

Security Risks Report – South Africa

July 2026

Executive summary

- The gang-related violence in Western Cape province that was the focus of the last edition of this report has continued into 2026, albeit at a lower level, with fewer murders, shootings and other attacks relating to gang feuds.
- President Cyril Ramaphosa said in his State of the Nation address in February 2026 that organised crime was 'the most immediate threat facing South Africa' and authorised a military deployment to Western Cape and Gauteng provinces, in support of police efforts against gang violence.
- The underlying causes of the 2025 spike in violence, particularly the fragmentation of established groups in the Cape Flats and resulting shifting allegiances, remain in place, and new surges are possible in the coming months.
- Overall, national statistics suggest that violent crime in South Africa has experienced a gradual decline in 2025-26, though concerns of under-reporting are being more widely expressed.
- Operation Shanela II, the South African Police Service (SAPS) crackdown on violent and organised crime, has continued, and is expected to be relaunched as Shanela III within the next year.
- Kidnapping remains a significant threat, particularly in Gauteng province, with this offence so far resisting the wider drop in incident numbers. Carjackings and related express kidnappings are particularly common.
- Extortion also continues to increase, with extortion campaigns becoming more explicitly linked to express kidnappings, particularly in Gauteng.
- An increase in anti-immigrant sentiment among South Africans from early 2025 has escalated significantly in 2026, with numerous violent incidents, some resulting in the deaths of migrants from other African nations.
- A number of African countries have either funded voluntary repatriations for their citizens, or warned them as to the consequences of remaining in South Africa.
- A number of anti-immigrant groups, primarily in KwaZulu Natal province, urged undocumented migrants to leave the country by 30 June, threatening a 'shutdown' to follow if government policy did not change to remove them by this date.
- SAPS stated that it arrested 15,384 suspects in connection with Shanela II in just one week in June, of which 2,884 were foreign nationals arrested for contraventions of the immigration act.





Review of recent developments



In focus: Anti-immigrant violence

The first half of 2026 has seen a continued escalation of violence and violent rhetoric directed against immigrants from other African nations in South Africa. The current wave of anti-immigrant action began in early 2025, and has been popularised primarily by social media, with a KwaZulu Natal-based group known as March and March being most prominent. A number of other anti-immigrant groups have supported March and March's demand that undocumented immigrants should leave the country by 30 June, with protesters threatening a 'national shutdown' and 'significant anti-immigrant action' after that date if no major changes to government policy emerge.

Violence against migrants has forced action both from nationals of other African nations in South Africa—regardless of their immigration status—and from African governments. The Ghanaian administration organised a repatriation flight for almost 300 of its citizens resident in South Africa in May, citing fears for their security but conceding that a minority of the 300 were irregular migrants. Nigeria is reported to have repatriated almost 600 nationals. A number of other governments, including those of Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi and Zimbabwe have either made formal complaints about the treatment of their citizens in South Africa or warned those citizens of the potential for xenophobic attacks.

A large encampment has emerged in the centre of Durban, the biggest city in KwaZulu Natal, with more than 10,000 primarily Malawian immigrants gathering there to seek protection and potentially secure a place on a bus returning to Malawi—a similar smaller camp for Mozambicans has developed in the last days before the deadline, while smaller camps have also been reported in Johannesburg. Groups representing migrants from countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia or Somalia, where continued conflict makes a return home a dangerous proposition, have issued statements bemoaning their situation, but have generally sought to keep a low profile for fear of attracting attention from violent elements within the protest movement.

Numerous attacks against migrants took place in June as the key date approached, with at least two Mozambican men killed in an arson attack on a migrant settlement in Western Cape province early in the month, and a Malawian man killed in a xenophobic incident in KwaZulu Natal province with less than a week to go before the unofficial deadline.

