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Youth deviance and youth violence: A European multi-agency perspective on best practices in prevention and control.

Nationwide institutional and expert survey report

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Results from the Belgian study

Jenneke Christiaens – Ann Evenepoel

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1 Survey process and composition of sample

1.1 Survey process

In Belgium the nationwide institutional and expert survey was launched in May 2011. All the respondents received an invitation to participate in the survey online through a web-based version. They were also offered the possibility to receive a paper-and-pencil survey delivered by mail. Due to technical problems with the web-based questionnaire (the main part of the respondents could not open the provided link to the survey) we have also sent the survey through mail and via email.

1.2 Response rate and sample composition

An intensive research into the field of prevention of youth deviance and crime in Belgium preceded the construction of the sample that was finally composed of 300 institutions and experts. From this amount only 33 respondents took part. A response rate of 11 % is extremely low.

An important practical problem in organising the survey was that we had a lot of contact information (email) at the level of the institution (or organisation) and not personal emails of members of the local teams. Especially in the French speaking part of Belgium a lot of institutions offered a general email address. This may have an influence on the response rate since we cannot be ensured that the invitation to participate in the survey reached the appropriate persons.

Furthermore the technical problems mentioned earlier have contributed to the low response rate as well. A lot of respondents tried several times to participate through the web-based survey in vain and may have lost their interest and will to co-operate.

Generally a lot of respondents mentioned that they have to participate too much in these kinds of surveys. This 'over-questioning' may also have had an influence on the low response rate in Belgium.

Of the 33 respondents taken part in the questionnaire, 17 persons were female and 16 were male all aged between 24 and 60. The average age was 39,09 (with SD = 9,635).

When we take a look at the educational background, most of the respondents have a degree in criminology or social work. The current fields of work are mainly related to the domain of security and prevention within local social policy entities. Youth delinquency forms an important aspect within this frame, especially problems with (social) incivilities appeared to be related more often to youth. Furthermore prevention of drug and alcohol abuse was indicated as an important task.

In the table below the results can be found regarding the institutional affiliations.

Table 1/ Institutional and organizational information (N= 33)

	N	%
Crime prevention service (prevention project)	15	50,0
Social service / welfare	9	17,9
Prosecutor's office	4	14,3
School / educational institution for minors	2	7,1
Police	1	3,6
Counselling / psychotherapy	1	3,6
University	1	3,6
Total (N)	33	100,0

Table 1/ shows that the main part of the participants work within a crime prevention service (or within a prevention project). In Belgium the possibility exists for local authorities to establish a Strategic Security and Prevention Plan, which is in fact a contract (financed by) with the federal government. It is within these contracts that local prevention services and prevention officers were created. The local Strategic Security and Prevention plans (contracts) imply that financial resources (grants) are provided to cities and municipalities to establish preventive projects. Hence, in Belgium a tradition developed of numerous local prevention projects. At the local level several social services and NGO - initiatives work together especially in the field of youth delinquency. This can explain why the mayor part of our respondents are working within a crime prevention service or a social / welfare service.

Other institutions were mentioned as well: strategic security and prevention plans, youth and child health prevention¹, urban youth service, local policy (institution 'living together')², municipal youth service, coordinating prevention service within section of policy strategy, international cooperation and city-wide financial resources, preventive work through a sport project. The institutional field of prevention seems broad and diverse.

¹ This is called JEPS and stands for 'Jeunesse Enfance Prévention Santé' of the municipality Theux.

² This company called 'Samen Leven' is a fusion between integral security services and social affaires of the city of Antwerp

Based on our results we can conclude and state that all these kind of institutions are situated within the field of local authorities and urban policy and are related to the above-mentioned security and prevention plans.

Finally table 1/ shows that only 1 respondent is working at a university (as a researcher). Nonetheless two other respondents are actually employed as researchers but not within an academic framework. They work as internal evaluators within the field of the Strategic Security and Prevention Plans and local policy in general.

2 Expert’s experiences with and views on youth crime prevention and control

2.1 Target groups of activities in the field of prevention and control of youth deviance, violence and crime

Section two in general deals with the experts’ experiences and views on youth crime prevention and control. With the first question, the respondents were asked to provide more information on the main target groups of their activities in the field.

Questioning the respondents about what are in their view the most important target groups, gives some insight in the image of youths perceived as problematic (in practice) and thus in need of a (preventive) intervention in Belgium.

