



Fifteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice



Abu Dhabi, 25–30 April 2026

Distr.: General
14 November 2025

Original: English

Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

**Advancing innovative and evidence-based crime
prevention strategies towards social, economic and
environmental development**

Workshop 1. Building resilient societies, with a focus on protecting women, children and youth: fostering engagement, education and the culture of lawfulness**

Background paper prepared by the Secretariat

Summary

The present background paper explores resilience-oriented and inclusive whole-of-society approaches to crime prevention and criminal justice, grounded in the meaningful participation of women, children and youth as essential agents of change in building peaceful, just and resilient societies.

Resilience is conceptualized as a multidimensional process that addresses structural drivers of inequality while strengthening protective factors at the individual, family and community levels, with a focus on trauma-informed care, restorative justice and community-based interventions that are reinforced by disaggregated data, tailored support services and cross-sector collaboration. The meaningful participation of women, children and youth is underlined as both a right and a strategic imperative, enabling them to co-create more effective and sustainable justice solutions, enhance institutional legitimacy through trust-building and further long-term reintegration and crime prevention efforts. The paper emphasizes the importance of embedding participatory, resilience-based approaches into policy and practice in order to address the root causes of crime and achieve sustainable justice outcomes.

* [A/CONF.241/1](#).

** The Secretariat wishes to express its appreciation to the institutes of the United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme network, in particular the Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, for assisting in the preparation and organization of the workshop.



I. Introduction

1. Women, children¹ and youth disproportionately experience violence, discrimination and other forms of victimization. Those experiences undermine individual, family and community well-being and are exacerbated by insufficient pathways for such groups to seek recourse to vindicate their rights. Despite their lived experiences, women, children and youth are frequently overlooked as key partners in designing effective justice solutions. Structural barriers and limited investment often hinder their capacity to influence policymaking. They also frequently lack access to psychosocial support that addresses victimization and trauma, which can have consequences that could be linked to, or contribute to the perpetuation of, cycles of crime and violence.

2. States Members of the United Nations, in adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 interconnected Sustainable Development Goals (General Assembly resolution 70/1), committed to pursuing resilience by building peaceful, just and inclusive societies to ensure that no one is left behind. To do so, crime prevention and criminal justice measures should be designed and implemented through a gender-responsive, child-sensitive and rights-based approach, ensuring that they are effective, equitable and protective of all, including women, children and youth.

3. Within the United Nations, resilience is a process-oriented conceptual framework to identify multidimensional risks that disrupt societies and systems, such as in political, socioeconomic and environmental contexts, and to devise strategies to address these risks through a multi-stakeholder and systemic approach.² A core principle guiding the implementation of resilience strategies is the prioritization of members of society most at risk and in vulnerable situations.³ In the context of crime prevention, resilience-oriented practices adopt a people-centred and prevention-focused approach at the individual, family and community levels, fostering personal agency, capacity-building and human development.

4. Gender and human rights dimensions of crime are critical to understanding its root causes, consequences and responses. It is therefore important to consider the distinct experiences and needs of those affected, which are shaped by intersecting factors such as age, gender, disability and ethnicity, when developing and implementing crime prevention and criminal justice measures. In this context, women, children and youth should not be treated as passive recipients of protection and services, but rather as active agents in prevention strategies, policy development and justice processes.

5. Many of the mandates, policies, practices and guidelines that support meaningful participation and resilience-based approaches to crime prevention are found in international law and the United Nations standards and norms on crime prevention and criminal justice, as noted throughout the present background paper.

6. Drawing on the regional youth consultations and the regional preparatory meetings, workshop 1 of the Fifteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice will explore resilience-based policies, practices and measures for crime prevention strategies and criminal justice reform that ensure the engagement and meaningful participation of women, children and youth, and that embrace a whole-of-society approach, in order to build peaceful, just and resilient societies. It also builds on the Kyoto Declaration on Advancing Crime Prevention, Criminal Justice and the Rule of Law: Towards the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 76/181, annex), which

¹ Children are defined as human beings under the age of 18 years, in accordance with article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1577, No. 27531).

² United Nations, *UN Common Guidance on Helping Build Resilient Societies* (New York, 2020), pp. 33 and 34.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

emphasizes the importance of fostering a culture of lawfulness; mainstreaming a gender perspective into crime prevention policies and criminal justice systems, coupled with the removal of impediments to women's empowerment in law enforcement and other criminal justice institutions; addressing the needs and protecting the rights of children and youth; and empowering youth to become active agents of change in their communities to support crime prevention efforts.

7. For the purposes of the workshop, the building of resilient societies in the context of crime prevention could be envisioned through an approach that: (a) proactively identifies the root causes of crime and victimization at the national and local levels; (b) provides women, children and youth with support through comprehensive governmental and psychosocial services, grounded in community partnerships and a whole-of-society approach; and (c) involves partnering with women, children and youth as agents of peace and change, including through their meaningful participation in policymaking against crime. When such approaches are implemented through inclusive processes that foster agency and the participation of marginalized and at-risk individuals, societies that are resilient to crime and victimization can be achieved.

