



Lifelong
Learning
Programme

CONSULTATION OUTCOMES FOR ITALY

EUGANGS

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New skills and competences to address skills gaps and mismatch within the sectors working with Gang and Youth Crime across Europe (EUGANGS) (539766-LLP-1-2013-1-UK-LEONARDO-LMP/ Grant Agreement 2013 3382 /001-001) has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



National policy

1. Is there a specific and coherent set of policies and policy instruments that address issues relating to gangs and serious gang associated youth offending?

In the Italian legal system, there aren't any laws that consider specific regulations for youth gangs.

The problem of juvenile delinquency is, in fact, taken as a whole with the judge making appropriate differentiations at the time of the process and of the applications of penalties.

Frequently, the issue of youth gangs emerges in national, regional and municipal levels, when delinquency interventions are regulated, such as a specific type of juvenile delinquency that manifests itself as a group phenomenon.

Particularly:

- a) the National Health Service (in Italian, SSN - Servizio Sanitario Nazionale) provides for the establishment of a service for drug addiction (in Italian SERT-SERD: Servizio tossicodipendenza - Servizio dipendenza);
- b) the municipal social services deal with family and social implications and the measures of custody (including those resulting from measures of the penal judge);
- c) the services that deal with youth policies often promote initiatives against deviance and address to all children. In all these cases, they specifically encourage intervention when it is necessary to impact on youth gangs.

All the problems occurring within the framework of prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency, and the same setting of the system, implement the principle of the protection of youth, according to Art. 31 of The Constitution of the Italian Republic, claiming that:

"The Republic assists through economic measures and other provisions the formation of family and the fulfillment of its duties, with particular consideration for large families. It protects maternity, infancy and youth, promoting the institutions necessary thereto".

The reference to the defense and therefore to the protection of youth in the Constitution, has been interpreted by the Italian Constitutional Court as an obligation of differentiation in social, educational and criminal interventions if compared to those applied to adults. In Italy, there is then the obligation of differential treatment regarding minors.

The juvenile justice system provides that a specialized judge (Juvenile Court) and a special prosecutor deal with crimes committed by those who have not attained the legal age of eighteen. The maturity



of the child must be assessed and the minor can be subject to punishment only if claimed responsible for crimes. The re-education measures are never mandatory.

With regard to administrative offenses committed by minors, that do not constitute a crime since they are considered, by the law, of lower seriousness (for example: most of the traffic violations, such as running a red light), pecuniary penalties are imposed on the parents who may, however, give evidence of their inability to prevent the event. This rule has been criticized because, among administrative offenses, there are many illegal conducts regarding relationships and behaviors in public places as the violations of the regulations of the city police, rowdiness and drunkenness.

When administrative offenses, that are not punishable if committed by minors, are repeated or related to the individual disadvantage, for example hanging around with bad people or educational deficiencies in the family, the intervention of the police, of the health and social services and of the school and health authority is then allowed, being prompted by authorities that notice the behavior and by social services that may ask to the civil courts to take measures to prevent the family's behavior detrimental to the child (Art. 333 of the Civil Code).

The so-called "Young adults" (age of just over 18) receive little difference of treatment in the event of conviction, than other adults.

2. In order to locate relevant policy, identify:

a) Which levels of government are involved in policy making and implementation relating to gangs?

The framework law 328/2000 regulates the implementation of the integrated system of interventions and social services and identifies the essential levels of social assistance, in order to ensure it in all regional settings.

The planning and organization of the integrated system of interventions and social services is under responsibility of the local authorities, the Regions and the State, pursuant to legislative decree of March 31st 1998, n. 112, and to the above mentioned law.

The State, the Regions and the Municipalities have some important tasks.

The State is responsible for:

- establishing a National Social Plan indicating the uniform and grassroots levels of the performances;
- establishing the requirements that families and communities-residential services, as well as professional profiles in the social field, must have;



-restarting the resources of the national social fund and monitoring the progress of reforms.

The Regions are responsible for:

- planning and coordinating social interventions;
- urging for the integration of health, social, training and job placement interventions;
- establishing criteria for accreditation;
- supervising public and private facilities;
- establishing a register of individuals allowed to perform tasks as indicated by the law;
- determining the quality of performance;
- determining the levels of user participation in the spending;
- financing and planning training for professionals of the social sector;

The Municipalities represent the administrative levels that manage and coordinate initiatives to realize the "local system of social services network". As such, Municipalities must involve, and cooperate with health care providers, with other local authorities and with the associations of citizens.

