



International Conference on “Crime prevention and resocialization of children in contact with the criminal justice system”.

28th and 29th of November 2016

Santiago de Chile

Conclusions and recommendations

Crime prevention

1. Crime prevention policies and laws need to be firmly grounded on a children rights-based approach, including the paramount consideration of the best interests of the child
2. Crime prevention policies and laws needs to reduce violence against children (when they are offenders and when they are victims or witnesses of crime), with specific strategies for them.
3. Crime prevention policies and programs need to be designed with a focus on the needs, rights and characteristics of children. That implies that these interventions should consider young offenders as children first and offenders second.
4. A comprehensive approach to crime prevention looks at the different levels of intervention: primary: universal rights, secondary: focus on children and families at risk; tertiary: programs and interventions that guarantee effective reintegration.
5. A comprehensive approach implies avoiding a merely “police-based” model of social crime prevention, which results insufficient and ineffective without a wider framework of action. Police detention should be always considered as measure of last resort and for the shortest period of time.
6. Policies and laws in crime prevention need to be data and evidence-based and constantly subject to objective monitoring and evaluation.
7. It is fundamental to operate with an inter-sectoral vision (education, health, labour training, police, justice), including a responsible organ or authority with the legal competence to require cooperation from other agencies.

8. Successful policies of crime prevention operate along children's families and communities, including schools and cities.
9. Positive crime prevention policies and program include children's participation (and their communities) through strategies and mechanisms where children, their families and communities can shape a culture of self-care and dignity.
10. Early assessment and intervention may be playing a positive role within crime prevention programs and policies. Nonetheless, it is important to pay attention to the eventual negative impacts of risk-based approaches (such as social stigmatization and labelling by social services).
11. While specific crime prevention policies and program are essential, these need to be firmly grounded within comprehensive child protection systems, allowing a permanent interaction between primary and secondary prevention.

Reintegration of children in contact with criminal justice systems

1. Available validated research suggests that hard-hitting criminal policies against children are ineffective in securing their reintegration. In particular, lowering of the age of criminal responsibility and widespread use of sanctions which imply deprivation of liberty.
2. Available research also indicates that early contact with formal juvenile justice systems – particularly those implying deprivation of liberty- have a negative impact on crime-trajectories in children. In the clear majority of cases, diversion seems to me more effective than formal prosecution in consolidating desistance from crime.
3. To be effective, nonetheless, diversion requires the existence of basic institutional and programmatic components, such as: a) strong child-protection systems in the community and; b) legal alternatives to allow the police, prosecutors and judges to make use of alternatives to formal criminal proceedings (such as restorative justice models).
4. If sentenced, young offenders need to have access to comprehensive and effective reintegration programs, designed, administered and evaluated by both judges and specialized government agencies.
5. The effectiveness of reintegration programs is strongly associated with both, the physical context where they take place and the quality of intervention. On the one hand, deprivation of liberty has a negative impact on both children's development and recidivism. On the other hand, reintegration programs require focusing on strengthening the key factors that have a positive impact on desistance: strong family ties, sense of belonging, school retention, positive parenting and peer's interaction, life projects, among others.
6. Children need to be considered as key agents within the design and implementation of reintegration programs and not as merely beneficiaries of social intervention. Such approach requires the development of innovative methodologies oriented towards the strengthening of children's sense of dignity and respect.