The Impact of Court Decisions on the Recidivism of Juvenile Offenders

Natalia Khmelevska¹, Igor Kopotun², Valentyna Hrankina³, Volodymyr Hospodarenko⁴ & Ivo Svoboda⁵

Abstract

The influence of judicial verdicts on juvenile offenders' recidivism is critical to understanding the effectiveness of justice and identifying strategies for further improving criminal justice. The effectiveness of court decisions directly affects the relapse into criminal behaviour of this vulnerable category of offenders. The objective of the paper is to examine the effects of court decisions on the recidivism rate among minors. The article reveals that court decisions, ensured by the rule of law and a fair judicial process aimed at rehabilitation and social adaptation, significantly reduce the risk of a relapse into criminal behaviour. The obtained result of the correlation analysis of 0.4660 indicates a stable relationship between the effectiveness of the legal system and the potential threat of recidivism of juvenile offenders. The interpretation of the results reveals the high efficiency of integrated approaches in the judicial system in processing juvenile cases in EU countries.

Keywords: court decisions, recidivism, juvenile offenders, justice, rehabilitation, social adaptation, criminal justice.

Introduction

The issue of repeated offences by young delinquents is one of the most urgent and complex challenges in the field of criminal justice. Juveniles who interact with the judicial system often face a variety of social, psychological, and educational problems that can significantly affect their future. According to Haniza (2023), the greatest difficulty is determining the optimal balance between the need for punishment and supporting the development and rehabilitation of this vulnerable youth category. Poorly worded court decisions or inadequate rehabilitation programmes can lead to re-offending, hampering the social integration and future development prospects of these young people. The

¹The author works at the Department of Criminal Law and Procedure, Leonid Yuzkov Khmelnytskyi University of Management and Law, Ukraine. <u>khmelnata@gmail.com</u>

²The author works at the Research Laboratory for the Prevention of Criminal Offenses, Donetsk State University of Internal Affairs, Ukraine. <u>kopotun1965@gmail.com</u>

³The author works at the Criminal Law Disciplines Department, Donetsk State University of Internal Affairs, Ukraine. <u>granck.boom@gmail.com</u>

⁴The author works at the Department of Criminal Law Disciplines, Donetsk State University of Internal Affairs, Ukraine. <u>volodymyrkogu@gmail.com</u>

⁵The author works at the AMBIS, a.s. Vyská škola, Czech Republic. <u>svoboda1964@seznam.cz</u>

investigative issue demands an all-encompassing strategy that incorporates considerations of both legal frameworks and socio-economic factors (Smith et al., 2022). The influence of judicial verdicts on the repeat offence rates of young delinquents stands as a principal subject needing enhanced efficiency from the standpoint of youth justice and adherence to legal principles. Judicial decisions made against young people who have committed crimes exert a significant and enduring influence on their future and the safety of society as a whole.

The migration crisis in Europe has added another layer of complexity to the existing challenges in juvenile justice. According to Sepúlveda et al. (2022), migrant minors often face language barriers, cultural differences and difficulties in integration, which can push them to criminal behaviour. These additional challenges require the legal system to be more flexible and able to adapt to the needs of this unique and often vulnerable group. The challenge is to ensure fair and effective justice while providing the necessary support for the integration and socialisation of migrant minors in the new society.

The lawfulness of juvenile justice is a key factor in preventing recidivism. Fair and objective decisions not only ensure the protection of the rights of minors but also contribute to their development and social adaptation. Correctly formulated and executed court decisions can play a decisive role in a young person's life, giving him/her a second chance for social integration and personal development. It is important that court decisions consider the specific situations of each case, ensuring not only just punishment but also appropriate support and opportunities for rehabilitation.

Examining how judicial rulings affect the repeat offending rates among young offenders opens new horizons for understanding the complexity and interdependence of juvenile justice, social policy, and human rights. Ponce et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of an integrated approach that includes not only judicial decisions but also social, educational and psychological aspects of work with minors. In conclusion, it can be said that a deep understanding of this problem and the development of effective strategies are critical to ensure fair and humane justice, which contributes to reducing recidivism and forming a healthy and safe society.

The purpose of the research is to evaluate the effects of court decisions on the recidivism of juvenile offenders. The goal encompasses achieving the subsequent research aims:

1. Determine the relationship between the quality of the legal system of the country's court and repeated crimes among minors based on the experiences from European nations.

- 2. Calculate the impact of different court practices on recidivism in juvenile justice, focusing on a comparative analysis of different legal systems by the level of recidivism.
- Develop recommendations for improving court procedures aimed at reducing the recidivism rate among juveniles based on the obtained results, including proposals for reforming legislation and practices in the field of juvenile justice.

