In 1978, the Council of Europe published a resolution on juvenile delinquency and social change calling for ‘the prevention of juvenile delinquency and the social integration of the young’. Since then, despite over ten recommendations relating to youth justice being released by the Council of Europe, few concerted attempts have been made by governments to meet them. When we acknowledge the fact that many countries generally ignore the youth justice standards, the situation becomes all the more concerning during a time of economic turmoil when even the most basic services to protect children’s economic, social, and cultural rights are at an increased risk.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child frequently expresses its concern that international standards on youth justice have not been fully implemented by European countries. Indications exist suggesting that the majority of European countries do not have a clear picture of the extent to which they are adhering to international and European standards, or, indeed, whether or not any of their practices in the sphere of youth justice are truly yielding the expected results, because they do not have sufficient data collection, monitoring and evaluation systems. In general, most countries tend to favor detention and punitive measures, however, this white paper will argue that through the prioritization of four key factors in the design of juvenile justice policies, European governments can save money, ensure greater security, and foster the positive development of its young population.
THE FOUR KEY FACTORS ARE THE FOLLOWING:

- **Prevention.** Governments must concentrate resources on prevention, as prevention methods yield considerable long-lasting savings to society in terms of reduced welfare, criminal justice expenditure and higher tax revenues.

- **Diversion.** The majority of children who commit an offence will only ever do so once. Of those children, worldwide, who come into conflict with the law, 90% are first-time offenders and 80% of these children will never offend again. Therefore, diversion is a valid way of ensuring that even when a child commits an offence, he or she does not have to go through a grueling court process, but can be given a second chance.

- **Utilizing community sanctions.** It is clear from the findings of research that it is more beneficial to rehabilitate a child in the community than in detention. Interventions delivered in the community are more effective at reducing reoffending than those delivered in custodial or institutional settings.

- **Reducing the number of children in pre- and post-trial detention.** Not only is detention harmful to children, this practice does not prevent reoffending and is the most expensive way of dealing with children in conflict with the law. There is also compelling evidence to suggest that detaining young people makes them more, rather than less, likely to commit further offences.

THE MOST IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS PRESENTED IN THE WHITE PAPER FOR GOVERNMENTS ARE, IN SUMMARY:

1. Collect and monitor data from the youth justice system so that practice can be based on evidence and evaluated for success against outcomes, and specifically comply with the European Commission’s Study to collect data on children’s involvement in judicial proceedings in the EU.

2. Review the youth justice system in order to understand where it can be made more efficient and more child-friendly, in order to better implement the Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Child Friendly Justice.

3. Review spending on youth criminal justice systems, and target resources away from detention and towards policies of prevention and diversion.

4. Reduce the number of children in pre- and post-trial detention by at least half of the current rate within the next five years, making use of community sanctions instead.

5. Ensure that training programmes for young people in conflict with the law are established within the community for children to acquire technical skills, foster social networks and enhance behavioral and social skills.

6. Nurture the capacity of youth justice staff by ensuring that they are motivated and given the necessary training and advancement.

7. Comply with the 2003 Council of Europe recommendation that states should ensure that ‘young adult offenders under the age of 21 should not be required to disclose their criminal record to prospective employment’ unless the nature of employment dictates otherwise.

The implementation of these recommendations will help countries to save money, protect society and benefit the young people that the youth justice system is meant to serve.