The experts needed to answer on a 5-point scale (from 1: not at all to 5: very much).

In the following tables we have divided the target groups (1) according to age, (2) specific features of youth and (3) the domain where the intervention takes place.

Table 2/ Main target groups in terms of age (sorted by descending means; N= 33)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
adolescents between age 14 and 17	4,2424	,751
female adolescents between age 14 and 17	3,3636	1,085
young males (18-24 years)	3,2424	1,226
boys up to age 13	2,7576	1,173
young females (18-24 years)	2,6061	1,088
girls up to age 13	2,3636	1,085

The main target group coming out of these results are boys between 14 and 17. Our respondents point this group out as the most important one in the field of prevention of youth violence and crime. Next in line are (surprisingly) girls of the same age group. We can conclude that youngsters between 14 and 17 are seen as the most problematic in the view of our respondents. We can observe a (classical but) significant difference in gender (disadvantaging males in general) since all the female groups are for every age category listed on a lower level than the male age groups.

Table 3/ Main target groups in terms of specific features of youth (sorted by descending means; N= 33)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Youths from disadvantaged families / neighborhoods	3,9091	1,011
Youths with substance abuse problems	3,6667	1,137
First offenders	3,3030	1,403
Ethnic minority youths	3,3030	1,262
Repeat offenders	3,0303	1,510
Victims	2,8485	1,302
People / groups at risk of becoming victims	2,6364	1,319
Youths with mental health problems	2,3939	1,088
Youths in care homes / in foster care	2,2727	1,069
Homeless youths	1,9063	,928
Witnesses	1,5312	,915

From the results we can conclude that youths from disadvantaged families and neighbourhoods are seen as the most problematized and therefore an important target group in the field of prevention and control. This classical vulnerable is immediately followed by youngsters using drugs and young first offenders. Also in the category 'other groups' urban gangs and people with alcohol problems were identified. These results show that in the view of our respondents Belgian youth crime prevention and control practices clearly aim at rather classical individual (drug and alcohol use, first offence) and neighbourhood (deprived environment) related risk factors.

Table 4/ Main target groups in terms of domain where intervention takes place (sorted by descending means; N= 32)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Semiformal / professional agents of social control (welfare offices, schools, health system etc.)	3,5313	1,135
Informal agents of social control (family, neighbors, peers, etc.)	3,0000	1,078
Formal agents of social control (police, criminal courts, etc.)	2,7188	1,349

The respondents indicated that the most important area of preventive activities is located within the area of semiformal social control like welfare institutions, schools and health system (cf. table/4). Table 4 can also be read in the sense that Belgian experts believe (informal) social and welfare agents and institutions are to be preferred above the formal agents of social control in the prevention of problematic and/or criminal behavior of youngsters. This statement is confirmed when we take a look at other categories that the respondents could specify themselves, like for example more general leisure time (like sport clubs) or community services. Nonetheless also formal agents like the public prosecutor's office were mentioned.

2.2 Types of youth problem behavior targeted by current activities

Activities within the field of prevention can be directed not only to specific types of youngsters. These activities can also target specific types of behavior. Asking the respondents which youth problem behavior is currently being targeted by prevention and control practices (question two of the survey), gives insight in which types of problem behavior is regarded as problematic and thus important (in practice) to tackle in Belgium. It is important to note that we do not use the term offense type, since this is a rather restricted label for several types of problem behavior that are not necessarily criminal.

The experts were asked to respond to question two on a 5-point scale (from 1: not at all to 5: very much)

Table 5/ Main types of youth problem behavior (sorted by descending means; 32 < N < 33)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Abuse of illegal substances	3,9091	1,182
School absenteeism	3,7879	,927
Youth violence	3,7576	1,001
Abuse of alcohol / legal substances	3,5455	1,325
School-related violence	3,4242	,830
Youth property offences	3,2727	1,179
Bullying	3,0303	1,132
Dating violence	2,7879	1,516
Gender-based violence	2,5152	1,202
Cyber crime	2,4545	1,063
Sexual offences	2,3030	1,287
Adherence to violence-legitimizing norms	2,2500	1,107
Knife crime	2,2121	1,111
Hate crime / violence against minorities	2,0909	1,011
Use of violent media	2,0000	,901
Political/religious extremism	1,7500	,803

From the table 5 we can conclude that experts perceive abuse of illegal substances, school absenteeism and youth violence as the main types of youth problem behavior targeted by their current activities in the field. Even abuse of (for adults) legal substances is listed very high. Related to minors this category of behavior is seen as problematic and subject of preventive interventions. Furthermore it can be observed that problematic behavior related to the school is indicated as very important by the experts, especially school-related violence and school absenteeism. On the other end of the spectrum the 'use of violent media' was listed as a rather rare target of prevention and control practices. Notwithstanding, the phenomenon of for example 'happy slapping' receives increasing (media) attention in Belgium.