The Municipalities deal with:

- determination of parameters for the evaluation of the conditions of poverty, limited income and total or partial inability due to physical and mental disability, and related conditions so to take advantage of the benefits;
- authorization, accreditation and supervision of social services and residential structures (both semi-public and private);
- granting citizens the right to take part in the control of service quality.



The actions, objectives and priorities for action by Municipalities are defined in the "Plans of Zone". Municipalities must also adopt and implement the Charter of social services that outlines available social opportunities and access criteria.

Municipalities, Regions and the State must, in fact, engage and empower the sector of non-profit organizations.

b. Which departments/agencies of government are involved in policy making and implementation relating to gangs?

The Department of Juvenile Justice (in Italian, DGM - Dipartimento Giustizia Minorile), is one of the four departments which form the Italian Ministry of Justice.

The Department is concerned, on the directives of the Minister of Justice, in the context of legal issues related to children both juvenile offenders and victims of crime.

The Department takes care of the protection of minors, of the prevention and combating of juvenile delinquency, of international judicial and prison activity, of the prevention and combating of crime with particular reference to organized crime, terrorism, illegal immigration, trafficking in people, and international abduction of minors, pedophilia and pornography.

In addition, the Italian legislation has attributed to that institute the functions for management, scheduling and coordination regarding social welfare and health care, relating to local and regional authorities.

The Social Service Minor Area of the Municipality is responsible for the supervision, tutelage and protection of children in the event of difficulties and shortcomings of the parents, which must be activated in the presence of risk factors in the evolution of the child (Art. 9 and Art. 23 of Law 184/83) even in the absence of a direct request of the family.

3. What are the key principles underlying relevant policies?

“The intervention on juvenile delinquency represents a kind of «investment», careful to avoid the dynamics of stigmatization, from which the individual and society will benefit. For the youth, conviction and punishment are not the necessary consequence of the offense, but need to be «filtered» by the search for solutions less burdensome, linked to the choice of using the prison as the



ultimate reason (extrema ratio) in the absence of viable alternatives. The crime committed by them shall not affect, however, their opportunity to build a future adult life in normal social inclusion.” (Pighi, 2002).

The interventions of assistance and control tend to help the family to implement change processes, work to promote the empowerment of parents and remove the causes of discomfort, as much as possible. Support for parents to properly perform their duties is intended to implement the minors’ right to grow up peacefully in their own families.

When the Municipality acts as foster parent, it consequently tends to make up for the lack of role of the family.

4. What are the specific programmes, policy instruments and legal framework that are in place?

Advice and guidance for the use of resources and access to services;

Social-psychological support for parenting;

Inclusion of children in educational contexts in the area;

Individual and group social-educational projects;

Financial support to families with children;

Interventions related to adoption and foster care;

Placements in residential communities;

Interventions relating to indicted children pursuant to DPR 448/88;

Measures related to legal separation;

Assistance related to procedures and findings of the juvenile authority.

5. How is policy experienced at local levels?

a) Agencies involved in local delivery

As previously pointed out, local government and National Health System deal with the problems of juvenile delinquency and social discomfort.



Social services in collaboration with non-profit organizations and social cooperatives deal with local interventions and also manage:

Residential communities for minors;

Residential communities for mother and child;

Refuges for people in need;

Home educational interventions;

Parent-child day care centers;

Educational centers;

Young careers;

Local aggregation centers;

Sports adoptions.

b) Impact of judicial and other legal measures

The social protection of children is usually appreciated. As previously pointed out, judicial and legal measures are the ultimate reason in the absence of viable alternatives.

c) How communities are engaged

Communities are engaged in projects meant to help young people with volunteers frequently operating in all services for the youth.

6. Are there available programmes of learning to develop professional skills relevant to this agenda?

a) Resources/toolkits available for practitioners



Seminars are held in local territories when projects about youth gangs are available.

In the region of Emilia-Romagna, seminars for the local police have been organised by the regional service for urban security.

b) On-line courses and programmes for practitioners

No information currently available about on-line courses and programmes.

Social structure

1. Definition - what is a gang?

a. Are the definitions provided in US and UK literature relevant to your national context?

In Italy the terms *gang* and *baby-gangs* are frequently employed by mass media to emphasize problems about juvenile delinquency but they are considered, by professionals who deal with or study juvenile group delinquency, very problematic and not applicable to most of the Italian youth groups that sometimes commit crimes.

The reality of Italian youth gangs is different, compared with the traditional representation of American gangs as highly structured, cohesive and violent groups, segregated along racial lines and with strict rules and honor codes.

There are very few groups that have some, or often none, of these features.

Also, the definition of gang suggested by Eurogang: (Weerman et al. 2009, p.20): "a street gang (or troublesome youth group corresponding to a street gang elsewhere) is any durable, street oriented youth group whose identity includes involvement in illegal activity", does not describe the Italian reality.

b. Are there clear or identifiable gaps?



