rates are highest in Gauteng, particularly in and around Johannesburg; carjacking rates are also highest there.
- Targets of kidnapping are predominantly South African nationals.
- High-net-worth local businessmen tend to be the main victims of long-term kidnap for ransom; usually, they have been deliberately targeted by organised gangs, often transnational.
- However, kidnapping by local criminals has become more widespread and opportunistic.
 - Affluent-looking individuals are at risk simply by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.
 - Small and medium entrepreneurs have become more frequent victims of targeted abductions.
- The spread of express kidnapping in recent years has meant that low-income individuals, including those in townships, are also now targets.
 - As most express kidnappings are opportunistic, foreigners must also exercise due care and pay attention to their surroundings.

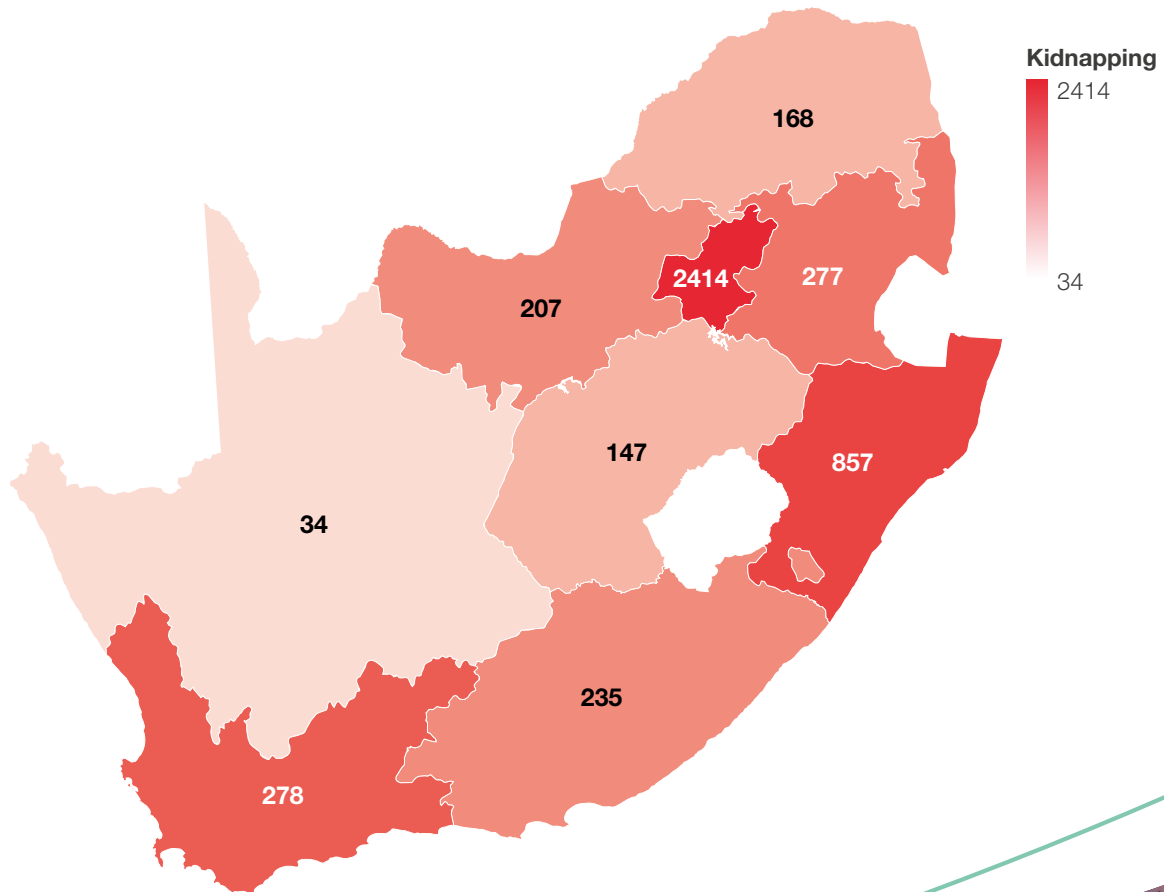


Statistics

- Crime statistics are publicly available from the South African Police Service (SAPS) and Statistics South Africa. While the official statistics suffer from under-reporting, they broadly reflect underlying trends.



Kidnappings by province, January-March 2025



Source: South African Police Service





Principles of security

There are seven fundamental principles of security:



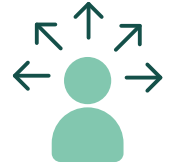
Layers of security



Planning



Communication



Situational awareness



Profile



Routine



Information security

These principles are applicable in any environment, however they are most relevant in unfamiliar surroundings or in areas with high levels of crime, terrorism or civil unrest. In terms of kidnap prevention, experience shows that given the relatively opportunistic nature of many kidnaps adherence to these principles can reduce the likelihood of someone becoming a victim of kidnapping.

