Module 3: School-wide policies and national anti-bullying frameworks

Objective:
- Familiarize teachers with national and school-specific anti-bullying policies.
- Train teachers on adopting a Whole School Approach to prevent bullying, drawing on UNESCO guidelines.
- Develop clear rules and consequences for bullying incidents.

Summary of content:
- Overview of local, national, and international anti-bullying policies.
- Steps for developing and enforcing school-wide anti-bullying rules.
- Ensuring policies are communicated effectively to students, staff, and parents.
- Legal responsibilities of teachers in handling bullying.
- How to create inclusive school charters emphasizing respect and safety.
- Introduction to the Whole School Approach, emphasizing collaboration among teachers, staff, students, and parents.

Lessons:
Lesson 1. Overview of European anti-bullying policies
Lesson 2. Overview of Italian anti-bullying policies
Lesson 3. Overview of Polish anti-bullying policies
Lesson 4. Overview of policies from North Macedonia
Lesson 5. Overview of Turkish anti-bullying policies
Lesson 6. Overview of Romanian anti-bullying policies
Lesson 7. Introduction to the Whole School Approach

Lesson 1. Overview of European anti-bullying policies

This lesson aims to provide an accessible overview of international anti-bullying policies, emphasizing the European Union's (EU) approach to combating bullying. At the European level, there are no unified, binding laws directly targeting bullying across all member states, but there are recommendations, frameworks, and indirect legal mechanisms that guide and encourage countries to combat bullying effectively. These operate primarily through human rights frameworks, education policies, and digital safety laws.

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC) (1989) is a human rights treaty that focuses on ensuring the rights and well-being of children worldwide. It has been ratified by nearly every country and forms the foundation of child protection efforts, including the prevention of bullying.

- Article 16 (Protection of privacy): This article protects children from arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy, family, or correspondence. Cyberbullying, which involves violations of privacy through online harassment or sharing harmful content, could fall under the protections provided by Article 16.
- Article 19 (Protection from all forms of violence): This article mandates that governments, schools, and other institutions protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, including bullying, neglect, and abuse. It highlights the importance of creating environments—both at home and school—that are nurturing, supportive, and free from harm.
- Article 37 (Prohibition of torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment): This article ensures that no child is subjected to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Severe bullying, especially if it involves humiliation or degrading behavior, can be addressed under this article.

Learn more here:
- UNCRC full text: https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child
- UNICEF's work on the UNCRC: https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention

The **Council of Europe** issued Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)7 to promote and protect children's rights in the digital environment, including addressing cyberbullying.

- *Section 2. General principles*

This section outlines fundamental principles to guide member states in respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the rights of the child in the digital environment. Several principles address bullying and cyberbullying indirectly by emphasizing children's protection, empowerment, and well-being. Member states must safeguard children's dignity, security, and physical and psychological integrity. This includes protecting them from all forms of violence, harassment, exploitation, and abuse in the digital environment. Member states should ensure that children are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to exercise their rights in the digital environment. This includes education on digital literacy and online safety to help children recognize and address risks like bullying and harassment. Member states should actively involve children in creating and implementing policies related to their rights in the digital world. Their input is valuable in shaping effective anti-bullying measures, as they can provide unique perspectives on the challenges they face online. Member states should recognize that certain children—such as those with disabilities, from minority backgrounds, or in marginalized communities—may face heightened risks of bullying and harassment online. Tailored measures are necessary to protect these vulnerable groups and ensure that they have equitable access to digital environments free from harm.

- *Section 3. Operational principles and measures to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment.*

The section emphasizes that member states must take measures to protect children from all forms of violence, exploitation, abuse, and harassment in the digital environment, including cyberbullying. It discusses establishing frameworks that ensure safety and mitigate risks in online spaces. Furthermore, the need for accessible and age-appropriate mechanisms for children to report harm or seek redress for violations of their rights in the digital world. This includes addressing cyberbullying through cooperation with digital platforms and service providers. The section also explains the necessity of providing children with education on digital literacy, enabling them to identify, understand, and address online risks like cyberbullying and harassment. Empowering children fosters resilience and confidence in dealing with digital threats. Paragraph 18 from this section covers protections against the misuse of personal information or images, which are common elements in cyberbullying and online harassment. It calls for safeguards to prevent such misuse and ensure children's privacy rights.

Learn more here:
- https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016808b79f7

The European Commission has consistently emphasized the importance of safeguarding children from bullying in schools and online. For example, the **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child** (2021-2024) integrates anti-bullying measures within its broader framework of promoting children's rights. This strategy focuses on protecting children from all forms of violence, including bullying, both offline and online. It underscores the importance of schools adopting preventive measures, such as promoting respect and inclusivity while addressing bullying through legal mechanisms. The strategy also highlights the need for a multidisciplinary approach, urging collaboration among schools, policymakers, parents, and community organizations to combat bullying. Importantly, it encourages the establishment of child-friendly reporting mechanisms to empower children to report incidents of bullying safely and without fear of retaliation.

The European Commission's **Better Internet for Kids (BIK)** initiative addresses the growing threat of cyberbullying. Recognizing the rise of digital platforms in children's lives, this initiative promotes digital literacy and safety. It provides resources for children, parents, and educators to identify and prevent cyberbullying effectively. BIK also collaborates with major tech platforms to ensure the implementation of robust content moderation policies and to provide quick responses to reports of harmful behavior. Additionally, it advocates for integrating digital citizenship education into school curricula, ensuring children are equipped with the skills to navigate online spaces responsibly.

The **Education and Training 2020 framework (ET2020)** is a European cooperation initiative that promotes quality education and lifelong learning. As part of its focus on well-being in education, it encourages member states to adopt a Whole School Approach to address bullying. This approach involves integrating anti-bullying policies into school governance, training teachers to recognize and address bullying, and fostering student participation in creating safe school cultures. You will find out more about this framework in upcoming lessons from this module.

Based on these frameworks EU member states started updating their legislation to better protect children against bullying. Let's see some examples from the participanting countries in this project. Check out the next lessons!

Lesson 2. Overview of Italian anti-bullying policies

Italy has adopted a series of regulations aimed at preventing and combating bullying, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of cyberbullying as well. The MIUR Directive No. 1455/06 lays down guidelines for schools on the prevention and management of bullying. In particular, it promotes an inclusive school culture of respect, through education in the values of solidarity and the creation of a serene and protected school environment.

Law 71/2017 is a specific response to the growing phenomenon of cyberbullying, which can occur through the internet, social media, and other online platforms. The law establishes prevention and counter measures, with the introduction of sanctions for perpetrators of cyberbullying, and specific responsibilities for online platforms. Schools are obliged to train staff and students on the risks of cyberbullying and to ensure that victims receive appropriate psychological support.

In 2024, Law 70/2024 supplemented Law 71/2017 by introducing specific regulations for bullying, strengthening action against bullying, considering new forms of psychological and digital violence. The law emphasises particularly on teacher training and awareness-raising activities in schools, also introducing accountability measures for educational institutions. Schools are required to adopt a Regulation for preventing and combating bullying and cyberbullying and an Internal Code, i.e. a school protocol for reporting, assessing alleged cases of bullying and cyberbullying, for handling cases on the basis of the assessment carried out by the Anti-Bullying and Emergency Team. in cooperation, in the most serious cases that constitute a crime, with the local police authorities, social and psychological support services.

The MIUR Guidelines (both those of 2015 and the more recent ones of 2021) offer a strategic framework for the management of the phenomenon in schools, including awareness-raising, prevention, and contrast actions. The guidelines aim to create a collaborative network between schools, families, and social services to ensure an effective response to bullying.

The action of the school is aimed at activating responses for all those involved (victim, bully, bystander), at creating an educational alliance through the involvement of parents, with a view to mediating conflicts. The school must plan prevention on three levels: 1. primary or universal, 2. secondary or selective and 3. tertiary or indicated.

Finally, Presidential Decree no. 81/2023 lays down the procedures for the physical and psychological protection of students, committing schools to ensuring a safe environment free of all forms of violence.

The supporting laws and regulations are:

- MIUR Directive No. 1455/06
- Law 71/2017 (Law against cyberbullying)
- Law 70/2024 (New provisions to combat bullying)
- MIUR Guidelines - April 2015, 13.01.2021
- Presidential Decree no. 81 of 13 June 2023 (School Safety Device)

Learn more here:

- https://www.mim.gov.it/web/guest/bullismo-e-cyberbullismo
- https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/
- https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2024/05/30/24G00086/SG

Sanctions (for perpetrators) and responsibilities (for individuals, institutions):

Sanctions vary according to the seriousness of the facts. Bullying perpetrators may be subject to school disciplinary measures, and in cases of a criminal offence, may be prosecuted. Law 71/2017 provides that social platforms are obliged to remove offensive content and cooperate with the authorities. Schools, in turn, are obliged to intervene promptly and report bullying incidents to the competent authorities.

Laws 70/2024 and 71/2017 address the issues of bullying and cyberbullying in a complementary manner, establishing specific sanctions and intervention measures for perpetrators of bullying, both in school and online. Let us look in detail at the sanctions provided for in both laws.