Italian youth groups that can be seen as gangs are not highly structured, their local identity does not imply the control of a territory and their members, in most cases, have mixed origins instead of having the same ethnic roots. Also, the illegal activity is not part of the identity of the group.

"The presence of youngsters committing criminal and anti-social behavior in small groups is registered in several cities of the country. The most frequent crimes committed by deviant youngsters are property crimes. What emerges is an increasing tendency by some young people, throughout different territories, to steal in shops and megastores or from other people (often from other young people) in order to obtain brand name items, mobile phones, etc."(Crocitti, Lucianetti, Nobili, Terenghi 2013, p. 151).

"In general, in Italy the problem of gangs is evidenced only in a very limited number of cities in the North, despite the local and national press increasingly reports episodes of youth deviance and/or anti-social behavior as if they are committed by "baby-gangs", (thus revealing an improper use of the term)". (Crocitti, Lucianetti, Nobili, Terenghi 2013, p.153).

In two large cities in the North of Italy, Milan and Genoa, there are gangs of young Latin immigrants, especially from Ecuador, whose features are similar to the "American" representatives of gangs: a name for the gang, rules and codes and typical clothing but without any control on the territory and any economically oriented criminal intent.

In the region of Emilia-Romagna, particularly, informal groups spontaneously gather in public places due to temporary situations, without planning any actions, imitating symbols or dress in the style of gangs (i.e. copycat groups) but there are very few groups that we can consider gangs. The members are aged 12-25 years old, mostly males but also girls, sometimes having a hidden leadership role. (Crocitti, Lucianetti, Nobili, Terenghi 2013 e Crocitti, Barbieri 2012).

2. What are the social forces that shape behavior and form the context in which gang can emerge?

a. What are the social structural conditions that influence this? What are the underlying socio-economic factors?

The young people committing anti-social and criminal acts are not always coming from deprived families/social backgrounds, but also from middle and sometimes even upper-classes.



Criminal and antisocial acts are committed by both youngsters living in a situation of deprivation and marginalization and by “normal” youngsters that may become antisocial and violent especially as a consequence of a lack of positive values and valid adult reference models.

Furthermore, immigration flowing towards many urban contexts is also at the basis of increasing social and cultural conflicts in public places and of integration-related problems.

In the last fifteen years, in Italy, immigration waves have grown up rapidly, especially in the North of the country.

When the children of the first generation of immigrants, who were born in Italy, become adolescents, or when they come to Italy to join their families, after growing up in their native country, some problems of integration may occur along with their need to feel part of a group: the gang can fulfill their request of belonging.

"The cities of Milan and, particularly, of Genoa have become the capitals of Latin immigration (especially from Ecuador). In the first phase (second half of the '90s) the phenomenon mainly regarded women irregularly working as caregivers for Italian families. With a second immigration wave characterized by family reunions, the presence of Ecuadorian immigrants radically changed in terms of composition and size, determining a different social perception and representation. Latin youths (i.e. *hermanitos*) belonging to the street organizations (i.e. Latin Kings or *Ñetas*) arrived in Italy between 2000 and 2003, as a result of the massive migration wave from Latin America.

In this sense, the phenomenon of street organizations in Milan and Genoa is linked to the migration processes, although their members were not necessarily engaged in similar experiences in their native country (Queirolo Palmas, 2006). These immigration flows - mainly due to family reunion - and the marginal condition, in which young people live, are among the main factors determining the formation of street groups and members' affiliation. Family reunions particularly, imply the arrival of young people that have lived their childhood and most of their adolescence in their native country. Their custody has frequently been granted to relatives, especially grandparents. Once arrived in Italy, with a feeling anger and disorientation, they have to confront difficult living conditions (lack of money, living in small and overcrowded apartments, etc.). Also, they experience a condition of alienation both in their school context and in the labor market." (Crocitti, Lucianetti, Nobili, Terenghi 2013 p.154)

b. How does the mass media and the rise of social media impact on gang-related reporting and activity?

The mass-media, especially local media, tend to emphasize problems related to gangs and for some academics and researchers (Cannarella, Lagomarsino, Queirolo Palmas, 2007) the mass-media



created the phenomenon of gangs, reporting some events and crimes committed by youth groups and describing them as typical American gangs featured in the movies.

Social media are used by youth gangs to communicate and reinforce their group identity: sometimes, a conflict previously emerged in the virtual space of social media, can be subsequently taken from the virtual into the real context.

c. What is the impact of youth culture on gangs and gang culture?

