

**Key findings and
policy recommendations on**

Disrupting youth recruitment into organized crime

**OSCE- Inter-American Development Bank
Technical Training and Policy Dialogue**

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Key Findings and Policy Recommendations on Disrupting Youth Recruitment into Organized Crime

OSCE- Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Technical Training and Policy Dialogue, 24-26 March 2026, Rome, Italy

INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes key findings and policy-oriented recommendations that emerged from the OSCE–IDB Technical Training and Policy Dialogue on “Disrupting Youth Recruitment into Organized Crime” held in Rome from 24 to 26 March 2026. It reflects insights from a diverse range of actors from South-Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, including policymakers and front-line practitioners from law enforcement, social services and child protection, international organizations and civil society. It is intended to contribute to the ongoing policy discussions within the OSCE on addressing organized crime and its impact on youth. These findings are aligned with the OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security, priorities for prevention set out by its participating States in the [Tirana Declaration](#) and its mandate on police-related activities. In this context, the increasing recruitment of children below the age of criminal responsibility represents a growing security and societal concern across the OSCE area and beyond.

KEY FINDINGS

Recruitment is occurring at a younger age

Organized crime groups are increasingly targeting children below the age of criminal responsibility (typically under 14), including to evade detection and prosecution. Cases involving children as young as 8 years old have been reported across South-Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Gender remains a blind spot

Evidence suggests that the recruitment of girls and young women appears to remain under-recognized. Criminal networks may target them as they may be perceived as less suspicious due to gender stereotypes and biases.

Young people are increasingly involved in more serious criminality

Young people are increasingly involved in serious criminal activities, including drug trafficking, money laundering and violent offences – in some cases described as “violence-as-a-service.”

A combination of risk factors increases vulnerability

A range of interrelated factors may increase vulnerability to recruitment. These include domestic and gender-based violence, often contributing to a victim–offender overlap. Other risk factors comprise neglect (including due to parental absence and migration), substance abuse, aggressive behaviour, dropping out of school, socio-economic disadvantage and the search for belonging, with criminal groups often exploiting gaps in safety, identity and support.

Social media is increasingly misused as a recruitment tool

Criminal networks increasingly use social media to expand and refine recruitment efforts, promoting criminal lifestyles and contributing to the normalization of violence. Through language and symbols tailored to youth, as well as elements of gamification, criminal activities may be presented as attractive, low-risk and rewarding, while masking their real consequences and dangers.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Start prevention efforts at an early stage

Prevention efforts should begin as early as possible, including by focusing on children below the age of criminal responsibility who are at risk of recruitment.

Shift towards tailored prevention

Prevention measures should be tailored to the individual child, their family context and specific risk factors, moving away from one-size-fits-all approaches.

Prioritize resources effectively

In the context of limited human and financial resources, support should be focused on high-risk children through evidence-based case assessment, prioritization, and sustained case management.

Strengthen interagency co-operation

Effective prevention requires close collaboration between law enforcement, social services, education, child protection and other relevant actors to help identify at-risk youth early and address root causes through a holistic and co-ordinated approach.

Invest in capacity-building

Continuous technical training is essential to equip front-line practitioners with the skills to identify, assess and respond to cases. Joint practice-oriented training across sectors can help build trust and improve co-operation.

Promote credible counter narratives in online spaces

As recruitment increasingly takes place online, prevention should also operate in digital spaces. Credible counter-narratives, including those informed by lived experience, can help expose the realities and risks of organized crime and counter its glamorization.

Enhance public-private co-operation

Stronger partnerships between law enforcement and the private sector, including social media platforms, are needed to detect, disrupt and prosecute online recruitment activities. The private sector can play a key supportive role in providing internships and vocational opportunities for at-risk youth, as well as supporting job placement for their family members, thereby contributing to their economic empowerment and overall crime prevention efforts.

Strengthen regional and cross-regional co-operation

Given the transnational nature of organized crime, prevention efforts should be supported through enhanced regional dialogue, information-sharing and networks of practitioners.

CONCLUSION

The above findings and recommendations highlight the urgency of strengthening prevention efforts and enhancing co-operation across relevant actors to effectively address the recruitment of youth into organized crime. In this regard, continued dialogue, capacity-building assistance, practical co-operation and the sharing of evidence-based experiences across the OSCE area and beyond remain essential to support participating States in developing effective and sustainable responses.