

2. Local authorities – a key role in crime prevention

While central government has a clear responsibility in setting up a legal framework for crime prevention and repression and in providing adequate financial resources and a political lead, it is nonetheless at the local level where the problem is most acutely felt and perceived and where a sense of insecurity is felt on a daily basis.

As a consequence, local authorities are best able to conduct policies and approaches dealing comprehensively with crime prevention which promote alternatives to imprisonment, community policing, combating illiteracy, civic education, research and communication and co-ordinating the programmes of different partners. Given their proximity, people see municipal departments as the most approachable and best informed about potential or actual crisis situations. Local authorities can also play an effective conciliation and mediation role and thus attempt to prevent tension from deteriorating to the point that it becomes necessary to involve the police and the courts.

Local authorities can also play a key role indirectly, through influencing the objectives of a range of sectoral policies, for which they are responsible, in order to ensure that they cover the issue of security. These can include:

- urban planning, including public transport, street lighting and safety measures at road junctions;
- the provision of public amenities, schools, playgrounds, stadiums, swimming pools, socio-educational centres;
- family welfare and assistance policy, designed to help parents shoulder their responsibilities better;
- maintenance, supervisory and security staff in public institutions and agencies;
- out-of-school social and educational services;
- establishment of a municipal police force.

As a consequence, national governments, in close co-operation with local authorities, are asked to:

- accept that local policies for reducing crime and urban insecurity are key elements in crime reduction programmes and that local problems require local solutions;
- strengthen local government and local democracy, along the lines of the European Charter of Local Self-Government;

- strengthen the responsibility of local government in crime prevention and ensure that they have the appropriate financial resources;
- reduce the degree of centralisation and control by central government, in order to allow decisions to be taken at the local level, where local needs are best understood and where customised solutions can be identified;
- ensure that local budget and resources stay within a community;
- foster the development of community capacity through citizenship education.