European Education Area Strategic Framework

Working Group on Equality and Values in Education and Training

Issue Paper on Countering Hate in and through Education

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LEGAL NOTICE

1. Introduction

The present Issue Paper on Countering Hate in and through Education has been produced within the framework of the **European Commission's Working Group on Equality and Values in Education and Training**. The Working Group (WG) operates within the framework of the Commission's Communication from 30 September 2020 on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025[1] and the Council Resolution from 26 February 2021 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030).[2] Its members include representatives from Member States and candidate countries, as well as from relevant EU agencies, stakeholder associations, social partners and international organisations. Coordination is provided by the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) of the European Commission, with support from consultants at ICF.[3]

This Issue Paper summarises the various presentations and discussions that took place during two WG meetings: online on June 20-21, 2024, focusing on confronting hate speech, and in Brussels on October 8-10, 2024, focusing on confronting (cyber)bullying. It also covers a webinar held on December 3, 2024, titled 'Parental and student active involvement in addressing (cyber)bullying', as well as a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) hosted by the Turkish Ministry of Education in Ankara, on April 7-8, 2025, titled 'Addressing Online and Offline Hate Speech and Bullying with Digital Literacy, Citizenship Education and Social-Emotional Learning'. The present Issue Paper incorporates the main contents of two Input Papers produced in 2024: one developed for the WG **on hate speech**[4], and a separate one **on (cyber)bullying**[5]. This Issue Paper includes major insights, findings, discussions, and inspirational practices that arose from the WG meetings, the webinar and the PLA. The document also aims to frame and provide depth to the various presentations and discussions that took place during these events.[6]

The primary target audience of the Issue Paper is policymakers at all levels across the EU. Secondary target groups include education practitioners, as well as other stakeholders and individuals interested in understanding and addressing hate speech and (cyber)bullying in education. The next sections of this Issue Paper examine the key concepts and definitions related to both hate speech and (cyber)bullying, followed by recent trends and data on these phenomena within educational settings. This is followed by an overview of relevant European and international initiatives. A section addressing key challenges and points for attention - generated during several WG meetings, a webinar and a PLA in Ankara - concludes the main body of the Issue Paper. Two Appendices have been added, focusing on key research related to hate speech and (cyber)bullying in and through education, as well as multiple examples of practice.

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[1] European Commission (2020). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025.

[2] Council of the European Union (2021). Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) (2021/C 66/01)

[3] Barry van Driel, Zsuzsa Blasko and Guillem Tosca Diaz.

[4] Working Group in Equality and Values in Education and Training (2024). Input paper – Hate speech. Equality & Values Documents.

[5] Working Group in Equality and Values in Education and Training (2024). Input paper on bullying/cyberbullying.

[6] This paper explores hate speech and (cyber)bullying in educational settings and among young people more broadly. However, discussions during the Working Group meetings focused less on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), Higher Education, and Adult Learning. This reflects both the composition of the Working Group on Equality and Values in Education and Training and the existence of other European Education Area strategic framework Working Groups dedicated to specific education sectors.

2. Concepts and Definitions

Both hate speech and (cyber)bullying may be conceptualised as intentional behaviours aimed at inflicting harm on others. As noted by Wachs (2021),[7] bullying always involves repeated aggressive behaviour aimed at harming individuals, often driven by power imbalances and always occurring within a social relationship. Hate speech, in contrast, does not necessarily involve these latter elements. However, hate speech consistently targets individuals or groups based on identity traits (e.g., race, gender) and reflects broader societal prejudices – elements that are not necessarily present in bullying. While the two phenomena may overlap, hate speech emphasises discrimination, whereas bullying centres on interpersonal aggression. Figure 1 below presents the connections between these concepts.

Figure 1: Conceptual similarities and differences between hate speech and bullying
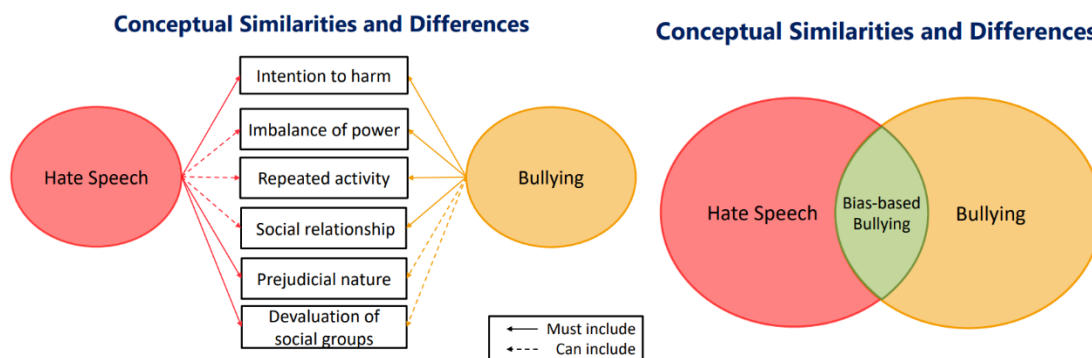
Source: Sebastian Wachs, University of Münster, Conference paper, World anti-bullying Forum 2021.[8]

2.1. Hate Speech

Hate speech - sometimes referred to as 'cyberhate' or 'cyberaggression'[9] when it occurs online - has been defined in various ways. There is no universally agreed-upon definition of hate speech in international human rights law[10] or among key scholars focusing on the issue globally. There can be differing views about its scope and how best to address it.[11]

Hate-motivated crime and speech are prohibited under EU law. The **2008 Framework Decision on combating certain forms of expressions of racism and xenophobia**[12] mandates the criminalisation of public incitement to violence or hatred based on race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin. Some Member States have extended their national laws to other grounds such as sexual orientation, gender identity and disability, also making it applicable to the online realm.

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[7] Wachs, S. (2021). Hate speech and bullying: Two sides of the same coin? Paper presented at the World Anti-Bullying Forum, Stockholm.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Dalla Pozza, V., Di Pietro, A., Morel, S., & Psaila, E. (2016). Cyberbullying among young people (Study for the LIBE Committee). Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament. p.116.

[10] In legal terms, hate speech has not been enshrined in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and the Court used the term 'hate speech' for the first time in 1999. See, McGonagle, T. (2013). The Council of Europe against online hate speech: Conundrums and challenges (Expert Paper No. MCM(2013)005).

[11] Ibid.

[12] Council of the European Union (2008). Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA on combating racism and xenophobia.

According to **the Council of Europe (CoE)**,[13] hate speech covers many forms of expression which advocate, incite, promote, or justify hatred, violence and discrimination against a person or group of persons for a variety of reasons. It poses grave dangers to the cohesion of a democratic society, the protection of human rights and the rule of law. If left unaddressed, it can lead to acts of violence and conflict on a wider scale. In this sense, hate speech is an extreme form of intolerance that contributes to hate crime.[14]

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)[15] has similarly defined hate speech as an expression of hatred against a certain group. It is used to insult a person based on their race, ethnicity, religion or other group affiliation. Such speech generally seeks to condemn or dehumanise the individual or the group, or to express anger, hatred, violence, or contempt toward them.[16]

UNESCO,[17] referencing the 'UN Strategy and Action Plan on Hate Speech',[18] defines hate speech as any form of communication – whether in speech, writing or behaviour - that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language targeting a person or a group based on who they are; in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor. Forms of hate speech can include scapegoating, stereotyping, stigmatisation, and the use of derogatory language.[19]

There has been considerable discussion about the **boundaries between free speech and hate speech**. In educational contexts, the 2023 UNESCO guide for policymakers 'Addressing Hate Speech through Education',[20] reflects on the challenges of balancing the need to combat hate speech with fostering freedom of expression in the classroom. Freedom of expression is crucial for learning and critical debate, but it should not facilitate the spread of prejudice and disinformation. For those targeted by hate speech, it can also limit their freedom of expression, as fear may hinder them from exercising their rights. Given the complexity of balancing protection from hate speech with safeguarding freedom of expression, teachers and other educators need support and adequate training to effectively fulfil this important dual role in education.

2.2. (Cyber)Bullying

Definitions of bullying have evolved over time, influenced by shifting contexts, cultural values,[21] and the growing prevalence of online bullying. With the advent of the internet and social media, bullying has become much more anonymous in nature, can occur 24/7, and now includes new dimensions such as photo manipulation, identity theft and the creation of deepfakes of classmates.

One of the earliest and most influential definitions of bullying, proposed by **Olweus**,[22] – often regarded as a pioneer in bullying research – highlights three main components: **actions intended to harm, the repetition** of harmful behaviour (a pattern rather than a single incident), and a **power imbalance** between the bully and the victim, with

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[13] Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance website. Hate speech and violence.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Mihajlova, E., Bacovska, J., & Shekerdjiev, T. (2013). Freedom of expression and hate speech. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).
[16] Ibid, 9.
[17] UNESCO website. Countering hate speech.
[18] UN (2019). United Nations Strategy and Action Plan on Hate Speech.
[19] UNESCO (n.d.). Countering hate speech.
[20] UNESCO, & Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (2023). Addressing hate speech through education: A guide for policy-makers.
[21] Tay, E. M. K. (2023). Revisiting the definition of bullying in the context of higher education. International Journal of Bullying Prevention.
[22] Olweus, D. (1993). Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do. Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

perpetrators being physically or psycho-socially superior. Some researchers have questioned whether these elements are essential for defining peer aggression as bullying. For example, they argue that a single serious incident can cause as much harm as repeated aggression. They also highlight the difficulties in identifying and measuring power imbalances and intent in bullying, noting that power differences can be subjective and hard to detect. Furthermore, a power imbalance does not have to be an objective fact; perceived power imbalance can have a significant impact. Finally, methods that fail to clearly distinguish bullying from playful interactions or student fights are problematic.[23] A study by Tay (2023),[24] focusing on the context of higher education, revealed that it is not always clear when bullying is taking place or whether all parts of the definition are clear-cut and accurate.

Many studies point to the role of **social contexts**. For example, the publication by the US Committee on the Biological and Psychosocial Effects of Peer Victimisation[25] emphasizes that bullying is a (learned) social behaviour occurring within social contexts that can either attenuate or exacerbate (i.e., moderate) the effects of individual characteristics on bullying behaviour. In an article on its website, titled 'Defining school bullying and its implications on education, teachers and learners',[26] **UNESCO** notes that many schools' anti-bullying programs rely on early definitions; however, evolving realities and new insights are introducing fresh perspectives. In this context, the UNESCO Chair on Bullying and Cyberbullying calls for 'reassessment of our understanding and approaches to bullying, especially in our increasingly complex world, where both in-person and online bullying intertwine with personal and societal issues.'[27]

In the light of the above, the following more recent definitions are worth considering:

2.2.1. Bullying

UNESCO: 'School bullying is a damaging social process that is characterised by an imbalance of power driven by social (societal) and institutional norms. It is often repeated and manifests as unwanted interpersonal behaviour among students or school personnel that causes physical, social, and emotional harm to the targeted individuals or groups, and the wider school community.'[28]

Council of Europe: 'Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems. Bullying may include physical violence, sexual violence, threats, teasing, social exclusion or other psychological violence.'[29]

2.2.2. Cyberbullying

European Commission: 'Cyberbullying is repeated verbal or psychological harassment carried out by an individual or group against others. It can take many forms: mockery, insults, threats, rumours, gossip, 'happy slapping', disagreeable comments or slander.

[23] Skrzypiec, G., Wyra, M., & Lawson, M. J. (2023). The confounding and problematic nexus of defined and perceived bullying. Children and Youth Services Review, 155, Article 107175.
[24] Tay, E.M.K. (2023). Revisiting the Definition of Bullying in the Context of Higher Education. Int Journal of Bullying Prevention.
[25] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2016). Individuals within social contexts. In F. Rivara & S. Le Menestrel (Eds.), Preventing bullying through science, policy, and practice (Chapter 3). National Academies Press.
[26] UNESCO website. Defining school bullying and its implications on education, teachers and learners.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] CoE website. Bullying.

Interactive online services (e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging) and mobile phones have given bullies new opportunities and ways in which they can abuse their victims.'[30]

UNICEF: 'Cyberbullying is bullying with the use of digital technologies. It can take place on social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms and mobile phones. It is repeated behaviour, aimed at scaring, angering or shaming those who are targeted. Examples include: spreading lies about or posting embarrassing photos or videos of someone on social media sending hurtful, abusive or threatening messages, images or videos via messaging platforms impersonating someone and sending mean messages to others on their behalf or through fake accounts.'[31]

Cyberbullying Research Centre: Cyberbullying is a 'wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones and other electronic devices.'[32]

2.2.3. (Cyber)bullying compared to hate speech

Cyberbullying is often used as a synonym for hate speech in the online world, and a link between cyberbullying and hate speech has been acknowledged by various EU Member States.[33] Nevertheless, there are distinctions between the two phenomena. In a systematic scientific review of hate speech among children and adolescents,[34] the authors point out that the literature tends to emphasise the fact that cyberhate was based on prejudicial and intolerant views about different social groups. They further note that while perpetrators of bullying may hold prejudicial views, this is not always the case. In contrast, prejudice is present in cyberhate, even when directed towards an individual rather than a group. Hate material aims to denigrate groups (a collective to which individuals belong), while cyberbullying is framed as an attack on individuals.[35]

(Cyber)bullying is often based on bias that stems from difference or perceived difference. So-called 'biased based bullying' or 'prejudiced based bullying' can be defined as bullying of individuals based on dimensions of that individual's identity, such as the person's actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and/or disability status.[36] This differs from online hate speech (though there is some overlap), which is often ideological, generalized, and aimed primarily at groups rather than individuals.

