



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

NESET Analytical Report, 2023

Summary

The analytical report presents a scientific review of the prevalence and impact of violence against children (VAC) and its relationship with educational opportunities and students' academic achievement. To advance the search for solutions that could eliminate VAC from education, the report identifies 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 effectiveness is supported by available evidence of social impact. The report also offers recommendations for the diverse agents involved in children's safeguarding.

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The Network is one of the seven key knowledge providers that contribute evidence-based advice to DG EAC. NESET provides reliable, independent and rigorous scientific support, country-specific expertise and advice to the European Commission in relation to equity and social aspects at all levels of education and training. NESET acts as a knowledge broker, bridging the gap between EU policy coordination and the academic world.

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Context

Child well-being refers to conditions in which children and youth have an opportunity to flourish, develop their potential, learn, play, build meaningful bonds with others, and be part of and contribute to the community. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child stresses the need to protect and promote children's rights to safeguard child well-being. Based on The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, the European Union and its Member States continue to apply measures promoting development and the rights of children, especially those at risk. The European Child Guarantee focuses on developing actions targeting children at risk of poverty or social exclusion that will allow them to overcome the situations of vulnerability in which they find themselves. Still, despite the existing tools to protect children and promote their rights and well-being, some challenges remain, and new challenges are emerging. This means further measures are needed to tackle these challenges.

Key findings

The results of scientific literature review shed light on the negative consequences of all types of VAC at three levels:



Academic achievement and school drop-out



Mental and emotional well-being and brain development



Physical well-being

The negative consequences of VAC are especially severe for the well-being of children who belong to at-risk groups, such as girls, children from ethnic minorities, LGBTIQ+ students, and children and adolescents with disabilities.

Scientific literature reveals that successful interventions that seek to safeguard children and tackle VAC share some common factors, which include:

promoting contexts of zero violence via the involvement of the whole community

training and dialogue based on scientific evidence regarding violence

promoting friendships to protect children from VAC, build resilience and promote child well-being

overcoming VAC during lockdowns and other emergency circumstances

The negative consequences of VAC are especially severe considering the well-being of children who belong to at-risk groups, such as girls, children from ethnic minorities, LGBTIQ+ students, and children and adolescents with disabilities.

Recommendations

Drawing on the key findings, the report provides recommendations for effective measures tackling VAC. The recommendations include:

- 1 Effective action towards tackling and preventing the effects of VAC demands an urgent response and a coordinated effort involving education, health services and all child protection systems and services.
- 2 To ensure developmental contexts free of violence, in which victims of VAC can recover and healthy rewiring of the brain after VAC can take place, schools and their efforts should be aligned with families and the entire community
- 3 To ensure that children can benefit from contexts that are full of positive and rich stimuli, among which quality human relationships stand out, which can protect children from VAC victimisation and enable them to be resilient, teachers and other adults should be fostering solidarity among children in all school interactions, and promoting 'upstander' behaviour among children.
- 4 Schools that are committed to preventing VAC and supporting the recovery of child victims of VAC can succeed in their objectives by implementing scientifically evidenced programmes that have been proven to be successful, while avoiding investments in and implementation of programmes that have not yielded evidence of social impact.
- 5 Schools and communities that are deeply invested in the prevention and elimination of VAC acknowledge the importance of addressing isolating gender violence as a requisite for overcoming VAC, and act accordingly. Developing policies and guidelines to protect those children and adults who protect victims of VAC in schools and communities, and engaging the whole community in ensuring the implementation of such policies, are successful tools. Fostering bystander intervention from all members of the community without fissures is key to eliminating isolating gender violence, and thereby eliminating VAC.
- 6 The promotion of quality friendships among children, in which they always stand up for their friends who are victims, protecting them from violence and denouncing any aggression against them, is an evidence-based resource for schools to protect children from bullying and other forms of VAC.
- 7 Policies or scale-up actions to prevent and address VAC should also be based on scientifically evidenced programmes that had yielded a solid body of data demonstrating a reduction in VAC and the promotion of child well-being after their implementation. Large-scale policies or interventions should also bring scientific evidence of the social impact of such programmes into dialogue with the schools in which they will be implemented, recreating and co-constructing this scientific knowledge in each context.