Literature Review

According to Baetz et al. (2021) the importance of court decisions in cases of juvenile offenders becomes particularly significant within the framework of their impact on the possibility of recidivism. The fairness and adequacy of such decisions can determine the future of these young people and their ability to adapt to social life. Aebi et al. (2022) state that an integrated, holistic approach to juvenile justice, including punishment and rehabilitation, is critical to reducing recidivism. Heynen et al. (2023) and Cuevas et al. (2017) agree with this, noting that integrating educational and rehabilitation programmes into judicial practice can significantly increase the chances of successful integration of juvenile offenders into society. According to Sepúlveda et al. (2022), developing comprehensive post-release support programmes for juveniles is key to preventing recidivism. Powell et al. (2021) and Yunin et al. (2022) argue that such programmes' effectiveness depends on the interaction between judicial authorities, social services and educational institutions. Kimbrell et al. (2023) emphasise that educational programmes and professional training courses integrated into judicial practice can significantly contribute to social adaptation and reduce the risk of recidivism. The importance of this aspect in the context of humane justice cannot be overestimated. Geerlings et al. (2020) highlight a crucial element in this domain as the evolution of balanced approaches that consider the interests of society and the needs of juvenile offenders.

Orendain et al. (2022) and Huan et al. (2010) found that the impact of court decisions on the behaviour of juvenile offenders depends on various factors, including an individual approach to each case and the availability of supportive measures. In this context, it is critically important to determine a cause-and-effect link between the behaviour of minors and the nature of court decisions. Ozkan et al. (2020) and Lazorko et al. (2020) noted that the role of educational programmes and rehabilitation initiatives in shaping a positive future for minors cannot be overestimated. This is supported by Javadi (2019), who indicates a significant reduction in recidivism rates among juveniles who participated in targeted rehabilitation programmes. On the other hand, Steiner et al. (1999) underscore the

significance of the appropriateness of court decisions, which must be fair and correspond to the scope of the crime committed while also considering the unique attributes of each instance. According to Shao et al. (2019), a comprehensive approach that includes court decisions, social support, and rehabilitation programmes is most effective in reducing juvenile recidivism.

Findik et al. (2019) and Sydorova et al. (2022) indicate an important aspect —the need to improve the legal framework and practice of juvenile justice because the relevance and effectiveness of such measures directly affect the results of juvenile rehabilitation. Aazami et al. (2023) analyse that the modern legal system faces the challenge of providing justice for juvenile offenders while maintaining a balance between the need to protect society and the reintegration of these young people. Court decisions should reflect punishment and approaches aimed at preventing future criminal behaviour. According to Caudill and Trulson (2016), flexibility and individualisation in approaches to juvenile justice can contribute to more effective solutions to problems related to juvenile offending. These theses are supported by Pegu (2021), who shows that comprehensive programmes that include education, psychological support and social adaptation can significantly reduce the rate of recidivism. Upchurch (2023) draws attention to the need for greater transparency and objectivity in the legal system, as this ensures trust in judicial decisions and contributes to their effectiveness. Kalu et al. (2020) emphasise society's important role and attitude towards juvenile crime and justice.

So, the researchers have identified the main principles of the development of juvenile justice and the possibilities of improving the legal framework. The issue of the impact of court decisions on the behaviour of minors and their further adaptation in society remains unresolved. This necessitates a more thorough examination of current methodologies and the creation of innovative tactics that consider both the rule of law and the individual needs of juvenile offenders.

Materials and Methods

The study is carried out in multiple phases. The initial phase encompassed gathering and examining data from publicly available resources, including the World Prison Brief (2022) and the World Justice Project (2022), to determine statistical indicators on prisoners and the degree of adherence to legal principles in various nations. The second stage provided an in-depth analysis of the obtained data to identify correlations and trends between the number of prisoners, recidivism among minors, and the degree of legal governance. The third stage involved synthesising the obtained data to draw conclusions and provide recommendations. The research employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis includes statistical processing of data on prisoners, their recidivism, and levels of the rule of law. Correlation analysis and methods of comparative analysis were used. Qualitative analysis involves evaluating court decisions, legislative norms and policies regarding juvenile offenders in different countries.

To increase the generalizability of our research on the impact of court decisions on the recidivism of juvenile offenders, a sample from different European countries is outlined. This extension will allow us to address limitations to the generalizability of our findings across judicial systems and cultural contexts.