2.2.4. Differences and similarities between bullying and cyberbullying

The **European Network Against Bullying in Learning and Leisure Environments** (ENABLE) project, which includes a scientific review of school bullying and anti-bullying programmes, notes that there is considerable overlap between traditional bullying behaviour and cyberbullying. However, there are some noticeable differences. Similar to bullying, cyberbullying can negatively impact school performance, self-esteem and can cause depression and other forms of maladaptive behaviour. The project's study revealed, however, that:

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[30] From the Safer Internet Days campaign 2009.
[31] UNICEF website. Cyberbullying: What is it and how to stop it.
[32] Cyberbullying Research Centre website. What is Cyberbullying?
[33] Dalla Pozza, V., Di Pietro, A., Morel, S., & Psaila, E. (2016). Cyberbullying among young people (Study for the LIBE Committee). Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament. European Parliament (2016). p.116.
[34] Kansok-Dusche, Julia, Cindy Ballaschk, Norman Krause, Anke Zeißig, Lisanne Seemann-Herz, Sebastian Wachs, and Ludwig Bilz (2023). A Systematic Review on Hate Speech among Children and Adolescents: Definitions, Prevalence, and Overlap with Related Phenomena. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse 24 (4): 2598–2615.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Özdemir, S. B., Caravita, S. C. S., & Thornberg, R. (2024). Bias-based harassment and bullying: Addressing mechanisms and outcomes for possible interventions. European Journal of Developmental Psychology, 21(4), 505–519.

- One act of cyberbullying can lead to repeated victimisation because it can be 'spread' by social media. Single posts can be disseminated quickly and widely.

- The imbalance of power, typical in bullying behaviour, is often different in cyberbullying. Those engaging in cyberbullying tend to have advanced technological skills and they often know how to remain anonymous. This gives the sense that they are not taking many risks.

- Cyberbullying tends to occur with much less adult and authority supervision.[37] It can happen from the comfort of one's room at home. Wherever youth can take their smartphones, they can go online and engage in cyberbullying. In contrast, traditional bullying typically takes place at school, on the way to school, or nearby.

3.   Recent Trends and Data

While bullying and hate speech have long existed in educational contexts across Europe and globally, the rise of the internet and digital devices has profoundly transformed their nature and how they manifest. The vast amount of online disinformation has contributed to the resurgence of traditional stereotypes in various ways. The rapid spread of false or misleading information through digital platforms has amplified outdated and harmful narratives about gender, race, religion, nationality, and other social categories.[38]

According to **Eurostat**, 'In 2024 in the EU, the share of young people using the internet daily ranged between 93% and 100%, averaging 97% at EU level'. Additionally, 'Social networks were used in 2024 by 88% of 16- to 29-year-olds in the EU, compared to 65% of the total population'.[39] One consequence of the proliferation of social media use among young people is a higher-than-average incidence of hate speech and cyberbullying among young people. The very recent and rapid growth of AI is also impacting the prevalence of both.[40]

Though many trends affect both hate speech and (cyber)bullying similarly, they are separated here to better reflect the focus of various studies.

3.1. Hate Speech

The **Fundamental Rights Agency** (FRA) report 'Online Content Moderation - Current challenges in detecting hate speech'[41] examined the difficulties in detecting and removing hate speech from social media directed against women, people of African descent, Jews and Roma, as these groups are often the targets of online hate. The analysis[42] of posts and comments published on social media platforms between January and June 2022 revealed that, out of 1,500 posts assessed by content moderation tools, more than half (53%) were considered hateful by human coders. The report also notes

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[37] Cyberbullying by adults is enabled by their ability to access the digital environments where young people interact.

[38] Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K. H., & Cook, J. (2017). Beyond misinformation: Understanding and coping with the 'post-truth' era. Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition, 6(4), 353–369.

[39] Eurostat website. Statistics Explained article on Young people – digital world (data for 2024 extracted in May 2025)

[40] See also e.g., Obermaier, M., Schmuck, D. (2022). Youths as targets: factors of online hate speech victimization among adolescents and young adults, Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, Volume 27, Issue 4; Krause, N., Zeißig, A., Seemann-Herz, L., Wachs, S., & Bilz, L. (2023). A Systematic Review on Hate Speech among Children and Adolescents: Definitions, Prevalence, and Overlap with Related Phenomena. Trauma, violence & abuse, 24(4), 2598–2615.

[41] FRA (2023). Online content moderation - Current challenges in detecting hate speech.

[42] FRA (2023). Online hate: we need to improve content moderation to effectively tackle hate speech. [Press release].

how lax regulatory frameworks have created gaps in moderating hateful or illegal content.

The **European Observatory on Online Hate**,[43] supported by the EU Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme, examined online messages posted between January 2023 and September 2023. Analysis of eight million online messages in the EU revealed that the level of hateful toxicity increased by 30% during this period.[44] The report concluded that Europe is currently experiencing an alarming increase in hate speech and hate crime.

Data on hate speech among children, especially in education settings, is scarce. In a survey[45] of children, conducted in a 2020 survey conducted by the **Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission**, children aged 10–18 from 11 countries in Europe were asked if they had seen hate messages attacking certain groups or individuals during the COVID-19 lockdown period. The JRC also gave examples of various kinds of hate messages to guide the respondents. These included offensive messages related to people, such as those with a different skin-colour, religion, nationality, or sexuality. The results showed that in all reviewed countries, the percentage of children who had ever been exposed to cyberhate ranged between one-half, with 52% in Austria, to over two-thirds in Romania (71%). Another study[46] from 2023 of more than 3 000 7th - to 9th graders in Germany and Switzerland found that 67% of the students had witnessed hate speech in their school, and 65% had witnessed online hate speech at least once in the previous 12 months.

3.2. (Cyber)Bullying

The **2020 EU Kids Online Report**[47] presented findings from a survey of children aged 9–16 across 19 European countries. The survey, conducted between autumn 2017 and summer 2019, examined various types of aggression, including (cyber)bullying. The proportion of children reporting exposure to aggression ranged from 3% (in Slovakia) to 38% (in Poland). The proportion of children reporting being perpetrators varied between 10% and 20%. There was no substantial gender differences found in this study; however, please see results from other studies in Annex 1.

The **2021 edition of the Education and Training Monitor**[48] examined the 2018 PISA dataset on bullying, with a specific focus on the EU Member States, pointing out to the following:

- Bullying appears to be widespread in the EU, with more than 50% of students having experienced bullying. In 19 EU Member States, more than half of all students' experience bullying at least a few times a year. The rate of being 'frequently bullied' stands at 6.9% in the EU, with values as high as 14.6%.

- Among the different types of bullying, 'being called names' is by far the most prevalent, followed by 'having nasty rumours spread about you'.

[43] European Observatory of Online Hate website.
[44] European Observatory of Online Hate (2023, December 11). Periodical Report Online Hate Speech in 2023.
[45] Lobe, B., Velicu, A., Staksrud, E., Chaudron, S., & Di Gioia, R. (2021). How children (10–18) experienced online risks during the Covid-19 lockdown – Spring 2020: Key findings from surveying families in 11 European countries. Publications Office of the European Union.
[46] Castellanos, N., Bilz, L., Wachs, S., Krause, N., Schulze-Reichelt, F., Kansok-Dusche, J., & Ballaschk, C. (2023). Hate speech in adolescents: A binational study on prevalence and demographic differences. Frontiers in Education, 8, 1076249.
[47] Smahel, D., Machackova, H., Mascheroni, G., Dedkova, L., Staksrud, E., Ólafsson, K., Livingstone, S., & Hasebrink, U. (2020). EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries.
[48] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2021). Education and Training Monitor 2021 – Education and well-being. Publications Office of the European Union, pp. 35–43.

- Frequent bullying has a detrimental effect on students' life satisfaction, an element of well-being. The EU average share of students with low life satisfaction was nearly 15 percentage points higher among those who reported being bullied frequently.

- In all but one EU Member State, the share of bullied students was higher in disadvantaged schools than in advantaged ones.

- The EU average for bullied boys (at least a few times a month) was nearly 5 percentage points higher than that of girls (24.4% vs. 19.7%).

- Low-achievers in reading are twice as likely to be bullied as high-achievers.

- Despite the high prevalence of bullying, school principals indicated that there was 'very little' hindrance to learning caused by students intimidating or bullying their peers.

The more recent WHO/Europe **Health Behaviour in School Aged Children** (HBSC) study,[49] published in 2024, revealed that traditional school bullying rates had remained steady since 2018,[50] though reports of cyberbullying have risen:

- On average, 6% of adolescents reported they had bullied others at school at least 2–3 times a month in the past couple of months (8% of boys and 5% of girls).

- Around one in 10 (11%) boys and girls reported that they had been bullied at school at least 2-3 times in the past couple of months.

- The prevalence of adolescents who reported that they bullied others at school remained relatively stable since 2018.

- Bullying victimisation also did not change substantially in absolute terms over time, although a slight increase was observed among younger girls.

- Overall, 15 % of adolescents reported being cyberbullied at least once or twice in the past couple of months (15% of boys and 16% of girls).

UNESCO also highlights to the pervasive character of bullying, noting that reducing school bullying has been challenging. It calls for a more holistic approach to bullying, to better reflect the new realities and complex nature of this phenomenon.[51]

The **OECD's Survey of Social and Emotional Skills (SSES)**,[52] from 2021,[53] asked 15-year-old respondents whether they had been 'threatened by people' and whether people had 'spread nasty rumours about them' while chatting or using social media. Approximately 7% reported being exposed to one or both forms of cyberbullying a few times a month or more over the past year.

The **International LGBTIQ Youth and Student Organisation (IGLYO),** together with **UNESCO's 'Global Education Monitoring Report'**, released a report in 2021[54] that showed experiences of bullying in educational settings among LGBTIQ youth are

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[49] World Health Organization (WHO) Europe (2024). Health Behaviour in School Aged Children study.
[50] The data were gathered in 2021/2022 in 44 European countries.
[51] UNESCO website. News article: Defining school bullying and its implications on education, teachers and learners.
[52] The OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills is an international survey designed to identify and assess the conditions and practices that foster or hinder the development of social and emotional skills for 10- and 15-year-old students. Key objectives of the survey include raising awareness of the critical role these skills play, and providing insight into how they develop and influence academic success, employability, active citizenship, health and well-being.
[53] Gottschalk, F. (2022). Cyberbullying: An overview of research and policy in OECD countries (OECD Education Working Paper No. 270). Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
[54] UNESCO (2021). Don't look away: Over half of LGBTI students in Europe report having been bullied in school. Global Education Monitoring Report.

pronounced. The study revealed that 54% percent of LGBTIQ individuals aged 13 to 24 had experienced bullying in school at least once based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or variations of sex characteristics. Additionally, 67% had been the target of negative comments at least once.

A 2024 report by the **Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) on LGBTIQ equality**[55] showed that while improvements have been made in some areas, there have been negative trends in others. The report indicates that there has been slow but steady progress, and EU and Members States' initiatives have positively impacted the lives of LGBTIQ people. For instance, more LGBTIQ individuals are now open about their sexual orientation and gender identity. However, bullying is on the rise. Furthermore, compared to 2019, there is a clear decrease in the proportion of respondents who believe that their government effectively combats prejudice and intolerance against LGBTIQ people (from 30 % in 2019 to 25 % in 2023). Overall, 62 % of respondents across the EU said that their school education never addressed LGBTIQ issues.[56] There has been a steep increase in everyday harassment and much of this happens in public spaces where people are supposed to feel safe. The results of the survey also show that trans and intersex people face even greater levels of victimisation. This worrying landscape emerges in the context of online hate speech and anti-LGBTI campaigns. The LGBTIQ survey respondents very frequently encountered online references to 'LGBTIQ propaganda' or 'gender ideology' and to LGBTIQ people posing a threat to 'traditional values' or being 'unnatural' or mentally ill and posing a sexual threat, while in many cases they faced calls for violence against LGBTIQ people. Some 67% said they suffered bullying, insults and threats at school because of who they are. This represented a steep increase compared to 46% in 2019. Furthermore, more than 1/3 of those surveyed had contemplated suicide in the previous year. That percentage was even higher among trans women (59%) and trans men (60%). For non-binary and gender diverse respondents the figure was 55%. Among those severely limited by disabilities, it was even higher at 66%.

The FRA has also recently reported on the harassment of Muslims[57] **and Jews**[58]. Overall, 16% of Muslim parents or guardians stated that their children have experienced harassment or bullying at school due to their ethnic or immigrant background. Some 6% of Muslim parents mentioned physical abuse such as hitting, hair pulling and kicking because of their children's ethnic or immigrant background. Regarding the harassment of Jews, some 22% of respondents said that they felt discriminated against for being Jewish. Some 40% of respondents indicated that they were rarely' or 'never' open about being Jewish at work or school. Around one in five respondents experienced the most recent incident of harassment either at work (11%) or at school/university (8%), while 11% experienced it in their own home or someone else's home and 15% somewhere else. More than half of the victims of antisemitic violence did not know the perpetrator, similarly to antisemitic harassment. However, 8% reported that the perpetrator was someone at school, 7% a neighbour, 6% an acquaintance or friend, and 5% a public official.