II. Crime prevention and criminal justice in relation to women, children and youth as a foundation for resilient societies

A. Identifying situations of vulnerability to crime and victimization

8. Crime is a recurrent challenge that has wide-ranging and persistent impacts on society and human development. Crime prevention is a resilience-building strategy that should be grounded in strengths-oriented approaches that generate protective factors, reduce exposure to harm and promote recovery, dignity and reintegration.⁴ Women, children and youth should feature prominently in resilience-based approaches to crime prevention because they face vulnerabilities to victimization and involvement with crime in many specific contexts and play an important role as active agents of change. Therefore, they should be accorded particular attention in the context of crime prevention policies and practices, especially in relation to rehabilitation and reintegration measures to address criminal conduct, protection measures to address their status as victims or, in many cases, both types of measures.

9. Resilience-oriented psychosocial support measures should be aimed at preventing crime and victimization before they occur. To comprehensively identify and understand potential vulnerabilities, Member States should adequately fund, support and prioritize the collection of disaggregated crime statistics and the implementation of crime-victim surveys, focusing in particular on the impacts on women, children and youth.

10. To prevent crime, its root causes must be understood. Criminology helps to understand pathways into crime, painting a picture of the complex root causes based on macro- and micro-level factors, including how individuals are impacted by their relationships with family, peers and social institutions, and how adverse experiences – including poverty, discrimination, stigmatization, abuse and other trauma – can become criminogenic factors, particularly when compounded by exclusion and limited access to protective environments.

11. Addressing the specific contexts in which women, children and youth experience marginalization and vulnerabilities is key to preventing victimization. They face vulnerabilities in relation to victimization through sexual abuse, human trafficking, cybercrime (including cyberbullying and online gender-based violence), recruitment and association with armed and criminal groups, including those designated as terrorist groups, and other forms of exploitation. Domestic violence is

⁴ *Handbook on the Crime Prevention Guidelines: Making Them Work*, Criminal Justice Handbook Series (United Nations publication, 2010), pp. 9 and 10.

experienced by women, children and youth, and women with children may feel obligated to endure such violence because of psychological manipulation, the need to protect and raise children or siblings and a perceived lack of alternatives. When women are victims of domestic violence, children are often victims as well, and children who are victimized by witnessing or experiencing such violence have generally been found to face greater vulnerabilities with regard to engaging in violent behaviour later in life,⁵ particularly when trauma remains unaddressed and protective systems fail to intervene with timely, coordinated and resilience-oriented support.⁶

12. Globally, women are experiencing increasing rates of arrest and imprisonment, which has generated debate regarding why the gender gap in the commission of offences is narrowing. While some attribute the rise in crimes committed by women to evolving social norms and gender roles, others see the change as the result of net-widening⁷ or of outdated, discriminatory laws against women.⁸ Increased attention to crimes allegedly committed by women has highlighted the importance of gender-informed and gender-responsive policies and practices. The United Nations standards and norms recognize that women have unique pathways into crime, unique caretaking responsibilities and unique treatment and support needs in prison and in the community. Moreover, female offenders experience a higher incidence of mental health issues, trauma and prior victimization. These adverse experiences have devastating, life-long impacts that can impede human development and steer some towards criminality, which highlights the intersection of victimization and crime.

13. Age and gender remain statistically correlated with certain patterns of offending and risk-taking behaviours.⁹ Consequently, boys and adolescent males are often prioritized in traditional crime prevention activities. However, it is now widely recognized, on the basis of neuroscientific research and adolescent development science, that the delayed maturation of the prefrontal cortex in adolescent children and youth contributes to heightened impulsivity, suggestibility and risk-taking behaviour. These are often adaptive and typically developmental factors, not fixed traits, that significantly diminish the culpability of such groups.¹⁰ This correlates with the criminological finding that individuals generally desist from offending before turning the age of 25.

14. Nonetheless, children and youth living in communities experiencing fragmentation and a lack of social cohesion, for example, may face greater susceptibility to risk-taking and maladaptive behaviours, often rooted in trauma, peer influence or social exclusion. Weak bonds to institutions and the exposure of children and youth to the attitudes and behaviours of peers engaged in unlawful or high-risk activities can place them on pathways into the justice system. Some children alleged as, accused of or recognized as having infringed criminal law are also subject to violence and victimization in custodial settings. An estimated 259,000 children are reported to be in detention worldwide, and many of them are denied family care and access to justice, often unable to challenge the legality of their detention, and are

⁵ Mark H. Moore, “Public health and criminal justice approaches to prevention”, *Crime and Justice*, vol. 19 (1995), pp. 237–262.

⁶ Seena Fazel and others, “Effectiveness of violence prevention interventions: umbrella review of research in the general population”, *Journal of Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*, vol. 25, No. 2 (April 2024), pp. 1709–1718.

⁷ Darrell Steffensmeier and others, “An assessment of recent trends in girls’ violence using diverse longitudinal sources: is the gender gap closing?”, *Criminology*, vol. 43, No. 2 (May 2005), pp. 355–406.