Law 71/2017 - 'Provisions against cyberbullying'

Law 71/2017 is the main regulation in Italy for preventing and combating cyberbullying. It focuses mainly on abuse carried out through the use of digital technologies, such as the internet, social media, messaging, and online platforms.

Law 71/2017 does not establish direct criminal sanctions for individual acts of cyberbullying, but provides for intervention measures, civil proceedings, and obligations for online platforms. However, it is mainly articulated in accountability and protection measures.

1. Content removal:

o   In the case of acts of cyberbullying, victims can request the immediate removal of offensive or defamatory content from websites, social media, or other online platforms. If the platform does not comply, the internet service provider or social network may be held liable for failure to act.

o   If the request for removal is not complied with, the Court may order direct intervention.

2.   Penalties for perpetrators:

o   Although the law does not provide direct criminal penalties for individual acts of cyberbullying, the aggressor could be prosecuted for criminal offences depending on the severity of the behaviour (such as defamation, threats, online stalking, etc.). In these cases, the penalties depend on the specific offence.

o   Perpetrators of cyberbullying may also be subject to school disciplinary measures, which vary from school to school.

3.   Protection of privacy:

o   The law stipulates that digital platforms must remove offensive content promptly, with a focus on protecting the privacy of victims. If they fail to comply with this provision, they may incur administrative sanctions.

4.   Training obligation:

o   Schools are obliged to inform and train children and parents on the risks of cyberbullying, including providing access to listening desks. Failure by schools to comply with these provisions could result in sanctions by the competent authorities.

Law 70/2024

Although not yet fully implemented in all its details, introduces some additional provisions and measures to improve the fight against bullying, with a focus also on cyberbullying. It is part of a context of strengthening policies for the prevention and management of bullying, both at school and social level .

Law 70/2024 complements existing provisions and focuses mainly on:

1.   Administrative sanctions:

o   The law stipulates that educational institutions are responsible for taking concrete measures to prevent and counteract bullying. Schools that fail to implement prevention and intervention policies risk administrative sanctions, which can vary depending on the severity of the negligence.

o   In the event of failure to adequately respond to bullying incidents (both physical and cyber), schools may be subject to action by local or regional authorities, which may include fines or other forms of accountability.

2.   Psycho-educational interventions for perpetrators of bullying:

o   Law 70/2024 proposes the adoption of compulsory psycho-educational programmes for perpetrators of bullying and the bullied, with the aim of rehabilitating aggressors. Although no prison sentences are envisaged, perpetrators of bullying could be obliged to participate in psychological or educational rehabilitation programmes.

o   In the event of recidivity or serious acts (such as physical aggression or direct threats), the perpetrator could be subject to disciplinary measures by the school, up to and including expulsion, and, if the behaviour is classified as a criminal offence, penalties under the criminal code will apply.

3.   Strengthening teacher accountability:

o   The law stipulates that schools must adequately train school staff on the issues of bullying and cyberbullying. If schools do not comply with this training, school managers and educational policy makers could be subject to administrative or disciplinary sanctions.

4.   Integration with the penal system:

o   If acts of bullying become criminal offences (e.g. stalking, threats, serious defamation), penalties under the Criminal Code apply. In particular, cyberbullying resulting in serious or repeated harm can be prosecuted with penalties for offences of defamation, threats or violation of privacy.

Common sanctions for both laws:

•   Physical and verbal bullying: Bullying incidents resulting in physical violence or verbal threats may lead to school disciplinary sanctions (e.g. suspension, expulsion), as well as criminal prosecution in cases of serious violence.

•   Cyberbullying: incidents of cyberbullying involving serious psychological harm, harassment or online threats may result in criminal charges, with penalties ranging from defamation to incitement to hatred or online threats.

•   Obligations of online platforms: Platforms and social media must remove cyberbullying content within 24 hours of reporting it. In case of non-compliance, they can be sanctioned with fines or suspension of licences.

In summary, Law 71/2017 focuses more on measures to protect and safeguard victims and to hold digital platforms accountable, while Law 70/2024 strengthens school policies, introducing sanctions for schools that do not adopt adequate policies and proposing rehabilitative measures for perpetrators of bullying. Both laws work synergically to create a system for the prevention and management of bullying, but their concrete implementation depends greatly on the effectiveness of policy implementation at the local level.

Guidelines and legal responsibilities for schools

The guidelines for schools contained in national directives and laws establish a clear framework for dealing with bullying within schools. MIUR Directive No. 1455/06 suggests that schools adopt a preventive and educational approach to combating bullying. Schools are invited to implement activities that foster mutual respect, understanding of differences, and inclusion. The directive emphasises the importance of training teachers, involving families, and promoting psychological support for victims.

The MIUR Guidelines (April 2015 and 2021) provide more specific guidance. Among the aspects covered, they highlight:

• Prevention through educational activities, which include awareness programmes on bullying and discrimination issues.

• Case management through the establishment of protocols for reporting and dealing with bullying incidents.

• Early intervention with the involvement of experts (psychologists, social workers) to ensure that victims receive the necessary support.

• The active participation of students, parents and school staff, with an approach that encourages collaboration between all those involved.

• The importance of creating a safe school environment through education that promotes peaceful coexistence and respect for rules.

Finally, Presidential Decree no. 81/2023 establishes the framework for ensuring student safety in schools, including specific measures to prevent all form of violence, both physical and psychological.

Italian schools have legal responsibilities with regard to bullying incidents that occur within their facilities. According to the MIUR Directive No. 1455/06 and the MIUR Guidelines (both 2015 and 2021), schools are obliged to take preventive measures and intervene promptly in case of bullying incidents. The main responsibilities of schools include:

1. Prevention: Schools must create an inclusive and safe environment by promoting educational initiatives that raise students' awareness of bullying behaviour and its consequences. This includes awareness-raising activities on issues such as respect, diversity education and empathy.

2. Early intervention: When bullying occurs, schools are obliged to intervene promptly to protect victims and manage aggressors' behaviour. Schools must activate an internal protocol that provides for immediate action, such as reporting to the competent authorities and involving parents.

3. Monitoring and reporting: Schools have an obligation to continuously monitor the situation, to detect signs of bullying and to prevent it from happening again. They must also promptly report violations to the police or other competent services, such as psychologists or social workers, when necessary.

4.   Victim protection: Schools must provide psychological support to victims of bullying, ensuring that they have access to adequate resources to deal with the psychological consequences of the abuse.

Schools are not only responsible for implementing preventive policies, but also for the immediate protection of the students involved. In the event of negligence or failure to act, the school can be held legally liable, both for moral damages and for any physical harm suffered by the students.

Legal responsibilities of teachers

Teachers, as professional and reference figures within schools, have specific legal obligations in case of bullying incidents. Law 71/2017 and MIUR Directive No. 1455/06 state that teachers are obliged to:

1.   Report immediately: When a teacher is aware of a bullying incident, he or she is obliged to report it to the school management promptly. The school, in turn, must initiate the procedures set out in the anti-bullying protocol.

2.   Early intervention: Teachers are required to intervene immediately when they witness bullying, stopping the aggressive behaviour and protecting the victim. Although teachers do not have legal authority to punish the aggressor in a lawful manner (unless there are serious violations of the law), they are responsible for handling the conflict immediately.

3.   Ongoing training: Legislation requires that teachers participate in training programmes on the subject of bullying and cyberbullying, to recognise the signs and effectively deal with cases that may occur in the classroom or in everyday school life. In particular, Law 71/2017 requires that teachers also receive training on recognising and dealing with cyberbullying.

4.   Protection of privacy and identity: When a teacher is aware of a bullying incident, he or she must respect the privacy of the students involved, treating cases with due confidentiality, while ensuring that the necessary actions are taken.

If a teacher fails to report a bullying incident or take appropriate action, he/she may be considered negligent and considered liable for damages resulting from such behaviour.

Legal responsibilities of parents/ families/ students

Parents and students also have important responsibilities in combating bullying, although their legal obligations are different in nature from those of schools and teachers.

1.   Parents' duty to report:

o   Parents of victims: If parents become aware of incidents of bullying of their child, they are invited and strongly encouraged to report them promptly to the school so that procedures to counteract the phenomenon can be initiated. Although there is no direct legal obligation to report to the authorities, reporting to the school is essential to start an intervention process.

o   Parents of perpetrators of bullying: Parents of students who are responsible for bullying also have a duty to educate their children and take disciplinary measures at home. In some cases, if the aggression is severe, parents may be called to account for their children's actions.

2.   Students' duty to report:

o   Student victims: Students have the right to report bullying to school authorities or other relevant figures (such as a school counsellor or teacher). There is no formal legal obligation for students to report, but it is still a recommended act to protect themselves and others.

o   Student bystanders: Students who witness bullying are encouraged to report it, either to school authorities or to family members or other adult figures. Although there are no strict legal obligations, cooperation between students is seen as a crucial component in preventing bullying.