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[55] FRA (2024): LGBTIQ equality at a crossroads: progress and challenges.
[56] There were significant cohort differences. In 2023, 35% of respondents aged 15-17 reported that their school education had never addressed LGBTIQ issues, compared to 47% in the 2019 survey.
[57] FRA (2024). Being Muslim in the EU – Experiences of Muslims.
[58] FRA (2024). Jewish People's Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism.

4. Key European and International Initiatives Addressing Hate Speech and (Cyber)Bullying

Efforts to address (cyber)bullying and hate speech in education intersect not only with each other but also with initiatives in other policy areas.

4.1. Initiatives Specifically Relating to Hate Speech

4.1.1. EU initiatives

Although many initiatives focusing on hate speech are not directly related to education, they are worth mentioning here, as they contribute to raising awareness and fostering a more inclusive and respectful society.

Under EU law, crimes and speech motivated by hate are illegal. The European Commission views hate speech and hate crime as particularly serious, due to the harmful impact on fundamental rights, on individuals and on society at large, ultimately undermining the foundations and values of the EU. The education sector is regarded as a particularly important arena for promoting common values and human rights to help prevent future incidence of hate speech. It is also a space where the most vulnerable individuals – children - must be protected from its harmful effects.

In 2016, the European Commission established the **High-Level Group on Combating Hate Speech and Hate Crime**[59] to facilitate expert discussions and the exchange of good practices, with of the aim of developing practical guidance, standards and tools to build capacity, and improve responses.

The **EU Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online**[60] represents an agreement (from 2016) between the European Commission and Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter, and YouTube.[61] Noting the responsibilities of IT companies, a key aim of this Code is to prevent and counter the spread of illegal hate speech online. The implementation of the Code of Conduct is evaluated through a regular monitoring exercise that has been set up in collaboration with a network of organisations located in the different EU countries. In this Code of Conduct, the IT companies and the European Commission express their willingness to collaborate in identifying and promoting independent counter-narratives, new ideas and initiatives, and supporting educational programs that encourage critical thinking.

On 9 December 2021, the European Commission adopted a **Communication titled 'A more inclusive and protective Europe: extending the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime**'[62] which prompted a Council decision to extend the current list of 'EU crimes' in Article 83(1) TFEU to hate crimes and hate speech. In January 2024

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[59] For more information, the meeting agendas and minutes are published in the Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities, under the name High Level Group on combating hate speech and hate crime, code E03425.
[60] European Commision website. The EU Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online. For all information concerning the revised Code of conduct+ visit The Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online +.
[61] The agreement was later extended to Instagram, Snapchat and Dailymotion (2018) Jeuxvideo.com (2019), TikTok (2020) LinkedIn (2021) and Rakuten Viber and Twitch (2022).
[62] European Commission (2021). A more inclusive and protective Europe: Extending the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime (COM/2021/777 final).

the **European Parliament** adopted a resolution[63] calling for the extension of the EU crime list to include hate speech and hate crimes.

The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) has compiled a **Compendium of Practices on Hate Crime**[64] which includes multiple entries specifically focused on hate speech. In addition, there is a **database[65] on anti-Muslim hatred** incidents and a **report on antisemitic incidents in the EU**.[66]

In December 2023, the European Commission and the High Representative adopted a **Communication titled 'No place for hate: a Europe united against hatred'**,[67] noting a rise in hatred that poses a risk for society and democracy. The Communication highlights education as a key contributor to raising awareness among pupils', students' and teachers', and strengthening their ability to respond to prejudice, extremist narratives, conspiracy theories, negative stereotypes, and the ideologies that fuel discrimination and hatred.[68] As part of the implementation of the Communication, the Commission convened a **European Citizens' Panel on 'Tackling Hatred in Society'** in April and May 2024. The panel brought together 150 randomly selected citizens from all EU Member States to discuss ways to strengthen responses to hate speech and hate crime. The participants agreed on 21 recommendations, many of which are strongly linked to education policies and initiatives at both European and national levels.[69] In tandem with the corresponding European Citizens' Panel, the European Commission opened a discussion on the **Citizens' Engagement Platform**, focusing on tackling hatred in society. This platform, available in all official EU languages, facilitated an online discussion from 22 April 2024 to 28 February 2025.[70]

The European Commission has also undertaken other initiatives to confront online hate speech, including the '**2022 European Strategy for a Better Internet for Kids (BIK+)**'.[71] This strategy aims to ensure that children are protected, respected and empowered online. The BIK+ portal offers a range of resources and best practices, many of which specifically address hate speech[72]. The portal serves as a platform for exchange with the EU co-funded **network of Safer Internet Centres** present in most EU Member States, which engage with children, parents, and teachers.[73]

4.1.2. Examples of other European and international initiatives and projects relating to hate speech

In 2015, the Council of Europe (CoE) independent human rights monitoring body, **the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance** (ECRI), adopted a '**General Policy Recommendation on combating hate speech'**.[74] The recommendation emphasizes the importance of education in addressing the

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[63] European Parliament (2024). Extending the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime (Resolution P9_TA(2024)0044).

[64] FRA (2021). Compendium of practices on hate crime.

[65] FRA Database 2012-2022 on Anti-Muslim Hatred.

[66] FRA (2023). Antisemitism in 2022 - Overview of antisemitic incidents recorded in the EU.

[67] European Commission (2021). No place for hate: A Europe united against hatred (COM(2021) 521 final).

[68] The Communication announced plans to support mutual learning and the exchange of best practices in 2024. The efforts of the Working Group on Equality and Values in Education and Training to address hate speech and bullying, as detailed in this paper, respond to this call.

[69] European Commission website. Final Recommendations. European Citizens Panel. Tackling Hatred in Society.

[70] European Commission website. Final Consultation Report the Citizens' Engagement Platform on Tackling Hatred in Society.

[71] European Commission (2022). A Digital Decade for children and youth: the new European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+). COM(2022)212 final.

[72] For example, see Europen Commission website Better Internet for Kids news article Media literacy in the fight against online hate speech.

[73] Europen Commission website. Safer Internet Centre network.

[74] CoE European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (2015). General Policy Recommendation N°15 on Combating Hate Speech.

misconceptions and misinformation that underpin hate speech and highlights the need for this education to be particularly directed towards youth. The report highlights online hate speech as a major trend, emphasizing that hate speech through social media has been rapidly increasing and has the potential to reach a much larger audience than extremist print media could in the past. The most recent report from 2023[75] makes specific reference to combating and preventing hate speech, warning that hate speech and hate related violence can have serious consequences. This report pays special attention to hate speech directed towards LGBTI individuals and the Roma.

The CoE has focused on hate speech over the last decade, primarily in the political and legislative domains.[76] In 2013, the CoE rolled out the **'No Hate Speech Youth Campaign'**,[77] which ran until 2017. This youth campaign aimed to mobilise young people to counter hate speech and promote human rights online. The core of the initiative involved national campaigns across Europe. Most campaigns focused on raising awareness of the risks that hate speech poses to human rights and democracy, as well as on educational activities. These campaigns typically involved a broad variety of actors and stakeholders. For example, in Poland, the Campaign Coalition[78] included youth, teachers, and educators. The campaign also developed an online compendium containing over 270 resources.[79]

More recent activities of the CoE in the area of hate speech include a joint project with the EU (running from 2023 to 2026) aimed at preventing and combating intolerant discourse and hate speech, as well as other forms of violence and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) across Europe.[80] In their recent study, **'Preventing and combating hate speech in times of crisis'**,[81] the CoE discusses some of the latest challenges that have provoked various forms of hate speech, including during the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian Federation' war of aggression against Ukraine. The study pays special attention to antisemitic hate speech as well hate speech against the Roma and LGBTIQ individuals.

Another **CoE** initiative is the **'Education Strategy 2024-2030'**.[82] It focuses on three priority pillars: renewing the democratic and civic mission of education, enhancing the social responsibility and responsiveness of education and advancing education through a human rights-based digital transformation. The strategy includes helping students become digital learners and promoting anti-discrimination. Hate speech was also mentioned as an important priority when the strategy was launched.[83]

UNESCO has mapped and analysed existing initiatives to combat online hate speech in its comprehensive **2015 report 'Countering online hate speech'**.[84] A special section is devoted to educational opportunities. The focus here is primarily on media and information literacy as a tool to counter hate speech, with increasing attention given to citizenship education and digital citizenship. The report notes that media literacy can strengthen learners' resilience to hate speech and build their capacity to recognise and

[75] CoE European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (2024). Annual report on ECRI's activities: Covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2023.
[76] CoE website. CoE - Combating Hate Speech.
[77] CoE website No Hate Speech. Youth Campaign.
[78] CoE website No Hate Speech. Campaign in Poland.
[79] CoE website No Hate Speech. Youth Campaign Compendium of Resources.
[80] CoE website EU/CoE project (2023-2026). Combating Anti-LGBTIQ Violence and hate speech and strengthening awareness raising and fact-based narratives about LGBTIQ persons.
[81] Faloppa, F., Gambacorta, A., Odekerken, R., & van der Noordaa, R. (2023). Study on Preventing and Combating Hate Speech in Time of Crisis. Council of Europe.
[82] Council of Europe (2024). Education Strategy 2024–2030: Learners first – Education for today's and tomorrow's democratic societies.
[83] Launch of the CoE Strategy. Media Release (29 September 2023).
[84] Gagliardone, I., Gal, D., Alves, T., & Martinez, G. (2015). Countering online hate speech. UNESCO.

counter misinformation, disinformation, violent extremist narratives, and conspiracy theories*.

Recent research efforts by UNESCO have specifically addressed the impact of hate speech and technology-facilitated violence on gender, particularly concerning women journalists. Examples include the 2020 study **'Online Violence Against Women Journalists: A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impacts'**[85], the 2021 report **'Chilling: Global Trends in Online Violence Against Women Journalists'**[86] and the 2023 study **'Your Opinion Doesn't Matter Anyway'**[87], among others.

Another key area of UNESCO's work involves addressing hate speech in times of crisis, conflict, and major elections. For example, the research produced as part of the **'Social Media 4 Peace project'**[88] highlights the impact of harmful online content on conflict-prone communities. In addition, UNESCO reports, guidelines and MOOCs identify possible responses to hate speech while strengthening election reporting in the digital age. One such example is UNESCO's 2025 publication **'Covering Hate Speech: A Guide for Journalists'**[89] which equips media professionals with tools and knowledge to recognise, report on, and counter hate speech - especially during election periods.

In 2023, UNESCO released the **'Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms'**,[90] advocating for a multi-stakeholder and human rights-based approach to digital governance. Building on this framework, UNESCO has developed a range of resources, policy guidance, awareness-raising tools, and implemented capacity-building initiatives for policymakers, regulators, civil society, media professionals, private companies, and other stakeholders. These combined efforts aim to strengthen responses to online hate speech as part of UNESCO's broader objective of safeguarding information integrity in the digital environment. As part of this work, UNESCO works with member states to map the context and needs related to hate-speech globally, to guide the design of context-specific capacity-building activities.

The 2023 publication by UNESCO and the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (OSAPG), titled **'Addressing Hate Speech through Education: A Guide for Policy Makers'**,[91] offers actionable recommendations for policymakers, including curriculum reform, teacher training, and inclusive school management. The guide promotes respectful global and digital citizenship, emotional learning, and culturally responsive materials. It aims to equip learners with the skills to recognise and oppose hate speech, both online and offline, while upholding the right to freedom of expression within educational settings.

In July 2021, the **UN General Assembly** adopted a resolution[92] on promoting inter-religious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech. This led to the UN initiative proclaiming **June 18 the International Day for Countering Hate Speech**.[93] In 2024, UNESCO dedicated the International Education Day to the topic of hate speech, highlighting the key role of education in combating it.

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[85] Posetti, J., Aboulez, N., Bontcheva, K., Harrison, J., & Waisbord, S. (2020). Online violence against women journalists: A global snapshot of incidence and impacts (CI/FEJ/2020/PI/1). UNESCO.

[86] Posetti, J., Shabbir, N., Maynard, D., Bontcheva, K., & Aboulez, N. (2021). The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists. UNESCO.

[87] Chowdhury, R., & Lakshmi, D. (2023). Your opinion doesn't matter, anyway: Exposing technology-facilitated gender-based violence in an era of generative AI (Issue Brief No. 41). UNESCO.

[88] Brant, J., & Hulin, A. (Ed.) (2023). Social Media 4 Peace: Local lessons for global practices. UNESCO.

[89] George, C. (2025). Covering hate speech: a guide for journalists. UNESCO.

[90] UNESCO (2023). Guidelines for the governance of digital platforms: Safeguarding freedom of expression and access to information through a multi-stakeholder approach.

[91] UNESCO, & Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (2023). Addressing hate speech through education: A guide for policy-makers.

[92] Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech (UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/75/309, July 21, 2021).

[93] UN website. Observances - countering hate speech.

In 2025, the CoE organised the second edition of the **'No Hate Speech Week'**[94] within the framework of an EU-CoE joint project.

Many **civil society organisations** focus on combating hate speech targeting specific groups. For example, the **European Disability Forum** (EDF), an umbrella organisation for persons with disabilities, published its '**Recommendations on EU initiatives on hate speech and hate'**[95] in 2021. These recommendations primarily emphasise awareness-raising. The EDF points to the fact that persons with disabilities are at higher risk of being victims of hate speech and hate crimes. The recommendations provide evidence showing that online hate speech against persons with disabilities is increasing and include various examples drawn from date by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation (OSCE). They also point out that persons with disabilities face multiple barriers to reporting hate speech and hate crimes.

