

# EUROPEAN BULLYING AWARENESS POLICIES AND ENABLING INITIATIVES

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**Abstract.** *Following a synthetic presentation of the definition of bullying in the context of the current profile literature, as a repeated form of emotional and physical abuse by a person or group of persons as a perpetrator or as a victimized person with negative consequences on victims, the article highlights the status of the phenomenon and its disastrous impact on the physical, mental and social dimension of adolescent personality. There are several issues that are related to the prevalence of the phenomenon at European level and its structuring according to bullying types (physical, emotional, cyberbullying ...), gender and countries. The most extensive chapter presents some initiatives aimed at enhancing awareness and enabling bullying in different European countries, developed in partnership projects.*

**Keywords:** *bullying, school violence, perpetrator, victim, European anti-bullying policies*

## 1. Introduction

The present article aims to achieve a brief definition and specific features of the bullying phenomenon that affects the school population, nominating the social roles involved and identifying some consequences on the personality of the children. Another objective was the presentation, based on statistical data analysis, of its dimensions and prevalence at a European level. The most consistent part of the article aims to reveal, based on social documents analysis, European awareness initiatives, also prevention and combat policies developed against bullying phenomenon in schools.

**Bullying** is a term that in Romanian does not match to any exact correspondent in English. In English, the word bully describes a *perpetrator, a hooligan, a mocker*. In Romanian, bullying defines a form of *emotional and physical abuse*, a repeated and intentional behaviour, (the same exact person gets always hurt), characterized by the existence of an imbalance of forces: the aggressor tracks his victim and exploits his/her weaknesses.

Olweus, in his extensive research (1978-2013), is the first theorist to define bullying, while his studies remain a universal scientific premise, to which the current research and investigations are reported. In 1993, bullying appears as *a deliberate, repetitive abuse action that involves negative actions on others, carried out by a group of*

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persons or by a single person holding a higher social status than the victim/victims (Olweus, 1993).

"The phenomenon of school victimisation/bullying is a current issue with serious implications on an international scale for the mental and social health of the individuals involved, as well as on their well-being (Marsh & Co., 2011, quoted in Tocai S.I., 2014:417). The particular bullying behaviour implies group exclusion of the different one, the humiliation, the rumour spreading (also known as social exclusion/ relational/social bullying), the prohibition of speaking to another colleague or denigrating on physical, ethnic, religious or gender grounds – also known as **social bullying**; physical violence or bodily harm threat - **physical bullying**; personal property destruction - **criminal bullying**; verbal insults, using negative nicknames – **verbal bullying**; and **cyberbullying** (through cyberspace and through social media).

It is emphasized the fact that school violence victims are more likely to develop depression and suicidal attempts than other teenagers (Lazarus, 2012 quoted Ibid). Assaulted pupils periodically present a low level of mental wellbeing, general health level and social adaptation, instead they exhibit high levels of stress (Rigby, 1996). Literature also highlights the difference between the form of *direct bullying* – which may include punching, pushing, biting, versus indirect forms of bullying – using verbal abuse, insults or a licentious language against a person, blackmail, rumours spreading, use of malicious nicknames or social exclusion (Cowie, 2008).

The assigned **bullying roles** describe the *perpetrator/the bully, the victim* who poses in a vulnerable position, the *reinforcers* or *active spectators*, those who encourage the perpetration of bullying behaviour through actions such as: laughter, acclamation, *the accomplice/s* or *assistant/s*, followed by *defender's witnesses* and the *passive spectators*.

Starting from the destructive effects on children's personality, researchers and social actors involved in their education have been concerned, in various ways, with enabling or reducing the phenomenon. We intend to present some relevant anti-bullying initiatives and frameworks at European level, including the level of Romania.