An important type of problem behaviour, mentioned by six different experts, is the category of so-called incivilities or nuisance (disrupting public order, occupation of public space, graffiti). This

phenomenon occupies an important place in the Belgium prevention field of youth problem behavior. Further other types indicated were: marginalization, gathering and violence in the streets, negative self-image and self-injury, lack of impulse control.

2.3 Approaches in prevention and control of youth deviance, violence and crime

The following question is concerned with experts' view on the main approaches in prevention and control of youth deviance, crime and violence. Again they needed to estimate their answers on a 5-point scale (from 1: not at all to 5: very much).

The different categories are below divided in two tables. Table 6 shows the results regarding the general character of prevention approaches (primary – secondary – tertiary). Table 7 represents respondents' answers concerning more specific forms of preventive approaches

Table 6/ Main approaches taken in prevention of youth deviance, crime and violence in terms of general features (sorted by descending means; N=33)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Secondary/targeted approaches (directed at at-risk populations)	3,5455	1,003
Tertiary/indicated approaches (directed at persons who have already become offenders/victims)	3,2424	1,251
Primary/universal approaches (directed at anybody)	3,0606	1,171

The results in table 6 show that primary prevention models are considered less important than secondary and tertiary in the Belgian context. This means that according to the respondents Belgian prevention of youth deviance and crime is focussed in the first place on youngsters (already) at risk of becoming offender/victim or already an offender/victim. A more general prevention approach focussing on a broad (general) youth group is considered less prominent. As mentioned earlier there is an important focus on risk factors in Belgium.

Table 7/ Specific features of approaches of prevention of youth deviance, crime and violence (sorted by descending means; 31<N<33)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Measures with a focus on social integration	3,4545	1,121
Measures targeted at reducing risk factors	3,3636	1,085
Measures with a broader focus on individual development	3,3030	1,185
Measures targeted at strengthening protective factors	3,2812	1,054
Offender-focussed approaches	3,2121	1,341
Situational approaches (reducing crime opportunities and rewards; increasing offenders' efforts and risks of detection and prosecution)	3,0938	1,174
Measures with a narrow focus on crime	2,8485	1,302
Measures based on punishment and deterrence	2,7273	1,257
Victim-focussed approaches	2,3030	1,132

When we take a look at the table above the most important approach of prevention appears to be measures focusing on social integration and measures targeting risk factors. It is however important to know how the experts interpret this concept. Measures focusing on social integration can be seen as part of primary prevention, aiming for example to stimulate social integration through decent employment policy. However, stimulating social integration is more often used as a pretext to (re) integrate (young) offenders or at risk populations at an individual level. Good examples are the numerous projects in Belgium aimed at young offenders or youth at risk or even just young people 'hanging' in public spaces with the purpose to direct them to leisure time activities or (sport) associations in order to entertain them, remove them from the street and "integrate them in

society”. In the latter case, we cannot speak anymore of a primary prevention approach. Therefore, this reintegrative approach must be understood as a modality of the (secondary) risk approach.

A striking observation is that measures targeted at reducing risks are perceived as more important than measures targeted at reducing protective factors. This however confirms the results in table 6/ making visible the priority assigned to secondary and tertiary approaches instead of primary.

3.1 Institutions and professions involved in prevention and control of youth deviance, violence and crime

Questioning which institutions and professions are involved in prevention and control of youth crime and violence delivered the following results (cf. table 8). Again respondents were asked to answer on a 5-point scale (from 1: not at all to 5: very much). There was also room provided to specify other categories.

Table 8 / Institutions and professions involved in prevention and control of youth deviance, violence and crime (sorted by descending means; 31<N<33)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Police	4,2424	0,867
Crime prevention service	4,0937	1,058
Social services / welfare	3,8438	1,051
Social workers	3,7576	1,062
Educational system / schools	3,5313	1,047
Courts / public Prosecutors	3,5152	1,202
Probationary service	3,2500	1,270
Correctional facilities	2,9375	1,162
Psychologists	2,8485	1,278
Health system / health professions	2,6452	1,018

Police and local crime prevention services are clearly considered to be the main actors of youth crime prevention in Belgium. This confirms that in Belgium local crime prevention services indeed play

central roles in this domain (cf. table 1). Unfortunately we could not reach different police officers³ to participate in the survey although they are regarded as the main actor involved in the prevention field.

