Youth Gangs Crime Prevention in Multi-Agency Partnerships*

Günter Stummvoll

Introduction

Günter Stummvoll is researcher at the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research.
stummvoll@euro.centre.org

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This is the final Policy Brief in a series of three about youth gangs and the prevention of youth crime. In Policy Brief 1 we noted that crime becomes more likely when risk factors such as early childhood experiences, broken family life, school failure and unemployment accumulate. In the second Policy Brief examples of prevention programmes in separate sectors such as the school, the community, and the family were presented. In this Policy Brief we discuss opportunities and challenges of multi-agency partnerships that integrate different actors of social control: the government, local authorities, and the community. Our findings are based on a review of literature that was published since initiatives had emerged under the so-called "partnership approach" in the mid-1980s and 1990s in Great Britain, Europe, North America, and Australasia. In this body of literature, we do not only find types and definitions of multi-agency crime prevention, and step-by-step instructions about how to organise, co-ordinate and evaluate such initiatives, but also a range of critical remarks on the difficulties and pitfalls of inter-organisational security and safety management (Walters, 1996; Sampson et al., 1988; Rosenbaum, 2002; Frevel, 2015; Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994).

A single comprehensive approach is suggested that connects preventive initiatives

As we identified several risk factors for young people to develop criminal careers, including personality traits, broken family relationships, school failure, social deprivation, poverty, and neighbourhood effects, we recommended addressing these risks on separate professional levels such as from a psychology, education, and social policy perspective. Here, we further suggest connecting preventive initiatives in policing, early intervention in families, school counselling, health treatment after substance abuse, and others in a single comprehensive approach. From this it follows that a network of professions such as the police, probation services, schools, social work, health services and others must be coordinated in one way or another. Such a network may be implemented either on a large-scale federal policy level, or

on a small-scale local level. Liddle and Gelsthorpe (1994) once noted the difficulties in synchronising the strategic and practice levels in crime prevention structures. Ideally, a multi-level structure will be set up with a clear hierarchical structure of "steering" and "rowing" (Osborne and Gabler, 1993). In the following, we shall elaborate on the relevant terminology before presenting and discussing various organisational challenges of multi-agency crime prevention.

What is multi-agency crime prevention?

Definitions of multi-agency crime prevention partnerships

"Multi-agency intervention is the planned, co-ordinated response of the major social agencies to problems of crime and incivilities […] Social control in industrial societies is, by its very nature, multi-agency."
(Young, 1991: 155; quoted in Hughes, 1998: 76)

"The movement to multi-agency rather than single-agency intervention implies that probation, education, employment, social work and other 'family' services, health, housing, and 'private' bodies such as charities and businesses, as well as the police, all have a role to play in an extended prevention continuum."
(Hughes, 1998: 77)

The above quotes on multi-agency crime prevention partnerships comment on the developments in the United Kingdom at the time of Conservative government when the 1984 inter-departmental circular 8/84 (Home Office, 1984) triggered the development of several large-scale initiatives in crime prevention. Initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s such as 'Five Towns' and 'Safer Cities' arose out of the UK Home Office officials' wish to establish multi-agency crime prevention and to integrate both situational approaches (opportunity reduction, target hardening) and social approaches. Furthermore, the so-called Morgan Report[1] (Home Office, 1991) had widened the scope of 'crime prevention' by adding the term 'community safety' to encourage greater participation from all sections of the community to engage in the fight against crime.

The following decades in UK politics were marked by a dispute between Conservative and Labour officials about power relations and resourcing between central government, local authorities, and the police regarding the leadership in these crime prevention partnerships. On the one hand, it was argued that the shift of responsibility from central government administration (police, criminal justice, and social welfare institutions) towards other agencies of social

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1   The formal title of the Morgan Report is the Home Office's Standing Conference on Crime Prevention report "Safer Communities: The Local Delivery of Crime Prevention through the Partnership Approach" (Home Office, 1991).

control (family, schools, private security businesses, community) was associated with contracting-out, deregulation and privatisation of original state services. On the other hand, the underlying justification for active collaboration of governmental agencies, social organisations, and the public as co-producers of crime prevention and public safety was based on the belief that social reactions to crime should reflect the nature of the phenomenon itself (Young, 1992). In the UK, crime prevention and community safety initiatives particularly focused on the problem of juvenile delinquency.