## **2. eCARE project *Early Child Abuse Response Enabling* - an European Approach to Address Bullying**

*eCARE project* (2015-2018) globally aim at contributing to children's rights and safe learning environment, building-up on existing initiatives, agenda, programmes or projects that were currently addressing the matter. **Main objectives** of this programme (Erasmus+ Each 2015-1-TR01-KA201-022267) followed: identifying the strategic needs of adult education specialists to prevent and combat bullying in schools, development of specific skills for pupils to prevent and manage the bullying situations in the school area and not only, promoting good practice at European level for the prevention and Control of Juvenile violence (aggression, children victims of domestic violence, young prone at events of violent behaviour).

eCARE consortium designed an innovative Capacity Building Programme by creating conditions for an inclusive partnership with Civil Society Organisations (C.S.O.), also learning, teaching and training activities. **The partner countries** entrusted in the project were Turkey (co-ordinating country), Spain, Portugal, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania (in Oradea, under the coordination of teachers, at Secondary School No. 11). **Partnerships** included a variety of individuals and groups, secondary school pupils, parents, school executives, teachers, educational staff, community organizations, Youth/Health bodies, public services agencies, community leaders etc.

Good practices collection and comparative examination proved to be real **tools** regarding the bullying approach. Each partner identified 5 good practices matching the project quality criteria (provided in the handbook specially designed for WP2). The identified good practices are the echo of the current trends and policies considering a variety of approaches and actors such as teachers and school staffs globally, Civil Society Organisations (CSO), experts, policy-makers, to name but a few. Find detailed information on collected good practice in the project website (Newsletter No. 4 & Editorial Retrieved at <http://earlycare.wixsite.com/ecare>).

### 3. Bullying phenomenon european dimensions

To a simple online search using *European anti-bullying policies* as a key word, there are numerous sites and platforms that promote actions in this direction, especially through the access of educational projects sustained by European funds. Titles appear as anti-bullying European campaign (<https://ec.europa.eu>), A Daphne project type, an European anti-bullying network (<http://www.antibullying.eu/>) which promotes anti-bullying policies in partnership with various European institutions/organisations that advocate the rights of young people; and other initiatives starting from this case. European bullying awareness is increasing, demanding more attention, resources and especially legislative framework.

On the current political agenda, the consequences of migration in the European area upon children occupy an important status in terms of the impact on their social and educational lives. Shortcomings include poverty, parents market labour absence, illiteracy and, for certain, interethnic discrimination type conflicts. Ethnicity person harassment is assigned in the literature under the name of the **ethnic bullying** (see Gladden &Co., 2014).

According to the data of a doctoral research (2013-2018), held in Bihor County schools, in Romania, it appears that boys are more likely than girls in becoming victims of bullying in general, also verbally or physical type. Likewise, boys are more exposed than girls in adopting the role of aggressor in a physical, ethnic, or verbal bullying encounter (Tocai &Chipea, 2017).

The phenomenon of bullying between young people extends far beyond the space occupied by ethnic bullying, which, while representing a current problem at European level, describes various typologies and harmful consequences among young people and educational society.

More than 500,000 calls were recorded in Europe and recorded *emotional bullying* harm. More common among girls (see Figure 2), while the form of *physical bullying* is more often found among boys" (See Figure 1) (<http://www.mediafax.ro>). About 57% of the calls were recorded from girls. Victims of the bullying phenomenon **around the world** are 43% boys assigned, 57% girls, and **in Europe**, 42% from boys and 58% from girls" (idem). It is also noted in the communiqué: "Almost 63% of the calls recorded by the *Child Phone Services in Europe* include *emotional bullying* form as the most widespread, followed by *physical bullying* 24%. More than 90% of victims in Europe have indicated schools' co-workers as perpetrators, and more than 10% included friends. In another 4% of cases are teachers being nominated" (Child Helpline, Retrieved at <http://www.salvaticopiii.ro>).



**Figure N°1** *Bullying prevalence in Europe among 15<sup>th</sup> year boys, reporting that they have been victimized at least twice in the last two months in 2009-2010*

*Source: Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Publications: International Reports, official site, <http://www.hbsc.org/>*

The widest spread of the phenomenon of bullying in schools, where 15-year-old boys adopt the role of perpetrator, meets in Lithuania, Belgium with a rate over 20%, followed by Romania and Austria with 15% -19% prevalence. Italy, Sweden and Iceland assign with the lower bullying prevalence (2009-2010).



**Figure N°2** *Bullying prevalence in Europe among 15<sup>th</sup> year girls, reporting that they have been victimized at least twice in the last two months in 2009-2010*

*Source: Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Publications: International Reports, official site, <http://www.hbsc.org/>*

The frequency which teenage girls adopt the role of aggressor is lower compared to boys' perpetrators, including countries as: Latvia (between 24%-20%), Central Europe (15%-9%), with a low prevalence among students from Norway, Sweden, Finland, UK, Italy S. A., according to data from *International study Health Behaviour in School Aged Children* on 2009-2010.