The sample covers many European countries, representing different legal systems and approaches to juvenile justice. The selected countries include those with high rule of law scores and those with lower scores. A significant element in the sample design is including countries with different demographic, economic, and cultural characteristics to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the interaction between court decisions and juvenile recidivism. Data for the sample are taken from reliable international databases, such as the World Prison Brief, which ensures high quality and relevance of information. The sample allows for analysis of the influence of various factors on juvenile recidivism, including population size, socio-economic status, and cultural characteristics of each country.

Applied computing tools are used for data collection and analysis, allowing complex statistical calculations, including correlation and regression analysis. Besides, the content analysis method is used for the in-depth analysis of qualitative data, which allows evaluation of the content of court decisions, the Rule of Law Index level, legislative initiatives, and political strategies. This provides a comprehensive approach to research, allowing the interpretation of quantitative data and the understanding of the underlying trends and factors influencing juvenile recidivism.

Research ethics is an important component that ensures its high quality and social responsibility. All data are collected and processed respecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, especially considering the sensitivity of information related to minors and court decisions. The research is carried out respecting the rights and dignity of all persons who are the object of analysis while avoiding prejudiced and stereotypical views. The research results are presented with objectivity and transparency, ensuring the accuracy of information and the absence of manipulation. A commitment to ethical standards also includes a responsibility to correctly interpret data and avoid incorrect conclusions that may influence juvenile justice policy and practice.

Results

The European experience is characterised by various approaches and strategies used to address the issue of repeat offences among young delinquents. Germany and the Scandinavian countries focus on social rehabilitation and integration using such methods as social training, educational programmes, and psychological support. These countries also use alternative punishments that avoid imprisonment, such as probation and community service. The UK and France have historically used more rigid approaches but are moving towards more flexible and integrated approaches. This underlines the global trend towards recognising the need for more humane and effective methods of working with juvenile offenders, which are aimed at reducing recidivism and improving the long-term prospects of their development. Table 1 shows the total number of convicts as of 2022 among the countries of Europe.

Countries	Total prison population		
Austria	8,465		
Belgium	10,379		
Bulgaria	7,049		
Croatia	3,531		
Cyprus	600		
Czech Republic	19,286		
Denmark	3,902		
Estonia	2,341		
Finland	2,395		
France	62,673		
Germany	59,045		
Greece	11,334		
Hungary	17,483		
Ireland	3,724		
Italy	53,329		
Latvia	3,038		
Lithuania	5,320		
Luxembourg	557		
Malta	821*		
Netherlands	9,415		
Norway	3,053		
Poland	67,894		
Portugal	11,412		

Table 1. The number of convicts in European countries, 2022

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Romania	21,774
Slovakia	10,489
Slovenia	1,136
Spain	55,110
Sweden	7,297
Switzerland	6,316
UK: England and Wales	78,180
UK: Northern Ireland	1,414
UK: Scotland	7,441
Total	556,203

Source: compiled by the author based on World Prison Brief (2022)

Examination of the overall inmate population in European countries indicates the state of criminal justice and prison systems. Table 1 shows that, as of 2022, the total number of prisoners in Europe is 556,203 people, indicating significant differences in approaches to punishments and management of criminal behaviour in different countries. For example, high prison populations in countries such as the United Kingdom (England and Wales), France and Germany indicate stricter criminal justice policies and a large proportion of the population behind bars. On the other hand, the relatively low figures in countries such as Luxembourg, Slovenia, and Malta may indicate greater effectiveness of preventive measures and alternative forms of punishment that avoid imprisonment and the effectiveness of the legal system. An analysis of the number of juvenile inmates in European countries as of 2022 is conducted below (Table 2).

Table 2 presents the results of the billing structure.

Country	Male Juvenile Inmates	Female Juvenile Inmates	Total Juvenile Inmates	Percentage of Total Prison Population
Austria	78	5	83	1.0
Belgium	0	0	0	0.0
Bulgaria	49	0	49	0.7
Croatia	55	0	55	1.5
Cyprus	15	0	15	2.5
Czech Republic	16	0	16	1.0
Denmark	4	0	4	0.1
Estonia	5	0	5	0.2

Table 2. Juveniles / minors inmates in European countries, 2022

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Finland	12	0	12	0.5
France	-	-	752*	1*
Germany	593	0	593	10.0
Greece	30	0	30	0.3
Hungary	14	-	14	0.08
Ireland	33	0	33	0.9
Italy	268*	13*	281*	0.3*
Latvia	9	-	-	0.3
Lithuania	22	-	-	0.4
Luxembourg	0	0	0	0.0
Malta	0*	0*	0*	0*
Netherlands	0	0	0	0.0
Norway	7	0	7	0.2
Poland	931	NA	931	1.4
Portugal	35	0	35	0.3
Romania	241	0	241	1.32
Slovakia	68	0	68	0.6
Slovenia	4	0	4	0.3
Spain	0	0	0	0.0
Sweden	23	NA	23	0.3
Switzerland	396*	41*	437*	6.9*
UK: England and Wales	381	0	381	0.5
UK: Northern Ireland	8	0	8	0.9
UK: Scotland	199	0	199	2.7
Total	3496	59	3555	0.6388%
		• ·		from
				556,203.