- **Layers of security:** there is no single measure that enhances personal security, instead the focus should always be on applying several layers of mitigation involving physical, procedural and behavioural measures, as well as adopting a generally proactive attitude towards security.
- **Planning:** individuals can reduce risk simply by making an effort to understand the general security environment in their location and then pre planning appropriate security precautions (for example insurance, airport pick-ups, security escorts and/or other local support).
- **Communications:** identifying in advance key points of contact in emergencies (for example local office, hotel, police, embassy, security providers) and have a back-up method of communications in the event a phone does not work locally for network or other reasons. In higher threat environments share itineraries with others in advance and consider establishing lost contact plans involving periodic 'check ins'.
- **Situational awareness:** being aware of your general surroundings at all times but particularly with regards to regular routines (for example arriving or leaving at home, the office, schools, or restaurants or shopping malls). Be aware of higher risk areas along routes you travel and be alert to unusual or suspicious incidents, behaviours, people or other occurrences in your vicinity. Avoid situations where you could become isolated and, above all, always trust your instincts.
- **Profile:** kidnappers – and criminals in general – normally target their victims because that individual has come to their attention for some reason. It is therefore important that individuals adopt a low profile in high kidnap threat environments. This should involve minimising overt displays of wealth, not unnecessarily sharing unnecessary details of itineraries or business trips, and ensuring personal information such as home addresses, phone numbers and email address and family information are not easily accessible.
- **Routines:** kidnappers are most easily able to target and abduct victims who have a predictable routine. It is important therefore in higher threat kidnap environments to avoid setting predictable patterns of behaviour, particularly regarding places you regularly visit. Most kidnaps occur at the beginning or end of journeys, so it is critical to be alert during these phases.
- **Information security:** to reduce vulnerability to both kidnapping but also extortion it is important individuals and their families regularly undertake periodic reviews of their online profiles – including all corporate and social media – to enable an assessment of what personal information is easily accessible and could be utilised by criminals.

Kidnap and Extortion

INITIAL ACTIONS

IF YOU SUSPECT YOU ARE THE VICTIM OF A KIDNAP OR THREAT EXTORTION

DO

- ✓ Start a log of calls, events and any actions taken.
- ✓ Form a small family crisis cell/company crisis team.
- ✓ Preserve any physical evidence carefully (e.g. letters or parcels received).
- ✓ If possible record any telecommunications with the kidnapper/extortionist, or carefully note all details of what is said.
- ✓ Note details of all demands, deadlines or threats received.
- ✓ **If you are a Convex client call the 24/7 Response Helpline and ask to speak to the Convex Crisis Response Duty officer.**

DON'T

- ✗ Agree to anything, make any offer or start negotiating.
- ✗ Acknowledge, agree to or self-impose any deadlines (e.g. "I can get that for you in an hour").
- ✗ Discuss the incident with anyone who does not need to know about it or, if it is not yet publicly known, report the incident without first receiving advice.
- ✗ Make any decisions until advised by Convex Crisis Response.

If a kidnapping

Prepare for a possible first call from the kidnappers by:

- Identifying someone (not a decision maker) to act as a 'Communicator' to speak on behalf of the family/company.
- Identifying anyone who could potentially receive a call from kidnappers and brief them on how to respond if they are contacted (to say and promise nothing and direct the caller to the Communicator's number).

If communication from someone claiming to hold the victim is received the Communicator should:

- Listen carefully to what is said and ask the caller to repeat anything that is unclear.
- Reassure the caller you wish to cooperate.
- Explain that you are not authorized to make any decisions as you have to consult other family or company members.
- Ask to speak with the victim to confirm that they are alive and well, or ask for other evidence of their well-being (e.g. the answer to a question that only the victim(s) can answer).
- If you do speak with the victim(s) reassure them you are doing everything you can to secure their release and that their family(s) are being looked after.
- Stay calm in the face of threats, these are normal, but challenge threats of violence towards the victim(s) (e.g. 'We want to resolve this without anyone getting hurt').
- If possible arrange a time for a call back.
- Stall for time pending the arrival of the Convex Crisis Response consultant.



REMEMBER

If in doubt call the Convex Crisis Response Helpline – we would rather help you prevent an incident than help you respond to one.





Convex Insurance UK Limited

52 Lime Street, London EC3M 7AF
+44 (0)20 3886 0560

Convex Re Limited

Point House, 6 Front Street, Hamilton HM 11, Bermuda
+1 441 232 0112

Convex Europe S.A.

37 Boulevard Joseph II, 2ème étage,
L-1840 Luxembourg, Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg
+352 27 86 22 76

Convex Guernsey Limited

Bucktrout House, Glatigny Esplanade, St Peter Port, Guernsey, GY1 1WR

convexin.com

Please note that this document only provides a summary of the typical key features of the type of policy wording which is described. It is not meant to be exhaustive, and it is subject to change without notice. Nor should this information be construed as legal, tax or financial advice regarding insurance coverage.

This document is not intended as a contractual offer to sell insurance, and it is not intended to create an agency relationship in any manner. This information is for preliminary information purposes only, and cannot be relied on as being a contractual document to any extent binding on Convex. It does not in any way replace or supplement the terms and conditions of any insurance policy which may be issued. When any policy is agreed and issued, the full terms and conditions of cover, including any exclusions, will be found in the policy schedule and wording together with any endorsements which are applicable.

This document contains general information about the Convex Group and although Convex Group endeavours to ensure that the content is accurate and up to date, users should make appropriate enquiries before taking any action based on its contents. Convex Group accepts no responsibility for any information contained within this presentation and disclaims and excludes any liability in respect of its contents or for action taken based on this information.

Convex Group is the trading name of Convex Group Limited, a company incorporated in Bermuda, and the ultimate parent company of the Convex Group of companies, as follows: Convex Re Limited, a company incorporated in Bermuda, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Convex Group Limited and licensed and supervised by the Bermuda Monetary Authority; Convex Insurance UK Limited, a company incorporated in England & Wales, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Convex Re Limited and authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA); Convex Europe S.A. a company incorporated in Luxembourg, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Convex Insurance Limited authorised and supervised by the Commissariat aux Assurances (CAA). Convex Europe S.A. UK Branch is a branch of Convex Europe S.A. and authorised by the FCA. Convex Guernsey Limited, a company incorporated in Guernsey, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Convex Re Limited and licensed and regulated by Guernsey Financial Services Commission; and Convex UK Services Limited, a company incorporated in England & Wales, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Convex Group Limited.