#### 4. European Anti-Bullying Initiatives Policy<sup>1</sup>

In 2009, for schools in **Sweden** was mandatory to implement anti-bullying policies to prevent harassment and other forms of child abuse (Gill, Petterson, 2010). Sweden becomes a promoter in developing strategies for combating school bullying. Such initiatives signal to a global awareness, stressing the fact that every state/society has an obligation to protect children's rights and to create a secure schools environment by adopting various educational programmes and policies (Tocai, 2017).

Starting from 2014, **Turkey** supports the Civil Society Organization's "BILKA", which includes 7 regions, 34 cities and 37 schools addressing students, teaching staff, the auxiliary and the family, according to *Ali Karay Ortaokulu* school(AKO) Avcilar, Istanbul, partner in the Early Child Abuse Response Enabling Project (eCARE). The issue of school violence in Turkey has a special specificity by considering both - the present cultural context, ethnic and regional varieties - as well as historical bases, with an emphasis on international cooperation policies in the context of existing conflict regions and refugees. Therefore, the proposed country action parameters aim at a wider area to access several levels - starting with the school system, the school community and the annexed communities, the social context, health services and security, until the development of the education system.

School violence is widespread on contemporary society's issues and leans for **interethnic violence**. Turkey has the latest and largest of a five-year strategic plan frame, of the ADNED, the *National Direction of Education in the Acvilar District*, which is primarily addressed to school violence. The participants were teachers, community stake holders, educational policies staff, academics, as well as specialists in the field of violence prevention and child abuse. The program encompasses activities aimed to enhance students standing up against abuse and violence, and training skills to recognize and control their risk situations.

Examples of good practices in combating violence/bullying include *Capacity Building Programs* (CBP) addressing students and teachers who explore the capabilities of active learning and promote methodologies to assist children with special needs learning, victims of violence. Strategies for teachers are closely linked to *inclusive education* as a primary need for society. The objectives of these programs are aimed at a multimodal development considered to be beneficial for school system, that responds as well to individual needs and at the same time provides interregional and interethnic cooperation. Together with the capacity development programs, there is the *Preventive Advancement Counseling* for 0-8 years aged children and represents a strategic approach promoted in the Acvilar district where teachers and students as future teachers are trained to handle the issue of violence by specialists Değerler Eğitimi (Values in Education).

**Spain** is analysing the phenomenon of bullying/school violence at the level of 2,727 students in 66 schools at secondary school and high school level in Barcelona through a

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<sup>1</sup> Data Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy They were provided as a result of analyses carried out by the project members within the Erasmus + EARLY CHILD abuse RESPONSE enabling – eCARE 2015-1-TR01-KA201-022267

survey. Subjects' responses reveal the frequency of school violence, bullying physical assaults, intimidation, mockery, marginalization, out of which 10, 7% say they have been assaulted at least four times a month, according to Portugal's eCARE report, 2016.

The initiatives to enable school violence are primarily included at a school level through projects, through existing NGOs or local/national educational policies. Is where we mention the *Seville* program involving 10 schools over 3 years (1996-1999) which was founded on the bullying paradigm of Olweus. Other such educational programs for intervention and prevention of school violence are: *Andave* (Educational Program for abuse prevention among students), *Convivir es vivir* (Living is companionship), a program for positive school interaction development, *No estás solo* (You are not alone) a program that provides material and emotional support to victims and aims to prevent victimization in schools and in student families. The *ConRed* project (see <http://www.uco.es/laecovi/conred/>) to prevent electronic violence as cyber bullying. There are organizations responsible for maintaining peaceful cohabitation in Spanish schools, such as the *Observatorio Nacional de la Convivencia*, (Valencia School Observatory) and *Instituto para la Convivencia y Éxito Escolar en las Islas Baleares* (Institute for Peaceful Cohabitation and School Success) in the Balearic Islands.

