



European
Commission

Achieving student well-being for all: educational contexts free of violence

Executive summary



Education and
Training

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NESET 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 NESET II (2015-2018), NESSE (2007-2010) and NESET (2011-2014). The Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) is responsible for the administration of the NESET network. For any inquiries, please contact us at: infonaset@ppmi.lt.

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Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that 'Children have the right to be protected from being mistreated, physically and mentally', while Article 31 indicates that 'Every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts'. These rights are violated when children are victims of violence, a reality that affects many children in Europe and around the world. Violence against children (VAC) takes various forms, among which gender-based violence (including sexual harassment, sexual violence, and intimate partner violence), bullying (including racism and all forms of intolerance), and online violence (cyberbullying) are particularly prevalent. The current EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (European Commission, 2021a) seeks to build the best possible life for all children in the EU and worldwide, and establishes that such a vision cannot be achieved unless VAC is tackled and eliminated.

When children suffer any form of VAC, their mental and physical health is affected, as well as their ability to attend school, interact socially and thrive. Education can play a key role in supporting children who are victims of VAC to become more resilient and can ensure a safe environment from which to gain strength to face adversity through empowerment. For children who are not victims of VAC, educational contexts can be used to prevent the risk of VAC victimisation. Likewise, educational actions and programmes can provide opportunities to promote integrated child protection systems in which various services and authorities relevant to safeguarding work together to support the child.

This analytical report presents a scientific review of the prevalence and impact of VAC (specifically, those forms that most affect school-aged children), and its relationship with educational opportunities and students' academic achievement. To advance the search for solutions that could eliminate VAC from education, the report also presents educational programmes and actions from across Europe and internationally that address various forms of VAC and serve all children – including those who are most vulnerable – to grow up happy and healthy, and to develop to their full potential. Of these programmes and actions, the report indicates those which are supported by available evidence of social impact. The report is guided by three questions:

- 1) What are the consequences of VAC for students' well-being?
- 2) What scientifically evidenced actions and programmes exist that address VAC?
- 3) How do the actions and programmes identified address the consequences of VAC?

The concepts of VAC, well-being and education are at the core of this report. The key findings of our in-depth literature review are divided into three main sections:

- 1) Scientific evidence on the negative consequences of violence against children.
- 2) Scientific evidence about programmes and actions that have been successful in addressing the consequences of VAC and promoting students' well-being.
- 3) Scientific evidence on *how* these effective actions and programmes address the consequences of VAC.

With reference to the first of these sections, the results of the literature review point to several negative effects that VAC has on children. These effects involve a worsening of the mental health of victims of VAC, the hindering of brain development, and an increase in the likelihood of poor academic achievement and early school leaving. In addition, the scientific evidence reviewed shows that children belonging to certain vulnerable groups are more likely to suffer from the effects of VAC, including an increase in those inequalities

they already suffer. Such vulnerable groups include girls, children belonging to cultural and ethnic minorities, those from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, refugee children, children with disabilities and others. In presenting these findings from the literature, this section indicates that for those affected, failure to address VAC and child well-being hinders their successful participation in education, equal opportunities, and their full enjoyment of children's rights.

Following on from this review of the negative impacts of VAC on children, the second section of the report presents an in-depth analysis of the scientific literature, leading to the identification of a list of 13 programmes and actions for which there is scientific evidence showing that they address one or more consequences of VAC reported in the previous section. The third section of the report describes *how* those programmes listed in the previous section achieve their objectives of preventing and mitigating the consequences of VAC. Key elements identified in the course of this analysis include community involvement; zero tolerance to violence; teacher training; bystander intervention; and student and community training, grounded in scientific evidence impact with regard to VAC (Roca-Campos et al., 2021; Villarejo-Carballido et al., 2019).

Based on these results, the conclusions section of this report provides recommendations for the diverse agents involved in children's safeguarding.

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