⁸ Penal Reform International and Women Beyond Walls, *From Poverty to Punishment: Examining Laws and Practices which Criminalize Women due to Poverty or Status Worldwide* (2025).

⁹ United Nations Model Strategies on Reducing Reoffending (the Kyoto Model Strategies) (Economic and Social Council resolution 2025/16, annex), para. 9.

¹⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), “Rethinking adolescence: integrating neuropsychological insights with person-centred, trauma-informed responses”, Science Paper (2024).

exposed to further rights violations, enduring cruel, inhumane and/or degrading conditions.¹¹

15. Regarding the root causes of crime and victimization, many women, children and youth are exposed to serious and multifaceted forms of adversity and vulnerabilities, which are to be considered through rights-based approaches that urge caution in interpreting general patterns as categorically deterministic predictors of crime.¹² How they and their families handle the resulting stress, how they are treated by others in response and the extent of their access to meaningful and timely psychosocial support can have lifelong and life-changing implications. When social reactions are negative and support is unavailable, women, children and youth are at risk of their prior victimization contributing to behaviours that increase the likelihood of contact with the justice system. Resilience-based approaches to crime prevention are aimed at overcoming adversity through individual, family and community support.

B. Criminal justice policies and practices to prevent crime and protect victims

16. Building resilient societies requires strengthening the capacity of individuals, families and communities to resist and respond to crime and victimization – ideally, before they occur. As socioeconomic development has progressed unevenly, measures to address societal adversity and fragmentation, poverty and unemployment are needed to reduce crime and victimization, while being cognizant of the risk of the overcriminalization of certain members of society based on stereotyping and implicit biases. At the same time, consideration should be given to how the justice system itself, through its policies and practices, can foster resilience and empower communities to prevent crime and violence.

17. The United Nations standards and norms on crime prevention and criminal justice provide a solid foundation upon which to build resilience-based policies and practices, stressing the importance of taking a multi-stakeholder approach to crime prevention at the local level through the adoption of integrated crime prevention action plans, involving social workers, educators, community health and housing authorities, the private sector, the media, criminal justice officials, elected officials, civil society organizations, parents and community volunteers.¹³ In developing and implementing such policies and practices, Member States should pursue multidisciplinary, whole-of-society and evidence-informed approaches, creating a package of protective factors – encompassing the individual, family and community levels¹⁴ – to support women, at-risk children and youth in overcoming adversity and stress.

1. Individuals

18. At the individual level, supporting people in overcoming stress through positive coping methods begins with interventions that address psychosocial needs and continues with family and community support to facilitate the individual's

¹¹ UNICEF, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, “Children deprived of liberty in the administration of justice: global and regional estimates and trends” (New York, 2025); and UNICEF, “Estimating the number of children deprived of liberty in the administration of justice” (New York, 2021), p. 6.

¹² See, for example, UNODC and UNICEF, *Rethinking Adolescence: Advancing Policy and Practice by Adopting Rights-based and Evidence-informed Approaches*, Policy Paper (New York, 2024).

¹³ Guidelines for cooperation and technical assistance in the field of urban crime prevention (Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/9, annex), para. 3 (b) and (c).

¹⁴ Emmy E. Werner, “Resilience in development”, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 4, No. 3 (June 1995), pp. 81–85; see also *Handbook on the Crime Prevention Guidelines: Making Them Work*, p. 13, in which the relevance of these factors to crime prevention is underscored.

engagement in society with a sense of agency, dignity and self-esteem. This resilience-based approach is equally applicable to victims, who also experience adversity, isolation, shame, stigmatization and trauma. Support should be individually tailored to address multifaceted needs, including access to counselling, medical and mental health services; treatment for substance use disorders; housing assistance; employment assistance; and educational, vocational and skills training, as promoted by the United Nations Model Strategies on Reducing Reoffending (the Kyoto Model Strategies)¹⁵ and the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power (General Assembly resolution 40/34, annex).

19. Research on resilience and criminology stresses the importance of developing the individual's self-esteem and self-efficacy and ensuring exposure to pro-social attitudes and values and access to support through individual counselling, therapy and restorative justice measures. Specific practices include therapy that addresses trauma and cognitive behaviour, pro-social role-modelling facilitated by "sustained access to competent and caring adults, both professionals and volunteers,"¹⁶ and programmes focusing on problem-solving and communication skills.

20. The resilience perspective stands in stark contrast to past examples of deterrence-based practices, such as "scared straight" programmes, shock incarceration programmes and boot camps for children. These punitive "get tough" programmes aimed at children not only fail to reduce reoffending but can be criminogenic.¹⁷ There is little empirical evidence supporting sanctions that increase the severity of punishment, and, in the context of adults, increases in already lengthy prison sentences have been found to have little effect as a form of deterrence.¹⁸

21. Reducing labelling and stigmatization has had profound impacts on child (juvenile) justice policies, particularly in terms of the deinstitutionalization of children alleged as, accused of or recognized as having infringed criminal law, the decriminalization of status offences and the proliferation of diversion programmes. This shift draws on a growing body of evidence that recognizes the effectiveness of diversion when paired with efforts to eliminate disintegrative shaming in reducing reoffending, regardless of individual circumstances.¹⁹

22. In line with international conventions and the United Nations standards and norms, criminal justice policies and practices should identify and address the unique needs of women, children and youth through the mainstreaming of gender-responsive and age-sensitive approaches that account for past trauma and victimization. These programmes should maximize the use of multi-stakeholder partnerships and available psychosocial resources to enable long-term support.