In cases where bullying reaches illegal levels (e.g. serious threats or physical aggression), the authorities may involve the police, in which case parents and students may be required to testify or cooperate with the investigation.

Cultural and societal factors

Local anti-bullying policies take into account several cultural and social factors that may influence the perception and management of the phenomenon. Some important aspects include:

1.   Cultural diversity: In regions with an ethnically diverse student population, local policies often include specific initiatives to prevent racial, xenophobic and culturally biased bullying. Schools are encouraged to promote intercultural understanding and respect for differences.

2.   Disability: Schools that accommodate students with physical or cognitive disabilities adopt special policies to prevent disability-related forms of bullying. This includes student awareness-raising and specific training for school staff.

3.   Gender and sexual orientation bullying: Local anti-bullying policies can also address bullying related to gender and sexual orientation, with programmes aimed at raising students' awareness of respect for gender identities and different sexual orientations, preventing homophobia and sexism.

4.   Socio-economic issues: In areas with high rates of social or economic deprivation, schools may have policies that address bullying related to economic disparities, such as bullying of students from less affluent families.

Local policies seek to address these factors and provide adequate resources to combat bullying in all its aspects, taking into account the specificities of the social and cultural context of each school community.

Current gaps and challenges

Despite significant progress in the fight against bullying, there are still some gaps and challenges to be addressed in laws and policies:

1.   Difficulties in monitoring and reporting: Not all schools have adequate systems to monitor and report bullying. Smaller schools or those with limited resources may find it difficult to implement national policies effectively.

2.   Insufficient training: Although there is mandatory training for teachers, not all educators are sufficiently prepared to handle complex bullying incidents, particularly those related to cyberbullying. Ongoing training and updates on new forms of bullying are necessary.

3.   Difficulties in addressing awareness-raising and training actions for parents: particularly in secondary schools, parents are not easy to involve and it is difficult to implement the necessary awareness-raising activities on the phenomenon in order to overcome cultural, social and stereotype legacies that are perpetuated in families and that are sometimes at the origin of many dysfunctional behaviours on the part of perpetrators and at the basis of silent acceptance by victims.

4.   Lack of adequate psychological support: Bullying victims and perpetrators often do not receive the necessary psychological support. School psychological resources are still insufficient in many schools, which prevents effective support.

5.   Disparities between schools: Local policies can vary widely from one school to another. Some schools are very active in prevention, while others do not adequately implement regulations. This creates disparities in access to resources and responses to bullying.

Recommendations:

•   Strengthen training: Introduce more in-depth mandatory training courses for teachers, school leaders and non-teaching staff, with a special focus on cyberbullying.

•   Improve monitoring: Develop centralised IT systems for reporting and monitoring bullying incidents, which can help schools respond in real time.

•   Increase psychological support: Invest in more professionals, such as school psychologists and social workers, to offer support to victims and work with aggressors.

•   Standardise local policies: Create stricter and more uniform national guidelines that ensure a uniform response to bullying in all schools, regardless of the local resources available.

Lesson 3. Overview of Polish anti-bullying policies

Polish laws and regulations emphasize the importance of ensuring a safe and supportive environment in schools. The following frameworks guide institutions and people:

•   Act on the Education System (Ustawa o systemie oświaty z dnia 7 września 1991 r. – Dz.U. 1991 nr 95 poz. 425)

•   Act on Upbringing in Sobriety and Counteracting Alcoholism (Ustawa o wychowaniu w trzeźwości i przeciwdziałaniu alkoholizmowi z dnia 26 października 1982 r. – Dz.U. 1982 nr 35 poz. 230) (includes anti-violence provisions).

- Regulation of the Minister of National Education on Ensuring Safety in Schools (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej w sprawie zapewnienia bezpieczeństwa w szkołach z dnia 31 grudnia 2002 r.)

Additionally, Poland has legal provisions addressing harassment, both in general (criminal law) and in the workplace (Labor Code):
- Criminal Code (Act of 6 June 1997 – Dz.U. 1997 No. 88, item 553). Specifically, Article 190a deals with persistent harassment (stalking). According to Article 190a of the Criminal Code, stalking is defined as "persistent harassment of another person or their close relative that causes a justified sense of threat or significantly violates their privacy." This includes both physical and digital forms of harassment, such as sending unwanted messages, following someone, or making threats. This regulation was introduced in response to the growing number of harassment cases in the digital era. It aims to protect individuals from psychological and emotional abuse.
- Labor Code (Act of 26 June 1974 – Dz.U. 1974 No. 24, item 141). Includes provisions on preventing mobbing (Article 943).

Schools in Poland are required by law to develop their own anti-bullying policies, which must align with national guidelines. These local policies are guided by the Act on the Education System and the Regulation of the Minister of National Education on Ensuring Safety in Schools.

Guidelines and legal responsibilities for schools

The following regulations guide schools in Poland:
- Act on the Education System (Ustawa o systemie oświaty z dnia 7 września 1991 r. – Dz.U. 1991 nr 95 poz. 425)
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education on Ensuring Safety in Schools (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej w sprawie zapewnienia bezpieczeństwa w szkołach z dnia 31 grudnia 2002 r.)
- Labor Code (Ustawa z dnia 26 czerwca 1974 r. – Dz.U. 1974 nr 24 poz. 141), Article 943 (applicable to bullying in workplaces, including school employees).

Schools are legally obligated to ensure a safe and supportive environment for all students. This responsibility is clearly outlined in the Act on the Education System and accompanying regulations. Key responsibilities include:
- Preventive measures: Schools must implement comprehensive prevention programs to address bullying. These programs should educate students, teachers, and parents about recognizing, preventing, and responding to bullying.
- Duty of care: Schools have a legal obligation to protect students from harm during all school activities, including classes, breaks, and extracurricular activities. This includes physical safety, emotional well-being, and protection from bullying.

• Establishing reporting mechanisms: Schools are required to create clear and accessible channels for students, parents, and staff to report bullying incidents. This ensures that victims or witnesses can report cases without fear of retaliation.

• Investigating bullying cases: Upon receiving a report of bullying, schools must promptly investigate the incident. This includes gathering evidence, interviewing involved parties, and assessing the severity of the situation.

• Providing support to victims: Schools must offer psychological and pedagogical assistance to students affected by bullying. This support often involves school psychologists, counselors, or external specialists.

• Disciplinary actions: Schools have the authority to impose disciplinary measures on perpetrators of bullying. These may range from warnings and behavioral agreements to more severe actions, such as suspension or expulsion.

• Collaboration with external authorities: In severe cases, such as when bullying involves physical violence, harassment, or cyberbullying, schools must report the incident to local law enforcement or child protection services.

• Documentation and reporting: Schools are required to document bullying incidents and submit regular reports to local education boards. This ensures accountability and helps monitor the effectiveness of anti-bullying measures.

Legal responsibilities of teachers

• Duty to act: Teachers have a professional and legal obligation to intervene when they witness or are informed of bullying. This obligation stems from their broader duty of care to ensure the safety and well-being of students.

• Mandatory reporting: If a bullying incident involves actions that could constitute a criminal offense, such as physical violence, threats, or harassment, teachers are legally required to report it to the school administration and, in severe cases, to law enforcement or child protection services. Criminal Code, Article 240, requires individuals, including teachers, to report knowledge of crimes such as severe abuse or violence. Failure to do so can result in legal consequences. Teachers in Poland are legally required to report bullying incidents to school administration and to law enforcement or external agencies.

• Internal reporting: Teachers must follow the school's anti-bullying policy and report incidents to designated authorities within the school, such as the principal or the school's safety committee.

• Providing support: Teachers are expected to offer immediate support to victims, ensuring their safety and referring them to appropriate psychological or pedagogical assistance.

• Recording incidents: Teachers are often required to document incidents they witness or learn about, contributing to the school's records on bullying cases.

Teachers who fail to report bullying incidents, particularly those involving criminal acts, may face:

•   Disciplinary actions from the school, including warnings or termination of employment.
•   Legal consequences under the Criminal Code for neglecting their obligation to report certain crimes.

Legal responsibilities of parents/ families/ students

•   *Parents' responsibilities:* While parents are not legally obligated to report bullying incidents to authorities directly, they do have a responsibility to ensure their children are safe at school. They must:
o   Report to the school: Parents are encouraged to inform school authorities (teachers, principal) if their child has been a victim or witness to bullying.
o   Cooperate with schools: Parents are expected to cooperate with schools to address bullying, including attending meetings, supporting anti-bullying initiatives, and helping to prevent further incidents.
o   Support victims: Parents have a legal and moral duty to support their child if they are being bullied, including helping to seek counseling or other resources provided by the school.

•   *Students' responsibilities:* Students are encouraged, although not legally bound, to report bullying incidents they witness or experience. The Act on the Education System emphasizes that students should participate in creating a safe and respectful environment at school. By reporting bullying, students help prevent further harm and promote a positive school culture. However, there is no direct legal requirement for students to report bullying.

Cultural and societal factors

In Poland, local anti-bullying policies reflect broader national legal frameworks but also consider cultural and societal factors unique to each school community.