Besides these main actors, social professions and services, as well as schools and educational organisations are regarded as key actors. The fact that psychologists and the health system are considered to be less important could imply that respondents see crime prevention preferably directed at external and visible behaviour. It could also imply that in the Belgian context youth crime and its causes are not immediately related to internal, psychological or medical factors. Finally, it certainly indicates that the prevention of youth crime in Belgium is dominantly taken up by police and prevention services.

3.2 Significance of interagency and multi-professional approaches

The institutional survey questioned the perceived and actual importance of interagency cooperation and multi-professional approaches in youth crime prevention and control according to the experts in their country, region or community. The respondents were asked to estimate two statements again on a 5-point scale (from 1: not at all to 5: very much). The results are shown in table 8.

Table 9/ Interagency cooperation and multi-professional approaches (sorted by descending means; 31<N<33)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
... are regarded as important in tackling youth crime / youth violence	4,2188	1,006
... are common practice in tackling youth crime / youth violence	3,3333	1,109

The results show that Belgian experts (respondents) regard the importance of interagency cooperation as very important. However, it is considered to be a less common practice in the Belgian field of prevention of youth crime and violence.

³ Only one police officer took part in the survey

3.3 Situation of financing and funding

The survey also paid attention to the funding (financial context) of prevention practices. Besides, the question of whom (authorities?) is providing financial resources for prevention activities in the field of youth crime prevention, respondents were also questioned to assess the current state of funding of the Belgian prevention domain (stable; predictable and sufficient). The results are displayed in the tables below.

Table 10/ Bodies funding youth crime prevention and control (sorted by descending means; N= 32)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Federal government / communities / regions	4,1818	,808
Cities and municipalities	3,7879	,960
Non-profit organization / voluntary organizations	2,3333	,957
Charities	2,0606	,747
Foundations	1,9697	,809
European Union	1,9688	,933
Commercial enterprises / companies	1,4545	,711

We can state that in Belgian public authorities dominantly fund prevention practices. The federal government together with communities and regions were pointed out as the main providers of financial resources in the field of youth crime prevention and control. Also the cities and municipalities play an important role according to their perception, which may point in the direction of financial resources provided through the earlier mentioned strategic security and prevention plans.

The respondents agree to a great extend that the European Union and commercial enterprises provide the least financial resources.

Table 11/ Situation of financing and funding in the field of youth crime prevention and control in terms of reliability (sorted by descending means; N= 32, 33)

Funding in general is ...	Mean	Std. Deviation
stable	2,3125	1,148
predictable	2,0909	1,042
sufficient	1,8788	1,139

These results show that according to Belgian experts financing and funding of youth crime prevention and control is neither stable, predictable nor sufficient.

3.4 Political strategies with regard to youth problem behaviour

With question 14 the experts were asked to what extent they would consider there is a coherent political strategy of dealing with problems of youth crime and violence. The results are shown in table 12.

Table/12 Existence of coherent political youth crime prevention strategy

Is there a coherent political strategy?	Frequency	Percent
no strategy at all	4	12,1
only partially	27	81,8
fully developed	2	6,1

A majority of experts (81,8 %) think that in Belgium there is only partially a coherent political strategy with regard to youth problem behavior.

Asking the respondents to provide more information on where Belgian prevention strategy is laid down, the vast majority pointed at the Strategic Security and Prevention Plans through consultation and cooperation between several political governments (federal as well as regional and communal).

Integral and integrated prevention approaches are very popular concepts in Belgium and can be seen as multi-professional and interagency strategies. Numerous experts refer to them as characteristics of Belgian political strategy. However even a larger part claims that although these concepts are recognized as important, there is a lack of coherency, cooperation, coordination and adaptation of political strategies amongst several services, sectors and political levels.

According to experts prevention services are primarily responsible for setting the strategy in action. More general is often referred to local authorities and public administrations in consultation with communal and federal governments.

3.5 Evaluation in the field of youth crime prevention and control

After the question regarding the existence of a political strategy, the experts were asked how they would characterize the overall status of evaluation in the field of prevention and control of youth crime and violence in their country (respectively community or region). The results are presented in table 13 below.