2. Families

23. At the family level, resilience-based approaches focus on strengthening the capacities of families to resist and respond to victimization and involvement with crime. Families are instrumental in child and youth development by fostering pro-social values, practising supportive parenting, promoting education and connection to pro-social institutions and providing stable living environments and opportunities for children and youth that promote human development. However, socioeconomic stress, fragmented family structures, caregiving under constrained

¹⁵ Many of the Kyoto Model Strategies may be applicable to children, provided that the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and child justice systems are respected. See footnote 9 above.

¹⁶ Werner, "Resilience in development", p. 84.

¹⁷ Anthony Petrosino, Carolyn Turpin-Petrosino and John Beuhler, "Scared straight and other juvenile awareness programs for preventing juvenile delinquency: a systematic review of the randomized experimental evidence", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 589 (2003), pp. 41–62.

¹⁸ Steven N. Durlauf and Daniel S. Nagin, "Imprisonment and crime: can both be reduced?", *Criminology and Public Policy*, vol. 10, No. 1 (February 2011), pp. 13–54.

¹⁹ Richard A. Mendel, "Diversion: a hidden key to combating racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile justice", *The Sentencing Project* (Washington, D.C., 2022), pp. 7–10, 14 and 15.

conditions, evolving standards of parenting and child development, and physical or mental abuse in the home can disrupt or impede human development.

24. Families in need of support should have access to family counselling and other interventions aimed at maintaining social bonds between parents and children. Parents and caregivers should be empowered through parenting skills training, the promotion of mental and emotional well-being and other parenting resources,²⁰ and should have access to psychosocial services through multi-agency coordination.

25. When women, children and youth are involved in crime or are victimized, stigmatization and shame can disrupt family relationships. In such cases, they should be supported in maintaining family contact and restoring damaged relationships.

3. Communities

26. Resilience-based policies and practices also focus on strengthening social cohesion and trust and identifying and connecting people with community resources. Crime prevention includes primary prevention, the prevention of recidivism and the protection of victims.²¹ Thus, situational crime prevention measures, offender rehabilitation and reintegration measures and victims' rights and assistance measures should all incorporate the resilience perspective.

27. Situational crime prevention views crime as the exploitation of criminal opportunities,²² which can be addressed through measures such as community and problem-oriented policing, target hardening and environmental design. Communities can play an important role in this process of deterring and preventing crime.

28. Community-level policies and practices should focus on strengthening social cohesion and inclusion through efforts to bolster "collective efficacy". Similar to individual efficacy, the collective efficacy of a neighbourhood reflects the willingness and ability of community members to intervene in and prevent crime on the basis of community values and mutual trust.²³ Unlike formal measures, the power of collective efficacy rests in informal social control exerted by the community, such as through individual vigilance and intervention, including through neighbourhood watch organizations.

29. The trust and cohesion that produce collective efficacy are also important in providing community support for offender rehabilitation and reintegration. Community volunteers are a growing yet underutilized resource, providing value through their personal investment in their community and their compassion and willingness to help others in need. Examples of community support include the use of volunteer probation officers, peer counselling, mentoring and community-based circles of support and accountability designed to address offending on the basis of restorative justice principles. Thus, the role of civil society, including the involvement of people with lived experience as offenders or as victims, should be mainstreamed into criminal justice practices.

30. Resilience-based policies and practices in efforts to support victims of crime and violence focus on empowering survivors and fostering long-term recovery, prioritizing trauma and violence-informed care and ensuring that victims are treated with dignity and compassion. Programmes should include access to counselling, legal

²⁰ The importance of such measures also applies to humanitarian settings. See Aala El-Khani and others, "Bridging the gap between the pressing need for family skills programmes in humanitarian settings and implementation", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 19, No. 4 (February 2022), art. No. 2181.

²¹ Guidelines for cooperation and technical assistance in the field of urban crime prevention, para. 3 (d).

²² Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson, "Social change and crime rate trends: a routine activity approach", *American Sociological Review*, vol. 44, No. 4 (August 1979), pp. 588–608.

²³ Robert J. Sampson, Stephen W. Raudenbush and Felton Earls, "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy", in *Criminological Theory: Readings and Retrospectives*, Heith Copes and Volkan Topalli, eds. (Boston, United States, McGraw Hill, 2010), pp. 96 and 97.

advocacy and safe housing, while also promoting community-based support networks. Multidisciplinary teams combining law enforcement, social workers and healthcare providers should collaborate to address victims' needs holistically and without causing secondary victimization. Restorative justice initiatives offer opportunities for healing and empowerment. By building individual and community resilience, these practices not only aid recovery but also reduce the likelihood of revictimization and strengthen social cohesion in the face of adversity.

