



SALZBURG
GLOBAL
SEMINAR

75th Anniversary

The Salzburg Statement on Youth Violence Reduction

BACKGROUND

Bold reforms in different jurisdictions suggest that cross-cutting interventions can be cost-effective and foster more humane, inclusive, and healthier societies. Fellows participating in this initiative have looked beyond the classic justice system to identify a “whole systems approach” (under different names in different contexts and jurisdictions) as the innovation with the most potential to influence approaches to youth violence reduction and criminal justice reform. In this approach, policymakers have used scientific evidence and the best available research to identify what causes youth violence and what interventions can stop it from spreading. Different organizations, professions, and sectors come together to support youth and to address the causes of violence holistically.

Central to that methodology is the intersection between research, policy, and practice, community-centered dialogue, and multi-stakeholder engagement. It concretely connects to models already employed in restorative justice, lessons from transitional justice in post-conflict post-authoritarian settings, and overcoming threats from political violence and extremism. As specifics vary among jurisdictions, these different contexts can provide a set of learnings that could influence reform efforts globally.

This Salzburg Statement represents general collective outcomes from discussions held during this initiative. The recommendations do not necessarily represent unanimous agreement, nor do Fellows participate in this initiative in their professional capacities as representatives of their respective organizations. This Statement is not attributable to any Fellow individually nor to their organizations.

Read more online: salzburgglobal.org/go/justice

INTRODUCTION

The [Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice](#) initiative seeks to tackle youth violence and promote youth safety and criminal justice reform. Launched in January 2021, this major multi-year series has brought together [over 100 diverse stakeholders](#), including young adults, to address the legal, economic, and social weaknesses and inefficiencies of legal systems across multiple jurisdictions.

This Salzburg Statement on Youth Violence Reduction sets out key elements for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to consider. Recognizing that across the world there are variations on language used, legal parameters, systems and structures, as well as unforeseen factors that affect a country’s stability, setting out guiding principles can help policymakers build on international evidence. This enables continuous learning and improvements worldwide.

KEY GOALS

- **Protect young people:** Young people should grow up in a safe and supportive environment.
- **Address systemic issues:** Remedying underlying issues which create inequality or injustice is critical to reducing a key driver of youth violence.
- **Improve public safety:** This can lead to increased public trust in law enforcement and other institutions and increase social trust more generally.
- **Reduce human and financial costs:** Victims of violence may suffer physical injuries, emotional trauma, and long-term health effects. Violence also imposes significant costs on the healthcare system, criminal justice system, and the economy as a whole.
- **Invest in the future:** The next generation should have the tools and resources it needs to succeed.

GUIDELINES FOR A WHOLE SYSTEMS APPROACH

- **Focus on prevention:** Research has consistently shown that early intervention is critical in preventing youth violence. A whole systems approach prioritizes the prevention of youth violence through early intervention and targeted prevention strategies. This involves identifying risk factors and addressing them early on to prevent violent behavior. Effective interventions include programs that promote social-emotional learning, parent support in the first 1001 days, attunement and empathy building, play and bonding, and home visit programs for at-risk families. Trauma treatment and recovery (for both children and parents) results in the prevention or reduction of adverse childhood experiences.
- **Address underlying causes:** It is important to address the underlying

causes of youth violence, which can include poverty, lack of access to education, unemployment, exposure to trauma and violence, substance use and abuse, and mental health challenges. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach that involves various stakeholders and sectors working together.

- **Remedy systemic inequities:** Many of the challenges facing young people today are rooted in systemic inequities and injustices, such as poverty, racism, and inequality in access to education and healthcare. Addressing these underlying issues can create a more equitable society for young people. This includes advocating for policy changes and investing in programs that address systemic inequities, as well as actively working to dismantle discriminatory practices and structures within systems that serve youth. Options include to invest in programs and initiatives that prioritize equity and justice, such as restorative justice programs and community-led initiatives, and to support and amplify the voices of marginalized youth and communities in advocacy and policymaking processes.
- **Foster supportive relationships and environments:** Positive relationships and environments are essential for young people's well-being and success. This includes fostering supportive relationships with caring adults, peers, and community members, as well as creating safe and supportive physical and social environments. Additionally, it is important to promote resilience and social-emotional development in young people, which can help them navigate challenges and adversity. Depending on the context, young people will need support in how they themselves have experienced violence – a leading indicator of propensity to cause violent behavior in adolescence and young adulthood – including through war, civil conflict, neighborhood gang and criminal activity, and domestic violence. This support can be provided through training and resources for adults who work with young people to better understand and support their social-emotional needs; promoting the development of safe and supportive physical environments, such as affordable and stable housing and access to green spaces; investing in programs and initiatives that promote positive youth development, such as mentoring programs and after-school activities; and offering opportunities for gainful employment to break the cycle of dependence and poverty.
- **Empower youth:** Youth should be empowered to participate meaningfully in the development and implementation of solutions. This includes involving youth in decision-making processes and providing opportunities for community members to take ownership of the issue and to develop the leadership of young people and adults with lived experience. Efforts to support youth safety are most effective when they leverage the strengths and voices of young people themselves as well as individuals with relevant lived experiences (e.g. people who experienced violence and/or incarceration in their youth). These people bring a critical perspective and use their experiences to guide better outcomes. At the same time, young people and individuals with lived experience often have less access to training and leadership development. Therefore, an intentional and robust approach to skills-building, leadership support, and gainful and desirable employment opportunities is critical to ensure that young people and individuals with lived experience are able to participate as equals rather than tokens.
- **Emphasize healing:** Trauma is widespread. Amongst youth who are likely to engage in high-risk behavior and/or interact with the criminal legal system, it is virtually universal. To create better outcomes for young people, it is of vital importance that the physical and psychological spaces in which we do this work are safe and create opportunities for healing. “Trauma-informed care” is the most popular framework addressing trauma, and it has helped advance the field of youth work, but it is time we outgrow it. Trauma-informed care does not only apply to trauma treatment, but to any human service provided (health, education, law enforcement, criminal legal, etc.) and emphasizes the need to account for any underlying trauma experienced by the individual. This includes emphasizing the need to avoid additional trauma caused by involvement in the “system.” Instead, “healing-centered engagement” offers the opportunity to recognize the universality of trauma and loss, and create spaces and approaches that provide safety and opportunities for healing.
- **Focus on humanizing the “other”:** Othering and dehumanization drive disparate outcomes, leading to the creation of social hierarchies. It is therefore critical to humanize these young people and the social groups they belong to in order to attack inequality at its root. For example, acts of violence around the world are disproportionately committed by boys and men, with girls and women frequently the targets. Healthy masculinity in safe and nurturing environments can support boys and young men to develop in non-violent ways.

