YOUNG PEOPLE IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW

“I started because I felt that my family saw me as scum and good for nothing. Later I started enjoying it; I needed more money.”

Petr, 19

Preparations for this year’s Regional Monitoring Report, Young People in Changing Societies included two Focus Groups and six individual interviews in the Czech Republic on the subject of juvenile justice. The discussions were based on the experiences of young offenders in penal institutions and their perception of the effects of detention on their lives. Participants included those who had recently left custody, and those still in detention, as well as police officers dealing with young offenders. Some of these views can be found in Chapter 5 of the Regional Monitoring Report, focusing on young people in conflict with the law.

The Report finds that the upheavals of the last decade in the transition region have been accompanied by a general increase in crime. Meanwhile, governments in the region are trying to reform their justice systems – a chance to build juvenile justice systems in line with international human rights standards.

Reported crime rates under communism were low compared to those in other industrialized countries, and rates are still low today. However, the rates of reported crime by those aged 14-17 almost doubled between 1989 and 1998 in 16 of the 25 countries for which data are available. Disparities have increased, with rises generally taking place in countries where initial rates were high, as in Central Europe, and falls in countries where initial rates were low, such as Central Asia.

The Report finds other disturbing trends, including large-scale under-reporting of crime, the growing number of young people who re-offend, relatively high numbers of offenders under the age of 14, increasing numbers of girls charged with offences and the emergence of new types of offences, such as drug-related crimes. Youth crime is also changing in nature. While property offences account for more than two thirds of juvenile crimes in countries where data are available, the share of violent crimes by young people is growing.

The Report calls for measures to tackle the over-reliance on deprivation of liberty to deal with young offenders across the region – a response that should only be used as a last resort, according to international human rights standards.

Click here for discussion guidelines on young people in conflict with the law