The concept of multi-agency crime prevention has also gained acceptance on the European continent since the early 1990s. For example, in Germany, the conventional practice of security governance with its division of labour between police and private security services has been replaced by a complex kaleidoscope of stakeholders collaborating in different ways (Frevel, 2015):

Crime prevention partnerships on different administrative levels in Germany

- First, in a very broad policy approach, a variety of topics such as urban planning, social integration, certain forms of offending (e.g., burglary, street violence, domestic violence) and leisure activities in public space are discussed from a security and safety perspective in so-called *kriminalpräventive Räte* (crime prevention councils). Here, a great number of institutions can be involved: public transport organisations, businesses, chamber of industry and commerce, trade unions, media, churches, and local communities.
- Second, *Sicherheitspartnerschaften* (security partnerships) are more limited in thematic and administrative scope. Local stakeholders act according to their own competences and exchange activities and achievements.
- Third, *Sicherheitskonferenzen* (security conferences) are held on the executive level of administration (courts, prosecution, federal police) to develop local security strategies together with selected partners in organisations of the critical infrastructure (tele-communication, energy providers, hospitals, etc.).
- Fourth, *Arbeitskreise* (round tables and conferences) are organised on a local level to respond to particular security problems, for example, domestic violence. Here, victim protection associations, men's counselling centres, anti-violence training centres, alcohol and substance use rehabilitation facilities, and psychological support centres get together to work out very specific solutions in response to current problems.

These experiences show that policy debates in security governance deeply affect the modalities of power relations between various sectors of central government, local authorities, service organisations, civil society and individual

citizens. The relations between these institutions are complex and depend on trust and shared goals in a polity. Box 1 presents an ideal-type model of collaboration between two or more organisations (Schimank, 2007; Wald & Jansen, 2007). This model can be applied to an unlimited spectrum of cooperation initiatives in all political sectors.

Box 1: Levels of collaboration in crime prevention partnerships

In a systematic view, organisational cooperation of two or more partners can be arranged in 4 stages:

(1) A most elementary form of collaboration is given in mutual (organisational) observation. The longer the period is of observing what 'the other side' is doing, the clearer are the rules, rationales, and 'no-gos'. This process of observation allows for better coordination in operational practice.

(2) Permanent observation in terms of awareness about each other's actions leads to mutual (organisational) transparency. Here the organisational decisions of the other actor are transparent, and the tasks, objectives and processes can be adjusted and coordinated accordingly. On this level consistent exchange can be expected, which leads to a consensus about overall objectives and goals supported by programme managers within each organisation.

(3) Inter-organisational transparency is the basis for developing respect and mutual (organisational) trust, which allows for special practices that require loyalty and consent between organisations. Trust building is fundamental for a common work ethic and "normative spirit" in the field.

(4) If all activities of the two partner organisations are driven by a common ethical orientation, the highest level of organisational cooperation can be reached: organisational cohesion, expressed in both subjective (personal) and objective (functional) unity. Cohesion includes all hierarchical levels of each organisation and allows for further development of common strategies of problem solution.

Figure 1: 4-step model of collaboration in partnerships
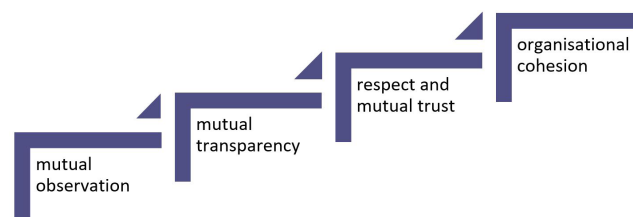
Source: Günter Stummvoll, 2022 (figure created based on Schimank, 2007)

Managing crime prevention partnerships

The official United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime suggest in their "Conceptual Frame of Reference" (United Nations, 2002: 4) that crime prevention encompasses a wide range of approaches, including (a) prevention through social development or social crime prevention, (b) locally based crime prevention, (c) situational crime prevention, and (d) reintegration programmes. This wide range of approaches needs a good planning process to set priorities, formulate goals and objectives, establish a timeline, recognize key partners and their contributions, and finally, evaluate the impact of the strategy.