Another example of civil society engagement is the **Minority Rights Group (MRG)**,[96] an international human rights organisation that works with minority and indigenous communities to help protect their rights. For example, it studied 'cyberhate' against the Roma in Bulgaria and Slovakia through its programme called 'Countering Online Antigypsyism and Cyberhate' (COACH),[97] which ran from December 2022 to November 2024. According to MRG, online hate speech against Roma restricts their digital participation, which is crucial for accessing services and engaging in society. Cyberhate contributes to normalisation of antigypsyism and discriminatory stereotypes. To counter hate speech, they emphasise raising awareness about Roma rights and realities by disseminating accurate and positive narratives among internet users in the form of short films, infographics, photo stories, online articles and social media campaigns.

4.2. Initiatives Specifically Relating to (Cyber)Bullying in Education

4.2.1. EU initiatives

In 2023, the **European Commission** published two **information sheets on bullying**. The first called 'What can schools do about bullying'[98] covers: (1) types of bullying; (2) incidence of bullying; (3) signs and symptoms in victimised children; (4) how schools, parents and communities can liaise; and (5) whole-school approaches. The second information sheet, titled 'What motivates children who bully, and can they change?'[99] covers: (1) what motivated children to bully; (2) how bullies can be popular; (3) incidence of bullying; (4) signs and symptoms in bullies; (5) persistent bullies; (6) how schools, parents and communities can liaise; and (6) whole-school approaches.

In 2023, the JRC published a report titled **'The experience of being bullied at school and its association with reading proficiency in grade 4: an analysis of PIRLS 2021 data'**.[100] This study examined 20 EU education systems and looked at the relationship between school bullying and reading test performance.

[94] CoE website. No Hate Speech Week 2025.
[95] European Disability Forum (2021). EDF position and recommendation on hate speech and hate crime.
[96] Minority Rights Group (MRG) website. Countering Online Antigypsyism and Cyberhate programme.
[97] Ibid.
[98] European Commission (2023). What can schools do about bullying? Publication Office of the European Union.
[99] European Commission (2023). What motivates children who bully, and can they change? Publication Office of the European Union.
[100] Karpiński, Z. (2023). The experience of being bullied at school and its effect on reading proficiency in grade 4: An analysis of PIRLS 2021 data. Joint Research Centre. Publications Office of the European Union.

In 2020, the European Commission published **'Anti-bullying Practices from the Repository of the European Platform for Investing in Children' (EPIC)**.[101] The document contains more than 200 practices related to bullying, including a large number that focus on the school environment.

A 2024 brief by the **European Parliament Research Service**, titled **'Cyberbullying among young people: Laws and policies in selected Member States'** highlights the dangers of cyberbullying. It explains that lawmakers are struggling to keep pace with the fast-changing online environment, which creates many policy challenges. The brief also notes that while EU policies focus on preventing cyberbullying, there is currently no EU-wide law against online bullying.[102]

In 2024 the **European Parliament** received a **petition** focused on fighting bullying of people with **autistic spectrum disorder** in school, a group particularly vulnerable to bullying.[103]

4.2.2. Examples of other European and international initiatives and projects relating to (cyber)bullying

The **Council of Europe** (CoE) considers protecting children from bullying as a strategic priority within its '**Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2022-2027'**.[104] The CoE promotes whole-school human rights and citizenship education programmes to tackle bullying and violence in schools. These programmes are based on the principles of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights.'

In 2022, the **OECD** published a Working Paper,[105] titled **'Cyberbullying: An overview of research and policy in OECD countries'**. The paper examined the prevalence and consequences of cyberbullying, research gaps, and existing policies and practices. It notes that approaches to tackle cyberbullying vary widely across different systems due to its complexity and related digital risks. Nevertheless, some common approaches were identified, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Cyberbullying policies and practices in OECD countries

Target	Examples of measures
Awareness raising	Campaigns and websites to inform stakeholders (parents, teachers, children) about cyberbullying
Reporting mechanisms	Including helplines, hotlines and digital reporting mechanisms for parents, teachers or children to report cyberbullying and request assistance
Policies and laws	Policy or legal frameworks to address cyberbullying; policy approaches can include action plans or frameworks to be adopted by schools or districts; legal responses can be specific to cyberbullying or can address cyberbullying through existing laws such as harassment, defamation or copyright
Internet safety support	Specific agencies or centres in many systems tasked with promoting digital safety and/or digital literacy; often also provide resources for schools or teachers to teach students about digital risks like cyberbullying
Cyberbullying interventions	Interventions usually implemented in schools, often focusing on skill building and promoting positive peer relationships; Some interventions developed specifically

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[101] Bruckmayer, M., & Galimberti, S. (2020). Anti-bullying practices from the repository of the European platform for investing in children (EPIC). Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission. Publication Office of the European Union.

[102] Murphy, C. M. (2024). Briefing - Cyberbullying among young people: Laws and policies in selected Member States. European Parliamentary Research Service.

[103] Petition No 1340/2024 submitted by Andrea Fernández Naya (Spanish) on fighting bullying of people with autistic spectrum disorder in schools.

[104] Council of Europe website. (n.d.). Bullying – Children's Rights.

[105] Gottschalk, F. (2022). Cyberbullying: An overview of research and policy in OECD countries (OECD Education Working Paper No. 270). p.32, OECD Publishing.

> for cyberbullying, although evidence suggests that anti-bullying interventions may also be effective in reducing cyberbullying

Source: OECD Education Working Paper No. 270 on cyberbullying (2020).[106]

The United Nations has addressed the issue of (cyber)bullying on several occasions. The 2022 UN General Assembly '**Resolution on protecting children from bullying'** reaffirms the Convention on the Rights of the Child[107] and recognises that bullying, including cyberbullying, has a negative impact and is a major concern for children. The UN calls on member states to take appropriate action to tackle bullying and provide support to affected children. Figure 2 below illustrates UNESCO's whole-education approach to bullying.

Figure 2: UNESCO's whole-education approach to bullying
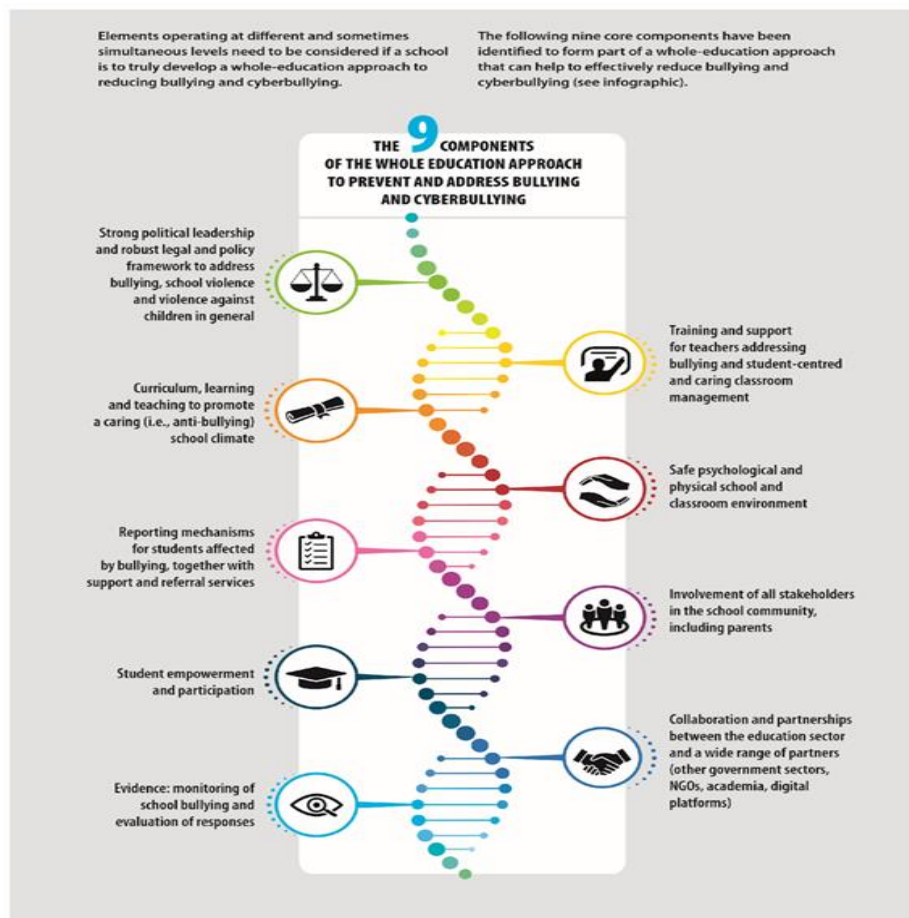
Source: UNESCO, & French Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports (2020).[108]

In its 2019 publication **'Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying'**,[109] **UNESCO** provides a comprehensive overview of global and regional trends related to school-related violence. The report examines the nature, prevalence, and impact of school violence and bullying. It highlights that in Europe and North America, psychological bullying is the most common form, and that cyberbullying affects as many as one in ten children. It also reviews national responses, focusing on countries that have achieved positive trends, and identifies key factors contributing to effective responses to school violence and bullying. Furthermore, **UNESCO** member states have

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[106] Ibid.
[107] United Nations (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child.
[108] UNESCO, & French Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports (2020). Recommendations by the Scientific Committee on preventing and addressing school bullying and cyberbullying. Conference report from the International Conference on School Bullying 5 November 2020 (online).
[109] UNESCO (2019). Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying.

designated the **first Thursday of November** as the **International Day against Violence and Bullying at School, Including Cyberbullying**. This day recognises that all forms of school-related violence violate children's and adolescents' rights to education and their health and well-being[110].

Finally, **UNICEF** has undertaken several initiatives to address (cyber)bullying. On an 'explainer' page titled **'Bullying: What is it and how to stop it'**, UNICEF focuses on both prevention and response.[111] The content is mostly directed towards parents and contains advice. UNICEF has also publishes country-specific data on bullying through its 'Data' webpage, which highlights the percentage of 13-15-year-olds who report being bullied on one or more days in the past 30 days.[112]

4.3. Initiatives Relating to Well-Being, Mental Health and Socio-Emotional Learning in Education that address Hate Speech and (Cyber)Bullying

There is a significant overlap between efforts to address (cyber)bullying and hate speech and initiatives aimed at promoting well-being of students and teachers. Several of these initiatives are worth highlighting.

The NESET (European Commission Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training) developed a social and emotional learning framework (SEE), and its **2018 analytical report titled 'Strengthening Social and Emotional Education as a core curricular area across the EU'**[113] argues that when sufficient time is devoted to its efficient delivery, SEE can significantly improve both emotional and academic outcomes in education. The report further notes that while many Member States now recognise the importance of SEE, there are still significant differences in the extent to which relevant policies are implemented and prioritised. It also points out the overlap between anti-bullying efforts and SEE, noting that school-based bullying and violence prevention initiatives often adopt a narrower focus than the broader approaches promoted by SEE.

The **'2022 Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success'**[114] addresses bullying and cyberbullying under its holistic, 'whole-school' approach. This document makes multiple references to (cyber)bullying and explicitly mentions providing social, emotional and psychological support to learners, with early interventions targeting both victims and perpetrators of bullying. The Recommendation also notes the importance of including social and emotional education, bullying prevention and mental and physical health in curricula, from ECEC to upper-secondary education and training. It further emphasizes the creation of peer and community support systems to prevent bullying/cyberbullying and to address all forms of discrimination.

In 2024, the European Commission's **Expert Group on Enhancing Supportive Learning Environments for Vulnerable Learners and for Promoting Wellbeing and Mental Health at School** published two sets of guidelines. One of the key recommendations is the importance of creating safe school environments to prevent and address various forms of violence, including cyberbullying. The issue of

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[110] UNESCO website. International Day against Violence and Bullying at School, including Cyberbullying.
[111] UNICEF website. Bullying: What is it and how to stop it.
[112] UNICEF website. Data on Bullying.
[113] NESET (2018), Strengthening social and emotional education as a core curricular area across the EU: A review of the international evidence. Publications Office of the European Union.
[114] Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on Pathways to School Success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving (Text with EEA relevance) 2022/C 469/01.

cyberbullying is addressed in both the **'Guidelines for Education Policymakers'**[115] and the **'Guidelines for School Leaders, Teachers and Educators'**[116].

Within the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,[117] schools have a formal duty to protect children from all forms of violence, both physical and psychological. Therefore, the 2021 **'EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child'**[118] and the **'European Child Guarantee'**[119] call for closing the gap between standards, commitments, and action to protect children from all forms of violence, including abuse, exploitation, and cyberbullying. Both initiatives emphasise the need for comprehensive legal, educational, and social measures to ensure children's safety both offline and online, while also promoting their well-being and digital empowerment.

4.4. Initiatives Relating to Youth, Education and Digital Literacy, Digital Citizenship and Digital Well-Being that address Hate Speech and (Cyber)Bullying

The rapid growth of the digital world, while offering many benefits, has also introduced new threats to student well-being, prompting a range of initiatives.

The **'2022 Digital Services Act'** (Regulation – 2022/2065),[120] among other things, seeks to offer stronger protection for children online and allow less exposure to illegal content online. The Act requires providers of online platforms to implement structural precautionary measures, such as safe default settings, to ensure a high level of privacy, safety, and security of minors using their service. In January 2025, the European Commission announced the integration of a revised Code of conduct+ on countering illegal and harmful hate speech online into the framework of the Digital Services Act.