A familiar story

Periods of xenophobic violence targeting migrants are not a new phenomenon in South Africa, the continent's largest economy, having occurred every few years since the restoration of majority rule in 1994, the most significant being in 2008. Successive governments have sought to toe a line between portraying the country as safe and criticising irregular migration. The most recent census, dating from 2022, stated that there were 2.4m nationals of other African nations residing legally among South Africa's population of 62.0m, while estimates of undocumented migrants begin at roughly the same number and reach as many as 12m in some sources. Some campaigns focus primarily on the impact of migration on public services (these most often focus on other southern Africans), while allegations of criminality target those from Nigeria and the Horn of Africa. Increased focus on migration from developing countries in Europe and North America has helped the protest groups in South Africa to develop, borrowing tactics and rhetoric seen by leading politicians and prominent 'grassroots' anti-immigration activists.

'Deadline day'

Many businesses in areas with significant migrant populations in Durban and other cities remained closed on 30 June for fear of attack, while demonstrations—some including elements armed with clubs and other non-bladed weapons—took place in numerous towns and cities, primarily in KwaZulu Natal. Disturbances were reported in connection with several 'deadline day' protests in Johannesburg, with a number of arrests made in Soweto and other townships for intimidation of shop-owners and other individuals, and for looting closed shops. Further violence is likely in the coming weeks as campaigns continue.

Western Cape gang violence

The spike in violence between criminal gangs in Western Cape province, particularly in the Cape Flats district around Cape Town's airport, has eased somewhat in 2026, though disputes, realignments and fragmentation among gangs continue. There were 983 murders in Western Cape in January-March 2026, compared with 1,157 in the previous three-month period and 1,160 in July-September 2025 (not all of these murders were gang-related).

In March, President Cyril Ramaphosa formally authorised a year-long deployment of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to support the activities of the South African Police Service (SAPS), with a focus on the Western Cape and Gauteng province, the two provinces with the most significant organised crime problems. SAPS has continued to intensify its Operation Shanela II campaign against violent and organised crime nationwide, and a 'Shanela III' relaunch some time between mid-2026 and mid-2027 appears likely. Nevertheless, Shanela has not been an unmitigated success, with its 'high-visibility, high-impact' style of policing causing irritation among ordinary people, while conviction rates are low and public suspicion of bribe-seeking, collusion and other forms of corruption among SAPS officers is increasing from an already high base.

Specialist international NGO the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC) continues to publish the Western Cape Gang Monitor (WCGM), its quarterly report on the gang violence centred on the Cape Flats. The WCGM conducts on-the-ground research into the dynamics of the gang situation in the area, and tracks the territorial disputes and shifting allegiances that have driven much of the recent unrest.

While official SAPS statistics confirm an easing of the 2025 surge, it is clear from both mainstream media reporting and from the WCGM that many of the underlying factors remain. Gangs are continuing to fragment, with some established players collapsing altogether when a leading figure is eliminated by opposition action or arrested by law enforcement. Newer groups are taking their place and asserting primacy over other potential successors, resulting in particularly significant episodes of violence in areas such as Manenberg, Mitchells Plain and Muizenberg.

The WCGM has also reported on the expansion of organised criminal activity in the area around Saldanha Bay, about 100km along the coast north of Cape Town. Saldanha Bay is South Africa's deepest harbour, and handles commercial, military and recreational traffic on a constant basis. Some of the expansion of gang activity there is believed to be related to efforts to become the 'trusted local partner' for international organised criminal gangs who have begun to use the bay's port facilities as alternative points of entry to Africa for cocaine and other drugs, given increased surveillance and enforcement efforts around more established trafficking ports such as Durban and Cape Town itself.

The escalation in gang conflict since the beginning of the 2020s has also had an indirect impact on more general criminal activity, particularly in Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Gauteng provinces. With weapons increasingly available (most thought to originate from current or former conflict zones elsewhere in southern Africa, including Angola, Mozambique and Namibia), and gang members more willing to use firearms in attacks and disputes, non-affiliated criminals are increasingly considering being armed a vital element of preparation.