•   Respect for tradition and authority: In Poland, schools often emphasize respect for authority, discipline, and hierarchy. This cultural norm can influence anti-bullying policies by focusing on fostering respectful relationships between students and teachers, and creating an environment where authority figures are expected to take an active role in preventing and addressing bullying. The importance of authority can also lead to proactive teacher involvement, with policies designed to create a clear distinction between acceptable behavior and bullying.

•   Emphasis on group cohesion: Polish culture places high importance on group cohesion and solidarity. This can affect anti-bullying policies by promoting the idea of unity among students and encouraging peer support networks. Local policies may emphasize peer mediation, collective responsibility, and students supporting one another in preventing bullying. There may be

programs in place where students are encouraged to stand up for their peers, reinforcing the cultural value of helping others.

•   Polish Catholic influence: The Catholic Church has historically had a strong influence on Polish society, and this cultural factor can shape attitudes toward bullying in schools. Many schools incorporate values of compassion, forgiveness, and Christian charity into their anti-bullying strategies. Catholic schools, in particular, may develop policies based on principles of moral responsibility, urging students to treat others with kindness and emphasizing reconciliation and forgiveness in the resolution of bullying situations.

•   Increasing awareness of cyberbullying: As in many countries, Poland has seen a rise in cyberbullying due to the widespread use of the internet and social media. This societal shift has led schools to incorporate specific policies on cyberbullying, such as providing digital literacy programs, educating students about online safety, and setting clear rules about acceptable online behavior. Local policies in schools are often adapted to address the increasing challenges posed by the digital age, reflecting growing societal awareness of the harm caused by online harassment.

•   Multiculturalism and diversity: In recent years, Poland has seen an increase in the number of students from different ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This demographic shift has led some schools to adjust their anti-bullying policies to promote inclusion and prevent discrimination. Local policies may include specific measures to address bullying related to race, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status. For example, schools may develop programs that foster understanding between Polish students and those from migrant or minority communities, aiming to prevent bullying based on cultural differences.

•   Rural vs. urban differences: There are notable differences between rural and urban areas in Poland, and these can influence local anti-bullying strategies. In rural schools, bullying may often be related to social class, family background, or regional identities, while in urban schools, bullying may more frequently involve issues related to diversity, peer pressure, and competition. Local anti-bullying policies in urban areas might focus more on addressing a wide range of social issues, while rural schools may concentrate on issues like family structure or social class disparities.

Local schools in Poland have the flexibility to design their own anti-bullying policies, allowing them to tailor strategies based on local cultural and societal factors. For example, rural schools might implement anti-bullying initiatives that focus on solidarity and group harmony, while urban schools may prioritize conflict resolution, respect for diversity, and addressing issues like cyberbullying. Additionally, some schools offer programs designed to promote social inclusion and support for marginalized groups, such as students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, or those from immigrant families.

Gaps and challenges

• Inconsistent implementation across schools: While Poland has national laws and regulations requiring schools to address bullying, the implementation of anti-bullying policies varies significantly between schools. The degree of commitment, resources, and support available for anti-bullying programs can differ greatly between rural and urban areas, or between well-funded public schools and those with fewer resources. In some cases, local schools may not have the capacity to effectively execute the policies, leading to inconsistent application of anti-bullying measures.

• Lack of clear guidance on cyberbullying: Although there is increasing awareness of cyberbullying in Poland, the current legal frameworks and school policies are still catching up with the rapid expansion of digital platforms. National policies on bullying generally focus on in-person violence and harassment but are less comprehensive when it comes to addressing the specific challenges of online bullying, particularly in terms of jurisdiction, evidence gathering, and student privacy in the digital space.

• Limited psychological and emotional support for victims: While schools are required to offer psychological support to victims of bullying, the availability and quality of these services are often limited, particularly in smaller or less resourced schools.

• Underreporting of incidents: Many bullying incidents go unreported due to a lack of trust in the system or fear of retaliation. Both students and parents may hesitate to report bullying because they believe nothing will be done or because of the potential social stigma attached to the situation.

• Limited focus on bullying based on discrimination: While the Polish education system has made strides in addressing bullying more generally, there remains limited attention to bullying rooted in discrimination based on factors such as ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

• Cultural barriers to addressing Bullying: There may be cultural resistance in some regions to fully embracing the concept of bullying or violence in schools, particularly in smaller, more traditional communities. Some people still perceive bullying as a "normal" part of growing up and may be less willing to acknowledge its harmful effects.

• Inadequate teacher training: Teachers play a key role in preventing and addressing bullying, but many teachers in Poland lack specialized training in identifying, preventing, and intervening in bullying situations. Training on anti-bullying practices may not be a standard part of teacher education, leading to a lack of confidence or competence among educators when confronted with bullying incidents.

• Lack of coordination between schools and external services: There is often a lack of coordination between schools, law enforcement, social services, and other external agencies. This can hinder effective intervention, particularly in severe cases of bullying, such as those involving physical violence or where the bullying is linked to other issues like family dysfunction. Without collaboration, efforts to address bullying may be fragmented or ineffective.

Recommendations for enhancing anti-bullying policies:

• Standardized national implementation: To ensure consistent and effective implementation, national anti-bullying policies should include clear, standardized guidelines for schools. These guidelines should ensure that all schools, regardless of location or resources, have the necessary tools, training, and support to combat bullying effectively. Local authorities could be tasked with monitoring schools' compliance and offering additional support where needed.

• Comprehensive cyberbullying legislation: Given the rise of digital technology, it is essential to expand anti-bullying policies to include specific guidelines and regulations about cyberbullying. These should address issues like the protection of students' digital privacy, proper reporting mechanisms, and how schools can monitor online interactions.

• Increase access to psychological support: Schools should be required to provide more comprehensive psychological services for victims of bullying. This includes increasing the number of school psychologists and counselors, offering training to teachers on how to support emotional and mental well-being, and ensuring that victims have easy access to ongoing emotional support.

• Create a national anti-bullying awareness campaign: To address the issue of underreporting, a national awareness campaign could help educate students, parents, and teachers about bullying, its consequences, and the importance of reporting.

• Targeted policies for vulnerable groups: Anti-bullying policies should include specific provisions for students from vulnerable or marginalized groups, including ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ students, and those with disabilities.

• Strengthen teacher training programs: Teacher training on anti-bullying practices should be made a standard part of teacher education programs and professional development.

• Improved coordination between schools and external agencies: To ensure a holistic approach to addressing bullying, there should be greater collaboration between schools, local authorities, social services, and law enforcement.

Lesson 4. Overview of policies from North Macedonia

North Macedonia has taken steps to address bullying, particularly in educational settings, through various laws and international commitments. Here's an overview:

1. Criminal Code Provisions:

- Unauthorized Recording (Article 152): This article prohibits unauthorized recording, with penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment for up to three years.
- Unauthorized Tapping and Audio Recording (Article 151): This provision criminalizes unauthorized tapping and audio recording, with imprisonment ranging from one to five years.

- Abuse of Personal Data (Article 149): This article addresses the abuse of personal data, with penalties including fines or imprisonment for up to one year, and in severe cases, up to three years.

2. The Law on Primary Education mandates schools to address bullying, protect victims, and conduct preventive activities. The Ministry of Education and Science oversees these reforms to ensure a safer educational environment.

3. ILO Convention 190: In October 2023, North Macedonia ratified the International Labour Organization's Convention 190 on Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. This convention provides a comprehensive framework to prevent and address violence and harassment, including bullying, in the workplace.

Learn more here:
- Ministry of Education and Science of North Macedonia: www.mon.gov.mk
- International Labour Organization (ILO): www.ilo.org
- Agency for Electronic Communications (for cyberbullying resources): www.aek.mk

Guidelines and legal responsibilities for schools

The Law on Primary Education and accompanying Ministry of Education frameworks provide clear guidelines for schools in North Macedonia to combat bullying and create safer learning environments. These laws emphasize preventive measures, immediate responses to bullying incidents, and long-term educational reforms to address the issue comprehensively.

In North Macedonia, schools are required to develop their own anti-bullying policies and regulations that align with national frameworks, such as the Law on Primary Education and guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education. These school-specific policies aim to address bullying while considering the unique needs of each educational institution. However, there are differences between national and local policies, particularly in terms of customization, implementation, and resource availability.

Schools are legally obligated to address and prevent bullying incidents. The Law on Primary Education explicitly prohibits discrimination in the educational process on all grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity. This law mandates that schools take measures to prevent and address all forms of violence and discrimination within the educational environment.

1. Preventive Measures

Schools are required to implement preventive programs aimed at reducing bullying incidents. These include:

•	Workshops and awareness campaigns: Regular sessions for students, teachers, and parents to educate them about the harmful effects of bullying, including cyberbullying and psychological abuse.

• Incorporating respect and empathy into curricula: Lessons on empathy, respect, and responsible online behavior are integrated into subjects like civic education.

• Code of conduct: Schools must adopt and enforce a clear code of conduct that outlines acceptable behavior and the consequences for bullying.