III. Engagement and meaningful participation of women, children and youth to build peaceful, just and resilient societies

31. The engagement, meaningful participation and empowerment of women, children and youth as powerful agents of positive change and innovation, through their own voices at the individual and systemic levels, are necessary elements of bolstering the effectiveness of crime prevention and justice efforts, fostering trust in and the legitimacy of institutions and building resilient societies and institutions based on a culture of lawfulness.

32. Women, children and youth with lived experience bring critical perspectives and insights to the table based on their understanding of the complex problems faced by justice systems, institutions and communities, and thus are able to help to devise solutions in the areas of prevention, protection and accountability in a manner that is relevant, effective, sustainable and not based on a one-size-fits-all approach. Inclusive, multi-stakeholder processes grounded in a robust enabling environment can ensure that the voices of those affected are heard and that the differential impacts of crime and criminal justice responses are addressed through tailored policies that are aligned with lived realities.

33. As problem identifiers, intervention designers and implementers, children and youth can serve as powerful advocates and mediators within their peer groups and communities, while women are often able to reach those in at-risk and vulnerable situations and access certain restrictive community spaces. Anchored in communities, a whole-of-society approach becomes a driving force when resilience is understood as the capacity to both rebound from harm and build collective capacity to prevent such harm at the outset, before it occurs. Community-oriented and locally led models for crime prevention and criminal justice, grounded in whole-of-society approaches, can be transformative in addressing the root causes of crime in a sustainable, holistic and context-specific manner and breaking the cycles of reoffending, while facilitating communal problem-solving based on shared responsibility and building public trust.

A. Core elements of engagement and meaningful participation of women, children and youth

1. Overarching principles for inclusive justice and resilient societies

34. Women, children and youth should be recognized as key agents of their own protection and equipped with personal knowledge of their rights and of effective methods to claim and exercise those rights, as well as to avoid and respond to situations of vulnerability.²⁴ This includes establishing mechanisms that facilitate their participation in the development and implementation of laws, policies and programmes at the national, subnational and community levels, while also building the capacity of the relevant authorities involved in the process.

35. Such engagement requires a safe and respectful enabling environment free of pressure and undue restrictions, manipulation and distrust, potential reprisals,

²⁴ UNODC, *Justice in Matters Involving Children in Conflict with the Law: Model Law on Juvenile Justice and Related Commentary* (Vienna, 2013), p. viii.

discrimination and other risk factors that may arise as a result of their participation. Such an environment should be responsive to situations of vulnerability and inequality, trauma and prior experiences of violence, abuse and exploitation, while addressing the power dynamics that often shape participation, especially in challenging settings. It is equally critical to avoid formalistic forms of participation and approaches by which women, children and youth are viewed and treated as mere beneficiaries rather than equal partners; such forms and approaches are not only ineffective but are actively harmful and can lead to participation fatigue and a lack of trust.

36. Meaningful participation, at both the individual and systemic levels, should be seen comprehensively as a continuum that includes: (a) the provision of information in an understandable, accessible and culturally sensitive manner; (b) empowerment, education and capacity-building; (c) co-creative and participatory activities and mechanisms, particularly those that are led by or have been co-designed with women, children and youth; (d) the translation of the participants' views into actual change in a purposeful and responsive manner; (e) follow-up through a feedback loop that indicates how their views and ideas have been interpreted and used and whether there are any specifically identifiable outcomes as a direct result of those views; and (f) regular joint assessment and monitoring to improve both implementation and design and to collectively inform the path forward.²⁵ Some of these steps are often overlooked, particularly in the context of systemic participation in justice, but they are collectively essential in institutionalizing meaningful participation and measuring its impact. Given the diversity of women, children and youth, systems should adopt tailored, inclusive approaches that are co-created with those groups.

2. Foundational grounding

37. The meaningful participation of women, children and youth, as well as other civil society and community actors, is deeply embedded in international law and relevant United Nations standards and norms. It is recognized as both a right and a programmatic foundation and further supported by multiple regional instruments and global studies that affirm its centrality to inclusive justice and sustainable development.

38. In relation to children, their right to be heard and other interdependent rights are enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules) (General Assembly resolution 40/33, annex) highlight the importance of taking into account the needs and views of children in developing appropriate policies and designing adequate and effective interventions.

39. The United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (the Riyadh Guidelines) (General Assembly resolution 45/112, annex) stress the importance of a child-centred approach that sees children as active partners in society, which involves their participation in crime prevention policies and processes, while the United Nations Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (General Assembly resolution 69/194, annex) encourage the participation of children, families and communities in policies and programmes for the prevention of crime and victimization. Similarly, the Guidelines for Action on Children in the Criminal Justice System (Economic and Social Council resolution 1997/30, annex) emphasize the child-oriented justice system approach that respects the child's right to participate meaningfully in, and contribute to, society.