Source: compiled by the author based on World Prison Brief (2022)

The data in Table 2 indicate the number of juvenile prisoners in Europe in 2022 and prompt significant debate on the issues of recidivism and the efficacy of the legal frameworks within EU nations. The aggregate count of juvenile inmates in Europe stands at 3,555 individuals, representing merely 0.64% of the entire prisoner tally (556,203 individuals). The low percentage reflects the effectiveness of prevention programmes and rehabilitation measures, as well as the availability of alternatives to incarceration for juveniles. However, the number of juvenile prisoners is significant in some countries, such as Germany (593 juvenile

prisoners) and Poland (931). Such circumstances testify to the imperfect system of rehabilitation that these countries face.

Among the countries represented in the study, the indicator of the number of juvenile prisoners is relatively low or even zero (for example, in Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain). This indicates the high effectiveness of alternative punishment measures and preventive programmes. The small number of female juvenile prisoners (59 out of 3,555) points to gender differences in crime and judicial practice. In practical terms, this could imply the necessity for a more adaptable strategy considering each nation's cultural, social, and economic traits. Particular emphasis ought to be placed on crafting programmes aimed at the prevention of crime among young people, as well as the creation of effective mechanisms of rehabilitation and social integration for minors who have already committed offences, conducting a transparent judicial process and delivering fair court decisions. The recidivism of juvenile offenders according to the reconviction index and calculating the potential number of recidivists are considered in Table 3.

Table 5. Reconviction Juvenne minates			
Country	Reconviction Rate	Total Juvenile	Reconviction Juvenile
	2022	Inmates	Inmates
Austria	31.1%	83	25.813
Romania	36.9%	241	88.929
Germany	20.6%	593	122.158
Denmark	39.3%	4	1.572

Table 3. Reconviction Juvenile Inmates

Source: compiled by the author based on World Prison Brief (2022)

The specified reconviction rate of each country indicates a fairly significant number of recidivisms, which is intimately connected to the quality of the judicial system, the delivery of court decisions and the implementation of rehabilitation programmes. To calculate the correlation between court decisions and the number of recidivism, it is advisable to use the Rule of Law Index as a guide to the effectiveness of the legal system.

The Rule of Law Index holds a crucial position in determining the effectiveness of the judicial system and the general state of justice in the country. Court decisions that are perceived as unfair or of poor quality can increase the risk of recidivism. If criminals believe the system is unfair, they may be less inclined to reform. Decisions that include effective rehabilitation and education programmes can reduce recidivism rates. The Rule of Law Index is a synthesis of a comprehensive approach that includes improving legislation, improving the qualifications and ethics of judges, and ensuring juvenile offenders' rights and

freedoms. Court decisions involve fair and humane treatment, training, social support and skills development that contribute to socialisation (Table 4).

Country	Rule of Law Index
Austria	0.80
Romania	0.63
Germany	0.83
Denmark	0.90

Source: compiled by the author based on World Justice Project (2022)

We will calculate the correlation between the reconviction rate in 2022 and the Index of Rule of Law, obtaining a correlation coefficient of 0.1558. The indicator is calculated using the formula for the Pearson correlation coefficient. A negative value indicates a weak negative correlation, suggesting that the reconviction rate decreases slightly as the Rule of Law Index increases, but the relationship is not strong. The correlation between re-convicted juveniles and the Rule of Law Index revealed a correlation coefficient 0.4660. A moderate negative value here indicates a more pronounced relationship, countries with a higher Rule of Law Index tend to have fewer juvenile re-convicts.

The weak negative correlation between the recidivism rate, reconviction rate and the Rule of Law Index means a slight downward trend in reconviction rates in countries with a higher Rule of Law Index. The moderate negative relationship between the number of re-convicted juveniles and the Rule of Law Index is more pronounced. This suggests that better standards of the rule of law may be associated with more effective juvenile justice systems, resulting in fewer reconvictions among juvenile inmates.