2. Responding to bullying incidents

When bullying occurs, schools must take immediate and coordinated action:

• Reporting mechanisms: Schools are required to establish accessible systems for students, parents, and staff to report bullying incidents, anonymously if needed.

• Investigation procedures: Once a report is filed, school staff, including psychologists and counselors, are obligated to investigate the matter promptly and thoroughly.

• Victim protection measures: Schools must prioritize the safety of victims by separating them from the perpetrators and providing emotional support through counseling services.

3. Teacher and staff training

The Ministry of Education mandates training programs for teachers and school staff to:

• Recognize signs of bullying, including subtle forms like exclusion and online harassment.

• Mediate conflicts effectively and de-escalate tense situations.

• Understand legal and institutional protocols for handling bullying cases.

4. Engagement with parents and communities

Collaboration with parents and local communities is a cornerstone of the framework:

• Parental involvement: Parents are encouraged to participate in workshops and anti-bullying initiatives organized by the school.

• Community partnerships: Schools work with local civil society organizations (CSOs) to amplify their resources and impact.

5. Monitoring and accountability

The Ministry of Education is responsible for monitoring schools' compliance with anti-bullying policies through periodic inspections and progress reports. Schools are required to document incidents of bullying and submit regular updates on prevention activities.

6. Support for cyberbullying victims

With the growing prevalence of cyberbullying, schools are encouraged to:

• Educate students about safe online behavior and the risks of sharing personal information.

• Collaborate with local helplines (e.g., Alo Bushavko) to provide immediate support for victims of online harassment.

Legal responsibilities for teachers

Teachers have a legal obligation to report bullying incidents. The Law on Primary Education explicitly prohibits discrimination in the educational process on all grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity. This law mandates that schools take measures to prevent and address all forms of violence and discrimination within the educational environment. It also requires the creation of a by-law to thoroughly regulate the procedure for reporting violence and protecting students. Furthermore, the law prescribes fines for school principals who fail to report incidents of violence, abuse, or harassment to the competent authorities.

Legal responsibilities for parents/ families/ students

In North Macedonia, parents and students do not have specific legal obligations to report bullying incidents under current laws. However, there are expectations in place for schools and other authorities to take action. Here's a breakdown:

1.   Parents' role:

o   While parents are not legally required to report bullying incidents, they do play a crucial role in supporting their children. They are encouraged to communicate with the school if they suspect or know that their child is being bullied or is involved in bullying. Schools are legally obligated to respond to such reports. The Law on Primary Education encourages parents to be active participants in the educational process, including in addressing issues like bullying, but it does not explicitly make reporting bullying incidents by parents mandatory.

2.   Students' role:

o   Students, like parents, are not legally bound to report bullying. However, they are encouraged to speak out about bullying or seek help from teachers, school counselors, or other responsible adults in the school. Schools typically foster an environment where students are encouraged to report bullying incidents, but this is more about educational practices than legal obligation.

Cultural and societal factors

While the legal framework mandates measures to address bullying, there are several cultural and societal influences that shape how bullying is perceived and managed

1.   Ethnic and cultural diversity: North Macedonia is a multi-ethnic society, with ethnic Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Romani, and others coexisting. This diversity is a factor in shaping anti-bullying policies that seek to prevent ethnic-based bullying. Schools are encouraged to promote inclusivity, tolerance, and respect for cultural differences as part of their anti-bullying strategies.

2.   Educational system and teacher training: The education system in North Macedonia is in the process of improving its approach to bullying. Recent initiatives, such as the training programs by the Bureau for Development of Education, aim to equip teachers with the tools to manage bullying incidents effectively.

3.   Family influence and traditional values: The role of the family is strong in Macedonian society, and traditional family structures can sometimes influence how bullying is addressed. Families are encouraged to be active partners in addressing bullying, though societal expectations around respect for authority may affect how openly bullying is discussed or reported within families and schools.

4.   Public awareness campaigns: Societal attitudes toward bullying are influenced by ongoing public awareness campaigns and initiatives, often backed by the government, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies.

Challenges and gaps

There are several gaps and challenges in the current anti-bullying laws, regulations, and policies, both at the national and local levels:

1.Implementation and enforcement gaps

•   Challenge: While the laws on education explicitly prohibit bullying and violence, there are ongoing challenges in the consistent and effective implementation of anti-bullying measures at the school level. Schools may lack the resources, training, or institutional support to handle bullying incidents effectively.

•   Recommendation: Strengthen oversight mechanisms to ensure that schools adhere to the legal requirements for reporting and addressing bullying. Regular monitoring, along with clear accountability measures for school leaders and educators, would ensure better enforcement of anti-bullying laws.

2. Teacher training and capacity building

•   Challenge: Although there are training programs offered to educators, there is still a gap in the overall capacity of teachers and school staff to recognize and intervene in bullying situations. Many teachers may not have the appropriate skills or awareness to effectively handle bullying, especially in sensitive cases involving sexual orientation, gender identity, or ethnic tensions.

•   Recommendation: Expand and strengthen teacher training programs to equip educators with the tools to identify, intervene in, and prevent bullying. This training should be continuous and incorporate best practices for handling different forms of bullying, including those related to gender, ethnicity, and LGBTQ+ issues. Training should also emphasize the importance of creating a positive, inclusive school environment.

3. Lack of comprehensive bullying prevention programs

•	Challenge: Anti-bullying measures in schools often focus more on responding to incidents rather than preventing them. There is a need for more proactive and comprehensive programs that focus on building empathy, respect, and understanding among students.

•	Recommendation: Develop and implement school-wide anti-bullying prevention programs that focus on promoting positive behavior, empathy, and conflict resolution. These programs should include regular workshops, student-led initiatives, and peer support systems that encourage positive relationships among students from different backgrounds.

4. Inadequate reporting and support systems

•	Challenge: While schools are required to address bullying, the mechanisms for students and parents to report bullying may not be well-established or trusted. Additionally, there may be insufficient psychological support for students who experience bullying, particularly in rural or underserved areas.

•	Recommendation: Strengthen the reporting mechanisms by creating anonymous, accessible channels for students and parents to report bullying incidents. Establish clear protocols for investigating and responding to complaints, and ensure that victims of bullying have access to counseling and psychological support. Expand these services, particularly in rural and remote areas, to ensure that all students have the resources they need.

5. Cultural resistance to addressing bullying

•	Challenge: In some areas, there may be cultural or societal resistance to openly addressing bullying, especially in relation to topics like sexual orientation, gender identity, and ethnicity. Traditional views on authority and family dynamics can make it difficult for parents and students to report bullying.

•	Recommendation: Launch national and local campaigns aimed at changing societal attitudes toward bullying, emphasizing the importance of tolerance, respect, and inclusivity. Encourage community engagement in these efforts, particularly involving parents and local leaders, to create a broader cultural shift toward understanding and addressing bullying.

6. Inadequate data collection and research

•	Challenge: There is a lack of comprehensive data on the prevalence and types of bullying in schools, which makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of current policies and pinpoint areas that need improvement.

•	Recommendation: Implement a national data collection system to track incidents of bullying, the types of bullying (e.g., physical, verbal, cyberbullying), and the demographic characteristics of affected students. This data would provide valuable insights into the scope of the problem and help shape more targeted policies and interventions.

Lesson 5. Overview of Turkish anti-bullying policies

With the amendment made in the Regulation on Secondary Education Institutions published in the Official Gazette on 15 November 2022, 'Peer Bullying' and 'Cyber Bullying' started to be considered as disciplinary offences in high schools. With the amendment, 'Peer bullying in a way that negatively affects the social or emotional development of another student with various repetitive behaviours, insulting school administrators, teachers, employees, students and other people in educational environments verbally, by behaviour or through social media, making posts containing insults, encouraging others to do so, threatening these people, damaging education and training activities, persons and institutions through information tools or social media' are defined as disciplinary offences.

Students who engage in peer bullying are subject to disciplinary penalties. Disciplinary penalties ranging from warning to suspension may be imposed on students who take and share unauthorised recordings and students who negatively affect the social or emotional development of another student.

At a general level, Law No. 5237 was designed to protect individual rights and freedoms, public order and security, the rule of law, public health and the environment, and social peace, and to prevent crime. Some important articles in the law:
- The principle of legality in crime and punishment: No one can be punished or a security measure can be applied for an act that the law does not clearly deem a crime.
- The principle of equality before justice and the law: A penalty and security measure proportional to the seriousness of the act committed is imposed on the person who committed the crime; no distinction can be made between persons.

The Turkish Penal Code No. 5237 regulates the sanctions against violence as follows:
- Committing a crime as a result of force and violence: A person who uses force and violence that he/she cannot resist or escape is considered the perpetrator of the crime and no punishment is given to this person.
- Unjust provocation: A person who commits a crime under the influence of anger or severe pain caused by an unjust act is given a sentence of eighteen to twenty-four years in prison instead of aggravated life imprisonment, and twelve to eighteen years in prison instead of life imprisonment.
- Torture: A public official who acts against a person in a manner that is incompatible with human dignity and causes physical or mental suffering is punished with imprisonment from three to twelve years.
- Threat: A person who threatens another person by mentioning that he/she will commit an attack on his/her life, physical or sexual integrity or that of his/her relative is punished with imprisonment from six months to two years.

