



# LASALLECUNMUN 2025

## UNODC

United Nations Office  
on Drugs and Crime

“Sentences for Youth:  
reforming the juvenile justice  
system by implementing  
Rehabilitation and  
Reintegration Programs,  
ensuring justice in  
sentences.”

Background Guide





Dear Delegates,

It is with great enthusiasm that I welcome you to the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crimes Committee. Indeed, it is a great pleasure, and I look forward to our insightful dialogues and to our collaborative efforts throughout the model. My name is Andrea Olvera Jiménez Méndez, and I have the distinct pleasure of being your president this year. Along with me we have the moderator of this chair, Jorge Emilio Sánchez Vázquez and as for our conference officer Isabella Franco Camacho.

Allow me to introduce a bit about myself: I am 17 years old and currently I am a student at Universidad La Salle Cancun, where I am in the fifth semester of high school, precisely in the Mathematical Physicist area. I aspire to pursue a degree in architecture, driven by my passion for design and transformation of our environment. Outside of my academic pursuits, I enjoy spending time with people who enhance my life and contribute positively to my experiences, as also I find it delightful doing volunteering activities. Over the past three years, I have actively engaged with MUN, participating in two models both as a delegate and in various organizational roles, including that of a conference officer and as a teacher. This multifaceted experience has enriched my understanding of global issues and cultivated my skills in public speaking and debating. The words of Salvador Allende resonate deeply with me: “Being young and not being revolutionary is even biologically contradictory”. This statement encapsulates the transformative power of us, youth in advocacy and leadership. I firmly believe that our gathering here is a statement of our shared commitment to effecting positive change in the world. One word at a time.

As we move forward, I encourage each of you to engage actively in our discussions and to voice your perspectives boldly. Our collective contributions will be instrumental in addressing the pressing challenges that lie ahead within the topic I specifically chose. I look forward to an engaging and productive model, where we can forge a path towards innovative solutions and meaningful dialogue. Also, I shall recall that if at any point you have doubts or require assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. I am here to support you in every way possible.

Best Regards,

**Andrea Olvera Jiménez Méndez**

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## **COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION**

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is a global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime, in addition to being responsible for implementing the United Nations lead program on terrorism. Established in 1997, UNODC has approximately 500 staff members worldwide. Its headquarters are in Vienna, and it operates 20 field offices, as well as liaison offices in New York and Brussels. For two decades, the UNODC has been helping make the world safer from drugs, organized crime, corruption and terrorism. It is committed to achieving health, security and justice for all by tackling these threats and promoting peace and sustainable well-being as deterrents to them.

***Topic: “Sentences for Youth: reforming the juvenile justice system by implementing Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs, ensuring justice in sentences.”***

## **INTRODUCTION**

The traditional approach to juvenile justice focuses on punishing young offenders to hold them accountable and deter crime, often through incarceration or probation. However, research shows that this punitive approach usually fails to address the underlying causes of delinquency, leading to high rates of repeat offenses. In contrast, the rehabilitation model seeks to help juvenile offenders by recognizing their potential for change. It emphasizes providing education, counseling, job training, and mental health services to tackle the root causes of their behavior. The goal is to encourage positive changes, lower the chances of reoffending, and support their successful return to society. The overriding purpose of the juvenile justice system is rehabilitation not punishment. The juvenile justice system recognizes the inherent differences between juvenile and adult offenders. At its core, the system is built upon the principle that children who commit crimes have diminished culpability and a greater capacity for change than adults.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The evolution of the juvenile justice system has evolved significantly since its inception, driven by changing societal views on youth, crime, and rehabilitation. This has marked a pivotal shift from viewing young offenders as “miniature adults” subject to the same legal penalties as adults to recognizing their distinct developmental needs and potential for rehabilitation.

The concept of a separate legal framework for juveniles emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, primarily in response to the recognition that children and adolescents are developmentally different from adults. The first juvenile court was established in Chicago in 1899, making a shift from punitive measures to a more rehabilitative approach. This court aimed to provide guidance and support rather than punishment, reflecting a growing belief that young offenders could be reformed.

It all started in 1989, with the CRC — the international agreement that defined fundamental rights of children including those who came into conflict with the law and set out steps for their implementation. This is all in accordance with the way children’s rights are provided for in Articles 37 (not to be subjected to detention to prepare respective, if possible, for rehabilitation and reintegration into the society) 39 and 40. In 1997, the United Nations Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 1997/30 opening the door to a global conversation about juvenile justice reform. It was in this resolution that a call for guidelines for action on children by the criminal justice system

was made, stressing child-sensitive responses. Given these stated trends, some big steps have been taken in the reform of child welfare systems besides residential care since around 2000 with the support of UNICEF and the European Union in wider Europe and Central Asia. These efforts were constructed to adapt national legislation to the global level, thus advocating for an increase in alternatives to detention, restorative justice options and solutions based on the local community. One of the key successes was a nearly 60% reduction in the number of children detained between 2006 and 2012 in multiple nations within this area.

#### ***UN Initiatives and Statements:***

The UN has been instrumental in guiding juvenile justice reforms globally:

- The **Interagency Panel on Juvenile Justice (IPJJ)** was formed to enhance coordination among various UN bodies working on juvenile justice issues. It aims to provide technical assistance and promote best practices based on international standards
- The UNODC has supported numerous countries in developing juvenile justice policies that prioritize diversion from formal judicial processes and ensure that detention is used only as a last resort
- In various reports, including those focusing on adolescent development, the UN has highlighted that traditional punitive measures are often ineffective for youth due to their developmental stage. Instead, it advocates for approaches that emphasize rehabilitation through community service and restorative justice

#### ***Consequences of Historical Developments:***

The historical evolution of juvenile justice has led to several key consequences:

- **Shift Towards Rehabilitation:** There is now widespread recognition that rehabilitation is more effective than punishment for young offenders. This shift is supported by research indicating that adolescent brains are still developing, which affects decision-making abilities.
- **Reduction in Incarceration Rates:** Many countries have seen significant declines in youth incarceration rates due to reforms promoting alternatives to detention.
- **Increased Focus on Equity:** Ongoing discussions about racial disparities within juvenile justice systems have prompted calls for reforms aimed at ensuring fair treatment across all demographics.