Two management tools to support the development and implementation of crime prevention partnerships are presented

In this section we briefly describe two of the most important management tools that have been developed in recent years in Europe to support organisations in setting up, implementing and evaluating crime prevention partnerships. Those schemes can also be applied to particular partnerships in the prevention of youth crime. The first has been developed by members of the CEN Technical Committee 325, the special working group on *'Prevention of crime – Urban planning and building design'* at the European Committee for Standardization (CEN – Comité Européen de Normalisation), which is the supra-national agency for national standardisation institutes in Europe. The second example refers to the so-called *'Beccaria-Standards for ensuring quality in crime prevention projects'*, developed by the German Crime Prevention Council on behalf of the Ministry of Justice in Lower Saxony.

CEN/TR14383 - Prevention of Crime

CEN/TR14383 is a guideline developed by the European Committee for Standardisation

The majority of standards elaborated at the European Committee for Standardisation are technical norms, but apart from that, experts in various fields also work on policy norms as guidelines in administrative procedures. Policy guidelines on crime prevention were published in a series of Technical Reports (CEN/TR14383). Part 2 in that series refers to "urban planning and building design" and has been worked out by expert consultants in the time period between 1995 and 2008 (Stummvoll, 2017). Although the theoretical scope is limited to methods in opportunity reduction and situational prevention, a significant part of the document is dedicated to administrative procedures that can help crime prevention partnerships to better organise the collaboration of stakeholders. Before this process may start, some general preconditions have to be fulfilled: The responsible body (the lead organisation) shall give evidence about its commitment to crime prevention and check for existing work on crime problems, crime hot spots and previous efforts for solutions. Only then a 'working group' (partnership) can be composed to define a mission statement and kick off. The CEN/TR14383 proposal is guided by internationally recognised

standards of quality assurance of the ISO-series 9001 and by sustainability standards (ISO 14000). It suggests a 7-step process:

Step 1: Crime review or crime assessment

The 7-step process model in crime prevention partnerships

A crime review is part of a risk assessment where information about offenders, potential guardians (police, bus drivers, residents, etc.), and victims or targets is collected. More specifically, data about the physical environment, socio-economic and demographic information, particular control features, and the issue of fear of crime are reviewed. These may be gathered via methods of crime mapping, victim surveys, offender interviews, and safety audits.

In regard to problems of youth gangs, in this vital part of the process all existing initiatives to tackle juvenile delinquency shall be listed and discussed, including social, environmental, and administrative projects in various institutions (schools, youth associations, sports clubs, probation services, artists and urban designers, nightlife-economy, etc.).

Step 2: Objectives / Requirements

Specific objectives of the project shall be listed in the form of a concrete set of safety and security requirements including a time schedule for implementation. Here, the synergy effects of different activities in safety projects shall be discussed.

Step 3: Plan of the Working Group

Scenarios of implementation for the most effective strategies are then prepared, costs are calculated, and potential risks are considered. Which activities will be carried out at what time and where, and who shall be involved?

Step 4: Decision by Responsible Body

The leading organisation presents a final decision for an action plan for the near or distant future, including specific prevention initiatives, distribution of responsibilities, time scales and reporting.

Step 5: Implementation and control

The implementation of selected projects will be carried out under clear monitoring and control within an agreed reporting procedure.

Step 6: Evaluation

The performance of the measures implemented in step 5 shall be evaluated with respect to their safety and security effects. External assessment shall comprise both programme and project evaluation and look at both process and outcome of single initiatives.

Step 7: Monitor and corrective action

Findings from evaluations shall lead to corrective action.

Beccaria Standards

The *Beccaria Standards* were developed and published in 2007 by experts at the Crime Prevention Council of Lower Saxony, Germany, and were translated into 18 languages.[2] Since that time, the quality standards for crime prevention have informed a great number of local safety projects. The document presents measures and requirements for quality planning, implementation and assessment of crime prevention programmes and projects. This manual for practitioners who are working in the field of crime prevention and public safety clearly has similarities to the CEN document and also includes 7 steps in project management:

The Beccaria quality standards were developed in Lower Saxony and are applied in many countries world-wide

1. Description of the problem
2. Analysis of the conditions leading to the emergence of the problem
3. Determination of prevention targets, project targets and targeted groups
4. Determination of the interventions intended to achieve the targets
5. Design and execution of the project
6. Review of the project's implementation and achievement of objectives (evaluation)
7. Conclusion and documentation

