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Deserters, returning workers blamed for crime wave

URBAN crime in Mozambique is on the increase, with deserting soldiers and returning workers from Germany being blamed.

During the first six months of this year 4,512 crimes were registered in Maputo, up on 4,018 last year.

In retribution in August alone at least a dozen people were beaten and burned to death in the capital.

Students and other Maputo residents have blamed the Mozambicans who have returned from working in East Germany for the increased crime.

Since early 1990, some 16,000 Mozambicans have returned with many themselves victims of racial violence.

During President Joaquim Chissano's visit to Germany last week the government there pledged financial assistance to a project to help reintegrate these returnees into Mozambican society.

Other towns outside the capitals have also been hit by the recent increase in urban violence, notably Xai Xai and Xibuto in Gaza province.

In the central Mozambican town of Chimoio residents have blamed the crime wave on the increased availability of goods. "In the mid-1980s there was simply nothing for anyone to steal here," said an aid worker.

The relative increased prosperity of Mozambican cities is in stark contrast to the poverty of the growing numbers of war refugees flowing into overcrowded slums.

Tensions are exacerbated by the easy availability of weapons carried by soldiers who have deserted with their weapons.

The military is now attempting to control the flow of weapons inside Maputo, but officials admit it is difficult to exercise control outside the capital.

[Own correspondent]