The **'2022 Guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training'**,[121] developed by the Commission Expert Group, provide guidance for educators. These guidelines focus on digital literacy and education and training as tools to raise awareness of and combat hate speech and cyberbullying. They aim to promote the responsible and safe use of digital technologies, increase understanding of disinformation help develop critical thinking skills. The Guidelines are scheduled to be updated by the end of 2025.

The European Commission has adopted several EU strategies and action plans responding to hatred against specific target groups, including the **'EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life',**[122] **'EU Roma strategic**

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[115] European Commission (2023). Wellbeing and mental health at school: Guidelines for education policymakers. Publications Office of the European Union.

[116] European Commission (2023). Wellbeing and mental health at school: Guidelines for school leaders, teachers and educators. Publications Office of the European Union.

[117] United Nations (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child

[118] The European Commission (2021). EU strategy on the rights of the child (COM/2021/142 final).

[119] Council recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee.

[120] Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market for Digital Services. The DSA oversees online intermediaries and platforms, including marketplaces, social networks, content-sharing sites, app stores, and travel platforms. Its primary aim is to curb illegal activities and disinformation, ensuring user safety, protecting fundamental rights, and promoting a fair online environment.

[121] European Commission (2022). Guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training. Publications Office of the European Union.

[122] European Commission (2021). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life (2021-2030) (COM/2021/860 final).

framework on equality, inclusion and participation'[123] as well as the **'EU Anti-racism action plan 2020-2025'**[124]. All of these are relevant to discussions of both hate speech and (cyber)bullying.

The European Commission's **Erasmus+ programme**,[125] as well as the **European Solidarity Corps Programme**[126] and the **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme** (CERV),[127] support numerous projects that address (cyber)bullying and hate speech and promote inclusion, diversity, intercultural dialogue, as well as projects that combat intolerance and discrimination.

'The European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principle for the Digital Decade',[128] adopted in December 2022, provides a reference framework for EU citizens. It sets forth a vision and concrete commitments for how the rights and freedoms enshrined in the EU's legal framework, along with European values, can be upheld in a secure, safe and sustainable digitally transformed world.

The **'2022 Council Conclusions on supporting well-being in digital education'**[129], acknowledge that learners and educators can be exposed to digital risks which impact their well-being. Well-being in digital education is understood as 'a feeling of physical, cognitive, social and emotional contentment that enables all individuals to engage positively in all digital learning environments including through digital education and training tools and methods, maximise their potential and self-realisation and helps them to act safely online and supports their empowerment in online environments'.

The Standing Conference of Ministers of Education of the **Council of Europe** member states have designated the **year 2025 as the 'European Year of Digital Citizenship Education'**.[130] A key aim is to empower learners to thrive ethically, responsibly and effectively in a digitally connected world, with well-being online as a top priority. Digital citizenship education, according to the CoE, helps people identify and manage risks such as online hate speech and cyberbullying.[131]

In the Council of Europe **'2019 Digital Citizenship Education Handbook**: **Being Online, well-being online, rights online'**,[132] which is based on the CoE's competences for democratic culture,[133] the importance of media and information literacy is highlighted as a component of digital citizenship, with reference to 'the ability to interpret, understand and express creativity through digital media, as critical thinkers'. The Handbook also has a focus on well-being online, which can directly be connected to the issue of hate speech and cyberbullying.

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[123] European Commission. (2020). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: A Union of Equality: EU Roma strategic framework on equality, inclusion and participation. (COM/2020/620 final).

[124] European Commission (2020). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Union of equality –EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025. (COM/2020/565 final).

[125] EU programme for education, training, youth and sport.

[126] European Solidarity Corps - EU funding programme for young people wishing to engage in solidary activities in a variety of areas.

[127] Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) supports projects that combat discrimination, hate crimes, and promote civic engagement, equality, and the rule of law.

[128] The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles. (2023/C 23/01).

[129] Council conclusions on supporting well-being in digital education (2022/C 469/04).

[130] European year of digital citizenship.

[131] CoE website. The European Year of Digital Citizenship Education 2025.

[132] Council of Europe (2019). Digital Citizenship Education Handbook.

[133] CoE website. Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.

5. Challenges and Points for Attention

The members of the Working Group on Equality and Values in Education and Training (2021-2025) identified the multiple challenges and points for attention throughout the group's activities. These are summarized below.

5.1. Challenges Relating to Awareness Raising

Although awareness of the impact of hate speech and (cyber)bullying on young people is increasing, many challenges remain. These include gaps in understanding among policy makers, communities, schools, teachers, and students who all struggle to fully grasp the exact meaning of these concepts. These concepts are constantly evolving, not only among academics, but also among various other stakeholders across EU countries. As a result, the prevalence and nature of hate speech and (cyber)bullying remain unclear, making comparisons difficult. This also hampers efforts to identify the most effective remedies and understand the circumstances and contexts in which they work. However, it is clear that hate speech and (cyber)bullying are significantly underreported, which further impedes obtaining a complete picture of the phenomenon. Increased awareness among different stakeholders would help those involved in prevention efforts address several key challenges associated with hate speech and (cyber)bullying: to better understand how to help bystanders become peer supporters, how to improve school-community relations when tackling these issues and how to create school and classroom environments that reduce their prevalence (see Chapter 6).

Points for attention:

- It is difficult to gain a clear picture of the incidence of hate speech and (cyber)bullying because various terms are used (such as 'online violence' and 'online hate') and incidence is (therefore) measured in different ways.

- The emotional impact of (cyber)bullying and hate speech is too often not taken seriously enough. Greater awareness is needed about the often-severe consequences of (cyber)bullying and hate speech on the mental health and well-being of both students and teachers.

- Addressing (cyber)bullying and hate speech should not be seen as isolated issues but rather within the broader context of general threats to student well-being. They are also part of a damaging process that targets, excludes and harms others.

- Some evidence suggests that those who engage in bullying behaviour at school are more likely to exhibit violent behaviour later in life, demonstrating the importance of (early) intervention.

- Most (cyber)bullying does not come from strangers; rather people are usually targeted by someone they know.

- Using labels such as 'bullies', 'bullying' and 'victims' can sometimes do more harm than good.

- Bullying and cyberbullying are closely related yet different phenomena; cyberbullying can take place anywhere and at any time, often with greater anonymity.

- There can be a so-called 'disinhibition effect' in cyberbullying which refers to the tendency of people to behave more aggressively, rudely, or inappropriately online than they would in face-to-face interactions. This effect helps explain why

some individuals engage in cyberbullying despite not exhibiting such behaviour offline.

- Gender differences influence both the types of (cyber)bullying that occur and their impact. Intersectionality aspects also come into play.

- (Cyber)bullying and hate speech incidents tend to be underreported. This makes it more difficult to respond. Also, more awareness is needed regarding the true incidence of these phenomena and how to reduce underreporting. A better understanding of underreporting by certain groups (e.g., LGBTIQ students) is important information to know. Furthermore, more subtle forms of (cyber)bullying and hate speech often go unreported.

- There is insufficient insight into the specific communities or youth subcultures targeted by (cyber)bullying and hate speech. This requires more attention and research.

- Certain communities or subcultures might consider certain forms of bullying to be acceptable behaviour and even a rite of passage.

- Moving from being a 'bystander' to becoming a 'peer supporter' requires support from schools, parents/caregivers and communities.

- The key lessons from empirical research, as well as effective existing practices with respect to (cyber)bullying and hate speech need to be better disseminated.

- Stakeholders involved in addressing (cyber)bullying and hate speech can benefit from learning how other EU Members States are protecting students. This can be done through a process of mutual learning and sharing of practices.

- The (social) media can play both a positive and negative role in addressing (cyber)bullying and hate speech. While new media have many benefits in education, they also increase the likelihood of cyberbullying and hate speech. The rise of AI has exacerbated this problem. It is important to stay abreast of recent developments.

5.2. Challenges Relating to Content and Approach

Although schools across the EU and beyond have long addressed bullying and hate speech, the rise of cyberbullying and online hate speech pose new challenges. While it has been shown that whole-school approaches involving the entire school community can have a positive impact and reduce prevalence, it remains unclear how to best implement and support such efforts. Fostering a positive school climate can reduce (cyber)bullying and hate speech, but more insight is needed to understand how to create and sustain such an environment effectively. Many approaches to address these phenomena are punitive, but research shows they can be less effective or even counterproductive. However, which alternative approaches work best, and under what circumstances, remains unclear. The evidence shows that not all of those engaged in bullying do this for similar reasons and not all strategies impact those who engage in bullying in a uniform way. This affects the effectiveness of initiatives, whether they focus on prevention, response, or both. To get beyond short term impact, sustainable, long-term strategies, tailored to different age groups and motivations are essential. Finally, past insights show that one size does not fit all; however, a key challenge remains in addressing the needs of today's constantly evolving school environment.

<u>Points for attention:</u>

- Too many initiatives to address (cyber)bullying and hate speech are short-term. Sustainable initiatives are likely to have a greater impact but more insight is needed on how to develop them efficiently.

- Too often, the impact of prevention-based programmes in schools fades over time, which is why ensuring they are high quality and sustainable is essential.

- Since both (cyber)bullying and hate speech impact student well-being, prevention approaches and interventions should need to take these into consideration.

- Creating a safe and positive school climate and classroom environment is essential for reducing (cyber)bullying and hate speech, while also enhancing overall student well-being. However, more insight is needed to better understand how to create an optimal classroom and school environment.

- Both anonymous reporting and reporting that includes the names of victims, and perpetrators have their advantages and disadvantages.

- Given the potential severity of long-term impacts of (cyber)bullying and hate speech, prevention and response strategies must also address the prevention of these lasting consequences. This requires system-level emotional and social support mechanisms.

- Many interventions that deal with (cyber)bullying and hate speech in schools focus on punishment of perpetrators. The present evidence shows this is not the most effective remedy.

- School policies should be clear regarding how they intend to promote and implement socio-emotional education policy, at both instructional and organisational levels.

- Socio-emotional learning is a key tool to address the challenges posed by (cyber)bullying and hate speech. It should be both a separate subject in schools (from pre-primary through secondary) and integrated across the curriculum.

- Empathy based learning approaches can be effective ways of reducing (cyber)bullying and hate speech, but often more is needed than just empathy.

- The voices of students and their direct involvement are critical in addressing (cyber)bullying and hate speech, both in shaping school policies and in their implementation.

- In general, didactic, information-based approaches should be avoided in prevention programs. Instead, engaging, interactive and student-cantered approaches have shown to be more effective.

- There are different motivations behind bullying behaviour, each of which may require different responses and prevention mechanisms. However, these aspects are not yet fully understood.

- Some expressions of (cyber)bullying and hate speech can be regarded as criminal behaviour and require cooperation with criminal justice institutions. It is important to understand the root causes of (cyber)bullying and hate speech, not just their manifestations, as well as which approaches work best to address them, and in what contexts.

- A balance needs to be struck between confronting hate speech and protecting freedom of speech in school settings, especially in contexts where there may be resistance to limiting hate speech.

- Insight is needed into how teachers and school staff can best collaborate with school students (and other stakeholders) when addressing (cyber)bullying and hate speech, and what role teachers should play.

- It is critical to better understand what strategies and methodologies are the most appropriate for different age groups when addressing (cyber)bullying and hate speech. One size fits all approaches are not appropriate. Prevention strategies need to start at a young age (even at the pre-primary level). Also, students respond differently to different approaches. This also applies to how effective certain approaches are for different groups of students (e.g. popular versus less popular individuals who engage in bullying behaviour).

- Whole-education approaches and a combination of formal and non-formal approaches have been shown to be effective when addressing (cyber)bullying and hate speech. Gaining insight into the relative effectiveness of various components of such approaches can lead to important insights.

- Mediators between schools and parents/local community can play a positive role in bridging differences of opinion and /or approach to addressing (cyber)bullying and hate speech, helping to bring schools closer to their local communities.

- Increasing access of students (and teachers) to the digital world, both in and out of educational settings, presents both opportunities and risks related to hate speech and cyberbullying.

5.3. Challenges Relating to Teachers and Students

Both teachers and students play a critical role in addressing the various manifestations of (cyber)bullying and hate speech that impact the school community. However, several key challenges remain for educators. Many teachers and other educators lack sufficient training on how to effectively engage with these phenomena effectively, and pre-service teacher education has struggled to keep up with recent developments, especially due to the growth of digital threats. While teachers and school staff often recognize physical bullying, they may overlook or minimize indirect or relational bullying, sometimes failing to intervene effectively. Also, a challenge for teachers is that cyberbullying and online hate speech often occur outside school walls and can take place 24/7, making it difficult to detect and address since much of it is invisible. Time constraints and unclear guidance further hinder intervention. Another complicating factor is the emotional dimension of (cyber)bullying and hate speech. Teachers and school staff are rarely trained to recognise and address students' emotional needs sensitively and effectively. Though student involvement in prevention can be beneficial, teachers often struggle to define their role in peer-led initiatives. It remains unclear how to actively involve (school) students in preventing and responding to (cyber)bullying and hate speech at all ages. A key challenge is that students are often reluctant to report such incidents or act as peer supporters,[134] complicating identification and response. Finally, it is important to note that addressing hate speech is particularly complex in politically sensitive environments.