Table/13 the overall status of evaluation in the field of prevention and control of youth deviant behavior, crime and violence (descending frequency; N= 32)

Status of evaluation	Frequency	Percent
average	17	53,1
below average	13	40,6
extremely poor	1	3,1
above average	1	3,1
excellent	0	0

More than half of respondents assess the status of evaluation in the field of youth crime prevention and control as average. Moreover 40,6 % thinks that this is even below average. No experts claim that the status of evaluation was excellent and only one person indicated above average.

When the respondents were asked to indicate who finances or commissions evaluation research almost half of them did not give an answer. This could be caused by two reasons. On one hand, respondents could be not aware of who is actually responsible for evaluation. On the other hand, this could reveal that respondents consider that there is an important lack of evaluation research in Belgium. Figures from table 13 can in some way confirm the last statement.⁴

Other part of respondents all indicated the federal government or the government of the regions or communities. Asking the experts’ opinion to what extend evaluation is a condition for financing, results give a scattered image. Several respondents indicate that evaluation is a condition contained in de Strategic Security and Prevention Plans (the function of an intern evaluator is explicitly foreseen in the contract). However, other experts claim that this (theoretical) condition is not really translated

⁴ One expert even claimed that evaluation research is nonexistent in Belgium

into practice. Moreover, a majority of the experts even thinks that there are no standards in Belgium regarding evaluation. Some indicate again the Security and Prevention plans.

In general the respondents characterize the status of evaluation in Belgium as nonexistent, scattered initiatives, not scientifically substantiated and with lack of cooperation between several governments. Actually quite chaotic, value and opinion based and not evidence based.

3.6 Sources of information on prevention of youth problem behavior

The last question of section two of the survey was formulated as followed: “where do you turn to in order to find quality information on prevention of youth deviance / youth violence / youth crime?”

A first surprising result is that most of the experts use more general information sources such as publications, databases, books, literature and most frequently they refer to the internet. Experts use often experience of colleagues in the field and information gained at conferences and study days. Several experts also use information made available by the police like newsletters, statistics and the Belgian Security Monitor. Generally they use information stemmed from services and institutions in the field like youth services and prevention services. However they do not always refer to the exact sources. Except for the following institutions or services:

- **National Institute for Criminalistics and Criminology (NICC):** this institution supports on the one hand judicial investigation through the execution of forensic expertise and providing expert reports (criminalistics). On the other hand the service of criminology conducts for a broad range of sponsors scientific research about different criminal phenomena and the responses to them.
- **Belgian Security Monitor:** this implies a population research on a large scale that is conducted on various points in time in Belgium. It involves themes like security, victimization en the functioning of police forces.
- **The Belgium Prize for Security and Crime Prevention:** this award is granted each year by the Federal public service of internal affaires, Direction local integral security. Every year another theme stands in the spotlight
- **Urban security - The Belgian forum for prevention and security in the cities and municipalities.** This initiative tries to bring together cities and municipalities in Belgium in order to reflect together on a integrated crime prevention policy. It aims to promote this nationally and internationally and to exchange and improve good practices.
- **Youth Welfare www.jongerenwelzijn.be:** this organization aims to provide information on

the special youth care system and its related services in Flanders for youth, their family or professions in the field.

- **'Infopunt jeugddiensten' (information point youth services)**
- **Integral youth assistance:** Is a policy concept that tries to organize Flemish youth assistance in Belgium and strengthen the cooperation between several sectors involved with youth assistance.
- **Federal public service of internal affairs**
- **Flemish information point for Youngsters:** This network association is responsible for the support and stimulation of making information available for children, teenagers and adolescents.
- **The Flemish association for cities and municipalities:** this organization is responsible for developing a strategy, providing service (exchange of information and knowledge) and looking after the interests of local governments in Flanders.
- **Association of alcohol and drug problems:** This association unites the large majority of organizations in Flanders aimed at tackling drugs, alcohol, medicines and gambling problems.

Furthermore policy documents were indicated as an important source like zonal security plans or in general the ministry of internal affairs (like mentioned above).

The most striking observation was that a significant number of experts turn to media as an important source. Eight respondents claimed that they either use newspapers or news on TV as a source for quality information. As previously mentioned a lot of experts also use the Internet in general, this can also be perceived as a media source. Because they did not specify which websites in these cases, it is not possible for us to draw this conclusion. However the fact that a lot of experts use media as a source may indicate that in Belgium there is a huge lack of centralized quality and professional information available.

