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IcARUS Policy Brief

Fostering Youth Engagement for Juvenile Delinquency Prevention

> ***Welcome to the IcARUS Policy Briefs, where the project's partners present their key findings***
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> *These policy briefs are designed to provide political decision-makers at local, regional, national, and European levels with insights and recommendations from the EU-funded and Efus-led IcARUS project. They cover the five areas that were explored through the project and are of primary concern for crime prevention policy-makers and stakeholders, i.e., social innovation, juvenile delinquency, organised crime, public spaces, and radicalisation leading to violent extremism.*

Fostering Youth Engagement for Juvenile Delinquency Prevention

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency is not a new phenomenon; it has consistently been at the forefront of public attention and a concern for local, regional and national authorities across Europe. Over the years, various trends and theories have emerged, aiming to understand its root causes and develop initiatives to prevent youth involvement in crime and delinquency. While rehabilitation and correctional approaches were the dominant methods for addressing juvenile delinquency up until the 1970s, there has since been a growing emphasis on prevention strategies.[1] These strategies focus on early intervention, community engagement and preventing offending before it occurs.

The IcARUS research has shown that the last twenty years have seen throughout Europe unprecedented declines in juvenile crime and offending, as well as in the number of young people engaging in risky behaviours – i.e., drinking, consuming drugs and smoking. This is particularly the case in European countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK.[2] This decline may be a product of better preventive interventions including diversion from the criminal justice system and multi-agency focus on welfare.[3]

However, juvenile delinquency remains a phenomenon that is complex and difficult to understand, and which attracts a disproportionate amount of political and media attention compared to other types of delinquency. It is therefore imperative not to stigmatise young people, as they are consistently the focus of media discourse and (some) citizens'

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[1] Howell, J. C. (2008). Preventing and Reducing Juvenile Delinquency: A comprehensive framework.
[2] Berghuis, B., & De Waard, J. (2017). Declining juvenile crime – explanations for the international downturn, 43(1); Fernandez-Molina, E. and Bartolomé Gutierrez, R. (2020). Juvenile crime drop: What is happening with youth in Spain and why?, European Journal of Criminology, 17(3), 306-331
[3] McAra, L. & McVie, S. (2018). *Transformations in youth crime and justice across Europe*, in Goldson, B. (ed.) Juvenile Justice in Europe, Routledge.

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concerns about (in)security. As the French Forum for Urban Security's *Livre blanc pour la sécurité des territoires – prévention, sanction, cohésion sociale* (2022) ("White paper on local security – prevention, sanction, social cohesion") reminds us, it is important to recognise that only a small fraction of European youths engage in delinquent behaviour.[4]

The prevention of juvenile delinquency

Juvenile delinquency remains difficult to define as many European countries interpret differently the concept of "juvenile" or "youth" depending on their respective cultural, social and legal perspective. Without attempting to formulate a standard definition, the IcARUS project suggests defining the prevention of juvenile delinquency as "*proactive or deliberate interventions that seek to prevent or reduce harm that arises from the consequence of juvenile offending and antisocial behaviour*" (those under the age of 18[5]).

As per the World Health Organisation (WHO), youth violence "*refers to violence that occurs among individuals aged 10-29 years who are unrelated and who may or may not know each other.*" It requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the "*social determinants of violence*", such as income inequality, rapid demographic and social change, and low levels of social protection.[6]

Problem context

This policy brief examines the prevention of juvenile delinquency with a focus on preventive interventions with youth engagement at their core. Key questions include: How to foster positive relationships between police and youngsters in order to promote mutual understanding and reduce anti-social-behaviour?[7] How to foster positive identity among young people? How to provide an alternative and viable solution to the so-called 'gang lifestyle' that provides short-term benefits such as money and material goods?[8] By putting young people at the heart, this brief underscores the importance of community involvement, in particular the youth, in designing solutions that promote a sense of ownership and active participation.

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[4] Forum français pour la sécurité urbaine (FFSU) (2022), *Livre blanc pour la sécurité des territoires – prévention, sanction, cohésion sociale* (only in French), p.63.
[5] IcARUS (2022). Report Describing the State of the Art and Cross Analysis of the Focus Areas, University of Leeds, p.53.
[6] WHO (2023). Factsheet on youth violence.
[7] IcARUS (2022). Report Describing The Results From The Workshop For Assessing Requirements, CAMINO, p. 18
[8] Nordic Safe Cities (2024). Democracy Spotlight #1 Combatting Youth Crime in the Nordics.