Points for attention:

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[134] The term 'upstanders' was often referred to in the WG discussions, to emphasize proactive and engaged behaviour, however, some scholars point out to alternative terms such as 'peer supporters', 'defenders', or 'helpers' as more neutral, and may help reduce the risks faced by children who intervene in bullying situations. While recognizing the diversity of language and perspectives within the field, the paper adopts the term 'peer supporters.

- Teachers play a key role in combating bullying, as they are often the first adults to have the opportunity to respond to peer conflicts in schools.

- While teachers and other school staff are generally capable of recognising physical forms of (cyber)bullying, they may perceive non-physical forms of bullying — such as relational or indirect bullying – as less harmful or serious and therefore may choose not to intervene, allowing incidents to go unnoticed. Some teachers do not consider these less physical types of bullying to be bullying at all.

- Often, teachers and other educators do not feel adequately prepared to identify or intervene in bullying incidents, largely due to a lack of awareness and training. Therefore, teachers and educators need more training, at both the pre-service and in-service levels, to effectively implement socio-emotional learning. This does not necessarily require vast resources, but it does require sufficient political will.

- The development of competences related to socio-emotional learning is not only important for students but also for teachers, who must examine and improve their own social and emotional competences as needed.

- The importance of socio-emotional learning tends to be recognised across the EU, but in practice more needs to happen, especially in teacher education.

- Because emotions are involved in (cyber)bullying and hate speech, teachers and other school staff need to learn how to recognise these emotions and respond adequately, providing appropriate support for the targets of such behaviours.

- An important issue is how teachers can be best empowered to educate about hate speech, and take necessary actions, especially in a political climate that may resist efforts to restrict it.

- Not enough school leaders have access to professional development relating to addressing (cyber)bullying and hate speech. Addressing (cyber)bullying and hate speech tends not to be part of standard professional development of teachers or in pre-service education. It also demands specific competences.

- Whole-school and whole-education approaches have been shown to be effective, but most teachers are not familiar with the best ways to implement them.

- School leaders are not always well-equipped to guide/support teachers in their efforts to address (cyber)bullying and hate speech, including how to involve the community.

- Since much of cyberbullying and hate speech occurs outside the classroom and school, it is difficult for teachers and other school staff, such as social workers and school psychologists, to understand what is happening. Bullying also takes place at home. As this affects students' functioning and behaviour at school, teachers and school staff need to learn how to best handle any knowledge they might gain about the home situation.

- Teachers and school leaders face exclusionary practices in their schools and classrooms, as well as increased aggression and violence in recent years. These challenges include threats and violence aimed at teachers themselves (whether linked or not to discussion of controversial issues), and (cyber)bullying and harassment among pupils.

- Teachers often have busy schedules and insufficient time to effectively address (cyber)bullying and hate speech.

- There is a need for specialised staff and health professionals in schools such as school psychologists, counsellors and school social workers to effectively address (cyber)bullying.

- Supporting and/or creating sustainable networks of teachers to address (cyber)bullying and hate speech can be beneficial. However, this requires the necessary resources.

- School leadership, teachers, school staff, and fellow students have the opportunity to become positive role models for others by taking steps to address (cyber)bullying and hate speech.

- In schools with high levels of bullying, students often perceive their treatment by teachers as unequal, the rules as unfair, and student participation in decision-making as very limited.

- Students may be reluctant to report (cyber)bullying and hate speech to adults, which is why peer support can play a vital role in addressing these issues. Nevertheless, many young people choose to remain bystanders for a variety of reasons when they witness (cyber)bullying and hate speech.

- Peer pressure cannot be underestimated when (cyber)bullying or hate speech occurs. It can influence whether young people intervene, remain bystanders, encourage aggressive behaviour or even engage in it themselves.

- It is critical to find methods to transform peers into active supporters through empowerment approaches, as well as to get them involved in prevention initiatives.

- Bystander interventions encourage peers to support victims during (cyber)bullying or hate speech and, generally speaking, have positive implications. Although concerns about retaliation exist - since defenders may be at risk of becoming targets themselves - some research suggests that defending behaviour does not typically increase this risk.

- While the term 'upstanders' is sometimes used, some scholars advocate for alternative, more neutral terms such as peer supporters, defenders, or helpers, which may help reduce the risks faced by children who intervene in bullying situations.

- It is important to move beyond 'one size fits all' approaches to addressing (cyber)bullying and hate speech. School students respond differently to different approaches. This also applies to the effectiveness of certain approaches for different groups of students (e.g. popular versus less popular individuals who engage in bullying behaviour).

- Actively involving students in addressing bullying can be effective but teachers do not always understand their role when allowing student peers to take on more leadership.

- Parents can sometimes be (highly) resistant to certain anti-bullying programs and to information that their child has been involved in bullying behaviour, either as the perpetrator or target. A key issue is finding the most effective way to communicate with parents about (cyber)bullying and hate speech and to break taboos surrounding these topics.

- Too often the same parents and/or community members attend meetings addressing (cyber)bullying and hate speech. A key question is how to use these parents as resources for peer support while also reaching those who typically do not participate.

5.4. Challenges Relating to Educational Authorities and Policy Makers

Educational authorities and policy makers have increasingly been paying attention to the phenomena of (cyber)bullying and hate speech, partly due to new online threats to young people. These developments also reflect increased attention at the international level. Since policy making is a relatively cautious, and, therefore, slow process, stakeholders face challenges in developing policies and approaches that keep pace with a rapidly developing online reality. Moreover, educational authorities and policy makers in different contexts use different definitions of these phenomena, complicating efforts to gain a complete picture of what the policies address. The intersectional nature of (cyber)bullying and hate speech presents an additional challenge. Limited research indicates that some policies are more effective than others in reducing prevalence, but it remains unclear which policies, or which aspects of policies, are most effective and in which contexts.

Points for attention:

- A key question is how to best promote and implement policies (at all levels) that create the positive school and classroom environment needed to effectively address (cyber)bullying and hate speech.

- Educational authorities and schools often need more insight into how they can best implement holistic, whole-education approaches to address (cyber)bullying and hate speech. A key aspect of this challenge is assessing the feasibility of implementing sustainable whole-education approaches.

- To adequately address the socio-economic determinants of children and young people's health and wellbeing related to (cyber)bullying and hate speech, and integrate support strategies, socio-emotional education needs to be anchored in policies across different sectors. Therefore, education policy makers need to collaborate with, for instance, health and social services.

- Countries need to carefully examine their education objectives, curricular frameworks, and learning outcomes to determine whether current policies and practices comprehensive adequately address a comprehensive set of social and emotional competences, and to make appropriate revisions where needed.

- Policy makers benefit from understanding what communities and schools are already doing to address (cyber)bullying and hate speech, including their experiences, and the impact of existing initiatives. For example, schools often lack clear policies and guidelines on when to involve external agencies versus handle the incidents internally. Support from central authorities is crucial in helping schools navigate this challenge.

- Collaborating with experienced NGOs could be a promising way for schools and education authorities to address (cyber)bullying and hate speech.

- While thousands of projects and programmes addressing bullying (to a lesser extent cyberbullying and hate speech) have been implemented, relatively few have been adequately evaluated. Existing initiatives need to be carefully assessed and evaluated, including policy initiatives. Collaboration with higher education and research institutions can play a valuable role in supporting these efforts.

- Since (cyber)bullying and hate speech are global issues, there is a need for greater awareness on how different regions address these phenomena and what successful initiatives have been implemented worldwide.

6. Appendix 1: Key Research on Confronting Hate Speech in and through Education

6.1. Key Research on Hate Speech

Empirical research on hate speech relating to children and adolescents is relatively scarce: a recent systematic review (Kansok et al., 2023)[135] identified no more than 10 distinct studies (published in 18 papers) examining the prevalence and main characteristics of the phenomenon. Most of the studies reviewed examine online content and found that between 31% (India) and 69% (Spain) of 12-to 21-year-olds have been exposed to hate speech, with studies from other countries reporting values between these two extremes. **Victimisation rates** varied between 7% in a U.S. sample and 23% in a Finnish one, with experiences of offline victimisation being less frequent compared to online victimisation. Finally, **perpetration rates** in the different studies range from 4% (South Korea) to 32% (Thailand).[136]

Males are more likely than females to report being perpetrators of hate speech both online and offline (Kansok-Dusche et al. 2023; Castellanos et al. 2023). Girls, however, are more likely to be victimised in online settings according to some studies, though not all. Concerning age differences, exposure to online hate speech seems to be increasing from age 12 to 20, while frequency of victimisation appears to be constant. In addition, students from a migration background are more likely to be exposed to or to be victims of hate speech according to several studies.[137] Finally, one study in the review suggested that children from more affluent family background are less likely to be victimised.[138]

While these findings are highly indicative of the extent of the problem, it is important to note that these figures are not directly comparable. This is because they come from different time points, and are based on different study designs, including the population studied (different age groups within the 12 - to 21-year-old group), sampling methods, and modes of measurements. In fact, a key conclusion from the review is that a consensus-based definition of hate speech is still missing from academic research and – relatedly – there is no standard tool available to measure its occurrence in a comparable manner. The review also highlights need to study children younger than age 12 – an age group that is surely affected but remains completely understudied to date.[139]

A handful of recent studies look specifically at **offline hate speech** in the school context. In schools, the most frequent forms of offline hate-speech among 14- to 17-year-olds include offensive jokes, the spreading prejudices, rumours or lies, and the sharing of discriminatory media.[140] The perpetrator is most often a classmate, but sometimes it is the teacher or other school staff, and the hate-speech can also come from an unknown source, e.g., in the form of graffiti.[141]

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[135] Kansok-Dusche, Julia, Cindy Ballaschk, Norman Krause, Anke Zeißig, Lisanne Seemann-Herz, Sebastian Wachs, and Ludwig Bilz (2023). A Systematic Review on Hate Speech among Children and Adolescents: Definitions, Prevalence, and Overlap with Related Phenomena. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse 24, no. 4: 2598–2615.
[136] Ibid, 73.
[137] Wachs, Sebastian, Norman Krause, Michelle F. Wright, and Manuel Gámez-Guadix (2023). Effects of the Prevention Program 'HateLess. Together against Hatred' on Adolescents' Empathy, Self-Efficacy, and Countering Hate Speech. Journal of Youth and Adolescence 52, no. 6: 1115–28.
[138] Kansok-Dusche, J, et al. (2023).
[139] Ibid, p.76.
[140] Wachs, S, et al. (2023). Ibid.
[141] Ibid, 78.

Countering hate speech immediately, i.e. providing a direct response either by openly supporting the victim, encouraging bystanders to speak up or by offering factual opposition to the content of the hate speech can be a powerful tool to reduce the negative impacts of hatred.[142] However, there are also risks involved (see later discussion in this Issue Paper on direct intervention). A positive classroom climate, with a supportive relationship among classmates has been shown to be conducive to counter hate speech among adolescents (Wachs, Castellanos, et al. 2023; Wachs, Valido, et al. 2023). Furthermore, 'counter-speech' is positively associated with a range of personal skills, including **perspective-taking, prosocial-behaviour, assertiveness,**[143] as well as self-efficacy and empathy[144] – which can all help improve the classroom atmosphere. A newly developed prevention program, *HateLess.*[145] *Together against Hatred* in Germany shows very promising short-term effects in improving adolescents' empathy and self-efficacy and in encouraging them to engage in counter-speech.[146] HateLess, also described in Appendix 2 of this Issue Paper, is a one-week interactive program designed to prevent hate speech perpetration and to equip students in Grades 7 to 9 with the necessary knowledge and socio-emotional skills to stand up against hatred.[147]

6.2. Key Research on (Cyber)Bullying

There is a considerable amount of research on (cyber)bullying, also with the educational realm, especially when compared to hate speech. Much of what has been written and researched about (cyber)bullying is also applicable to hate speech. The following subsections highlight insightful research related to various aspects of bullying, including cyberbullying, in schools. In some cases, research from outside the EU has been included where relevant. These subsections are outlined below:

- Research on the impact of (cyber)bullying
- Research on targets of (cyber)bullying
- Research on who commits (cyber)bullying
- Research on bystanders and on peer supporters[148]
- Research on effectiveness of programs that respond to (cyber)bullying behaviour
- Research on policies relating to (cyber)bullying.

6.2.1. Research on the impact of (cyber)bullying

There is a general understanding, supported by extensive research, that bullying and cyberbullying negatively impact both academic performance and the mental health of young people. The following studies look at these issues more in-depth, with insights often drawn from the fields of psychology and medicine.

PISA 2018 looked at both prevalence and impact of bullying. The study found a high prevalence of bullying in the EU. As reported in the Education and Training Monitor 2021 looking at PISA findings, frequent bullying has a considerable detrimental effect on students' life satisfaction, with the EU average share of students with low life satisfaction

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[142] Garland, Joshua, Keyan Ghazi-Zahedi, Jean-Gabriel Young, Laurent Hébert-Dufresne, and Mirta Galesic. (2022). 'Impact and Dynamics of Hate and Counter Speech Online'. EPJ Data Science 11 (1): 3.
[143] Wachs, S, et al. (2023). Ibid.
[144] Ibid, 81.
[145] Website HateLess - Together against hate.
[146] Ibid, p.81.
[147] Ibid, p.81.
[148] The term 'upstanders' was often referred to in the WG discussions, to emphasize proactive and engaged behaviour, however, some scholars point out to alternative terms such as 'peer supporters', 'defenders', or 'helpers' as more neutral, and may help reduce the risks faced by children who intervene in bullying situations. While recognizing the diversity of language and perspectives within the field, the paper adopts the term 'peer supporters'.

in 2018 being nearly 15 percentage points higher if they also reported being bullied frequently[149].