A few respondents also mentioned journals that they use when they need qualitative information. These were:

- **Tijdschrift Welwijs:** Journal with information on interface between social work (welfare) and education
- **Tijdschrift voor welzijnswerk ('Weliswaar'):** A journal on welfare matters
- **Panopticon:** Journal for criminal law, criminology and forensic social work

4 Experts' view on effects and efficiency of measures in youth crime prevention and control

The last section of the survey dealt with the experts' view on which programs, activities and projects in the field of prevention and control of youth crime that according to them work, appeared promising or does not work.

4.1 What works or appears promising?

In the following we will provide a list of programs or specific projects that are according to the respondents efficient or appear promising in preventing youth crime.

4.1.1 Programs within the judicial domain:

- Police intervention in general: appropriate for young people that have committed a crime or were involved in it
- The employment of criminologists at the youth prosecutor's office was considered as an effective method to approach first offenders. Also the intervention of youth public prosecutor like a warning letter or convocation at the prosecutor's office with the parents was seen as an instrument to reduce the feeling of impunity amongst youngsters.
- Programs aimed at youth who were placed in closed institutions (or youth prisons). For example **'API'** (*'accompagnement post-institutionnel'*) is an organization linked to the closed community centers for the placement of minors. This service offers guidance after these youngsters leave the closed institution in order to reintegrate the minors in their environment and keep track of what happens after they get released. Another program aimed at youth who end up in prison for the first time is called **TOP- coaches** (*'terug op pad'*).

4.1.2 Programs aimed at school related problematic behavior

The participants in the survey appear to attach significant importance to prevention measures that take place in the school environment. The following examples were mentioned:

- **'Accrochage scolaire'** is a service of the French speaking community and aim to tackle school absenteeism and school violence
- **'Time-out project'** is often used in Belgium within the context of schools and consists of a period of time-out for youth with problematic behavior with the aim of offering specific guidance. This is used to prevent school drop out.

- **'Unplugged project'** is an educational program aimed at teachers to prevent drug use with students for the first grade of secondary schools. This program is the first prevention program that is scientifically evaluated by European Drug Abuse Prevention (EU Dap). It appears to be effective in reducing or postpone experimental behavior of young students.
- **'Schoolspotters'** are people who supervise the environment around schools. This project aims to tackle problems like incivilities, school absenteeism and bullying.

A significant part of the experts indicated **restorative practices** in general as effective especially to (re) connect youth with society and to establish or restore social ties. One respondent specified group conferences as a restorative answer in school that involves the whole school community (teachers, parents, youth and the class). Some experts refer to alternative restorative sanctions like community work effective for minor delinquents who did not commit serious offences and express feelings of empathy. Restorative practices were regarded as important for strengthening the feeling of responsibility amongst minors and reduce feelings of insecurity and injustice amongst victims.

4.1.3 General social services, institution and professions

A large part of the respondents mentioned several social services established within the special youth care system in Belgium. They offer assistance to youth and their family but nonetheless this is not always narrowly focused on (prevention of) delinquency or deviant behavior. Some examples mentioned were:

- **AMO 'Aide en Milieu Ouvert'** (assistance in an open environment): This is a service of the French speaking community and offers preventive help and guidance to youth on a non-compulsory base.
- **Centre Public d'Aide Sociale:** This is a public center for social assistance that often has a section with youth work. It may be effective with regard to integration, work, health and school drop out.
- **Comité voor Bijzondere Jeugdzorg** (committee for special youth care) and **Service d'Aide à la Jeunesse** (service for assistance to youth) are respectively from the Flemish community and the French community. These services offer voluntary assistance to youth and their family and were mentioned as effective for first offenders who are willing to cooperate.
- **Community guards:** These guards are supervisors who work within a certain municipality in cooperation with the police. They are regarded as effective for prevention of small incivilities and preservation of security around school areas.

