

Partners Bulgaria - Against School Aggression Partnership

The values of freedom, tolerance, respect for diversity and non-discrimination are fundamental for European societies. There are alarming proportions of bullying and violence in European schools which is a worrying signal for educators, civil society and communities. Bullying has serious and long-term effects for both victims and perpetrators. It affects mental and physical health as well as the academic performance of students.

From political point of view, if not addressed, bullying corrupts the school environment, poisons the climate and in a long term may create a generation of apathetic citizens, bystanders of political processes and non-believers of significance of actions for change. The lack of will to combat bullying at school maintains impunity of perpetrators, rewards those irresponsible for their actions and puts the seeds of cynicism, anti-social attitudes and disrespect to law and order and to the school institution as a whole. It undermines the values of equality, dignity and liberty.

Against School Aggression Project raises awareness about the prevalence of school bullying in Hungary, Malta and Bulgaria and in many other EU countries. It provides data from selected schools in each of the three countries, which is supported by similar national and international research and which can inform policy and practice against bullying and school aggression.



The following recommendations aim at stimulating a policy discussion about bullying in the EU. These recommendations are in line with the European Commission efforts to implement the 2015 Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education.

The following recommendations are drawn from the experience of Partners Hungary Foundation, SOS Malta, Partners Bulgaria, Szolnok school, Hungary, schools in Bulgaria and Malta, during and beyond the implementation of Against School Aggression Project. They aim at supporting EU policy-makers and practitioners to take decisions about strategies, regulations and mechanisms for preventing bullying and violence in schools across the EU.

1

Promote a culture of peace, human rights, democracy and civility in schools through comprehensive strategic approach and throughout the whole school system

- Apply strategic approach for bullying and violence prevention starting from pre-schools education and primary school to higher academic education and adult learning.
- Enhance understanding and recognition of a culture of peace, human rights and democracy at school and build capacity to their operationalisation to school policy in all levels of education.
- Peaceful resolution of school conflicts and reinforcement of democratic values as opposite to aggression, bullying and violence
- Focus on both academic achievement and child and staff wellbeing
- Focus on discriminatory bullying to children from minority groups
- Integrate various approaches such as: strategy to prevent school drop-outs; strategies for inclusion of children with special needs and integration of minority and migrant children; children rights and child participation; civic education, social and emotional learning etc.
- Expand teachers education and in-service teachers' training to competences needed to establish a positive classroom and school climate including conflict resolution skills, teaching kindness and cooperative learning etc.

2

Develop school curricular that focuses both on academic achievement and on social and emotional learning, conflict resolution and problem solving skills

- Introduce teaching methodologies within the existing academic curriculum which facilitate cooperation, kindness, empathy, sensitivity, caring, teambuilding, taking responsibility for oneself and for the group, problem solving, embracing diversity and resolving conflicts.
- Improve existing curriculum and school subjects such as social and emotional learning, conflict resolution and mediation, citizenship and democracy education, intercultural education, human rights; etc.
- Involve students in the design of the programs, materials, videos and other means related to students' lives and needs and aiming at raising awareness about bullying behaviour. Students from the minority groups who are object of discrimination can be especially helpful in the design of such a group.

3

Support necessary conditions to operationalize the whole school approach in the educational systems.

- Build democratic culture and a culture of peace by asserting democratic principles at school and bringing the voice of all students;
- Increase the role of students' councils and parents participation;
- Engage students from vulnerable groups which are most often victimized and ensure their voices are heard.
- Pay special attention to challenge homophobic attitudes, prejudices, gender based violence and all forms of discrimination;
- Promote Model programs that proved their effectiveness in decrease of bullying such as reinforcement and strict maintenance of school regulations; students' participation; training programs for students, parents, teachers, school administrators, restorative practices; school and class anti-bullying policy; democratic school and trust building between teachers and students

4

Promote training programs that build capacity of teachers, school administrators and education experts in conflict resolution and mediation

- Develop teaching and non-teaching staff conflict resolution skills as part of pre-service and in-service education;
- Assess teachers' behavior and attitudes, diversity competence, classroom management skills and ability to create positive class atmosphere as part of their professional performance;
- Combat teacher's prejudices and discriminatory attitudes by providing training and support;
- Ensure teachers and all educators are role models for students in terms of living democratic and human rights principles.

5

Promote the inclusion of democracy, human rights and children rights principles into the school governance

- Identify and address all systemic barriers to end school violence and bullying such as broader xenophobic and discriminatory attitudes.
- Increase cooperation among professionals including those from the education, health and social welfare system and facilitate dialogue and formulation of mea-

- sures at national, regional and local level;
- Include students, especially those from vulnerable groups, in such cooperation;
- Engage parents in school governance in a meaningful constructive way;
- Make sure all schools develop, reinforce and update anti-bullying policy and practices;
- Develop instruments such as self-assessment tool to assist schools to measure their situation and the impact of measures applied;
- Improve school education practice by strengthening evaluation capacity, focused on both academic and human well-being criteria.

6

Facilitate introduction of conflict resolution structures and mechanisms at school such as restorative practice, mediation and others.

- Introduce teachers and non-teaching staff to restorative practices, meditation and other conflict resolution mechanisms;
- Conduct training in peer mediation and encourage students to build conflict resolution skill by elevating their reputation as mediators and leaders;
- Establish and maintain school mediation services;
- Introduce school peace index, school peace award and other instruments to combat violence and bullying;

7

Provide family support and involve parents in school governance

- Challenge parental practices that influence students violence and aggression /authoritarian parenting, punitive approach, violence at home/;
- Engage with social and health services to evaluate family situation when parental practices endanger the child wellbeing and provide family support as needed;
- Make sure every community maintains family support service and the schools are in close collaboration with them;
- Involve parents in school anti-bullying policy development and ensure their input to such policy and its reinforcement;

8

Engage with wider community

- Encourage school community outreach efforts and closer connections between schools and community;
- Provide instruments to engage schools and students in broader community activities / sport clubs, parks, libraries, art centers etc./

9

Conduct regular EU members states comparative studies on school aggression and effective practices to combat it

- Support research and analysis in all member states including comparative analysis on school culture of peaceful conflict resolution,
- Support research on school culture of peace and cooperation, including:
 - A. School conflicts, aggression and bullying. Given the increasing number of cases of bullying and violence in European schools the importance of meaningful policies and practices to educate children in peaceful and democratic environment and ensure safety and child's wellbeing, is of direct relevance to the EU and its engagement in child protection, quality education and the values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education.
 - B. Dealing with children prone to violence and aggression, children victimized during their schooling, children who appear in both roles and those who are not affected by act as bystanders or observers;
 - C. Specific case studies where discrimination and victimization is related to xenophobic and homophobic attitudes;
 - D. School policy and practice and various mechanisms to promote a culture of peaceful conflict resolution, tolerance and non-discrimination.

10

Conduct impact evaluation of policies and practices

- Strengthen quality control on school governance and school anti-bullying policies;
- Promote good practices within the EU educational systems including
- Dissemination of school self-evaluation and impact evaluation mechanisms;
- Carry out a number of school anti-bullying policy and practices evaluations and promote the results with recommendations to introduce similar methodologies in all members states;
- Convene seminars on evaluation of existing policies and practices within the EU and engage expert and group to suggest a common evaluation methodology.