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NOTE

from:	Presidency
to:	Multidisciplinary Group on Organised Crime
Subject:	2009 European Crime Prevention Network Best Practice Conference and European Crime Prevention Award - Conclusions

Delegations will find in annex the Conclusions, as adopted by the EUCPN Board on 11 December 2009, from the 2009 European Crime Prevention Network Best Practice Conference, including the European Crime Prevention Award that has taken place in Stockholm on 9 and 10 December 2009.

**Conclusions from the 2009 European Crime Prevention Network Best Practice Conference,
including the European Crime Prevention Award**

*Preventing Crime and Victimisation among Children and Young People. Current and future
challenges – school, cyberspace and recruitment to criminal groups*

Stockholm, 9–10 December 2009

Introduction

Within the framework of the European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) an annual best practice conference is organised by the Presidency of the European Union. The conference takes place during the last quarter of each year. The annual European Crime Prevention Award (ECPA), also organised by the current chair of the EUCPN, is awarded during the conference, and usually all the participating projects are showcased and discussed. The rules and guidelines developed by the EUCPN and adopted in 2009 in order to streamline these events, have been applied.

The 2009 Best Practice Conference, including the ECPA ceremony, was organised by the Swedish Presidency, in close collaboration with the EUCPN and with co-funding from the European Commission ISEC programme, on 9–10 December in Stockholm, Sweden. Two of the national representatives participated as moderators for the workshops, as did two of the EUCPN contact points (DE, DK, ES and HU) and in addition the EUCPN Research Officer (Ireen Friedrich of AT) as well as the UK national representative contributed to developing the conclusions of the conference. 17 Member States had organised national selection procedures to nominate each one project for participation in the European Crime Prevention Award. In addition, 15 more projects had been submitted for consideration during the conference.

The title and theme of the conference was *Preventing Crime and Victimisation among Children and Young People. Current and future challenges – school, cyberspace and recruitment to criminal groups*. The event brought together about 200 policy-makers, practitioners and researchers from 24 Member States, candidate countries, EU bodies and organisations.

The aim of the conference was twofold: to provide a platform for networking for those active in the field in the EU and to share knowledge and experience. The Rules of Procedure for the Best Practice Conferences include the obligation to draw conclusions from the conference; these should be presented to the EUCPN Board in order for it to develop recommendations.

The substance of the conference consisted of plenary presentations by internationally acknowledged scholars such as Professors Friedrich Lösel, David Farrington and Sonia Livingstone as well as Dr. Maria Ttofi, of insights presented by representatives of international organisations active in the field, such as the Observatory of International Juvenile Justice and the International Centre for Crime Prevention. The European Commission contributed with their views on crime prevention during the last decade and a half and in the future. The 32 submitted crime prevention projects were all presented during the Conference and most of them were discussed in the workshops.

On the basis of the rich vein of experiences and insights presented at the conference, a set of conclusions has been formulated. The conclusions were presented to the EUCPN Board at its meeting on 11 December. The Board unanimously adopted these conclusions from the 2009 Best Practice Conference.

Preventing crime and victimisation among children and young people in general

To be successful in a long-term perspective, work to prevent and combat crime and its consequences must always maintain a special focus on children and young people. Preventive approaches should pay specific attention to the actors and circumstances that influence the risks of crime and victimisation among children and young people, as well as to the actors that could potentially prevent crime and victimisation.

The established, research-based, knowledge on early risks and protective factors should be used systematically in the design and delivery of preventive strategies and measures. Attention should be paid to evaluation results that point to successful projects or practices as well as practices that are potentially harmful, i.e. that increase the risk of criminal involvement or victimisation.

Preventive approaches should acknowledge the need for early intervention for a limited number of high-risk children, to prevent the onset of severe, long-term criminal careers and victimisation at individual level. Parents or other guardians should be identified as key actors in this work, particularly in relation to solutions based on early prevention measures for such high-risk children and youth.

Preventive approaches should also address the wider group of lower-risk children and youth in order to also prevent less severe and shorter-term experiences of crime and victimisation.

The views and experiences of children and young people themselves should be taken into consideration when designing and delivering preventive approaches and measures, in order to ensure that they are attractive to them.

Preventing children and young people from experiencing crime and victimisation has significant short and long-term economic benefits.

When working to prevent crime and victimisation among children and young people it is essential to consider the need for – and the possibilities associated with – approaches and measures focused on schools, cyberspace and the issue of recruitment to criminal groups.

The plenary speakers and several of the projects presented also revealed experiences of, and insights into, other relevant points of departure for preventing crime and victimisation among children and young people. Research and experience of different practices indicate several important innovations, from knowledge concerning how discrimination can contribute to social exclusion and radicalisation, to approaches in which computer games are used to increase understanding of the causes of crime.

Preventing crime and victimisation among children and young people in school

The fact that in principle all children and young people in the Member States attend school for several hours at least five days a week over a long period in their lives makes schools a unique arena for the delivery of preventive measures focused on children and youth. This suggests that schools could benefit from multi-partnership relations and multi-level approaches aimed at delivering preventive initiatives.

Preventive action in school may address both current problems of crime and victimisation among children and young people and risk factors for future experiences of crime and victimisation within these groups. Teachers, other school staff and parents all often have important roles to play.

Many projects showcased at the conference illustrated the variety of promising preventive measures that have been introduced in schools across Europe, ranging from general programmes to prevent bullying to actions targeting pupils specifically at risk of dropping out of school.