Discussion

The impact of court decisions on the recidivism of juvenile offenders is an important issue for consideration in the legal field. The conducted research indicates a significant relationship between the nature of court sentences and the probability of re-offending by minors, which is similar to this study (Stanković et al., 2019). According to the data, more than 70% of juvenile offenders who received alternative forms of punishment, such as rehabilitation programmes, are less likely to re-offend compared to those who served traditional incarceration. This is confirmed by the study, which notes that an approach to rehabilitation and social adaptation has a significantly greater impact on reducing recidivism than strict punishments (Ezell et al., 2018).

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The rule of law is a fundamental principle for any legal system, playing a key role in the stability and fairness of judicial proceedings. The research confirms that countries with a strong rule of law have lower recidivism rates (Marshall et al., 2020). It's crucial to understand that the rule of law not only mandates adherence to legal statutes but also secures safeguarding citizens' rights and liberties. The study indicates that strong legal systems contribute towards the safeguarding of fundamental human rights and freedoms, which are essential to the foundation of a democratic society (Musa & Haniza, 2023). However, there are critical issues in implementing the principle of the rule of law in individual countries, which is debatable and different from the results. The research shows that the effectiveness of the legislative system can be undermined by the lack of an effective law enforcement mechanism and insufficient judicial independence (Orendain et al., 2022). A common outcome is the recognition of the significance of the rule of law as the basis for an effective legal system (Shablystyi et al., 2020).

A research paper found that upholding the rule of law contributes to political stability and economic growth (Guarnaccia et al., 2022). Implementing these principles is the key to developing a just and democratic society, which was confirmed by the results of the conducted analysis. A study found that juveniles from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to re-offend, regardless of the type of punishment (Navarro-Pérez et al., 2020). This points to the need to integrate court decisions with social support and education programmes, as emphasised in these studies (Barrett et al., 2014; Barrett et al., 2016). An analysis of the impact of an individual approach in court decisions showed that a detailed study of minors' life circumstances and psychological state significantly improves the results of court decisions (Geerlings et al., 2020). Such individualised approaches reduce the probability of relapse by 50-60%, which is a significant improvement but different from the article's results by 20%. The error may consider the role of the family and social environment in the reintegration of minors.

The study shows that a stable and supportive family environment reduces the risk of recidivism by 40% (Welner et al., 2020). This highlights the necessity for an integrated strategy to address the issue of juvenile delinquency, encompassing both legal and societal dimensions. Hence, contemporary research underscores the need for a versatile and holistic method in tackling juvenile recidivism. The success of legal rulings is contingent upon their capacity to meld with an extensive array of social and psychological interventions focused on rehabilitation and preventative efforts.

Conclusions

The study of the impact of court decisions on the recidivism of juvenile offenders testifies to the complex and multifaceted nature of the relationship between the judicial system and juvenile offending. The correlation analysis conducted in the study indicates a certain relationship between the degree of legal governance within the nation and the frequency of recidivism among minors. This opens up new prospects for understanding the importance of the quality of justice and its influence on the effectiveness of educational measures for young offenders. In particular, a moderate negative correlation was found between a strong adherence to the principles of legal governance and the quantity of recidivism cases.

The conducted research is relevant as it opens the way for developing more effective strategies in the field of juvenile justice focused on the prevention of relapse and social adaptation of juvenile offenders. The understanding that fair and humane treatment of young offenders, combined with a quality legal system, reduces the risk of recidivism can lead to changes in legislation and the practice of working with minors. This approach is especially relevant in the context where many countries seek to find a balance between guaranteeing public safety and ensuring young people's rights and freedoms. European countries show a wide range of approaches to the problem of recidivism among juvenile offenders. In the Scandinavian countries, the emphasis is on social rehabilitation and integration, with minimal use of imprisonment. They often use individualised approaches that focus on the needs of each young person, involving professional support and education services. The findings from the research suggest that European countries can serve as a bright example for the rest of the world in terms of developing systems that will not only punish young offenders but also ensure their rehabilitation and return to a full life in a society with a high level of legal system and judicial decision-making procedures.

Recommendations

The recommendations based on the research results indicate new needs for reforming and developing the field of juvenile justice.

1. The research results indicate new requirements for reforming and developing the juvenile justice sector.

2. Introduce changes in court procedures that concern minors, focusing on social regeneration and personal development.

3. Establish integrated programs encompassing education, vocational training, and psychological support to ensure the complete rehabilitation and integration of young offenders into society.

4. Promote cooperation between the judicial system, educational institutions, social services, and public organisations.

5. Involve a diverse group of professionals to develop and implement comprehensive strategies aimed at preventing recidivism among juvenile offenders.

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