40. In the context of children deprived of liberty, the global study on children deprived of liberty stresses the need to empower such children to influence decisions

²⁵ Cédric Foussard and Ha Ryong Jung, "Towards a holistic approach to systemic child participation for child-friendly justice", in *Incarceration and Generation*, vol. 2, Silvia Gomes, Maria João Leote de Carvalho and Vera Duarte, eds. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

related to their own treatment and to work with children in all detention contexts and settings to identify their views and experiences.²⁶

41. In the context of women, their right to participation is enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In the updated Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (General Assembly resolution 65/228, annex), Member States are urged to consult relevant stakeholders, including women, in evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) (General Assembly resolution 65/229, annex) emphasize that incarcerated women from different religious and cultural backgrounds, for example, should be consulted by prison authorities when building comprehensive programmes and services, including pre- and post-release services and reintegration programmes, in a manner that addresses gender-specific needs.

42. More broadly, in the Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime (Economic and Social Council resolution 2002/13, annex), it is noted that there is a need for active participation by communities and other segments of civil society to ensure effective crime prevention, including in identifying, implementing and evaluating crime prevention priorities.

B. Examples of engagement and meaningful participation in practice

43. In diverse contexts, a consistent set of practices has emerged that demonstrates how inclusive and meaningful participation contributes to effective crime prevention, justice reform and the development of peaceful, just and resilient societies. While they are context-specific in their implementation, these practices reflect shared principles and approaches that align with the international normative framework.

44. Whole-of-society partnerships, built on cross-sector collaboration among government, civil society and community actors, have been central to designing and implementing inclusive, sustainable responses to crime and violence. In particular, women, children and youth with lived experience have creatively co-trained justice professionals, co-developed and co-delivered peer-to-peer programmes and advised institutions regarding inclusive, survivor-informed and trauma-responsive practices. Children have also supported the establishment of child courts and the designing of child-centred spaces in a manner that takes into account the experiences of children in courts, including in Indigenous communities. Such initiatives have contributed to better-informed and more effective and sustainable justice interventions, while reinforcing the legitimacy, adaptability and effectiveness of justice institutions.²⁷

²⁶ Manfred Nowak, *The United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty* (New York, 2019), p. 113.

²⁷ See footnotes 25 and 26 above; see also Gerison Lansdown, *Every Child's Right to be Heard: A Resource Guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12* (London, 2011); Ton Liefaard, Stephanie Rap and Apollonia Bolscher, *Can Anyone Hear Me? Participation of Children in Juvenile Justice: A Manual on How to Make European Juvenile Justice Systems Child-Friendly*, 2nd ed. (Brussels, International Juvenile Justice Observatory, 2017); Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Engaging youth in policy-making processes (Module 6)", in *Evidence-based Policy Making for Youth Well-being: A Toolkit* (Paris, 2017), chap. 8; United Nations, "Meaningful youth engagement in policy and decision-making processes", Our Common Agenda Policy Brief, No. 3 (New York, 2023); UNODC and International Olympic Committee, *Preventing Youth Crime and Violence Through Sports: A Policy Guide* (2024); UNODC and others, *Policy Guide for National Anti-Corruption Authorities on Meaningful Youth Engagement in Anti-Corruption Work* (2023); UNICEF, "Child and youth councils: guidance to support meaningful participation" (2022); and David Ponet and others, *A Handbook on Child Participation in Parliament* (Geneva; New York, Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNICEF, 2011).

45. Children and youth have taken the lead in organizing community and intergenerational dialogues, awareness campaigns and creative advocacy efforts, such as initiatives involving theatre, storytelling and sports, to promote peace, challenge stigma and foster social cohesion. Such platforms have enabled children and youth to express their perspectives, build leadership and peacebuilding skills and contribute to local prevention strategies. Initiatives in schools, community centres, hospitals and detention facilities have helped to address protective factors and root causes associated with crime and violence, generating safe spaces to facilitate positive child, youth and community engagement and leadership. Collectively, these efforts have strengthened cognitive, emotional and social skills and values, fostering a culture of lawfulness and behavioural change to counter issues such as gang violence, organized crime and corruption. They have also strengthened community trust and ownership, particularly in contexts affected by violence or insecurity, while enhancing local capacity to prevent violence, support reintegration and promote inclusive justice responses.²⁸

46. Networks of children and youth have been formally recognized and integrated into policy and governance processes and leadership structures, thereby building an enabling environment to ensure the systemic and institutional inclusion of their voices on the basis of mutual respect. Examples include legally mandated participatory processes, children's parliaments, child and youth policy advisory groups, parliamentary evaluation committees and local government bodies on children's rights, children's budgetary councils and child and youth representatives within legislative committees. Through structured collaborative activities, constructive engagement backed by a proper feedback loop, the co-management of mechanisms and the intergenerational co-development of action plans and processes, children and youth have contributed to the co-designing and implementation of justice and reintegration strategies and to the strengthening of accountable and inclusive institutions, thereby ensuring that their perspectives are reflected in decision-making.²⁹

