

Global Innovations on
Youth Violence, Safety and Justice Program

Key Insights On *Advancing Youth Safety and Justice: Transformative Policies, Community Solutions, and Accountable Practices*



December 1 to 6, 2025

Salzburg, Austria



The following insights and recommendations emerged from the Salzburg Global session on *“Advancing Youth Safety and Justice: Transformative Policies, Community Solutions, and Accountable Practices”* held in Salzburg, Austria from December 1 to 6, 2025.

Salzburg Global's *Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice* program began in 2021 with the aim to reform justice systems and promote youth safety worldwide. While this has been a sustained, multi-year initiative, the five key insights that follow reflect the central takeaways from the session held in December 2025 on *“Advancing Youth Safety and Justice: Transformative Policies, Community Solutions, and Accountable Practices.”*

This gathering brought together experts, youth leaders, and those with lived experience of the justice system to address how systems must evolve to handle emerging digital and environmental risks while remaining grounded in lived experience and empathy. The focus of this final session was the consolidation of concrete, actionable outputs, moving from exploration to alignment in order to accelerate meaningful systems change.

Opinions expressed here do not necessarily represent the opinions of all participating Fellows, nor of their institutions, nor of Salzburg Global.

The Transformative Power of Narrative and Language

Precise, accessible language is vital across all sectors to counter harmful stereotypes and misinformation. By reframing narratives, we can shift institutional culture away from "soft on crime" perceptions toward a focus on human dignity. Effective storytelling directly influences resource allocation and drives the systemic change necessary for sustainable reform.

What's needed:

- Investment in narrative change strategies that equip practitioners, advocates, and institutions with precise, human-centered language.
- Support for storytelling that reframes justice around dignity, safety, and long-term impact.
- Data-informed communications that link narrative shifts to policy decisions and resource allocation.



"Nothing About Us Without Us": Centering Lived Experiences

Meaningful reform requires centralizing youth voices in policy frameworks and implementation. Systems must prioritize evidence-based developmental science and child-centered approaches, such as those utilized in Brazil, to elevate lived truths over deficit narratives. Mobilizing youth leadership ensures that those most affected by justice systems are architects of their evolution.

What's needed:

- Formal mechanisms to embed youth with lived experience into policy design, governance, and evaluation.
- Adoption of child-centered, developmentally grounded frameworks that move beyond deficit-based narratives.
- Sustained funding and capacity-building for youth leadership and peer-led initiatives.





3

Leading with Curiosity to Move Beyond Punitive Reflexes

Innovation in justice begins with empathy and a commitment to understanding the "why" behind behavior. Instead of relying on punitive reflexes, practitioners must prioritize root causes, trauma, and community contexts. Challenging labels that define young people by a single action allows for a more nuanced, trauma-informed approach to safety and healing.

What's needed:

- Training for justice actors in trauma-informed, curiosity-driven practices that prioritize root causes over punishment.
- System-wide efforts to challenge labels and language that reduce young people to single actions.
- Time, space, and institutional support for reflective practice and community-based problem solving.



4

Building Bridges Through Cross-Cultural Collaboration

The complexity of modern justice requires multi-disciplinary partnerships between policymakers, practitioners, youth, and corporations. Drawing inspiration from global case studies and cross-country learning strengthens the "whole-system approach".

What's needed:

- Multi-disciplinary partnerships connecting policymakers, practitioners, youth, corporate partners, and researchers.
- Structured platforms for cross-country learning and adaptation of promising global practices.
- Incentives for systems to collaborate across silos and adopt a whole-system approach.

5

Evolving Systems for a Rapidly Changing World

Digital and environmental shifts, including AI-driven harms and climate change, are reshaping risks to children faster than current systems can adapt. Children face increasing exposure to organized criminal networks and unsafe conditions in custody. Justice systems must rapidly strengthen standards to protect children from these emerging technological and social realities.

What's needed:

- Updated safeguarding standards that address AI-driven harms, digital exploitation, and environmental risks.
- Stronger oversight and accountability mechanisms to protect children in custody from emerging threats.
- Agile policy frameworks that allow justice systems to respond rapidly to technology.



Call to Action

The future of youth justice must be shaped by a commitment to bridging the gap between vision and implementation. Salzburg Global Fellows have moved beyond dialogue to lead systemic efforts that prioritize child-centered legal frameworks, inclusive leadership, and community-led safety. To move forward, allies and partners must do more than observe: They must commit to redistributing resources, embracing intergenerational leadership, and building a future where safety is built on dignity and equity rather than punishment.





Read More From *Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice*

Salzburg Global's *Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice* initiative began in 2021 with the aim of reforming justice systems and promoting youth safety worldwide. Over the past five years, the initiative has brought together Fellows from across sectors and regions, generating a body of work that reflects shared learning and emerging evidence. As this initiative concluded with the 2025 session, we invite you to explore the full digital report, which captures the depth and breadth of this multi-year program.



Explore our digital report

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Salzburg Global is where open-minded leaders from around the world gather for breakthrough conversations on pressing global issues.

We are an independent, non-profit organization with a mission to overcome barriers and *open up a world of better possibilities.*

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