We can find everything about youth culture: clothing, music, style, etc. and about gang culture, too: gangs have their own music, style, and clothing but they look very much like other young people, who are not members of gangs. It is therefore hard to identify gang members only by their clothing or style.

d. How relevant are the concepts of belonging and social status to gang involvement and ongoing associations?

Different factors can influence groups' affiliation:

1. Groups offer a form of community belonging where youngsters can experience affective relationships, support and solidarity;
2. Groups offer the opportunity to escape from life strains and anonymity, while sharing practices that question the discriminatory situation;
3. Membership to a group offers the chance to avoid family control and experience freedom, power and risks associated to a group's action.

Violent behaviors usually represent a way to safeguard the respect of the group and/or of the individual group member. Furthermore, the use of violence is connected to specific cultural variables that define a masculine identity according to which males have to demonstrate to be brave, physically strong and courageous". (Crocitti, Lucianetti, Nobili, Terenghi 2013 p.155).

"The analysis of street violence is useful to trace the boundaries among groups and is characterized as follows:



1. Conflicts occur among peers belonging to the same age range and sharing a similar subculture;
2. Conflicts occur in specific places, such as clubs and undergrounds.

Violent acts represent a way of expressing group affiliation and they also contribute to the definition of a group's internal hierarchy and leadership". (Crocitti, Lucianetti, Nobili, Terenghi 2013 p.156).

e. What is the relationship between gangs and crime and how is this represented in academic and policy debates?

The problem of street groups acting violently in public places has emerged and has been studied in northern Italian cities, particularly in Milan and Genoa where the academic and public attention is focused on the existence of street organizations or groups made of Latin American young people.

Specific projects have been jointly implemented by youth and social workers and researchers with the aim of fostering social inclusion and preventing violence. (Cannarella, Lagomarsino, Queirolo Palmas, 2007 e Bugli, Conte 2010).

Violent episodes that took place in Genoa and Milan and leading to subsequent charges of criminal association, robberies and assaults determined the construction of a misleading image of these groups by the mass media.

Violence was not proved to be connected to criminal activity or to activities aiming at controlling the territory.

On the contrary, in most cases, violent acts (such as fights) were not planned and often originated in fortuitous events (the conflict over a girl, a bad look or a previous enmity). (Crocitti, Lucianetti, Nobili, Terenghi 2013)

f. What is the impact of family in socialization process of young people and what are the social factors that shape the development of deviance?

Some of the youngsters that join gangs, but not most of them, have troublesome families and parents with legal problems.

Sometimes there are problems in family relationships due to absent parents.

In general, the problems into the family can be one of the disadvantages that lead young people towards antisocial and criminal behaviors.



Socio-psychological approaches

1. Why do people join gangs and "behave badly"?

a. Why do some young people join gangs and embrace offending behavior?

Often young people join gangs to find other people with similar experiences of social marginality. This is typical of gangs of youngsters living in the city suburbs and sharing similar situations related to family problems, marginality and discrimination, failures at school and job insecurity.

Nonetheless, also young people with a "normal" background join gangs, thus making hard to identify exactly the reasons for joining gangs and embracing offending behaviors.

b. Why do the majority of young people from similar backgrounds "choose" a different path?

The need of belonging, coupled with a sense of marginality, is not always the cause for joining a gang and having a criminal or antisocial behavior.

2. What is the meaning of social-psychology in understanding human groups and gangs?

a. How important are issues of identity and attachment in understanding gang membership?

Issues of identity and attachment are very important for youngsters and it is their need of identity and belonging that lead them to join groups and also the so-called gangs.

Belonging to a group give to the youth the idea of "being there" even if in conditions of marginality.

b. How can the most relevant socio-psychological approaches be applied to working with gangs?



The first studies about gangs are important because they connect this phenomenon to the social, spatial and demographic features of the urban context.

Thrasher (1927) affirms that youngsters belonging to gangs are especially children of immigrants that live in urban disorganized suburbs. They meet in public places to satisfy their need to socialize, like all the adolescents do.

The creation of gangs develops in an informal way, because young people share traditions and memories and identify themselves as a group being different from other groups.

Criminal acts and violence are interpreted as a consequence of lack of parental control and a way for gang members to affirm themselves and claim their spaces and their existence in the society.

Cohen (1963) attributes gang origins to the social structure.

For youngsters belonging to working class, there is no correspondence between predominant values and the possibility to have success in life, because of their social condition.

Hence, the antisocial and criminal acts are caused by the sense of being considered losers in the society and the need to be positively accepted in the group thanks to criminal and antisocial acts.

Deviant conduct is then acquired inside the gang.

It is also important to consider the Desistance model, in order to understand how a process of desisting to crime can appear.



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