47. Similarly, women have spearheaded transformative initiatives to address organized crime, corruption and violence, including gender-based crimes and the disproportionate impacts on women. They have built networks that influence policy, expand capacity-building opportunities and drive institutional change. Their leadership has been instrumental in advancing gender-responsive justice systems and inclusive governance. With the wider participation of women across criminal justice systems and the systematic training of practitioners to assess and address gender and rights considerations when preventing and responding to crime, the fairness and integrity of investigations, prosecutions, judgments and the treatment of individuals can be strengthened, which can ultimately enhance the overall effectiveness of criminal justice systems.³⁰

48. Female officers in law enforcement agencies and women with lived experience have co-developed programmes incorporating strengths-based approaches to provide a safe community-based environment. Such initiatives empower, build protective life skills for and provide mentorship to young women to both prevent crime and to facilitate their safe exit from engagement in crime.³¹

49. Criminal justice responses, such as diversion and reintegration programmes, have had more effective outcomes when individuals subject to such measures, together with victims or survivors, where appropriate, as well as families and

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ See United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and others, *A Practitioner's Toolkit on Women's Access to Justice Programming* (2018); and UNODC, Global Judicial Integrity Network, *Gender-related Judicial Integrity Issues* (Vienna, 2019).

³¹ See Mirko Fernandez and Jane Townsley, *The Handbook on Gender-Responsive Police Services for Women and Girls Subject to Violence* (New York, UN-Women and others, 2021).

communities, have been meaningfully engaged in the development, design and evaluation of such processes. Such participatory approaches foster a stronger sense of individual and collective ownership. Evidence has also demonstrated that child participation in particular contributes to the development of self-esteem, cognitive abilities, social and reasoning skills, an understanding of society, trust in public institutions and the likelihood of civic engagement in adulthood.³²

50. Restorative justice practices both within and outside of the justice system have been identified as an effective, positive, safe and sustainable form of engagement and participation that can serve to effectively resolve conflict; meet the needs of, and provide pathways to healing for, the victim or survivor; ensure accountability while reducing reoffending; and facilitate reintegration and community engagement.³³ Where necessary and appropriate safeguards are in place, such practices can be particularly impactful when they involve women, children and youth in various settings, irrespective of their age, such as in schools, community centres, courts and detention facilities.

51. Advancements in information and communications technology are enabling children and youth, in particular, to more directly participate and to exert influence using modalities such as social networks, messaging applications and other digital tools with which they may be more familiar than adults are, which means that they may not necessarily need adults to act as intermediaries for their participation.³⁴ As a result, the landscape of participation is undergoing a fundamental shift, with children and youth increasingly acting as the gatekeepers of their own participation. This shift makes it essential for the intergenerational dimension of participation to be reframed and embraced in a manner that recognizes, respects and amplifies the agency of children and youth.

52. In that regard, the Committee on the Rights of the Child encourages States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to utilize the digital environment in order to consult children on relevant legislative, administrative and other measures and to ensure that their views are considered seriously, complemented by carefully crafted support for their participation, on an equal basis, with adults, so that they can be effective advocates for their rights, individually and as a group (CRC/C/GC/25, paras. 16 and 18).

53. Taken together, these approaches illustrate that meaningful participation is not only a principle of justice, but also a core mechanism for achieving the very outcomes associated with resilience, such as safety, reintegration, healing and institutional adaptability. When embedded in policy and practice, meaningful participation becomes a foundation for inclusive, effective and sustainable crime prevention and criminal justice systems.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

54. Fostering the engagement and meaningful participation of women, children and youth in crime prevention and criminal justice is a foundational pillar for building peaceful, just and resilient societies. It ensures that those most significantly affected by crime and violence are at the centre of efforts to formulate solutions. In order to move from commitment to action, it is essential to ensure that policymakers and criminal justice systems foster joint leadership and consider structural reforms that

³² See Lansdown, *Every Child's Right to be Heard*; Liefwaard, Rap and Bolscher, *Can Anyone Hear Me?*; and OECD, "Engaging youth in policy-making processes".

³³ UNODC, *Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes*, 2nd ed., Criminal Justice Handbook Series (Vienna, 2020), pp. 8–10 and 33–36; and Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, *Promoting Restorative Justice for Children* (New York, 2013), pp. 27–31.

³⁴ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, *When Children Take the Lead: 10 Child Participation Approaches to Tackle Violence* (New York, 2020), p. 64.

are co-designed with women, children and youth and are supported by sustainable financing. Multidimensional resilience-oriented and inclusive whole-of-society approaches to crime prevention and criminal justice, grounded in meaningful participation, are better positioned to address the root causes of crime and achieve fair, equitable and sustainable justice outcomes.