Law No. 5651 addresses electronic harassment, unauthorized use of personal data, fraping (face account) attacks, outing (publication of private images of the victim with the intent to harm them). Such actions are also supported by other legal regulations such as the Turkish Penal Code and the Personal Data Protection Law.

Learn more here:
- 15 November 2022,Official Gazette, Issue : 32014: https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2022/11/20221115-1.htm
- Education Policies of Turkish National Education Ministery; Circular dated 21.08.2023 and numbered 2023/28 : https://mevzuat.meb.gov.tr/dosyalar/2234.pdf
- Law Number: 5237: https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuat?MevzuatNo=5237&MevzuatTur=1&MevzuatTertip=5
- Law Number 5651 (for cyberbullying): https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuatmetin/1.5.5651.pdf
- CIRCULAR 2024/56: https://orgm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2024_08/28104927_okuldasiddetinonlenmesigenelgesi.pdf

Guidelines and legal responsibilities for schools

According to CIRCULAR 2024/56:

-Security in educational environments: necessary measures will be taken by the administration to ensure security inside and outside the school and institution, and cooperation will be made with relevant institutions and organizations.

-Detection of risk factors: Risk factors that may cause violence in educational environments will be determined by the school principal, and necessary measures will be taken against priority risk factors or the effects of violence.

-Guidance and psychological counseling services: Appropriate conditions and personnel support will be provided for the work to be carried out by school guidance and psychological counseling services and RAM(guidance and research center)s to prevent violence.

-Digital security: Work will be expanded to develop children's safe space skills and virtual literacy in digital environments.

-In-Service Training: All managers in the provincial organization of the Ministry will receive in-service training on preventing violence.

-Notification to law enforcement: Priority situations detected by the school and institution principal regarding school security will be reported to the upper unit and law enforcement immediately.

The legal responsibilities of schools regarding bullying are as follows:

- Prevention obligation: school administrations are obliged to prevent peer bullying. This means taking deterrent measures against bullying in schools and punishing personnel who facilitate bullying within the framework of disciplinary provisions.
- Legal regulations: with the amendments made to the secondary education institutions regulation of the ministry of national education, peer bullying has been included among the disciplinary articles and penalties have been determined for such behaviors. Relevant laws include article 8 of the european convention on human rights and the United Nations Convention on The Rights of The Child.
- Protection from neglect and abuse: school administrators are obliged to raise awareness to prevent child abuse and neglect and to take the necessary measures to protect against physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

Legal responsibilities of teachers

Teachers are legally obligated to report bullying if they witness or become aware of it. This obligation is both a professional and moral responsibility of teachers, and teachers are given the responsibility by law to intervene in such situations.

Legal responsibilities of parents/ families/ students

-Contacting the school administration: First, the school administration should be contacted to warn about the issue and request that the necessary measures be taken.
-Petition and CİMER("Presidential Communications Center") Application: A document registration number should be obtained for the petition submitted to the school administration and complaints should be submitted simultaneously through CİMER.
-Notary warning: If the school administration remains indifferent, a warning should be sent through a notary and it should be stated that legal rights will be used.
-Administrative complaint: An administrative complaint should be filed with the educational institution and the national education directorates about the relevant personnel.
-Application to the Public Prosecutor's Office: If no action is taken despite all these processes, the law enforcement and the public prosecutor's office should be contacted to initiate a criminal investigation.

Cultural and societal factors

-Empathy and inclusion: Encouraging understanding and appreciation of differences within the school community.

-Family involvement: Involving parents and guardians in anti-bullying efforts, providing information and resources.
-Societal dynamics: Considering factors such as media coverage of bullying and societal biases.
-Preventive programs: Implementing evidence-based programs that focus on empathy, respect, and conflict resolution.
-Societal values: Ensuring that the school structure reflects the values of the community and that these values are used to address bullying issues.

Gaps and challenges

-Lack of awareness: Bullying is not understood correctly and confused with ordinary conflicts
-Not taking individual differences into account: The difference in the types of bullying experienced by girls and boys is not monitored.
-Lack of comprehensive education programs: Bullying prevention programs focus only on certain students and do not include students who are not bullies.
-Lack of continuous professional development: Teachers and school personnel are not provided with sufficient training on recognizing, preventing and intervening in bullying.

Recommendations:

-Comprehensive education programs: Integrating bullying prevention programs into the curriculum and expanding them to cover all students. A consortium should be formed in each school district and awareness-raising activities on peer bullying should be made continuous.
-Individualized approach: Developing interventions customized to the needs of students who are subjected to bullying.
-Family and community collaboration: Involving parents and the community in efforts to combat bullying, establishing support lines.
-Regular training and supervision: Regularly update the skills of teachers and school staff to recognize and intervene in bullying.

Activity: After reading/talking about the regulations in your country, reflect on the new information you have learned and how this will shape your future actions related to bullying.

Lesson 6. Overview of Romanian anti-bullying policies

In Romania, there are several regulations that help individuals and institutions to tackle bullying.
- ✦ ORDER no. 4.343/2020 regarding the approval of the methodological norms for the application of the National Education Law no. 1/2011, concerning psychological violence – bullying.

This is a document issued in Romania with the purpose of establishing rules and procedures for preventing and combating the phenomenon of bullying in the school environment. These methodological norms have been issued in accordance with the provisions of the National Education Law no. 1/2011. The main purpose of these methodological norms is to ensure a safe and healthy environment in schools, where students can develop in a harmonious way and reach their maximum potential. The document has the following objectives:

☞ Preventing bullying: The methodological norms establish measures and strategies for preventing the phenomenon of bullying in schools. These include informing and training students, teachers, and parents about bullying, organizing information and training sessions, as well as introducing topics related to bullying in the school curriculum.

☞ Combating bullying: The document establishes procedures and measures for managing and resolving cases of bullying in schools. These include identifying incidents of violence, individual and group counseling for the students involved, effective communication between the institutions involved in combating violence, as well as organizing non-violent recreational activities.

☞ Informing and involving the community: The methodological norms provide for the involvement of parents, the local community, and institutions responsible for combating violence in schools. This is achieved through debates, information sessions, and inter-institutional collaboration.

☞ Monitoring and evaluation: The document establishes procedures for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of anti-bullying measures implemented in schools. This is done through periodic reports, data analysis, and the review of action plans.

☞ Creation and implementation of an anti-bullying action group in schools. The group includes teachers, 2 parents, 2 or more pupils aged 12 years or older. The Student Council appoints from among its members 2 or more "anti-bullying ambassadors" and may organize anti-bullying teams at class level with the role of informing about: (a) raising awareness among school students; (b) identifying bullying situations; (c) the importance of mediating unthreatening conflicts that may worsen relationships between school students and lead to serious acts of violence; (d) encouraging school students, especially witnesses, to adopt strategies to support victims of bullying; (e) empowering pupils to report acts of psychological violence to any teacher or to the anti-bullying action group; (f) promoting the activities of the school anti-bullying action group.

✶ Order no. 6235/2023 for the approval of the Procedure regarding the management of cases of violence against preschoolers/kindergarteners/students and the staff of the educational unit, as well as other related situations in the school environment and the suspicion of violence against children outside the school environment

The purpose of this document is to establish a standardized procedure for managing cases of violence in educational institutions and addressing situations related to violence against children. It provides guidelines and protocols for identifying, reporting, and addressing cases of violence, ensuring the safety and well-being of preschoolers, students, and educational staff.

The document includes:

- ☞ General provisions regarding the inclusion in the Internal Regulations of measures to prevent and combat bullying; mechanisms for the anonymous reporting of suspicions and acts of violence and informing children and parents about the existence of this procedure; the obligation to eliminate risks, to call the single emergency number 112 if necessary, to notify the school's medical staff where it exists if necessary, and to restore to students a sense of physical and emotional safety.

- ☞ To prevent revictimization, repeated interviewing of the victim(s) is prohibited. Depending on the severity of the case, the interviewing of the involved parties is carried out by representatives of the police, the child protection department, or the school.

- ☞ The school staff is required to communicate with the parents/legal representatives about the situation of violence/related issues in the absence of the preschooler/schoolchild/student, in the presence of the counselor and/or the school mediator (if applicable), in a space that ensures the confidentiality of those involved.

- ☞ At each school level, a Commission for the prevention and elimination of violence, acts of corruption, and discrimination in the school environment and the promotion of interculturality is established. The commission coordinates the development, revision, and implementation of the Plan for the prevention and reduction of violence in the school environment.

- ☞ The director and school staff inform students who become victims of violent situations and their parents about the possibility of benefiting from reimbursed psychological and psychotherapeutic intervention services, based on a recommendation from the school counselor, in accordance with the provisions of art. 65 para. (11) of the Pre-University Education Law no. 198/2023, with subsequent amendments, and the provisions of Government Decision no. 1.389/2022 regarding the approval of the methodology for reimbursing psychological and psychotherapeutic intervention services and the modalities for enrolling in the National Support Program for Children, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic "Out of Care for Children."