- **Understand the impact of technology on youth:** Technology has revolutionized the way young people interact with the world, but it has also brought new challenges and risks. These include cyberbullying, online harassment, and exposure to harmful content. Therefore, it is important to address the impact of technology on youth and to support young people in developing healthy relationships with technology. Education and resources can be provided for young people on digital literacy and online safety, including addressing the root causes of cyberbullying and online harassment. Conversely, technology can also be harnessed to empower youth, seeing a positive role for tech in empowering young people to connect, communicate, and even build valuable employability skills.
- **Keep a long-term perspective:** A whole systems approach takes a long-term perspective, recognizing that addressing youth violence requires sustained effort and resources. This involves investing in prevention strategies and supporting the development of resilient communities. It recognizes that advancing and investing in best outcomes for young people is inextricable from the long-term ability of society as a whole to thrive and prosper.
- **Take a collaborative and community approach:** A need exists to address all stages of the process – preemptive prevention and risk reduction response to violence once it occurs, and rehabilitation and reintegration – holistically. Young people’s lives stretch across the boundaries of any single system, therefore, supporting young people requires effective collaboration across organizations, sectors, and systems. Youth-facing systems across the world should strengthen and innovate practices for strong collaboration, including referrals, data sharing, and coordination. A whole systems approach to youth violence must recognize the interconnected nature of these issues and therefore will involve collaboration among government agencies, community organizations, schools, and other stakeholders. All parties involved need to work together and share resources to create a comprehensive and effective response. Community-based approaches that involve collaboration among multiple sectors, including law enforcement, schools, and community organizations have been shown to be effective in preventing youth violence. These programs empower children to embrace positive values at an early stage and involve engaging youth and families in the development and implementation of strategies.
- **Employ evidence-based strategies:** Strategies implemented to prevent youth violence should be based on research and evidence of what works. This requires continuous evaluation of programs and services to ensure that they are effective. Programs that have been shown to be effective in preventing youth violence include mentoring programs, conflict resolution training, and programs that promote positive behavior and problem-solving skills. Research and evidence should also be locally developed to reflect specific circumstances rather than universal solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

- **Gather system-wide evidence:** There is a challenge to ensure that the need for a whole system approach is evidence-based and articulates the effectiveness of that system as a whole, not just particular interventions within it. More varied methods of research will help understand impact of innovations.
- **Advance and foster interdisciplinary research:** To understand the different (and sometimes competing) systems, and as a corollary to the whole systems approach, there is a need for more interdisciplinary work that result from the collaboration of researchers coming from different disciplines. Furthermore, that collaboration can foster clearer outcomes which make the body of research more accessible and informative to policymakers.
- **Develop a toolkit with options:** A global toolkit improves accessibility, leading to context-specific applications. International research can be tested at a local level with local researchers in order to validate outcomes in differing jurisdictions, political arenas, and circumstances.
- **Recognize lessons from past international documents:** Further research should be undertaken with respect to lessons from past guidelines developed by international bodies, such as the [United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice](#) (1985), the [United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency](#) (1990), or the outcomes from the [World Bank Global Gender-Based Violence Task Force](#) (launched in 2016) to determine how effective these have been in practice both in policy-setting and as tools for domestic implementation. If they have not been fully utilized, why not? Is it because they are not seen as

appropriate, or because they do not translate to domestic political discourse, or because of a lack of awareness? Making new recommendations effective requires understanding outcomes from previous ones.

- **Focus on outcomes:** Supporting young people requires a coordinated approach from many systems, and the connection between action and result is complex. All too often, programs and policies born out of good intentions go on to have minimal or even harmful results. Therefore, it is critical that all efforts to support young people identify concrete, measurable outcomes they hope to attain, and that their implementation involves regular impact review with opportunities for revising or ending the approach. A goal is to disrupt this inequity and move toward a world where wellbeing is distributed evenly. There is no way to do this without robust measurement.
- **Invest in youth-focused research and evaluation:** Research and evaluation are essential for understanding what works and what does not when it comes to supporting young people. Therefore, it is important to invest in youth-focused research and evaluation that is rigorous, responsive, and inclusive of diverse perspectives. Research and evaluation that is participatory and engages young people as partners and co-researchers should be prioritized. The limitations and biases of traditional research methods can be addressed by incorporating qualitative and community-based approaches. Research and evaluation should inform policy and practice and promote continuous improvement and innovation.

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