Spain, as well, sets emergency lines and support for school violence victims *El Teléfono Amigo* (Friendly Phone) school violence since 2001, created in Andalusia and *Protégeles* (Protect) in the NGO system. The Spanish (2015) Erasmus research highlights the negative consequences on the mental and physical health of those involved in bullying acts, by emphasizing the association between the role of victim and symptoms such as sleep disturbances, headaches, irritability, tiredness. Correlation with the consumption of toxic substances, alcohol and tobacco were also revealed, likely for perpetrators, more than for victims of bullying, or non-victims. The authors also point to the downward trend of the bullying phenomenon from high school to middle school.

Following the surveys carried out by the National *Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Children and Young People in Portugal* (May 2015), there are 29,594 reported cases of violence, of which 30511 correlated to risk situations (of which 94.9% are domestic violence), 8896 (39.2%) correlated to exposures to acts that compromise the child's psychological health, and 4148 (14%) refer to violence among young people, according to the Portuguese partner report in eCARE, 2016. In 2015, the number of children involved in bullying acts is estimated at 240,000 (*Centro de Investigação e Intervenção Social do ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa*, Center for Investigation and Social Intervention of the University of Lisbon, Statistics) claim that 1/5 children are directly involved in school violence at school level national (<https://eurohealthnet.eu/>).

Portugal's national policies on addressing bullying and child abuse, or sexual harassment include data from 133 countries since 2014 and point to the harsh need for preventive and countermeasures. Examples of good practice in combating school violence include theoretical intervention guidelines and applied programs: *Violência en contexto Escolar* (Guideline Violence in School Context, see <http://www.dge.mec.pt>), *Escola Segura Program* (Program for a secured school) promoted at the level of the National Ministry since 1992 (see <http://www.psp.pt>).

**Italy** points to the need for a legal policies framework to tackle child abuse and to manage different types of violence. In the E-report, Italy calls the most significant initiative *Bullying in Italy: Violent and Offensive Violence*, 2015. The statistical distribution of the phenomenon indicates its increase among the students: more than 50% of the 11-17 aged children were victims of the violence of the elderly, and 19.8% constant

victims, where the girls more than the boys. Another significant aspect in this context is the increase in cyberbullying, 5.9% of children with electronic gadgets say they have been victims of this type of violence.

The first initiatives to stop these phenomena occur in 2007 when the Ministry of Education and Research is developing a national prevention campaign and provides a strategic guide and two emergency contact lines: *General strategies for preventing and stopping bullying* as well as an *Orientation Guide to Preventing and Stopping Bullying and Cyberbullying* in 2015 (see [www. smontailbullo.it](http://www.smontailbullo.it)).

**Greece** recorded the prevalence of school violence in 2000, when 14.7% of 8-12-year-old students in Athens identified themselves as victims, 6.2% as perpetrators, and 4.8% with double roles. Statistics on bullying prevalence at national level are included in the HBSC (*Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Publications*) study every four years in 2015 revealing that of 4 141 participants aged 11 to 15 6.4% are constantly victims of school violence and 7.5% are aggressors or accomplices (<http://www.hbsc.org/>).

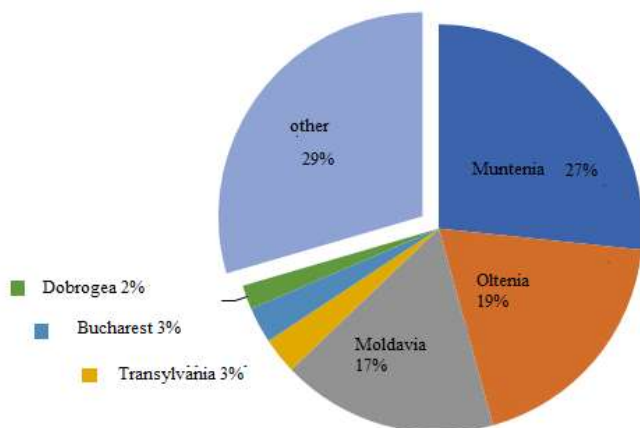
Among the most recent research of the Ministry of Education regarding the prevalence and types of bullying violence, participated in a total of 33112 secondary school students from Greece. The results emphasize the alarming incidence of this phenomenon and the risk of escalation from one year to the next.