Kidnapping and extortion

Kidnapping

Kidnapping remains a significant threat to security in South Africa, with incident rates remaining broadly static, even in the context of a consistent gradual decline in other violent offences throughout the country. In the final quarter of the 2025/26 statistical year (covering January-March 2026), 4,478 kidnappings were recorded by the SAPS, compared with 4,571 in the same period a year earlier. This decline of 2.0% is likely to represent natural variation rather than a sustained downward trend.

As is usually the case, this quarter saw more than half of all recorded kidnappings (54.8%) take place in Gauteng province, with all but three of the 30 police precincts recording the most kidnapping incidents being located in Gauteng.

Almost all kidnap incidents in South Africa are motivated by financial gain, although only about 5% result in the issuance of an immediate ransom demand. Carjackings and express kidnappings (where the victim is expected to transfer funds to their kidnappers via banking app or ATM withdrawals), are the most significant categories of offence, with local NGO the Institute of Security Studies suggesting that more than 80% of kidnapping incidents in Gauteng are express kidnappings, sometimes referred to as 'extended robberies'.

Various media organisations reported in March 2026 that shopping malls and supermarkets were a growing location for the targeting of victims of kidnapping, though there is as yet no publicly available data to support this, nor any comment from SAPS.

Notable incidents in 2026

- The Rt Rev. Victor Mnculwane, Bishop of Zululand, was abducted and robbed by armed men on 16 January, before being released unharmed. This is reportedly the second time that the bishop has been carjacked, and a number of church leaders have reported that clergy are being targeted for similar incidents across South Africa, being perceived as wealthy and soft targets.
- A TV chef was reported kidnapped in February 2026 and found unharmed three days later, but was later discovered to have staged the incident to buy time to leave the country in response to having been 'catfished' in an online romance scam.
- Steven Gruzdl, a prominent Jewish foreign-policy expert, disappeared following a meeting in Johannesburg on 27 March, and was found dead two days later, with five suspects arrested. Despite international reports suggesting the attack was anti-semitic in nature, both police and Jewish community organisations stressed that the incident appears to have been an express kidnapping, motivated by financial gain.
- Police in Gauteng arrested five members of an alleged kidnapping syndicate on 23 June, freeing two victims kidnapped in separate incidents the previous week, in the process.
- Three police officers were sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in June over the kidnapping and robbery of one Nigerian and two DR Congolese nationals in a bogus police operation in the Johannesburg suburbs in 2018.
- The vast majority of incidents target ordinary South Africans, though the display of signs of wealth may encourage opportunists to select an individual as a target.

Extortion

Meanwhile, extortion continues to affect businesses and ordinary people throughout South Africa (though again, the problem is generally worse in provinces and areas with established organised crime scenes, most notably Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Western Cape). Moreover, extortion campaigns are a key driver of express kidnappings and other financially motivated violent crimes.

