



How to Prevent and Tackle Bullying and School Violence

Evidence and Practices for Strategies for Inclusive and Safe Schools
Executive Summary



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AUTHORS:

- **Paul Downes**, Institute of Education, Dublin City University
- **Carmel Cefai**, Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health, University of Malta

CONTRIBUTORS:

- **Laima Vaigė**, Mykolas Romeris University, Institute of International and European Union Law
- **Vanessa Jantzer**, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Center for Psychosocial Medicine, University of Heidelberg
- **Yves Montoya**, LACES EA 4140, University of Bordeaux
- **Georgios Zarifis**, Department of Education, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
- **Emil Buzov**, Step by Step Program Foundation

LANGUAGE EDITOR

- **Siobhan Denham**, Freelance copy-editor, proofreader

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CONTRACTOR:



Public Policy and Management Institute
Gedimino ave. 50, LT - 01110 Vilnius, Lithuania
Phone: +370 5 2620338 Fax: +370 5 2625410, www.ppmi.lt

Director Haroldas Brožaitis

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Paul Downes is Senior Lecturer in Education (Psychology), Director of the Educational Disadvantage Centre, Dublin City University, Ireland. He has been involved in various expert advisory roles for the European Commission, including for its School Policy Working Groups. He has been a Visiting Research Fellow at University of Cambridge, Lauterpacht Centre for International Law, a member of the Irish Senate and Parliament Expert Advisory Group on early school leaving, an advisor to the Irish National Disability Authority report on bullying, and a consultant for the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe). Published internationally in areas of psychology, education, law, philosophy, anthropology and social policy, he has given keynotes and invited presentations in more than 20 countries. Email: paul.downes@dcu.ie.

Professor Carmel Cefai, PhD (Lond), FBPS, is the Director of the *Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health*, and Head of the Department of Psychology, at the University of Malta. He is Joint Honorary Chair of the *European Network for Social and Emotional Competence* and joint founding editor of the *International Journal of Emotional Education*. He has led various research projects in mental health in schools, risk and resilience in children and young people, children's wellbeing, and the development of a resilience curriculum. Recent publications include *RESCUR Surfing the Waves, A Resilience Curriculum for Early Years and Primary Schools* (2015) published in 7 languages and *Social and Emotional Education Primary School. Integrating Theory and Research into Practice* (Springer USA, 2014). Email: carmel.cefai@um.edu.mt.

ABOUT THE NETWORK

NESET II is an advisory network of experts working on the social dimension of education and training. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture initiated the establishment of the network as the successor to NESSE (2007-2010) and NESET (2011-2014). The Public Policy and Management Institute ([PPMI](http://www.ppmi.lt)) is responsible for the administration of the NESET II network.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School bullying concerns all EU member states. It is an affront to the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination. Its effects are serious and may be long-term. It is not only a problem for education policy to address. It is also a health and welfare issue relevant to child protection.

School bullying can affect the mental and physical health as well as the academic performance of children and young people and may lead to early school leaving. In many cases, bullying leads victims to suicide or attempted suicide, anxiety, depression and self-harm. Being a perpetrator of bullying is associated with later violent behaviour and anti-social personality disorder.

The aim of this report is to inform policy-makers and practitioners at EU, national, regional and local level on the most effective strategies and practices for preventing bullying and violence in schools across the EU. It examines evidence from European and international research, reviews national practices and the work civil society organisations with regard to school bullying and violence.

Bullying is to be understood as physical, verbal and relational behaviours, which involves one party having the intention to repeatedly hurt or harm another, within an uneven power relationship where the victim is unable to defend him/herself (Olweus, 1999).

1. PREVALENCE OF SCHOOL BULLYING

- School bullying takes many forms. These include discriminatory bullying against minority groups, homophobic bullying and bullying against students with special needs or any student who seem vulnerable for his or her peers.
- There is a clear gender difference in school bullying trends in Europe, with the rates of boys being higher than that of girls in most of the countries. Both victimisation (being a victim of school bullying) and perpetration (being a person bullying others) are more common among boys.
- The prevalence of bullying varies considerably across Europe. Lithuania, Belgium, Estonia, Austria and Latvia are some of the countries with relatively high victimisation rates between around 20 % and 30 %¹, compared to the lower rates of Denmark, Sweden, Czech Republic, Croatia, Italy and Spain below 10 %.
- Bullying perpetrator rates increase significantly from 11 to 15 years. In most European countries the increase is relatively small but in a few countries it is more than 10 % points amongst boys (e.g., Latvia, Greece, Austria, Luxembourg).

2. THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIES

- Bullying can be a complex problem to solve, which requires a comprehensive, multidimensional approach. The lack of a systematic approach to address school bullying is an issue of concern for many Member States, among them some with particularly high bullying rates.
- National school bullying and violence prevention strategies are lacking in many European countries.
- Homophobic bullying lacks a strategic focus in many EU Member States. According to the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights' survey, the highest levels of hostility and prejudice towards LGBTI groups recorded in the EU are in Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania. It is notable that very few of these countries address prevention of homophobic bullying in schools in a strategic manner.

¹ Based on a national sample of the school population between ages 11 and 15.

- Similarly, the prevention of discriminatory bullying in school (against groups such as Roma, minorities, migrants, as well as against those experiencing poverty and socio-economic exclusion) needs a stronger strategic focus in many EU Member States.
- Cross-departmental policy synergies between education and health are needed for more effective preventions of school bullying.

3. SUCCESS FACTORS

- International reviews of whole school approaches to bullying prevention do not endorse one particular model but they highlight some key features of successful interventions. The most effective programme elements associated with a decrease in *bullying* others: parent training/meetings, teacher training, improved playground supervision, videos about the consequences of bullying, disciplinary methods (that are not reducible to punitive or zero tolerance approaches), cooperative group work between professionals, school assemblies, support for parents, appropriate classroom management and rules, and a whole school anti-bullying policy.
- Strong international evidence concludes that a curricular approach to social and emotional education is key for personal development to challenge a culture of violence in school. Sufficient classroom time for social and emotional education in schools across Europe is an important success factor for school bullying and violence prevention.
- Working with parents is strongly associated with both a decrease in bullying and being bullied in school. However, many approaches to parental involvement for bullying prevention are top-down, information-type approaches rather than approaches which actively involve parents.
- Discriminatory bullying requires challenge through a democratic school culture promoting the different voices of students. Young people who are part of minority or excluded groups must help design concrete curricular resources that address bullying and prejudice.
- While not necessarily the same individuals are at risk of early school leaving and bullying, possible responses show great similarities and therefore a common strategy may be useful, including common systems of supports, such as a transition focus to post-primary, multidisciplinary teams for complex needs, language support, family outreach supports and teacher professional development on issues relevant to preventing both problems.
- Family support services for early intervention are crucial for the prevention of school bullying and violence, just as they are for positive mental health. A ‘one-stop shop’ where multidisciplinary services across health and education are available at local level is the most effective way to engage families with a range of needs for emotional and communicative support.
- A specific community outreach strategy, which offers opportunities for intercultural contacts is an important approach for overcoming prejudice between groups. This can be facilitated by shared communal spaces, which bring different groups together, such as community lifelong learning centres, arts and sports facilities, libraries, green spaces, community afterschool centres, family resource centres, religious centres, gyms.
- Successful national approaches may include explicit focus on bullying and violence prevention in governance structures and processes, such as school self-evaluation, external inspection and whole school planning and national committees for student welfare.

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