- ☞ Teachers have the obligation to periodically organize age-appropriate activities with students to understand the phenomenon of violence and its impact on all those involved, both children and adults.

- ☞ Measures for managing cases of minor violence among preschoolers/schoolchildren/students occurring in the school environment.

- ☞ Measures for managing serious cases of violence among preschoolers/students occurring in the school environment.

- ☞ Measures for managing cases of violence by school staff against preschoolers/kindergarteners/students.

- ☞ Measures for managing cases of severe violence by students against school staff.

Order no. 6235/2023 refers only to bullying and cyberbullying, but regarding the procedures it provides information on how to manage other several situations: child trafficking, neglect. Instead,

Order No. 4.343/2020 differentiates very well the concepts that could create confusion: bullying (defined as psychological violence), physical violence, cyberbullying, emotional abuse, sexual violence, aggressive behavior.

Learn more here:
- https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Legislatie/2020/OMEC_4343_2020_norme%20antibullying.pdf

Sanctions (for perpetrators) and responsibilities (for individuals, institutions):

Romanian legislation stipulates that at the school level, support measures and legal sanctions should be established for the individuals involved. Support measures may include:

☐ group and/or individual counseling;

☐ organizing and recommending participation in thematic support group meetings;

☐ organizing and recommending participation of children involved in violent situations in activities to develop socio-emotional skills and emotional self-regulation strategies in stressful moments;

☐ referral/recommendation for psychological and psychotherapeutic intervention;

☐ identifying resources for hiring a therapist to assist the victim or the child who is the aggressor over a period of time - shadow services;

☐ activities to combat hate speech, discrimination, marginalization, and social norms that favor violence;

☐ conflict mediation activities through restorative approaches — except for victims of gender-based violence;

☐ transfer to another class/study program, in the case of students who are victims of violent situations, at the request of parents/legal representatives.

Also, failure to comply with the procedures for reporting and taking measures against the phenomenon of bullying by school staff constitutes a disciplinary offense and is sanctioned as such, in accordance with the provisions of art. 209 para. (1) and art. 210 of the Pre-University Education Law no. 198/2023, with subsequent amendments.

Guidelines and legal responsibilities for schools

At the beginning of each school year, schools in Romania have the responsibility to draw up their own strategies and plans to ensure and maintain a social climate suitable for quality education, an essential condition for preventing and combating bullying, by:

☞ the application of policies to prevent and combat bullying

- ☞ participatory processes with the direct involvement of school students, parents, teachers and auxiliary staff
- ☞ annual evaluations of the educational climate, including debates, focus groups, extracurricular proposals, aimed at reducing bullying.

To optimize the prevention of psychological violence - bullying, at the level of each school, an anti-bullying action group is created with the role of preventing, identifying, and resolving bullying incidents committed among students through physical, verbal, relational, and/or cyber actions. The anti-bullying action group includes the school principal, the school counselor, three teachers trained in the issue of violence, including psychological violence - bullying, two or more student representatives, a parent representative, and representatives of the local authority. In identifying the situation of psychological violence - bullying, teachers must differentiate between accidental situations, minor harassment, abuse, and repetitive and intentional violent situations.

To create and maintain a safe and positive environment in schools, educational institutions are required to identify potential problems/risk situations, initiating proposals regarding the types of prevention and intervention necessary, which, after approval by the boards of administration, will be sent to the school inspectorates for approval and monitoring.

Activities to prevent psychological violence - bullying are carried out according to the specifics of each educational institution, through:

- ☞ the implementation, at the level of the educational institution, of a school plan to prevent and combat violence, programs/projects/campaigns aimed at increasing the cohesion of the group of children and the children-adults community, raising awareness of the consequences of psychological violence - bullying, eliminating the causes/risks/vulnerabilities that could lead to such behaviors.
- ☞ carrying out information and awareness activities in collaboration with other institutions or specialists with expertise in the field.
- ☞ promoting an educational climate that encourages positive, non-violent, and supportive attitudes among the members of the preschoolers/students and adults' community, learning and practicing empathy, interactions of a mutually beneficial nature, involving preschoolers/students of all ages in all decisions that concern them, and promoting peer-to-peer actions among preschoolers/students.
- ☞ promoting democratic relationships between children and adults through tolerance, respect, inclusion, and solidarity.
- ☞ implementing administrative-organizational measures that contribute to creating a physically and emotionally secure environment for children in the educational unit, such as installing surveillance cameras, having duty teachers, ensuring the security of educational spaces, arranging classroom furniture to facilitate collaboration among children, promoting teamwork, and forming study groups, in accordance with legal provisions.
- ☞ training teachers in personal development and the use of positive discipline methods.

Legal responsibilities of teachers

The teacher/school counselor who has identified a situation of bullying or cyberbullying against the child is responsible for initiating the intervention in the rehabilitation of the victim. In relation to each situation of violence against the preschooler/school student, it will be reported, according to the law, to the school management, to the county-level general directorate of social assistance and child protection, and for immediate support, to the public social assistance service at the community level; the continuation of investigations, confirmation of the case, and implementation of the rehabilitation plan objectives will be carried out subsequently.

Legal responsibilities of parents/ families/ students

☞ Students verbally and urgently inform the principal about cases of bullying among students.

☞ If there is suspicion of committing an act provided for by criminal law and, until that moment, the single emergency service 112 has not been notified, the school principal shall verbally and urgently notify the Police.

☞ The school principal verbally and urgently informs the parents/legal representatives of the involved students (mainly the victim/victims and the perpetrator/perpetrators) and requests them to come to the school to manage the situation, in the best interest of the child.

☞ The school principal verbally informs the School Inspectorate about the serious case of violence that occurred between students in the school environment.

☞ If there is no school counselor at the school, the school principal requests the Educational Resource Centers to appoint a school counselor and a school mediator (if applicable) for case management.

☞ The school staff delegated by the principal isolates the victim/victims from the bullies, guiding them to safe spaces to reduce stress levels and for protection.

☞ Upon arrival of the parents, they are informed about the condition of the preschoolers/school students, any immediate protective measures taken by the school staff and are immediately reunited with the preschoolers/students (victim/s and bully/bullies).

Although parents are not required by law to report bullying incidents, it is encouraged to do so, in order to create a safe school environment for everyone.

Cultural and societal factors

There are no specific cultural or societal factors considered in local anti-bullying policies, but in the identification forms for bullying cases, there are indicators that refer to social and cultural factors, for example: they make fun of my family's traditions, they exclude me because of my skin color, they make racist comments about me, they make fun of my home, my neighborhood, my city.

Gaps and challenges

Although Romania has made significant strides with laws like Order 4343/2020 and various initiatives, several gaps and challenges hinder the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies at the national and local levels.

- Schools in rural and underprivileged areas often lack the financial and human resources to implement comprehensive anti-bullying measures, such as teacher training and awareness campaigns.
- Schools are required to integrate anti-bullying measures into their internal rules, but compliance is inconsistent. Some schools fail to prioritize these regulations, either due to a lack of awareness or competing demands.
- While Order 4343/2020 outlines the need for documentation of bullying incidents, there is little national oversight to ensure schools are tracking and addressing issues effectively.
- Both students and parents may hesitate to report bullying due to fear of retaliation, embarrassment, or being labeled as weak.
- Cyberbullying has become a pervasive issue, yet many schools lack the expertise and tools to address it effectively. While initiatives like "Ora de Net" exist, many parents and educators are unaware of how to recognize or address online harassment.

Recommendations:

- Create a centralized body to monitor compliance with Order 4343/2020, ensuring all schools implement and follow anti-bullying measures consistently.
- Provide targeted funding for underprivileged schools to ensure they have the resources needed for teacher training, awareness campaigns, and support programs.
- Encourage partnerships with other organisations that offer specialized trainings to teachers and counsellors (e.g. Save the Children Romania, mental health related NGOs, universities).
- Develop national campaigns targeting parents and students to reduce stigma and normalize reporting.
- Integrate digital literacy education into the curriculum to teach students about online safety, ethical behavior, and recognizing cyberbullying.

Lesson 7. Introduction to the Whole School Approach (WSA) in bullying prevention

The Whole School Approach (WSA) is a comprehensive, systemic strategy that engages all members of the school community—teachers, students, staff, parents, and local stakeholders—in preventing bullying and fostering a positive school environment. UNESCO defines WSA as involving "collective and collaborative action by a school community to improve student learning, behavior, well-being, and the conditions that support these" (UNESCO, 2017). This approach not only addresses bullying incidents but also promotes a culture of respect and inclusion.

Principles of WSA

- Inclusivity: All members of the school community collaborate to create a culture that values diversity, equity, and respect (UNESCO, 2017).
- Prevention: Proactive measures, such as promoting positive behavior and awareness campaigns, aim to prevent bullying before it occurs (Council of Europe, 2015).
- Whole-community involvement: Engages stakeholders, including parents, local authorities, and community organizations, to address bullying comprehensively (European Commission, 2021).
- Accountability and monitoring: Establishing clear policies, reporting mechanisms, and regular assessments ensures accountability and effectiveness (UNESCO, 2017).