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Juvenile delinquency is usually associated with alcohol and drug abuse, antisocial behaviour, truancy, and dropping out of school.[9] Recent data in Swedish cities show that suspects of gang violence including manslaughter, murder and deadly assault are getting younger.[10] Preventing juvenile delinquency is further complicated due to its intersection with various policy areas and public services. These include, but are not limited to, municipal offices for security, youth, schools and/or social services, local police, Prisoners Advice services, religious organisations, youth committees, and relevant NGOs.

The research conducted on European local and regional authorities' crime prevention policies and initiatives over the past 20-30 years shows that many have implemented prevention measures and activities targeting young people and children, an area they consider a priority in their urban security strategies.[11] Tailored interventions for at-risk individuals and young offenders are common. Many cities implement primary prevention initiatives in schools, such as training on cyberbullying, and use mediators in public spaces or schools. Several cities have adopted approaches that focus on some neighbourhoods in particular, which they implement through steering committees that include representatives of various public services and stakeholders.[12] In Lisbon, for example, the community policing model used in deprived neighbourhoods where juvenile delinquency is prevalent is based on positive interactions between officers and young residents, rather than on a punitive model. It is a successful example of a municipality-led initiative based on building a sense of ownership among young people and involving them in the co-development of solutions.

Recommendations

Implementing the following recommendations requires a **commitment to understanding and addressing the root causes** of youth delinquency, as well as a dedication to fostering an inclusive, safe and supportive environment.

- **Advocate prevention strategies that improve relationships** between young people, their local community and police officers.

- **Engage young people in identifying and developing solutions** to problems in their local community and promote a sense of ownership and active participation. This will also help them gain useful knowledge and life skills (particularly for those excluded from mainstream education).

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[9] IcARUS (2022). Factsheet #8 Spotlight on Preventing Juvenile Delinquency. University of Leeds.
[10] Sunnemark, V (2023). 'How gang violence took hold of Sweden – in five charts', The Guardian.
[11] IcARUS (2022). Report Describing The Results From The Workshop For Assessing Requirements, CAMINO, p. 13.
[12] IcARUS (2021). The Changing Face of Urban Security Research: A Review of Accumulated Learning, University of Leeds

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- **Implement actions to address violence and insecurity:** Take actions aimed at reducing young people's relationship with violence (loyalty and a certain form of masculinity) and feelings of insecurity, while also addressing gender. Indeed, juvenile delinquency has historically almost exclusively focused on the behaviour of boys and young men, without any gender consideration

- **Invest in primary and secondary resilience-building programmes**: Allocate resources to enhance protective factors and foster resilience among children and adolescents, addressing individual, familial and community levels.[13]

- **Improve coordination by fostering a collective impact approach** involving different municipal sectors (health, education, social services), police, the judiciary system and local stakeholders (NGOs).[14]

- **Encourage data collection from different actors operating in the prevention of juvenile delinquency to help co-design interventions.** This can be supported by a digital dashboard that maps out data relevant to the juvenile delinquency problem.

- **Invest in evaluating the impact of innovative strategies and share lessons learned within organisations and stakeholders**. Juvenile delinquency requires a multi-agency approach that can benefit from the lessons learned and successes they have built together in a local community. In this way, a promising practice can be further developed through a cycle of constant improvement.
    - It is important to stress that many well-intentioned programmes and initiatives that seek to reduce juvenile crime can have unintended consequences, particularly given the negative association of contact with criminal justice and future offending (labelling and net-widening). Hence, the need for evaluations to explore the impacts (both intended and unintended) over time.[15]

- **Bridge the gap between practitioners, policy makers and academia.** Academic research is mainly focused on understanding the root causes of juvenile delinquency and the mechanisms and pathways into criminal behaviour. Academic findings must be translated into practical, feasible and concrete measures as part of an overall policy.

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[13] Glowacz F., Born M. (2015), Away from delinquency and crime: Resilience and protective factors, in J. Morizot and L. Kazemian (eds.) The Development of Criminal and Antisocial Behavior , Springer International Publishing, 2015.
[14] Urban Agenda for the European Union (2021), Action 5, Report on the Collective Impact model and its application in European Cities with a special focus on the topic of urban security and social cohesion.
[15] Examples from the US include the Cambridge-Sommerville Youth Study and the 'Scared Straight' programme.