Again, a concise problem description uses a variety of datasets in order to fully comprehend the dimension, location, timing, and target groups of crime issues and to identify the particular stakeholders involved in existing and previous efforts of problem solution. Also, the work of 'description' must be separated from 'analysis', the latter referring to a deeper understanding of social causes of the problem. It is important to understand the 'history of the present' of a crime problem as well as specific approaches to problem-solving that have failed in the past. In regard to youth delinquency, risk factors and protective factors shall be analysed. *Risk factors* are conditions that are detrimental to a young person's development, for example child neglect, contact with delinquent

2   The Beccaria standards can be downloaded for free: https://www.beccaria-standards.net/

peers, deterioration of neighbourhoods. *Protective factors* can prevent crime from occurring. For example, stable emotional bonds between youths and their parents, safe houses for girls in isolated neighbourhoods, good lighting of public places that are known as trouble spots.

Both models may provide useful insights for developing and maintaining crime prevention partnerships as related to youth gangs.

The partnership approach: Pitfalls, obstacles and hurdles

Expansion of partnerships increases the complexity of the problem

In our literature review we identified several obstacles to multi-agency crime prevention and multi-agency initiatives to tackle youth gangs. The first concerns the problem of *thematic expansion*: In a holistic approach, different agencies interact in various ways with the benefit of pooling information and resources. However, the collaboration of different agencies increases the complexity of the problem: As different agencies bring different datasets to the table and describe the problem from different perspectives, juvenile delinquency gets blended with other problems such as unemployment, substance abuse, truancy, migration, spatial segregation, and infrastructure development. Then, an agreement on strategies to tackle youth delinquency becomes extremely difficult as stakeholders need to reconcile different forms of delinquency, economic problems, health issues, schooling, demographic change, and environmental matters. As a result, one can easily lose sight of the issue at hand.

Second, there is the issue of a *contradictory understanding of the problem*. The police may look at youth groups as troublemakers, whereas social workers regard the same group as people in trouble and as victims of their circumstances. Similar differences may also occur between police and schoolteachers, and between health workers and criminal justice officials. Hence, negotiations in security partnerships can stall, but they can also produce creative solutions that were not thought of at the outset. An exchange of interpretations of given problems (*communication*), setting priorities in discussions (*coordination*), and careful distribution of tasks in collaborative activities (*cooperation*) seem to be the core elements in multi-agency partnerships.

Third, a different understanding of the term *prevention* can be a major impediment in discussions across professions and can result in severe disagreements about target groups. Here, it will be important to point to the variety of approaches that are captured in typologies in the relevant literature. Figure 1 shows a two-dimensional typology of crime prevention that combines

the criminological division into social and situational prevention and the public health division into primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention (Crawford, 1998).

Table 1: Two-dimensional Typology of Crime Prevention

	Primary prevention	Secondary prevention	Tertiary prevention
Social prevention	Education and socialisation, public awareness and advertising campaigns, Neighbourhood Watch	Work with those 'at risk' of offending: youths, the unemployed, community regeneration	Rehabilitation, confronting offending behaviour, aftercare, diversion, reparation
Situational prevention	Target hardening, surveillance, opportunity reduction/ removal, environmental design, general deterrence	Target hardening and design measures for 'at risk' groups, risk prediction and assessment, deterrence	Individual deterrence, incapacitation, assessment of 'dangerousness' and 'risk'

Source: Crawford, 1998.

Stakeholders need to discuss their understanding of 'prevention'

A good understanding of prevention and the quality of solutions will also depend on facilitating between ingrained political ideologies: Deterrence by surveillance and punishment as well as reducing crime opportunities are associated with a rational choice approach to crime prevention; treatment and recovery, early social intervention in families, and a change in socio-economic conditions in neighbourhoods reflect a welfarist approach in favour of a pre-determined offender; arguments for legalisation, tolerance, minimal intervention and diversion echo the problem of stigmatisation, labelling and criminalisation of young people as 'folk devils' in society. In that way, conservative ideas clash with critical ideas about power relations in society. Due to these conflicting ideologies, which often occur even within the same profession (Stummvoll, 2021), heated discussions can occur at security conferences. As all parties involved seem to pursue the same objective at the onset of meetings (i.e. reduction of youth violence), different concepts and ideologies may come at a surprise and are seldom addressed explicitly.