### **CURRENT SITUATION**

The current state of the conflict between juvenile justice reform advocates and traditional punitive approaches remains complex and evolving. In recent years, there has been a significant shift towards more rehabilitative and reintegrative models, guided by scientific understanding of adolescent development and international standards.

#### ***United Nations Recommendations:***

The United Nations has been instrumental in shaping global perspectives on juvenile justice reform:

1. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) emphasizes that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children, including those in conflict with the law.
2. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules) stress the importance of promoting juvenile welfare and minimizing the necessity of intervention by the juvenile justice system.
3. The United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (The Riyadh Guidelines) advocate for child-centered orientation and emphasize the active role of young people in society.
4. The United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty (The Havana Rules) state that imprisonment should be used as a last resort and for the minimum necessary period.

These international standards consistently emphasize the need for alternatives to detention, the importance of rehabilitation, and the protection of children's rights throughout the justice process.

#### ***Recent Developments and Their Consequences:***

Several significant developments have occurred in juvenile justice reform in recent years:

1. **Shift towards evidence-based practices:** Many jurisdictions have embraced evidence-based programs like the Juvenile Justice System Improvement Project (JJSIP), which aims to integrate effective practices into juvenile justice systems based on extensive research.
2. **Reduction in youth incarceration:** In Europe and Central Asia, the total number of children in detention (pre-and post-trial) decreased by almost 60 percent between 2006 and 2012. This trend reflects a growing recognition that incarceration often exacerbates issues faced by young offenders.
3. **Focus on mental health:** There's an increased emphasis on addressing the mental health needs of youth in the justice system. Programs like Multisystemic Therapy (MST) provide comprehensive in-home treatment that engages families and communities, significantly improving outcomes for at-risk youth.
4. **Restorative justice practices:** Many jurisdictions have implemented restorative justice programs that focus on repairing harm rather than simply punishing the offender. These programs engage youth in community service and encourage them to take responsibility for their actions.
5. **Addressing racial disparities:** Reforms are increasingly recognizing the need for race-conscious approaches to reduce disparities in juvenile justice processing. Initiatives aimed at ensuring equitable treatment across racial lines have shown promise in various jurisdictions.
6. **Developmental approach:** The National Research Council's report "Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach" has influenced policy by emphasizing that legal

responses to juvenile offending should be grounded in scientific knowledge about adolescent development.

The consequences of these developments have been largely positive. Countries implementing these reforms have seen reductions in recidivism rates, improved outcomes for youth, and more efficient use of resources. For example, the multi-country evaluation commissioned by UNICEF and the EU showed that the number of children diverted from judicial proceedings increased, and more children benefited from alternative measures

### ***Possible Consequences:***

The ongoing reforms in juvenile justice systems could lead to several potential consequences:

1. **Reduced recidivism:** As more jurisdictions adopt evidence-based practices and focus on rehabilitation, we may see a significant decrease in repeat offenses among youth.
2. **Improved life outcomes:** By prioritizing education, mental health treatment, and skill development over punishment, reformed systems could lead to better long-term outcomes for youth who meet the justice system.
3. **Cost savings:** Alternatives to detention are often less expensive than incarceration. As more jurisdictions adopt these alternatives, there could be significant cost savings in the long run.
4. **Shift in public perception:** As reforms show positive results, there may be a shift in public opinion towards more supportive attitudes for rehabilitative approaches.
5. **Challenges in implementation:** Despite the positive trends, there may be challenges in fully implementing these reforms across all jurisdictions. Resistance from entrenched systems, funding limitations, and the need for comprehensive training for juvenile justice personnel can hinder effective reform efforts.
6. **Potential backlash:** If not carefully managed and communicated, there's a risk of public backlash if reforms are perceived as being "soft on crime."
7. **International standardization:** As more countries adopt similar approaches based on UN guidelines and scientific evidence, we may see a more standardized global approach to juvenile justice.
8. **Improved data collection:** Many reform efforts emphasize the importance of data collection and analysis. This could lead to more evidence-based policymaking in the future.

In conclusion, while significant progress has been made in juvenile justice reform, continued advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based practices will be crucial to maintain momentum toward a more rehabilitative approach that prioritizes the well-being of youth while ensuring public safety.

## **COUNTRY BOX**

Argentine Republic  
Commonwealth of Australia  
Dominion of Canada  
Federative Republic of Brazil  
French Republic  
Federal Republic of Germany  
Italian Republic  
Japan  
Kingdom of Netherlands  
Kingdom of Norway  
Kingdom of Sweden  
New Zealand  
Republic of India  
Republic of Indonesia  
Republic of Kenya  
Republic of Korea  
Republic of the Philippines  
Republic of South Africa  
United Mexican States  
United States of America

## **GUIDE QUESTIONS**

- I. How can juvenile justice systems balance rehabilitation with accountability to ensure fair and just sentences for youth offenders?
- II. What are the most effective rehabilitation and reintegration programs currently being implemented around the world for juvenile offenders?
- III. How do cultural and societal perceptions of youth crime affect the sentencing and rehabilitation processes for young offenders?
- IV. What role should international organizations play in promoting juvenile justice reforms that prioritize rehabilitation over punitive measures?
- V. How can juvenile justice systems incorporate individualized approaches to sentencing to address the specific needs of each young offender?

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