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How the recommendations can be implemented in practice

In practice: Jovem Design Lisboa (JDL), City of Lisbon (Portugal)

Jovem Design Lisboa (JDL] provides a design-oriented approach to engage young people in identifying and developing solutions to problems in their local community and improve their relationships with their local community and police. The scheme targets young people aged 11–19 years that are identified as "at risk of offending", or are excluded from school, and/or live in communities experiencing feelings of insecurity. The municipality coordinates a 12-week programme where individual teams of young people meet to identify problems in their local area and design solutions. The young people enrolled in the scheme present their solutions to a panel of judges during a high-profile showcase event.
> More information on
https://icarus-site.dev.loba.com/tools-insights/icarus-tools/lisbon-toolkit/

In practice: Sbocciamo Torino, City of Turin (Italy)

The Turin Tool Sbocciamo Torino ("let Turin bloom") is a multi-stakeholder governance network that deliberates and co-produces interventions aimed at preventing or solving juvenile delinquency issues in the city of Turin. The network includes a committee composed of local stakeholders who design interventions based on data provided through a digital dashboard (Urban Data Platform). The objective of this scheme is to build long term sustainable relationships between the different relevant stakeholders and help the City Council to design actions to prevent and address juvenile delinquency.

> More information on
https://icarus-site.dev.loba.com/tools-insights/icarus-tools/turin-toolkit/

In practice: The Calm Street project (or 'Lugna Gatan' in Swedish), City of Stockholm (Sweden)

The Lugna Gatan project was first developed in 1995 by the Fryshuset Youth Centre in close cooperation with local communities, social authorities, the police and political decision-makers in order to counteract violence and vandalism in the streets and in public in the city of Stockholm. It brings together unemployed people aged between 20 and 30 who are trained to prevent problems caused by (other) young people who loiter in public spaces and around subway and bus stops. Rather than traditional security guards, the trainees are able to act as role models for young troublemakers.

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Lugna Gatan has been successful not only in creating better and safer environments in local communities, but also in creating meaningful employment for young people who might otherwise lack opportunities.

In practice: ORPHEUS, City of Mechelen (Belgium)

Research shows that it is essential for young people to have a solid base within the community where they feel they belong and have a voice. The absence of such a foundation can be a risk factor for violent extremism. In Mechelen, the ORPHEUS model promotes an innovative, grassroots and well-being-oriented approach to prevention. Even though the scheme was established to help young people become more resilient to violent extremist narratives, its principles and modus operandi can be used to prevent juvenile delinquency. It is based on a co-creation approach between young people and youth workers / educators, promoting the agency of young people as equal citizens in democratic societies and supporting them to be part of the solution. ORPHEUS targets the interplay of risk factors for violent extremism, always with a well-being perspective in mind, by seeking to strengthen positive networks for young people, offer legitimate channels to young people for the public expression of their grievances, and promote positive alternatives to violent extremist narratives.

> More information on https://www.orpheusproject.eu/en/home

In practice: The BeSecure-FeelSecure (BSFS) Project, City of Piraeus, (Greece)

The BeSecure-FeelSecure European project (2019-2023) aimed to promote urban security in the city of Piraeus (Greece) through a multistakeholder approach, with a particular focus on youth. One of the areas of the project was physical and cyber bullying. The municipality and their partners Panteion University, Hellenic Police and Space Hellas organised awareness sessions in four local high schools on the type of threats young people are exposed to in the digital space. These sessions gathered in total 680 students. They were prepared together with the municipal Directorate of Secondary Education, the schools' governing committees, and parents' and guardians' associations.

> More information on https://www.bsfs-piraeus.eu/news/students-awareness-sessions/

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Conclusion

Juvenile delinquency remains a persistent issue; to address it effectively requires a multifaceted approach. This policy brief has stressed the importance of defining interventions that promote local cooperation and youth engagement, and create positive youth lifestyles and horizons.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to assess how criminal networks take advantage and exploit vulnerable youths to involve them in illicit businesses. However, understanding how these criminal networks operate and their strategies for recruiting vulnerable young people is essential for developing effective prevention measures.[16] It is also important to take into account the increasing digitisation of young people's lives and the long-term consequences of the Covid pandemic, as well as the role of technology and social media in juvenile delinquency.[17]

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[16] IcARUS (2022). Factsheet #8 Spotlight on Preventing Juvenile Delinquency. University of Leeds.
[17] IcARUS (2022). Report describing the inventory of practices, tools and lessons learned. University of Leeds.

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City of Nice	Lisbon Municipal Police - Lisbon Municipality (LMP - CML)	Local Police of Turin (PLTO)	makesense	Camino
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The IcARUS project (Innovative AppRoaches to Urban Security) aims to rethink, redesign and adapt existing tools and methods to help local security actors anticipate and better respond to urban security challenges. This factsheet is based on the IcARUS Review of Accumulated Learning and cross-analysis of urban security.

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