Participants in partnerships often think of commitments in terms of trade-offs

Fourth, in an *exchange perspective*, stakeholders are endowed with various 'goods' such as expertise, services and resources (data, access to target groups, personal and financial resources) that will be traded on the marketplace in security partnerships. Outcome and success will be evaluated individually at the end according to a personal cost-benefit assessment: Did I get something in return for my input? Did everyone give an equal share? However, occupational cultures and especially occupational structures constrain the parties involved in their concessions to varying degrees. Participants from organisations with

hierarchical structures such as the police need to request approval from their line managers, whereas participants from social work associations may be more autonomous and more flexible in their decision about commitments. This can lead to an imbalance in the decision-making process and the search for agreements.

Is there a hierarchy of expertise between professionals and civil society?

Fifth, *acceptance of expertise* is a critical issue in participatory processes particularly in questions of security and public safety. In crime prevention partnerships with invited professional experts (lawyers, planners, social workers, police) and representatives from the civil society, the different views will range from complex discussions on law to very specific cases of social disorder. The expert-laymen divergence can be observed in differences of knowledge, responsibilities, capabilities, the use of technical language, impulsiveness and (lack of) self-control. Civil society includes, for example, youth clubs, senior citizen associations, victim support organisations, schools and parent associations, owners and customers of restaurants, bars and night-clubs, churches and religious communities, sports clubs, cultural institutions, residents' associations, and many more. Will their representatives be heard, and will they get an equal voice? Are they accepted as experts or demoted to laymen? Who decides who is invited and who is denied access? In general, participatory processes require good steering competencies of an independent facilitator who leads through the programme and who co-ordinates different interest groups. The absence of co-ordination can result in a situation in which the "different interest groups pass each other like ships in the night" (Sampson et al., 1988: 488, quoted in Crawford, 1998: 178).

Safety and security are unlimited ideals that can never be fully saturated

Sixth, especially in the field of security, there is often a *gap between service providers and service users*: Safety is an ideal and fictitious commodity, a product of which there can never be enough, and whose demand will never be saturated. Moreover, prevention is oriented to the future and depicts safety in terms of absence of crime and violence. This negative understanding in the term prevention and the missing positive imagery of the future leads to unlimited expectations in the population. This ideal of "ontological security" resembles the definition of health, where people feel healthy as long as they do not feel any pain, or as the French physiologist René Leriche once said: "living with the silence of organs" (Canguilhem, 1977: 157ff.). Accordingly, "ontological security" is understood as the absence of threats. The pursuit of total security thus refers to the elimination of risk, and hence becomes utopian. In this way, high expectations of neighbours in a residential community or the high demands of victim support associations are often difficult to meet. The perception of this gap between service provision and user expectation can easily lead to frustration on the part of residents and victim support staff as problems cannot be reasonably resolved.

Further conflicts can arise, first, from excessive formalities and bureaucratic hurdles; second, from a lack of financial, material, and human resources; and third, from the fact that an expansion of surveillance and control comes at the expense of neglecting civil liberties. Regarding the formality-informality debate, Crawford (1998) pointed to a double-edged problem: too formal meetings can become unproductive and turn into mere 'talking shops' while informal partnerships allow for greater flexibility and swift decisions but are particularly susceptible to the negative impact of staff turnover – and they are difficult to evaluate.

Policy recommendations for multi-agency crime prevention partnerships

Secondary benefits of networking dominate over primary goals

The involvement of diverse stakeholders in crime prevention partnerships can become inefficient for at least two reasons: First, partners focus too much on communication technologies rather than on problem solving. Often, presentations of hotspot analyses use sophisticated techniques of graphic design, space syntax demonstrations and other geo-statistical methods in predictive policing – this can distract stakeholders from moving forward in problem solving. Also, placing too much emphasis on establishing personal relationships to facilitate direct communication can sometimes distract participants from the real goal of planning a concerted effort. In both cases, the secondary benefits of networking predominate, and a superficial consensus masks the fundamental controversies that naturally arise. While consensus is generally helpful, work in crime prevention partnerships becomes self-referential.

