



Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

Kaitohutohu Mātanga Pūtaiao Matua ki te Pirimia

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# Terms of Reference

## Evidence summary on minimising harm from and within gangs in Aotearoa

(DRAFT – NOT GOVERNMENT POLICY)

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### Background

Gangs have long been a flashpoint for the media, the public, and politicians, with the extent of harm caused by them often over-stated.<sup>1</sup> Against this backdrop, recent years have seen an increase in their association with international organised crime.<sup>2</sup> In 2019 at the Police Association Annual Conference, then Minister of Police, Stuart Nash, commented on the changing nature of gangs and gang formation, stating that they had evolved into “a more sophisticated criminal business enterprise.”<sup>3</sup> More recent anecdotal evidence corroborates this statement – in 2022 gang related criminal activity remains of concern and, there is a growing understanding that New Zealand gangs are forging larger global networks.<sup>4,5</sup>

A recent snapshot of New Zealand gang membership supports the idea that gang numbers have grown continuously since 2010 with figures from the National Gang List (NGL) estimating 7722 gang members in New Zealand as of April 2022,<sup>6</sup> although, this list is not designed as an accurate census of gang membership. Factors that lead to an individual being added to the NGL, such as wearing a patch, are much easier to verify than factors that lead to an individual being removed. While the NGL serves as a

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert, J. (2013). Patched the history of gangs in New Zealand. Auckland University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert, J. (2019). New Zealand: patched gangs, police, and political corruption. In Handbook of organised crime and politics (pp. 363–373).

<sup>3</sup> Nash, S. (2019, October 15). Police Association Annual Conference.

<sup>4</sup> Venuto, D. (2022, May). The Front Page: Inside New Zealand's fight against escalating gang violence. NZ Herald.

<sup>5</sup> Hill, R. (2022, July 21). New Zealand gangsters forging global networks, security expert warns. RNZ.

<sup>6</sup> Bellamy, P. (2022). New Zealand gang membership: A snapshot of recent trends.

helpful indicator, figures should be interpreted with caution.<sup>7,8</sup> That aside, the 2020 Corrections volume report shows that gang affiliated prisoners in New Zealand made up 32% of the sentenced prison population in 2020, an increase from 17% in 2010.<sup>9</sup>

When seeking to minimise harms associated with gangs in New Zealand the context within which gangs are formed and subsequently sustained needs to be understood. A 2021 study exploring the spatial risk factors associated with gang membership in New Zealand cites various complex and overlapping domains that influence gang membership including, individual characteristics, family factors, peer groups, schooling and truancy, and community conditions.<sup>10</sup> Pathways to gang disengagement and eventual exit are similarly complex where gang members are often presented with challenges such as employment difficulties, broken familial relationships, threats of violence and, mental health challenges.

A recent restricted report by New Zealand's Gang Intelligence Centre (GIC) carried out a review of international gang exit strategies.<sup>11</sup> The review highlighted strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats of each exit strategy. A second portion of work looking at factors which influence individuals to join gangs is pending. The work is set to be released in three separate products.

The analysis carried out by the GHIC will provide a helpful baseline for our work. We propose to complement this work by looking in more detail at the social contexts within which gangs form, the contexts within which gang exit strategies have been implemented and, New Zealand's history of interventions targeting criminal behaviour.<sup>12</sup>

### Aim of project:

This project seeks to provide a New Zealand focussed literature review to summarise:

- a) Contextual factors that influence individuals to join or leave a gang in New Zealand.
- b) The complex realities of gang membership in New Zealand. Distinguishing between gang membership, gang crime, anti-social and pro-social gang behaviours.
- c) The implications of gang membership on women, children and wider whānau, and the opportunities that these relationships present for positive interventions and early intervention.
- d) Present day gang control mechanisms.
- e) Contextual factors that are likely to impact the development and efficacy of an established *exit pathway strategy* in the New Zealand gang landscape.
- f) Contextual factors that are likely to impact the development and efficacy of an established *entry prevention strategy* in the New Zealand gang landscape.

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<sup>7</sup> Bellamy, P. (2022). New Zealand gang membership: A snapshot of recent trends.

<sup>8</sup> Woods, A. (2022, June). Gangs in Northland: Number of members on police list misleading - expert Jarrod Gilbert. New Zealand Herald.

<sup>9</sup> Corrections Volumes Report 2019-2020. (2020).

<sup>10</sup> Breetzke, G. D., Curtis-Ham, S., Gilbert, J., & Tibby, C. (2021). Gang Membership and Gang Crime in New Zealand: A National Study Identifying Spatial Risk Factors. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00938548211034200>

<sup>11</sup> Review of International Gang Exit Strategies Considerations for Disengagement in New Zealand. GIC/IR/20220701 (2022).

<sup>12</sup> Lampe, R. (2016). Youth Mentoring - Evidence Brief.

## Methodology

### 1. Review of national and international literature to understand

- The impact of gangs in New Zealand.
- Risk factors for individuals joining gangs<sup>13</sup>
- Factors that make individuals resilient to joining gangs.
- Factors that influence gang retention.
- Factors that disrupt disengagement processes.
- Structural factors that influence gang development and growth.
- Law and order mechanisms that have been employed to suppress gang activity and, an evidence-based assessment of outcomes.

### 2. Stakeholder engagement

- Understand what work has been previously done in New Zealand, shedding light on prior initiatives that have been implemented with the opportunity to gauge how effective previous strategies have been.
- Understand work that is underway at present and build on existing best practice.
- Develop a well-rounded appreciation for our unique New Zealand gang context. This includes exploring existing pro-social gang behaviours that might benefit from support and anti-social gang behaviours that present potential challenges to successful interventions.
- Understand the impact on whānau. What are the implications for partners, children, the whānau unit, and wider social structures, when an individual is a gang member?
- What opportunities do whānau present for supportive interventions?

### 3. Analysis of international exit strategies

- How would New Zealand's unique gang environment impact on their use?
- Considerations for application in New Zealand. Is gang disengagement and exit the only measure of successful intervention?
- What implications are there on the over-representation of Māori and Pacific Island communities in our gang communities?
- To what extent have international strategies focussed on the wider whānau, children, and communities?

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<sup>13</sup> Where risk factors vary according to characteristics such as age, this will be explored in greater detail in the final report, guided by the literature and expert input.

## Process

- Scope, objectives, and methodology to be finalised in collaboration with a diverse group of experts once PM has signed off the ToR and relevant Ministers have been briefed.
- Co-authors to draft the report with support from the OPMCSA and peer review from a wide group of experts and stakeholders including Iwi and Pacific communities.
- The report will be delivered to the Prime Minister and relevant Ministers and Ministries and later made public on the PMCSA website.

## Timeline

TBD once the size and scope of the project have been finalised, but definitely pre-election. Parts of the work could be delivered ahead of the full report if helpful to support other workstreams.