- **Youth houses/ clubs:** offer a place to spend time for non-organized youth and can guide them to find connection with possible services needed.
- **Community centers:** These centers are effective according to the experts because they can daily follow-up the youngsters in a risk-environment on a long-term base.
- **Street work (ers):** Are effective because they get to know the youngsters in trouble and try to understand them. They work proactively with regard to vulnerable youth and tackle social incivilities

4.1.4 Specific programs

- Cognitive behavioral and pedagogical programs:
 - **'Zapp'** (self-reliance preventive program): This is a training program to enforce self-reliance for youth who are 'too weak' and easily become a victim of for example bullying. On the other hand it also offers training in the other way around for youth with low impulse control and aggressive behavior.
 - **'Rots en water'**: This project (originally from the Netherlands) offers a defensibility-training program for boys and girls.
 - **'Fan coaching'** is a project aimed to prevent violent behavior amongst (young) football supporters through (pedagogical) activities organized by social workers.
 - **'Opboxen'** is a project that comes from the Netherlands⁵ and addresses in Belgium youth from 14 years old. The project tries to positively stimulate their self-image and confidence and social skills through box training and guidance.
 - **'Project Passerelle'** organizes collective activities for young people (with the focus on urban arts) and tries to prevent youth violence.
 - **'Project multolerantie'** is an intensive guidance program (in cooperation with the judicial system) for minors aged between 12 and 23 who have been subject of a measure applied by the juvenile judge. In the period of 9 months group activities and supportive counseling / conversations are being organized.
 - **'Été solidaire je suis partenaire'**: a project that offers student jobs by during the summer. It involves community services and tries to improve the life style of youths by letting them work in public spaces and with fragile persons like older people.
 - **'POT project'**: support for 15-18 year old students in part-time education (prevention of school absenteeism)

⁵ www.opboxen.nl

- **'Colombus project'** is a project for minors and their family who have been subject of an intervention of the special youth care committee. Basically this project aims to search in a constructive way for a solution together with every member of the family.
- **'Project early intervention'**: this project is organized in the city of Antwerp. It is directed at youngsters who display problematic drugs or alcohol abuse. At the end of a guidance session it is decided whether the minor needs to be referred to another service or which other steps need to be taken.
- **'Youth encounter spaces'**: This initiative wants to create spaces for youngsters to 'hang around'.
- **'Guidance trajectory crisis and collocation'**: this program is directed at children and youngsters with psychiatric problems who are referred to the youth prosecutor's office in order to collocate them. The trajectory involves an intensive screening of the file by child and youth psychiatrists with the aim of finding an appropriate alternative for a forced placement.
- **'Youth intervention team'** (Antwerp): This city service conducts home visits after a case of incivil behaviour with a minor. It tries to confront both the parents and the youngster involved and investigates whether other underlying problems are present in order to start a guidance trajectory or to refer them to an appropriate service (if necessary).
- **'Young' association** (vzw Jong): This organization is responsible for the youth welfare work in the city of Ghent. It organizes daily activities for children and youngsters but offers guidance as well. It also aims to advise and sensitize relevant services and governments.
- **'t Circuit project'**: This project offers individual and group guidance for youngsters of secondary education who experiment with alcohol and drugs.
- **'ACT Therapy'** (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy): This preventive training is directed at youngsters from secondary education. It tries to teach them to cope with negative things in their lives. This therapy involves more general health prevention that tries to stimulate the wellbeing of young people.
- **'Family group conferences'** (eigen kracht conferenties): These conferences aims to solve problems by implying and bringing together key figures in a persons life and environment like neighbours, friends, family and to search together for a solution. An independent professional social worker supervises the process and coordinates it.
- **'Jes'** (Antwerp): This service is responsible for the youth work in Antwerp. It organizes activities, formations and courses for youngsters.
- **'First offenders'**: With this project in Ghent police works together with the social service and the youth prosecutor's office. It is directed at minors who have committed their first offence and tries to prevent recidivism and if necessary support in situations where the youngster's behaviour is caused by underlying problems.

- **'SOS Enfants'**: This center deals with all kinds of problems related to child abuse.
- **'Machtig!'**: This program is based on the 'Rots en water' project mentioned earlier. It aims to enforce the defensibility and assertiveness of youngsters in order to give them more power on their own lives.
- **'Action plan school absenteeism'**: This policy instrument contains a sort of manual for an integrated approach of truancy. It tries to involve relevant services and to stimulate their cooperation.
- **'No blame method'**: This method (for schools) is directed at tackling and preventing bullying with youngsters in a problem solving, non-punitive way.
- **'Cleanliness charter'**: This initiative organized in Ghent tries to stimulate cooperation between pupils from the schools and the city service in order to keep the city clean.
- **'Green care projects'**: These projects let young people work in farms or other nature related projects to offer them appropriate leisure time activities.
- **'Project young leaders' ('Koplopers')**: Is an intensive formation for social vulnerable youngsters who have leader mentalities and capacities. It aims to provide these 'leader figures' a significant role in the social change of vulnerable neighbourhoods.
- **'Réveille toi mon gars'**: This diving project tries to teach youngsters from difficult neighbourhoods social skills and self-confidence with attention for a group dynamic.