Research across multiple studies highlights the significant impact of bullying - both offline and online - on adolescents' mental and physical health. An **international comparative study in 28 countries from 2005**, mostly located in Europe, looked at bullying and various accompanying health-related symptoms among school-aged children who had been bullied. The study examined the prevalence of symptoms such as headache, stomach-ache, backache, feeling low, bad temper, nervousness, difficulties in getting to sleep, dizziness, loneliness, being tired in the morning, feeling left out of things and feeling helpless. The conclusion was that 'There was a consistent, strong and graded association between bullying and each of 12 physical and psychological symptoms among adolescents in all 28 countries.'[150]

According to a 2020 report by the **Kidsrights**, an international children's aid and advocacy organisation based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, the available research reveals that bullying - in both its physical and digital form - can have lasting psychological effects on children. For instance, bullied children are more likely to be anxious and to think about committing suicide. The problems are not only psychological and emotional but also cause physical harm to the bullied child. The report notes that studies have shown that these effects often persist into adulthood, with one study finding that male young adults who were bullied in high school were likely to suffer from low self-esteem and depression even a decade after the bullying had ended.[151]

A publication by **Arseneault (2017)** for King's College in London looked at the long-term consequences of bullying victimisation on mental health. The author also points out that emerging research shows that the impact of bullying extends far beyond the moment when the bullying stops. She mentions that various studies have shown that 'young victims of bullying have higher rates of agoraphobia, depression, anxiety, panic disorders and suicidality in their early to mid-20's. Child victims of bullying also have an increased risk of receiving psychiatric hospital treatment and using psychiatric medications in young adulthood. Victims of bullying in childhood report high levels of psychological distress at age 23 but, and most importantly, also at age 50. Adults who were victims of frequent bullying in childhood had an increased prevalence of poor psychiatric outcomes at midlife, including depression and anxiety disorders, and suicidality.' The author also comments that 'this conclusion would imply a profound shift for prevention and intervention strategies, which commonly focus on the perpetrators of bullying - the bullies – in the direction of greater attention to the victims, with the aim of reducing the burden of bullying victimisation on individual lives and societal costs.'[152]

Regarding cyberbullying, in particular, a review of the literature **(Nixon, 2014)** found clear indications that cyberbullying poses a threat to adolescents' health and well-being. This study concludes that there is a 'relationship between adolescents' involvement in cyberbullying and negative health indices. Adolescents who are targeted via cyberbullying report increased depressive affect, anxiety, loneliness, suicidal behaviour,

[149] European Commission (2021). Education and Training Monitor 2021 – Education and well-being. Publications Office of the European Union, p.38.
[150] Due, P., Holstein, B. E., Lynch, J., Diderichsen, F., Nic Gabhainn, S., Scheidt, P., & Currie, C. (2005). Bullying and symptoms among school-aged children: International comparative cross-sectional study in 28 countries. European Journal of Public Health, 15(2), 128–132.
[151] Van Tiel, Jarno (2020). Cyberbullying, an overlooked and ever growing danger to the development of children. KidsRights Foundation.
[152] Arseneault, L. (2017). The long-term impact of bullying victimization on mental health. World Psychiatry 16(1), 27-28.

and somatic symptoms. Perpetrators of cyberbullying are more likely to report increased substance use, aggression, and delinquent behaviours.'[153]

A study on the impact of cyberbullying on both perpetrators and victims **(John et al., 2018)** reviewed the evidence for associations between cyberbullying involvement and self-harm or suicidal behaviours. The results of the study showed that 'victims of cyberbullying are at a greater risk than non-victims of both self-harm and suicidal behaviours'. Interestingly, the results also show, though to a lesser extent, that 'perpetrators of cyberbullying are at risk of suicidal behaviours and suicidal ideation when compared with non-perpetrators'.[154]

6.2.2. Research on targets of bullying

The risks associated with bullying and victimisation in schools are neither random nor evenly distributed.

A study by **Bokhove et al. (2022)** looked at various correlates of bullying. They conclude that 'factors related to bullying are relatively stable over time and related to several individual characteristics. Victims are often quieter and more sensitive, and more likely to be social isolates…'[155]

The **PISA 2018** survey examined which groups are more likely to become victims of bullying in Europe. 'Looking at who is most vulnerable to and most affected by the phenomenon of bullying, PISA 2018 data unequivocally show that socio-economically disadvantaged groups and students from disadvantaged schools are disproportionately affected. … A lower socio-economic school environment is therefore clearly linked with the prevalence and propensity for school bullying'.[156]

However, a significant proportion of bullying incidents among adolescents in Europe go unnoticed by teachers. While precise percentages vary across studies and countries, research consistently highlights a substantial gap between students' experiences and teachers' awareness. A comparative study by **Eriksen and Huang (2019),** focusing on Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, found that teachers and principals reported significantly fewer bullying incidents than students did.[157] A German study **(Wachs et al., 2019)** found that almost one-third of bullying incidents among adolescents went unnoticed by teachers, even when the teachers were present.[158] This under-detection is particularly prevalent with relational bullying (e.g., social exclusion, rumour-spreading) and cyberbullying.

Gender and (cyber)bullying

Research shows that gender and age matter with respect to adolescent bullying behaviour. Gender plays a role in the type of bullying, as well as the impact of bullying. In general, boys are more likely to bully others and experience physical bullying, while girls are more frequently victims of relational and cyberbullying. These trends have remained relatively stable, although cyberbullying has increased, especially among girls.

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[153] Nixon, C. L. (2014). Current Perspectives: The Impact of Cyberbullying on Adolescent Health. Adolescent Health, Medicine and Therapeutics 5 (Aug 1): 143–58.
[154] John, A., et al. (2018). Self-Harm, Suicidal Behaviours, and Cyberbullying in Children and Young People: Systematic Review. Journal of Medical Internet Research 20, no. 4.
[155] The influence of school climate and achievement on bullying.
[156] European Commission (2021). Education and Training Monitor 2021. Publications Office of the European Union 38–39.
[157] Eriksen, I. M., and L. Huang (2019). Discrepancies in School Staff's Awareness of Bullying: A Nordic Comparison. Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education 3, no. 1: 51–68.
[158] Wachs, S., Bilz, L., Niproschke, S., & Schubarth, W. (2019). Bullying intervention in schools: A multilevel analysis of teachers' success in handling bullying from the student's perspective. Journal of Early Adolescence, 39(5), 642–668.

A U.S. study by **Wang et al (2009)**[159] found that boys are more likely to be involved in physical bullying, both as perpetrators and victims, while girls are more likely to engage in or be victims of relational (social or emotional) bullying, such as exclusion, spreading rumours, or manipulation of friendships.

Girls tend to report higher emotional distress (e.g., depression, anxiety) in response to bullying compared to boys, while boys are more likely to react to bullying with externalizing behaviours, such as aggression or defiance **(Hunter et al, 2004)**[160]. Boys are less likely to report bullying and seek help from adults or peers. This is because of social expectations and norms: reporting that one has been bullied among boys is sometimes viewed by peers (and others) as being unmasculine and weak. Girls are more likely than boys to view support as the best strategy for both stopping bullying and for helping victims feel better.

There have been multiple studies looking at **sexual minorities and bullying**. Following up on the UNESCO 'Rio Statement on Homophobic Bullying and Education for All, from 2011'[161], the 2019 **UNESCO** publication 'Bringing it Out in the Open: Monitoring school violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression in national and international surveys'[162] presents the results of a study examining the most recent data relating to the nature, scope and impact of violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression and of current action to address this. The report notes that in Europe the most prevalent form of homophobic and transphobic violence reported is psychological violence. The study had a global focus and found that a significant proportion of LGBTIQ students experience homophobic and transphobic violence in school. Students who are not LGBTIQ but are perceived not to conform to gender norms are also targets. It was shown that school-related homophobic and transphobic violence affects students' education, employment prospects and well-being. Students targeted are more likely to feel unsafe in school, miss classes, or drop out and students who experience homophobic and transphobic violence may achieve poorer academic results than their peers. Homophobic and transphobic violence was also shown to have adverse effects on mental health including increased risk of anxiety, fear, stress, loneliness, loss of confidence, low self-esteem, self-harm, depression and suicide, which also adversely affect learning.

In 2021 **UNESCO** published a policy paper 'Don't look away: no place for exclusion of LGBTI students'[163]. The policy paper notes that in the EU, though there have been improvements in recent years, 43% of 15- to 24-year-olds stated they 'were ridiculed, teased, insulted or threatened at school because they were LGBTI. By contrast, 44% of 15- to 17-year-olds and 57% of 18- to 24-year-olds felt their rights were never or rarely supported during their time in school.'

A 2024 study by the **Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)**[164] confirms the general conclusions of these findings, noting that LGBTIQ students are often not only the targets of other students but also the targets of some teachers. As a result, some of the most

[159] Wang, J., Iannotti, R. J., & Nansel, T. R. (2009). School bullying among adolescents in the United States: Physical, verbal, relational, and cyber. Journal of Adolescent Health, 45(4), 368–375.

[160] Hunter, S. C., Boyle, J. M. E., & Warden, D. (2004). Help seeking amongst child and adolescent victims of peer-aggression and bullying: The influence of school-stage, gender, victimization, appraisal, and emotion. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 74(3), 375–390.

[161] BeLonG To – LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland (2011). Rio Statement on Homophobic Bullying and Education for all.

[162] UNESCO. (2019). Bringing it out in the open: Monitoring school violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression in national and international surveys. (Technical brief, March 2019, No. 7).

[163] Global Education Monitoring Report Team, & International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Intersex Youth and Student Organisation (2021). Don't look away: no place for exclusion of LGBTI students. (Global education monitoring report: Policy paper No. 45). UNESCO.

[164] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2024). LGBTIQ Equality at a Crossroads: Progress and challenges. Publications Office of the European Union.

vulnerable young people in society are exposed to constant harassment - even in spaces that should be safe. This can severely impact their well-being.

A key factor in determining the prevalence of harassment among targeted communities is the rate of reporting. There are clear indications that young people who are members of certain groups are more likely to underreport their bullying experiences. **Stevens et al. (2020)**[165] examined the association between immigration and bullying victimisation among children in 26 countries/regions across Europe. The results showed that first- and second- generation immigrants were less likely to report bullying victimisation than non-immigrants and pointed to the vulnerability of immigrant children in Europe to bullying. A U.S. study from 2018 **(Lai & Kao, 2018)** concludes that 'Compared to White and female students, minority (particularly Black and Hispanic) and male students report comparable or greater experiences of bullying *behaviours* (such as being threatened, hit, put down by peers, or having belongings forced from them, stolen, or damaged), but are less likely to report that they have been 'bullied'. These findings point to racialised and gendered differences in reporting bullying experiences such that indicators of 'weakness' in peer relations may carry a greater stigma for minority and male students.'[166] Underreporting has also been found among LGBTIQ youth, mostly because of experiences of school staff not addressing the issue effectively.[167]

Special educational needs and (cyber)bullying

Several studies have shown that students with disabilities are at greater risk for being targeted than their peers. A systematic review of studies on 4- to 17-year-olds by **Maïano et al. (2016)** reported that approximately 36% of youth with intellectual disabilities experienced bullying victimisation. Specific types of victimisations included physical (33%), verbal (50%), relational (37%), and cyber (38%) forms.[168] . A study by Abregú-Crespo, Renzo et al. (2024)[169] also found that children with intellectual disabilities are more likely to be involved in bullying, either as victims or perpetrators, compared to their typically developing peers.

Research has consistently shown that children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) experience higher rates of victimisation, often due to social communication challenges, behavioural differences, and difficulties in interpreting social cues. The meta-analysis by **Maïano et al.**[170] showed that autistic children are significantly more at risk of being bullied compared to their neurotypical peers. The study showed that 44% of children with ASD experience peer victimisation. This rate is significantly higher than the average for typically developing children. Many autistic children also have difficulties verbalising bullying experiences and thus reporting these experiences.[171] There is some evidence that the higher prevalence of bullying aimed at those with ASD is compounded by disproportionately negative experiences and

[165] Stevens, G.W.J.M. et al. (2020). Immigration status and bullying victimization: Associations across national and school contexts. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology 66 (2020) 101075.
[166] Lai, T .& Kao, G. (2018). Hit, Robbed and Put Down (but not Bullied): Underreporting of Bullying among Male and Minority Students. Journal of Youth and Adolescence (47), 619–635.
[167] Theirworld (2024, June 27). Survey reveals widespread unreported bullying and discrimination among LGBTQ+ youth in schools.
[168] Maïano, C., A. Aimé, M. C. Salvas, A. J. Morin, and C. L. Normand. 2016. Prevalence and Correlates of Bullying Perpetration and Victimization among School-Aged Youth with Intellectual Disabilities: A Systematic Review. Research in Developmental Disabilities 49–50 (Feb-Mar): 181–95.
[169] Abregú-Crespo, Renzo et al. (2024). School bullying in children and adolescents with neurodevelopmental and psychiatric conditions: a systematic review and meta-analysis. The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, Volume 8, Issue 2, 122-134.
[170] Maïano, C., Normand, C. L., Salvas, M. C., Moullec, G., & Aimé, A. (2016). Prevalence of school bullying among youth with autism spectrum disorders: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Autism Research, 9(6), 601–615.
[171] Cappadocia, M. C., Weiss, J. A. and Pepler, D. (2012). Bullying Experiences among Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders 42: 266–77.

outcomes. **Humphrey and Hebron (2014)**[172] refer to a 'double disadvantage'- higher prevalence, and also worse outcomes. For the child with ASD, negative social outcomes can reduce the motivation for further interaction, creating a pattern of avoidance and solitary behaviour that limits opportunities to develop social and communication skills.