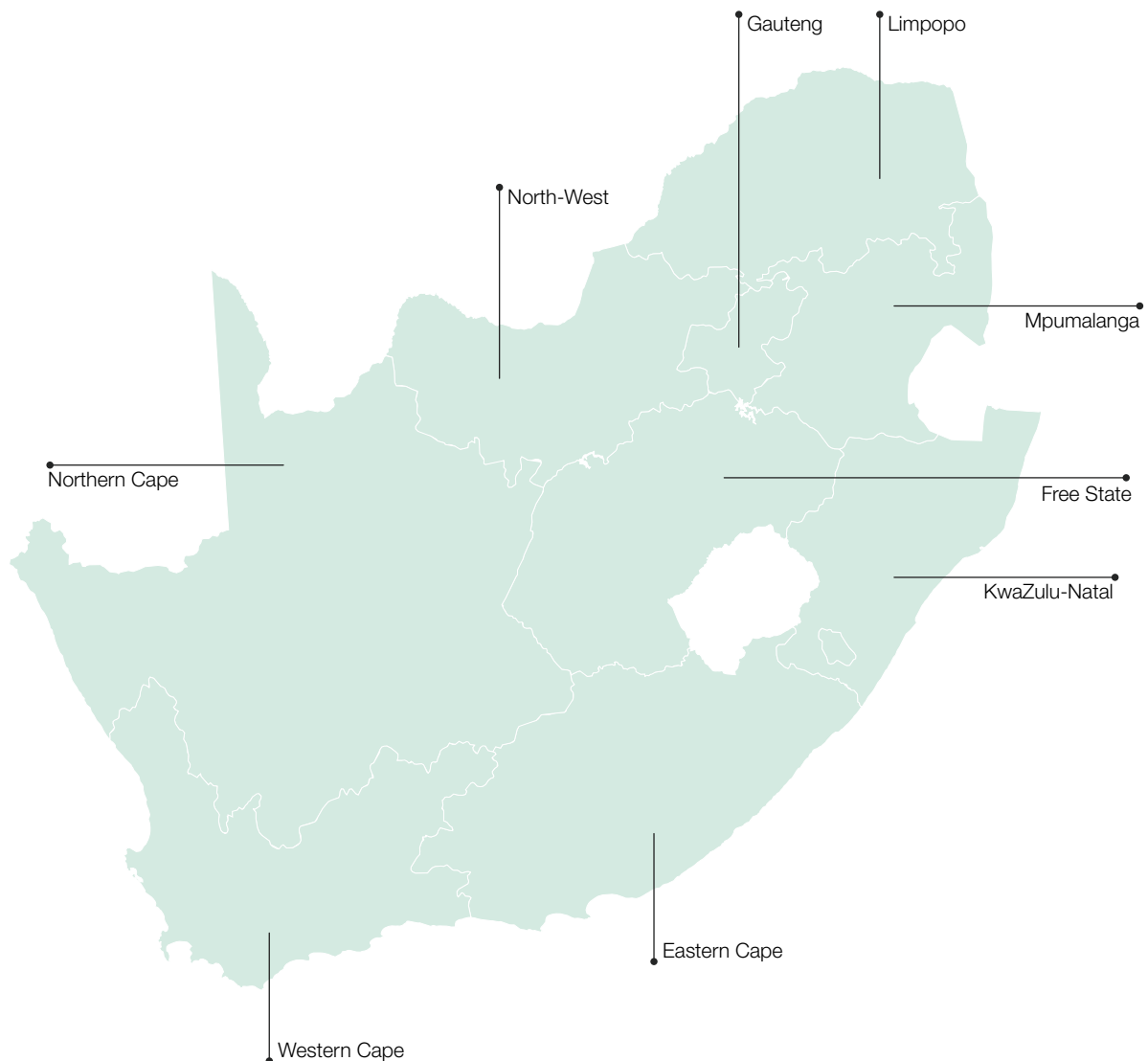
Extortion affects all levels of the economy, with small, cash-focused businesses such as spaza shops and taxis in lower-income areas targeted by low-level local gangs, while sophisticated syndicates can demand as much as 30% of public works or construction contracts. An emerging trend is the targeting of international mining operations for protection rackets, with extortion syndicates threatening kidnap or violence against workers or executives, as well as infrastructure and utility disruption, if compliance is not forthcoming.

Notable cases in 2026

- In April 2026, SAPS made seven arrests linked to a long-running campaign of extortion against Intercape, South Africa's largest inter-city bus operator. Incidents related to the campaign include the murder of a driver in 2022, a number of attacks with firearms and stones on buses in transit on highways, and assaults and robberies against passengers at rest stops. The seven were subsequently revealed to be the owners of taxi firms or leaders of taxi confederations.
- Another case involving a taxi boss came to court in May, with a mining company in Mpumalanga province alleging that a local taxi company owner and three co-accused had demanded more than ZAR2m (USD122,000) in protection money over several years.
- On 29 June a barber in Nyanga, Western Cape, was shot dead following an extortion attempt at his premises. The man is believed to have been foreign (as many barbershop operators in townships are), but local community leaders have stated that they do not believe the incident to be connected to the anti-immigrant protests, which have so far gained little traction in the Cape Flats compared with other areas.