Some of the significative anti-bullying programs implemented in Greece are *School Stop Bullying* (2010-2011), *Andreou's program and collaborators*, that enhance understanding school bullying and seek for prevention/intervention at the gymnasium level. All these programs are addressed to both students and teachers through training modules.

The Greek Ministry of Education has implemented the priority axis of the *Operational Program Education and Lifelong Learning* (NSRF) 2007-2013 Development and Information Network for the development, management, training, prevention and treatment for school violence and bullying, (see <http://stop-bullying.sch.gr/>). *The smile of a child* is a Greek NGO designed to protect the rights of the child and to provide support and services to families and children at risk. Through its actions it promotes the *European strategy against bullying The European Strategy Against Bullying*. The goal of the strategy is to develop an inclusive organization for all major governmental, non-governmental and relevant stakeholders working against violence. Another strategy to protect victims of violence in Greece is *Daphne III* as part of the Fundamental Rights and Justice Program. The state has the service 1056 Helpline registered as a national phone line of the child since 1997.

The study "The phenomenon of bullying in schools" done by *Child Helpline Association* which is the first of its kind in **Romania**, shows that 46 % of Romanian children were at one time or another victim of bullying, among which 53 % are girls and 47 % boys ([www.salvaticopiii.ro](http://www.salvaticopiii.ro)).

The *Child Telephone Association* recorded 2,907 cases of bullying in Romania, 45,72% of the cases of physical violence, 22,86% verbal violence, 15,24% emotional abuse and 14,28% relational abuse (<http://www.telefonululuiui.com>). Among 12-17 years adolescents who are victims of bullying, 28.58% are assigned as girls, and boys 57.14% as boys according to the same source. Analysing the results of these studies, it is shown that violence in Romanian schools has a high frequency - more than 75% of Romanian schools face this phenomenon, 53% of pupils recognize acts of violence among pupils as a common practice and 12% of participants states that they are happy to witness conflicts (<http://salvaticopiii.ro>).



**Figure No 3** *Bullying prevalence in Romania among Counties*

*Source: Child Telephone Association 2011- 2013,*

Retrieved at <http://www.telefonulcopilului.ro>

Among the effects of the bullying phenomenon were: depressions and behavioural disorders (33.15%), exclusion and difficulty in relationship (29.78%), suicidal thoughts (15.17%), fear and anxiety (12, 92%), identity and loneliness (4.49%). Most cases were recorded in the Muntenia region (26.66%), followed by Oltenia (19.05%), Moldavia (17.14%), Transylvania (2.86%), Bucharest (2.86%), and Dobrogea (1.91%) (<http://www.telefonulcopilului.ro/>).

Examinations and analyses conducted to improve the legal system for minors stresses the next giving priority to the creation of institutions and programs to provide legal assistance to minors (*Criminal Trafficking Directive No. 16*, [www.unicef.ro](http://www.unicef.ro)).

### Conclusions

Young communities at risk (ethnic groups / groups of unskilled / illiterate young people, socially disadvantaged groups, groups of young offenders, etc.) by their spatial segregation, stir up bullying where they act as a victim, or even as a perpetrator. These excluded social groups represent real challenges for many countries (Clotfelter, 2001; Hoorens et al., 2013) and produce certain costs for integrating states (Patterson, 2005), such as illiteracy prevention, project funding, specialized necessary services, and others.

Evidence show that pupils that come from an incomplete or a single parent family have a greater vulnerability to become *victims of bullying* and even more in adopting the role of aggressors than in complete families (Sîrbu & Chișea, 2016).

The school life of a *bully* describes a trajectory of the young delinquent in the making, with a history of aggressions acts against others, associated with school dropout. These young people start with serious deficiencies, they initially start from a moral pollution of the social context and gradually turn into deviant groups absorbed by street communities (Chișea, 1997:57).

In this context, facilitating the process of integrating children from a migrant environment becomes an imperative on the European educational policies agenda. Studies show that immigrant pupils are more likely to be enrolled in socio-economically



disadvantaged schools (Karsten et al., 2003, Coughlan, 2015; Schleicher, 2006); and with weaker learning conditions (Schleicher, 2006). Among the European socio-educational imperatives that concern the development and literacy of young people, it is necessary to manage the prevention / combating of ethnic and social bullying.

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