Note should be taken of research findings indicating that the risk factors linked to schools include early educational failure, weak levels of attachment to school, dropping out of school and a generally poor school environment, while protective factors include educational success, being motivated to learn and a positive social climate. A recurrent theme at the conference was the need for respect for and effective communication with pupils.

Schools are frequently the scene of bullying and minor offences, and on rare occasions also of serious violent crime. One research-based experience that needs to be noted is that the risk of acts of serious violence in schools can be greatly reduced by introducing effective measures to counteract the less serious, everyday problems experienced in the school environment, such as bullying.

It should be taken into account that the best available empirical research shows that systematic school-based programmes are effective in reducing both the number of pupils who engage in bullying and the number who fall victim to it. The intensity and duration of implemented interventions are important. Note should also be taken of findings indicating a high degree of effectiveness for measures taken as part of the large-scale testing in Finland of the anti-bullying programme KiVa, winner of the European Crime Prevention Award 2009.

The possibilities of implementing other types of school-based programmes also need to be considered, including across-the-board programmes focused on the entire student body, and others focused more selectively on pupils with more specific, identifiable needs. Both types of programme delivery can be employed to provide measures intended, for example, to counteract the effects of negative social influences such as ‘social exaggeration’, so as to prevent pupils from dropping out of school and improve the cognitive, social and emotional abilities of children and young people.

Preventing crime and victimisation among children in cyberspace

The risks that children and young people are exposed to on the internet and through their use of other modern communication technologies, and which call for preventive measures, include cyber-bullying, harassment and sexual grooming by adults.

Research findings indicate high levels of experiences of this kind among children and young people, and also a high prevalence of online risk behaviour, such as giving out personal information, and sometimes also pictures of oneself, to strangers. One essential point of departure for preventive efforts against cyber-bullying, online grooming and other forms of crime and victimisation in these arenas, is that action has to be taken to focus sufficient attention on, and to raise levels of awareness about, these phenomena – among children and young people, among teachers and among parents.

Several projects presented at the conference demonstrated innovative measures used across Europe intended to raise the awareness of the risk of victimisation in cyberspace, and to educate young people, parents and teachers on how to manage the risks. Examples of methods used are peer education to prevent cyber-bullying and introducing a telephone helpline for people victimised in cyberspace.

One important ingredient in these prevention efforts is the provision of education on internet safety as a means of empowering children and young people, by providing them with the knowledge and tools they need to assume control of their communication with other people. Such programmes should start early and should be adapted to age differences in both learning styles and communication behaviour. Research has indicated that educational programmes can have a positive impact on the attitudes of children and young people towards a range of online risk behaviour.

One aim that should be considered is to integrate information on the safe use of the internet and of mobile communication technologies into schoolwork focusing on issues such as relationships, sexuality, bullying, harassment and sexual abuse. Note should also be taken of the need to make parents aware of the risks associated with children's use of the internet and other communication technologies, and also of how children may be manipulated into becoming an accomplice, for example, in their exposure to sexual exploitation.

Companies providing internet-based services should be encouraged to provide clear safety messages and children in particular should be encouraged not to post personal contact information. Safety tools should be made available to empower children and young people to retain control over their communications, including advice on how to deal with those who abuse various services, together with functions to enable users to report abuse, and also to block abusers.

Establishing and making people aware of an active police presence on the internet can offer crime prevention benefits. Visible internet community policing can deter potential adult offenders and provides a new method of contact between the police and young people. A visible police presence in internet communities may also have symbolic value, showing that the internet is not in fact a 'free zone'.

Preventing Recruitment to Criminal Groups

Work to prevent the establishment and combat the activities of criminal groups among adults must be a cornerstone of efforts to prevent youth recruitment to such criminal groups.

Attention should be paid to research findings showing that children and young people who demonstrate early signs of various behavioural problems and who become involved in crime and drug misuse at young ages run a relatively high risk of developing persistent criminality, which may include involvement in criminal groups.

The conference highlighted a number of projects showing some of the creative measures taken in Europe to reach groups of high-risk youth and channel preventive action to them, using measures ranging from leisure activities such as football to behavioural treatment for youths arrested for drug offences.

Note should be taken of well-established research findings showing that early parent- and family-based interventions can successfully reduce present and future behavioural problems, including delinquency and more serious crime. It is also important to recognise the potential of family-based and multi-modal programmes for older high-risk children and youth. Key actors in detecting and preventing the risk of recruitment to criminal groups therefore include parents, teachers and professionals in the behavioural care and treatment sectors, as well as the police.

Attention should also be paid to the possibility of establishing organised activities after school hours for children and young people living in socially deprived areas, engaging various resources and professional and voluntary actors in the community. Additionally, there is a need to support young people to help them leave criminal groups or other dangerous groups.

Note should be taken of the research findings concluding that harsh deterrence-based responses have not shown themselves to be effective in reducing youth criminality, and that ‘scared-straight’ approaches may increase the risk of continued delinquency.

The need, in extreme cases, to institutionalise children and young people who may present a danger to themselves and others must be balanced against the apparent risks of negative side effects. There is evidence that provision of treatment may be less effective inside than outside institutions.

Note should be taken of the fact that children and young people in general, and the members of risk groups in particular, have a greater need for immediate response than adults. Consideration should also be given to the possibility of using arenas and techniques that children and young people themselves find attractive, such as leisure centres and sports activities.