In contrast, stakeholders need to be realistic about existing (professional) differences and expect disagreements at the onset of a collaboration process. Nevertheless, a positive and constructive atmosphere in meetings needs to be established. From our literature review, we have identified the following success factors for crime prevention partnerships, as illustrated in the area of youth gangs:

Accept differences

Stakeholders bring different vocational cultures to the partnership meetings

Police, social service providers, health organisations, public transport organisations, schools, churches and others, differ in organisational structures, legal mandates, social responsibilities, principles and work methods. However, partners inherently have opinions about each other that often express themselves in stereotypes and prejudices, such as about youth prevention. For example, social workers are unfamiliar with hierarchical structures in the

police and respective command structures, hence the impatience in decision making during partnership meetings. On the other hand, police officers are overwhelmed by the low-threshold activities of social workers and refuse to jump to conclusions. One solution to this is to dedicate sufficient time to exchange about professional cultures at the start of partnership meetings. Another solution is to organise regular joint vocational trainings for different actors in the field of safety management (Stummvoll et al., 2021).

Define interfaces

Situations where stakeholders meet in practice shall be identified

Stakeholders have different responsibilities in security and safety management, but their expertise overlap in theory and practice. This is also true for tackling youth gang crime. There are many occasions when stakeholders meet: in cases of domestic violence, bullying at school, substance use, vandalism, at football games and music festivals. Here, perceptions of problems and professional responses may vary. Therefore, it is all the more important to define interfaces between actors. This can refer to particular groups of persons (target groups), situational and spatial contexts (e.g., nightlife). Therefore, responsibilities, functions, skills, and methods need to be clearly defined at the interface of situations. This will lead a to more efficient use of resources, more swift exchange of information, better access to target groups, expanded competences, the more productive use of synergy effects and the increased avoidance of misunderstandings.

Work towards a common understanding of problems

Do not ignore conflict – it is only natural

At first glance, the goals of stakeholders involved seem to be obvious and congruent: to prevent crime and increase public safety for all. But already at a first encounter it often turns out that stakeholders have different views about security and prevention of youth gangs. Police speak about emergency response, while pedagogues look at the causes of delinquency in family relations; police define social situations in terms of breaking the law, while health workers see the needs of substance users; street workers support homeless people, while shop owners are concerned about their clients and see disruption to their business. Therefore, an exchange of different views is essential to construct a common understanding of problems such as gang activities.

Find an impartial coordinator

An impartial coordinator plays an important role in organising, running and monitoring partnership meetings. Although someone must initiate the process, it is recommended that neither the police, nor the city council nor any other organisation takes the lead in crime prevention partnerships. Whoever is

Employment of a neutral and impartial coordinator is worthwhile

the initiator, responsibility to coordinate partnership programmes should be outsourced to independent consultants with an expertise in organisational counselling and skills in mediation, moderation and conflict resolution who are not bound by directives. Taking a neutral position is vital when collecting topics of stakeholders, designing agendas, preparing information before meetings, taking the minutes, supervising the process management, regulating disputes among partners, etc. It is a challenging responsibility to balance interests in multi-agency crime prevention partnerships, such as in tackling youth delinquency.

Conclusion

In conclusion, youth crime by its nature is multi-faceted, both in its causes and effects. Hence, it takes special efforts to coordinate a variety of counter measures and project activities in schools, in parks, in youth clubs, in the nightlife economy, and in the criminal justice system. Often there are several bi-lateral initiatives running simultaneously without coordination or without an overall strategy: Police run awareness campaigns in schools; social workers coordinate activities with girls and boys in public parks; probation workers initiate social network conferences as a form of diversion in the criminal justice process.

We have shown that there is clearly a need for coordination of wide-ranging activities in social crime prevention in general, but particularly in tackling youth crime and the multiple stakeholders involved. Such coordination is complex and needs to be embedded in appropriate organisational structures and well-guided processes. The policy recommendations concluded with several suggestions for creating productive multi-agency crime prevention partnerships.

"Cooperation/partnerships should be an integral part of effective crime prevention, given the wide-ranging nature of the causes of crime and the skills and responsibilities required to address them. This includes partnerships working across ministries and between authorities, community organizations, non-governmental organizations, the business sector and private citizens."

United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime. Economic and Social Council resolution 2002/13. Annex. Clause 9 (Basic Principles).

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United Nations Standards and Norms in Crime Prevention

Beccaria-Standards for ensuring quality in crime prevention projects

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