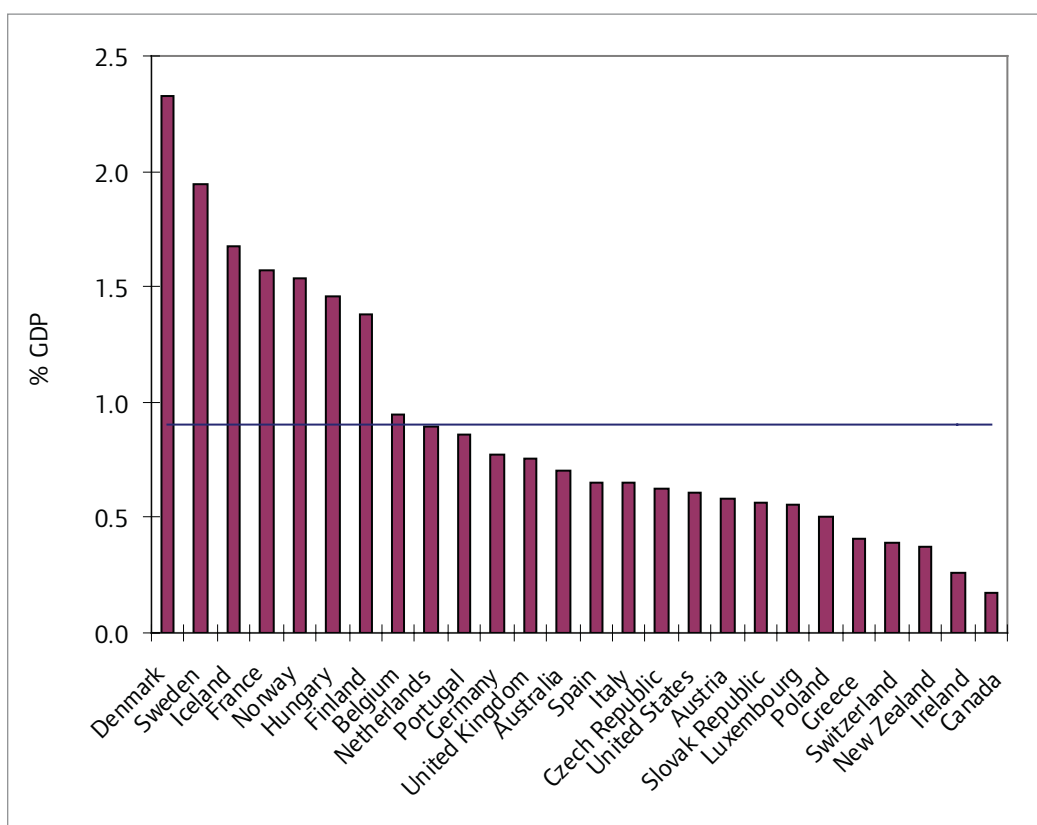


3. Youth offending in the European context

Before discussing the European context for offending, it is interesting to examine the European context for young people. The recent study by UNICEF (UNICEF 2007) suggested that young people in the UK have the lowest level of well-being in Europe. British young people experience particularly low levels of subjective well-being and report especially poor relationships with their peers and parents. They also have relatively low levels of material well-being, with a high proportion living in poverty. It may be no coincidence that they also report high levels of risk behaviours, including fighting, drinking, drug-taking and teenage pregnancy.

Another aspect of the context in which young people live is the level of support provided to families by the Government. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has collected data from 2003 (see Figure 3.1 below) which shows that the UK spends less than the OECD average on family services such as childcare and early education facilities, assistance for young people, residential facilities, and centre-based facilities and home help services for families in need.

Figure 3.1:
Spending on family services, as percentage of GDP, compared with OECD average, 2003
Source: OECD Social Expenditure Database



Comparable statistics for European countries are often hard to compile, and this is particularly true for youth offending. Countries tend to vary in their definition of an offence, age of criminal responsibility and how figures are collected. There is data available from police records and victimisation surveys. As the peak age for offending is in the mid-to-late teenage years, we can use these overall crime rates as a rough indicator of levels of youth crime.

Trends in youth offending

The British Crime Survey (BCS) suggests that, from its peak in 1995 to the most recent data for 2007, the number of crimes in England and Wales has fallen by 46 per cent, with vehicle crime and burglary falling by over a half and violent crime falling by 47 per cent during that period. Crime is now at its lowest recorded level since the BCS began in 1981. However, only a minority of