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.

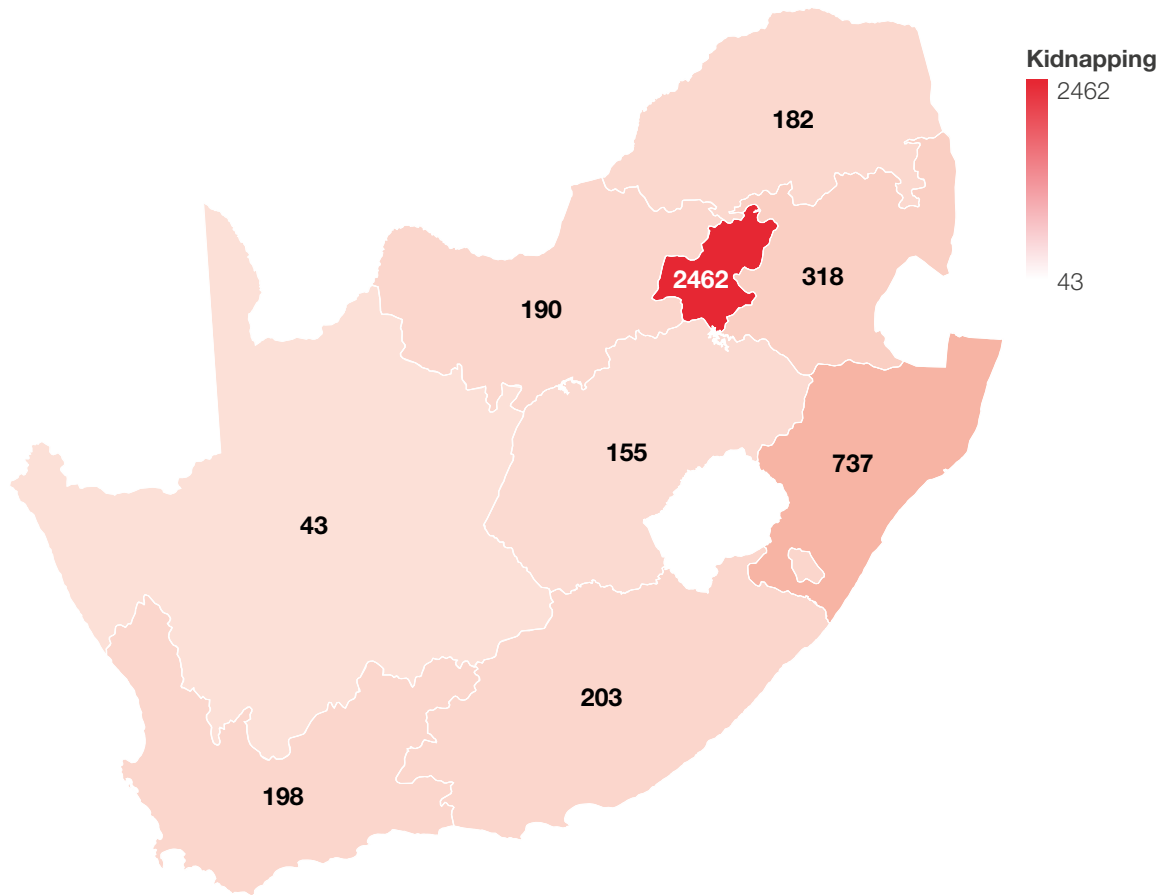


Statistics

- 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 2026



Source: South African Police Service





Principles of security

There are seven fundamental principles of security:



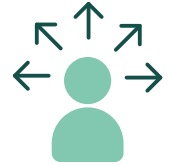
Layers of security



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.





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