55. Taking into account the outcomes of the regional youth consultations and the regional preparatory meetings, the Fifteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice may wish to consider the following recommendations:

(a) Target resilience-oriented responses to crime and victimization towards members of society in vulnerable situations, especially women, children and youth. Such responses should be in line with the core principles of the Kyoto Model Strategies, the Bangkok Rules, the United Nations Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and other United Nations standards and norms, in a manner that involves the mainstreaming of child-sensitive, gender-responsive and trauma-informed treatment and that is grounded in individually tailored interventions at the individual, family and community levels for at-risk and victimized individuals. The responses should be aimed towards providing continuous, long-term psychosocial support using a multi-stakeholder approach, and they should be implemented in a manner that ensures the meaningful participation of affected individuals and communities in the design, delivery and evaluation of support systems;³⁵

(b) Strengthen existing legal, policy and institutional frameworks to better serve and protect women, children and youth in their diverse roles as victims, witnesses or persons accused of crime, and to incorporate resilience-oriented approaches to crime prevention;

(c) Mainstream meaningful participation for women, children and youth in the design, implementation and evaluation of legislation, policies and practices on crime prevention and criminal justice, including by adopting a comprehensive continuum of meaningful participation. This should be grounded in a safe and respectful enabling environment that fosters continuous participation across different levels of decision-making. The effectiveness of such an arrangement should be reinforced by sustained high-level political and whole-of-government commitment, dedicated resource allocation and ongoing capacity-building for relevant officials and stakeholders;³⁶

(d) Ensure that at-risk children, including adolescents, receive child-sensitive, gender-responsive and trauma-informed treatment and support to foster their full developmental capacity. All responses should be guided by the best interests of the child and grounded in child neuroscience and developmental science. Criminal justice policies and practices should be designed and implemented to minimize or prevent secondary victimization and to promote resilience, recovery, reintegration and dignity;³⁷

(e) Enable the development of community crime prevention policies and practices, ranging from situational crime prevention measures to support for offender rehabilitation and reintegration and to ensuring victims' rights and victim assistance and support. Such policies and practices should incorporate the resilience perspective,

³⁵ [A/CONF.241/RPM.1/2](#), para. 30 (e) and (j); [A/CONF.241/RPM.1/CRP.2](#), pp. 2 and 3; [A/CONF.241/RPM.2/2](#), para. 37 (m); [A/CONF.241/RPM.2/CRP.2](#), p. 6; [A/CONF.241/RPM.3/2](#), para. 44 (f)–(i); [A/CONF.241/RPM.3/CRP.1](#), p. 5; [A/CONF.241/RPM.4/2](#), para. 41 (c) and (e)–(f); [A/CONF.241/RPM.5/2](#), para. 27 (a), (c) and (k); and [A/CONF.241/RPM.5/CRP.1](#), p. 3.

³⁶ [A/CONF.241/RPM.1/2](#), para. 30 (f) and (h); [A/CONF.241/RPM.1/CRP.2](#), pp. 2–3; [A/CONF.241/RPM.2/2](#), para. 37 (b) and (m); [A/CONF.241/RPM.2/CRP.2](#), p. 6; [A/CONF.241/RPM.3/2](#), para. 44 (a); [A/CONF.241/RPM.4/2](#), para. 41 (h) and (k); [A/CONF.241/RPM.4/CRP.1](#), p. 5; [A/CONF.241/RPM.5/2](#), para. 27 (e); and [A/CONF.241/RPM.5/CRP.1](#), p. 3.

³⁷ [A/CONF.241/RPM.1/2](#), para. 30 (f); and [A/CONF.241/RPM.4/2](#), para. 41 (j).

driven by the meaningful participation of affected communities and a focus on strengthening social cohesion and inclusion in a manner that fosters a culture of lawfulness;

(f) Implement resilience-oriented policies and practices through a whole-of-society approach, leveraging both the resources and reach of the national Government, as well as the localized knowledge of local Governments and communities, civil society and community volunteers and their ability to provide timely and sustained interventions and support that promote safety, inclusion and long-term well-being;³⁸

(g) Build and reinforce partnerships with women, child and youth-led organizations, relevant networks and other civil society organizations. Member States are encouraged to support the Generation Justice Youth Network in order to facilitate engagement with youth in the implementation of the Abu Dhabi declaration that is expected to be an outcome of the Fifteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice;

(h) Invest in community-driven, multidisciplinary data collection and analysis systems to ensure that crime prevention strategies are informed by accurate, localized and disaggregated evidence, and jointly measure, monitor and evaluate the outcomes that have been derived from the engagement and meaningful participation of women, children and youth, thereby ensuring the effectiveness of engagement practices and strengthening institutional responsiveness and public trust. Such processes should support fair, inclusive, transparent and effective decision-making in criminal justice responses, with the aims of reducing vulnerabilities to victimization and involvement in crime and of empowering communities to shape safer and more equitable environments;³⁹

(i) Offer or seek technical assistance, as appropriate, for the adoption or implementation of effective resilience-building and crime prevention and criminal justice practices to address the unique needs of women, children and youth, based on relevant United Nations standards and norms. Member States are also encouraged to share information on promising practices and to support efforts to build capacity among crime prevention and criminal justice practitioners with a view to building resilient societies.

³⁸ [A/CONF.241/RPM.2/2](#), para. 37 (j); [A/CONF.241/RPM.2/CRP.2](#), p. 6; and [A/CONF.241/RPM.5/2](#), para. 27 (j).

³⁹ [A/CONF.241/RPM.2/2](#), para. 37 (c); and [A/CONF.241/RPM.4/2](#), para. 41 (b).