WSA recognizes that bullying is a complex social issue that impacts the entire school community. Everyone—teachers, staff, students, and parents—shares responsibility for preventing and addressing bullying.

Example: Teachers and staff can collaborate to integrate anti-bullying principles into classroom activities, assemblies, and school policies. Encouraging students to be upstanders, rather than passive bystanders, can create a culture of accountability.

The WSA emphasizes the importance of creating an environment where every student feels safe, valued, and respected, regardless of their cultural, ethnic, or socio-economic background. This aligns with UNESCO's goal of inclusive education, which promotes equality and safety for all learners.

Example: Schools can hold regular inclusion workshops and implement peer-support systems that encourage students to mentor and support classmates from diverse backgrounds.

WSA encourages schools to extend their anti-bullying initiatives to the broader community by engaging local organizations, government agencies, and community leaders. This helps create a broader network of support for students and reinforces the message that bullying is not tolerated.

Example: Partner with local NGOs, community centers, and law enforcement to develop joint programs aimed at preventing bullying both inside and outside school grounds.

If you like this approache, consult **Annex 2,** for a step-by-step implementation plan of WSA in a school.

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Annex 2. Implementing WSA in a European school

Step 1. Build a core team

The first step in implementing the Whole School Approach (WSA) is to establish a core team responsible for spearheading anti-bullying initiatives. This committee should represent a diverse cross-section of the school community, ensuring that all perspectives are considered in planning and decision-making. The team typically includes:

Teachers: To provide insight into classroom dynamics and student interactions.

Students: To share firsthand experiences and voice concerns about bullying in school and online.

Parents: To ensure a home-school partnership and bring a family perspective to the table.

School Administrators: To ensure that the committee's actions align with the school's policies and governance.

Local Stakeholders: This could include mental health professionals, local NGOs, law enforcement, or community leaders, who can provide expertise and resources.

Responsibilities of the core team

Policy development: Draft or revise the school's anti-bullying policy to ensure it is comprehensive and up-to-date.

Awareness campaigns: Organize events such as Anti-Bullying Week or workshops to educate the school community.

Incident monitoring and reporting: Create a system for tracking and addressing bullying incidents.

Evaluation: Assess the effectiveness of interventions and recommend improvements based on data and feedback.

Example: Safe School Committee in France

At a secondary school in Lyon, a "Safe School Committee" was established to address rising bullying incidents. The committee comprised:

Two teachers who led awareness workshops in classrooms.

Three students who acted as peer mentors, offering support to younger students.

Two parents who organized informational sessions for other parents.

The school principal, who ensured the committee's plans aligned with school policies.

A local NGO representative, who provided expertise on managing bullying and ran teacher training sessions.

This team met monthly to:

Review reported bullying incidents and evaluate their resolutions.

Organize events such as an Anti-Bullying Day, where students performed skits to raise awareness.

Monitor the impact of new initiatives through anonymous surveys distributed to students and parents.

Step 2. Conduct an initial assessment

After forming the core team, the next step is to conduct an initial assessment to evaluate the current state of bullying in the school. You can employ the following protocol:

1. Determine what you want to learn, such as:

- The prevalence and types of bullying (e.g., physical, verbal, relational, or cyberbullying).
- High-risk areas and times (e.g., playgrounds, lunch breaks, or online platforms).
- Perceptions of bullying among students, teachers, and parents.
- Effectiveness of current policies and reporting mechanisms.

2. Design data collection tools

- Use a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather comprehensive data:
- Surveys: Distribute anonymous questionnaires to students, parents, and staff. Include questions about experiences with bullying, perceived safety, and awareness of existing policies.
- Focus groups: Organize small group discussions with students, parents, and teachers to explore attitudes and behaviors around bullying.
- Observations: Monitor common school areas like hallways, cafeterias, and playgrounds to identify potential bullying hotspots.
- Review records: Examine incident reports, disciplinary actions, and attendance records for patterns related to bullying.

3. Engage stakeholders in the process

- Involve the entire school community in the assessment to ensure diverse perspectives:
- Students can provide insights into bullying behaviors, both observed and experienced.
- Teachers and staff can share their observations and challenges in addressing bullying.
- Parents can offer valuable input on their children's experiences and concerns.

4. Ensure confidentiality and sensitivity

- Design the assessment to protect participants' privacy and encourage honest responses:
- Anonymize survey responses and assure participants that their feedback will remain confidential.
- Use age-appropriate language and provide a safe environment for focus groups.

5. Analyze the data

- Summarize findings to identify: common types and patterns of bullying, key risk factors and triggers, gaps in existing prevention and intervention measures.
- Use charts, graphs, and reports to present findings to stakeholders clearly.

Step 3. Develop an anti-bullying policy

Once the baseline assessment is complete, the next step is to develop or revise the school's anti-bullying policy. This document serves as the foundation for all bullying prevention and intervention efforts. It outlines the school's commitment to a safe and inclusive environment, defines bullying, and provides clear procedures for addressing incidents.

Example: Anti-bullying policy summary in a Polish Highschool

- Definition: The policy defines bullying as "repeated actions or words intended to harm another individual physically, emotionally, or socially."
- Prevention: The school conducts monthly workshops on empathy and respect.
- Reporting: Students can report bullying via a confidential online form or by speaking to their designated class representative.
- Response: Reports are investigated within 48 hours. Victims receive counseling, and perpetrators undergo a restorative justice program.
- Monitoring: The school's anti-bullying committee reviews incident data every semester and updates the policy annually.

Step 4. Train staff and teachers

Conduct a survey to assess staff confidence in addressing bullying and identify specific areas for improvement. Use the results of the initial assessment (Step 2) to tailor training programs to the school's unique needs, such as addressing cyberbullying, relational bullying, or cultural sensitivity. Include in your training teachers, but also cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and custodial staff, as they often witness bullying in less-supervised areas.

Develop a comprehensive training program, which includes the following components:
- Understanding bullying: Types of bullying, its effects on victims and perpetrators, and how it differs from normal peer conflict.
- Recognizing signs: Subtle indicators of bullying, such as changes in behavior, academic performance, or social interactions.
- Intervention strategies: Techniques to defuse bullying situations, support victims, and hold perpetrators accountable without escalation.
- Restorative practices: Methods for repairing relationships and promoting empathy between parties involved.
- Cyberbullying prevention: Training on online safety, digital citizenship, and responding to incidents of cyberbullying.

Partner with external organizations, such as anti-bullying NGOs or mental health professionals, to provide specialized training. Examples include workshops led by organizations like the European Anti-Bullying Network or UNESCO's Whole School Approach trainers.
Incorporate practical activities into the training (such as role-play scenarios, case studies, group discussions) and provide ongoing support for teachers. The support can be offered by creating a

mentorship program where experienced teachers support newer staff in addressing bullying. You can also offer access to online resources and refresher courses to ensure continuous learning.

Step 5. Involve students and parents

Students and parents are active parties of bullying prevention and they need to be involved regularly in the school's efforts.

You can create a Student Anti-Bullying Committee, with students from different grades, that can organize awareness campaigns, provide peer support, and advise on school policies. Also, you can pair older students with younger ones to serve as mentors and role models. Mentors can guide mentees on handling peer pressure, reporting bullying, and fostering friendships.

Parents can be involved by encouraging them to participate in regular workshops/ information sessions and dedicated teacher-parent meetings. Also, you can form parent groups that work alongside the school's anti-bullying committee to provide support and resources. Develop written agreements that outline the shared responsibilities of parents and the school in addressing bullying. Include guidelines for monitoring children's online activities and fostering respectful behavior at home.

Step 6. Integrate anti-bullying lessons into the curriculum

Use other MUDI modules to incorporate social learning into your lessons and educate students about bullying. You can integrate this information in existing subjects. For example, in language class, you can assign reading or composing essays on themes about kindness, diversity, and overcoming adversity. In social science classes, you can discuss the impact of discrimination and social justice movements on societal development. In biology class, you can examine the physiological effects of bullying related-anxiety/fear on the students or assign a project about how stress affects the brain and behavior. In Digital literacy classes, teach students about online safety, privacy, and online ethical conduct.

Step 7. Monitor and evaluate anti-bullying efforts

Define what success looks like by setting measurable objectives, such as:
- Reducing bullying incidents by a specific percentage within a set timeframe.
- Increasing the number of students reporting bullying.
- Improving students' sense of safety and belonging in school.

Monitor these objectives regularly, such as at the end of the semester, or at the end of the school year.

Use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data. Create a standardized reporting system for students and staff to document bullying incidents. Include details such as location, time, and type of bullying. Conduct regular surveys to assess students'

experiences with bullying, their perception of school safety, and their awareness of anti-bullying policies. Organize discussions with students, teachers, and parents to gather qualitative feedback on the school's efforts.

Present evaluation results to students, parents, and staff to maintain transparency and encourage continued engagement. Use these results to upgrade the school's approach and anti-bullying strategy.