It can be concluded that the experts advocate measures or interventions aimed at behavioral change through pedagogical and cognitive programs. The school appeared to be a key environment to organize prevention activities and interventions. The problem of incivilities is often targeted by prevention measures, which confirms the previous observation that these types of problems are regarded as important. Finally several experts mentioned the need for cooperation between several social institutions, school and police and measures aimed at parents like parent training and assistance.

Only a few respondents explained why some programs are promising but not yet (proven as) effective. The most important explanations were that these projects still needed to be evaluated and where currently still in experimental phase. The other reason was the lack of resources to establish certain initiatives. More need for a systematic structure for delinquent minors with psychological and psychiatric problems was stressed too as necessarily but not enough provided in Belgium.

4.2 What does not work?

In the last part of the survey, the experts were asked to mention measures, programs, activities that are ineffective. First of all some respondents argued that more general concepts do not work like the service for assistance to youth or even in total the organization of the Special Youth Care (Flemish community)⁶. Furthermore also the large amount of measures foreseen in the law regarding the protection of youth was regarded as ineffective due to lack of resources. Also several forms of youth work that does not put boundaries to the behavior of youth who cause incivilities were mentioned as ineffective.

Finally the last general measure that was advocated as ineffectively was compulsory interventions due to the fact that the minors are no longer the actors anymore.

Besides these more general remarks regarding what does not work, the experts also specified some programs or interventions:

- **prevention of violent behavior in schools** are ineffective due to lack of staff.
- **camera surveillance** causes a displacement of the problem and does not have a preventive influence on violent behavior.
- **fines** do not work for behavioral change and same applies to boot camps.
- **a letter with a reminder on the law** sent by the youth public prosecutor's office is not effective for delinquent and nuisance youths.
- **additional police patrols** can often work as fuel to fire
- **mono-functional organization of public space** may have some unexpected and unintentional effects.
- the use of **classic social prevention concepts** like integration and emancipation do not work for a certain nationality like East-European people according to one respondent.
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5 Summary and conclusions

The Belgian nationwide institutional expert survey reached mainly people from social services and local crime prevention services. These local services can be considered as important instruments in developing and translating local prevention policies of cities and municipalities.

Preventive approaches in Belgium are classically aimed at young boys from disadvantaged families and neighborhoods and/or with substance abuse problems. Moreover school related deviance is

⁶ Which is a striking observation considering that these services were previously mentioned as effective instruments in the domain of prevention of youth deviance and crime

regarded as important to tackle. This shows that in Belgium a sharp focus on risk factors in preventing youth crime prevails. Those risk factors are traditionally placed on the individual level (drug use), family and community (disadvantaged neighborhoods and families) and school (school related deviance and crime). This observation is supported when looking at the dominant prevention models in the views of our respondents: especially secondary and tertiary prevention approaches are preferred in combination with approaches focusing reduction of risk factors. Key actors of Belgian prevention practice appear to be police and local prevention and social services.

All our experts regard interagency cooperation and multi-professional approaches as very important. At the same time they indicate that this approach is far from reality in Belgian prevention practices. The same can be said about the state of financing and funding as well as evaluation of measures in the field of prevention and control of youth crime.

Concerning the use of (professional and non professional) sources, we must stress the huge lack of high standard professional information available for people working in youth crime prevention practices. The fact that professionals working in the domain of prevention and control of youth crime more often turn to media sources for relevant information shows the need for more systematic, accessible, centralized and valuable sources.

Exploring measures in youth crime prevention considered to be effective, most respondents point out behavioral programs, related to sports or other leisure activities, in combination with individual assistance. Especially projects related to school environment are positively evaluated by respondents. Finally more general welfare services aimed at youth are regarded as effective in preventing youth crime. However, these same services appear in the list of programs that are considered not to work. Respondents argue that due to a lack of resources, the youth welfare system does not work at all and needs to be reconsidered.

However, this Belgian institutional expert survey reached only a very small number of experts. Therefore, our findings must be taken as very preliminary and explorative. Results must be read as hypothesis and questions to be further explored. Results cannot be generalized and perceived as defining for the Belgian youth crime prevention practices.