In one U.S. study in rural areas **(Farmer et al., 2012)**,[173] it was found that female students with special education needs were 4.8 times more likely to be targets of bullying than their peers without disabilities.

Racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups and (cyber)bullying

A systematic review of the literature **(Sapouna et al., 2023)** examined the risk of bullying victimisation among racial, ethnic and/or religious minority youth. It looked at individual, school, family, and community-level factors. The authors conclude that 'overall, this review found that negative stereotypes and discrimination operating in school and community contexts put racial/ethnic minority, immigrant, and refugee youth at an increased risk of racist bullying victimisation.' The authors also found that in terms of gender, males, in most studies, were reported to be at higher risk of being victimised due to race, ethnicity, citizenship status and/or religion, though a couple of studies showed no significant gender differences in bullying victimisation due to race/ethnicity.[174]

Research in Spain **(Llorent at al. 2016)** looked at bullying and cyberbullying and the relationship between majority group and minority group students, both in terms of ethnicity and sexual identity. The study found no significant differences among groups, on the whole, in terms of bullying or cyberbullying perpetration, but there were significant differences in terms of victimisation. Especially belonging to a sexual minority predicted higher levels of bullying victimisation. Belonging to a double minority (ethnic-cultural and sexual) was also related to higher levels of victimisation (but also perpetration).[175]

A systematic review **(Basilici et al., 2022)**, which looked at the link between classroom and school ethnic diversity in relation to bullying and victimisation, found different results for the U.S. and Europe.[176] The authors conclude that 'Almost half of the analyses did not find any significant association between bullying perpetration and ethnic diversity, while the other half found a positive one; few studies found a positive association between ethnic diversity and victimisation. In North America, focusing on race, ethnic diversity has shown a protective role for victimisation; in Europe, where the focus is on immigrant backgrounds, diversity may constitute a risk factor. About victimisation, ethnic diversity represents a risk factor at younger ages and turns into a more protective factor in secondary schools.' The authors recognise that multiple mediating and complicating factors might be at play here, such as how ethnicity is defined and calculated. Another possible explanation for a possible discrepancy in

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[172] Humphrey, N., and J. Hebron (2015). Bullying of Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Conditions: A 'State of the Field' Review. International Journal of Inclusive Education 19, no. 8: 845–62.
[173] Farmer, T. W., Petrin, R., Brooks, D. S., Hamm, J. V., Lambert, K., & Gravelle, M. (2012). Bullying involvement and the school adjustment of rural students with and without disabilities. Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 20(1), 19–37.
[174] Sapouna, M., de Amicis, L. & Vezzali, L. Bullying Victimization Bullying Victimization Due to Racial, Ethnic, Citizenship and/or Religious Status: A Systematic Review. Adolescent Research Review 8, 261–296 (2023).
[175] Llorent, V. J., Ortega-Ruiz, R., & Zych, I. (2016). Bullying and Cyberbullying in Minorities: Are they more vulnerable than the majority group? Frontiers in Psychology, 7, Article 1507.
[176] Basilici, M. C., Palladino, B. E., & Menesini, E. (2022). Ethnic diversity and bullying in school: A systematic review. Aggression and Violent Behavior, 65, Article 101762.

outcomes is the difference between actual rates of victimisation and reported rates (self-reports are not always accurate).[177] [178]

6.2.3. Research on who commits (cyber)bullying

Although it is clear that (especially) cyberbullying is on the rise it remains somewhat unclear who the perpetrators are. The following studies look at this issue.

An important dynamic regarding cyberbullying is the so-called '**disinhibition effect'**. This refers to the way people behave in online environments. They have the opportunity to behave more aggressively or inappropriately online than they would in face-to-face situations, largely because digital environments reduce social and psychological restraints. Given the ability to remain anonymous online individuals can also separate their online actions from their real identity, reducing accountability.

According to the results of a survey on those responsible for cyberbullying in Europe in 2018, the majority of cyberbullying stems from a classmate of the child being bullied (57% of those who indicated they had been bullied). The study looked at young people aged 16 and older.[179]

In terms of gender, a recent study examining gender differences in bullying behaviour **(Cosma et al, 2022)** in 46 countries, primarily in Europe, found that bullying others and cyberbullying others were more prevalent in males than in females in most countries. The study concluded more specifically that 'boys had higher odds of perpetrating both traditional and cyberbullying and victimisation by traditional bullying than girls. Greater gender inequality at the country level was associated with heightened gender differences in traditional bullying. In contrast, lower gender inequality was associated with larger gender differences for cyber victimisation.'[180]

The motivations to engage in bullying behaviour differ. A study in Germany **(Riebel, 2014)** used a questionnaire among middle school students and explored to what extent the following reasons were deemed relevant; instrumental, power, sadism, ideology, and revenge. Those who engaged in bullying behaviour pointed mostly to revenge as a motivating factor, while those who had been targets pointed to power and sadism, showing that the perceptions of these two groups differed.[181]

There is some evidence that, in general, the reasons for engaging in bullying among majority versus minority groups might differ. A study conducted in Norway **(Strohmeier et al, 2012)** found that immigrant youth and non-immigrant youth had differing motivations. This study showed that for immigrant youth, bullying behaviour represented the need for affiliation and acceptance more than for the majority group.[182]

[177] Lai, T .& Kao, G. (2018). Hit, Robbed and Put Down (but not Bullied): Underreporting of Bullying among Male and Minority Students. Journal of Youth and Adolescence (47), 619–635.
[178] Suler, J. (2004). The Online Disinhibition Effect. CyberPsychology & Behavior 7, no. 3: 321–26.
[179] Statista (n.d.). Persons responsible for cyberbullying in Europe in 2018. [Statistic]
[180] Cosma, A., Bjereld, Y., Elgar, F. J., Richardson, C., Bilz, L., Craig, W. M., Augustine, L., Molcho, M., Malinowska-Cieślik, M., & Walsh, S. D. (2022). Gender differences in bullying reflect societal gender inequality: A multilevel study with adolescents in 46 countries. Journal of Adolescent Health, 71(5), 601–608.
[181] Riebel, J. (2014). Why Do Students Bully? An Analysis of Motives Behind Violence in Schools. Youth and Society, 49(5), 567-587.
[182] Strohmeier, S, Fandrem, H. & Spiel, C. (2012). The need for peer acceptance and affiliation as underlying motive for aggressive behaviour and bullying others among immigrant youth living in Austria and Norway, Anales de Psicología. vol. 28, no 3 (October), 695–704.

6.2.4. Research on bystanders and on peer supporters

Most face-to face bullying is witnessed by others.[183] However, direct intervention by these witnesses is often absent.

Multiple reasons have been identified as to why young people might not intervene when they witness bullying behaviour. In an article titled 'Why Kids Choose Not to Intervene During Bullying Situations', **Whitson (2013)**[184] lists the 6 most frequent reasons given by young people for not intervening when they witness bullying. These are: (1) that someone else will most likely intervene; (2) the fear of becoming a target of the bully oneself; (3) friendship bonds with the person who engages in bullying behaviour even though the bystander might not agree with the behaviour; (4) why intervene to help somebody who is not a friend?; (5) not wanting to stand out and get involved, preferring to stay one of the crowd, and (6) not knowing what actions to take to stop the bullying behaviour.

Another reason that has been identified, explaining why young people might not intervene when (cyber)bullying or hate speech takes place relates to 'moral disengagement'. However, a meta-analysis of moral disengagement and bullying behaviour **(Killer et al., 2019)**[185], looking at the roles of perpetrator, target, bystander and peer supporter (referred to as a defender here) showed that moral disengagement did help explain the actions of those engaged in bullying behaviour (more moral disengagement) and also those who chose to be peer supporters (more moral engagement, less disengagement) but failed to explain why young people remained bystanders.

On a more social-psychological level, the so-called 'bystander effect' looks more at the social environment to explain non-intervention. The bystander effect refers to the process in which the presence of others makes it less likely that helping behaviour will take place if others who are nearby do not intervene, for instance when somebody is being bullied. A certain level of 'diffusion of responsibility' takes place in which people feel a reduced sense of responsibility due to the presence of others. The earlier mentioned fear of retaliation and even fear of being embarrassed in front of other people seems to be particularly the case in ambiguous situations. The bystander will almost always look at others for social cues as to what is happening, while observing others who do not respond. Bystanders who do little or nothing model inaction in this manner. This points to the importance of modelling, and gaining experience in, pro-social behaviour.[186]

Bystander interventions aim to promote defending behaviours among witnesses to halt the aggression or mitigate its effects. Such actions can turn bystanders into peer supporters (defenders). There are multiple ways young people can become peer supporters when (cyber)bullying or hate speech takes place: by attempting to stop the harmful behaviour (either verbally and/or physically, either as an individual or group), by asking a teacher or another adult for help, or supporting, consoling, or taking the side of the student(s) being victimised.[187]

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[183] Craig, W. M., & Pepler, D. J. (1998). Observations of bullying and victimization in the school yard. Canadian Journal of School Psychology, 13(2), 41–59. Through observations of playground behaviour, the authors found that peers were involved in some capacity in 85% of bullying incidents. However, active peer intervention occurred in only 11% of these cases.

[184] The Psychology Today website. Whitson, S. (posted October 29, 2013). Why Kids Choose Not to Intervene During Bullying Situations.

[185] Killer, B., K. Bussey, D. J. Hawes, and C. Hunt (2019). A Meta-Analysis of the Relationship between Moral Disengagement and Bullying Roles in Youth. Aggressive Behavior 45, no. 4 (July): 450–62.

[186] Ibid.

[187] See e.g., STOMP Out Bullying website. Bullying Bystanders Become Upstanders.

There has been some disagreement regarding the extent to which direct defender behaviour by school students is desirable. As mentioned above, students can fear retaliation by those engaged in bullying and such retaliation is known to occur.[188] A code of silence can take place to discourage reporting, with threats of retaliation should anyone tell.[189] Nevertheless, a **study among Finnish youth**[190], while mentioning that it is often thought that defender behaviour among peers can place the defenders at risk of becoming targets themselves, shows that generally speaking, direct defender behaviour has positive implications. The authors argue, based on their results, that defending behaviour among young people tends not to be a risk factor for becoming a target oneself.

The often-cited study by **Hawkins, Pepler, and Craig (2001)** demonstrated the importance of peers getting involved in addressing bullying behaviour.[191] The study involved a naturalistic observation of peer interventions in bullying among 58 children in Grades 1 to 6 on school playgrounds. The research revealed that peers were present in 88% of bullying incidents but intervened in only 19% of cases. When peers did step in, 57% of interventions effectively stopped the bullying.[192] Gender differences emerged, with boys more likely to intervene in male-on-male bullying and girls in female-on-female incidents. The study also highlighted how bullying often happens within social groups, making intervention complex. Another overview of peer intervention showed that witnesses of bullying intervened less than 20% of the time.[193] These studies also point to the importance of training children in effective, non-aggressive intervention strategies.

Research by **Hessel (2019)[194]** shows that, in terms of actual outcomes, the relative social status of the person intervening and the person engaging in bullying behaviour can be important. The author notes that when defender popularity exceeds bully popularity, bullies tend to retaliate less against the defender. When the defender is better liked than the bully, the defender tends to gain friends and popularity.

Teachers play a key role in promoting or deterring pro-social behaviour when (cyber)bullying or hate speech takes place. When a teacher, trainer, or school administrator consistently intervenes in bullying, it can positively influence the moral engagement of students by setting a standard for expected behaviour. It also helps improve student peer relationships, which reduces moral disengagement and helps prevent bullying. A teacher not responding or intervening – remaining a bystander - can be perceived by students as silent agreement. On the other hand, teacher intervention when bullying and other harmful acts occur serves to send a clear message to students about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.[195]

6.2.5. Research on effectiveness of programs relating to (cyber)bullying behaviour

There are hundreds of anti-bullying projects across the EU and beyond. Some programs focus on prevention while others focus more on interventions. Many have components

[188] Hessel, K. 2019. Who Should Defend Victims of Bullying? The Effects of Relative Status on Defender and Victim Outcomes.
[189] Safe@School. (n.d.).Peers and Bullying: Tattling vs Telling.
[190] Malamut. S.T. et al (2023) Does defending victimized peers put youth at risk of being victimized? Child Development, 94(2), 380–394.
[191] Hawkins, D. L., Pepler, D. J., & Craig, W. M. (2001). Naturalistic observations of peer interventions in bullying. Social Development, 10(4), 512–527.
[192] Of course, this means that 43% did not stop. It is unclear what factors made a significant difference in outcomes.
[193] Nickerson, A.B et al. (2014). Measurement of the bystander intervention model for bullying and sexual harassment. Journal of Adolescence, 37, 391–400.
[194] Ibid.
[195] StopBullying.gov. (n.d.). Preventing Bullying Through Moral Engagement.

of both. Some seem to be more effective than others, depending on a variety of factors such as the age targeted, socio-cultural context, type of approach (e.g., involving parents or not, limited versus whole-school approach, support for teachers in implementing programs). However, robust evidence on the effectiveness of the individual programmes is scarce, and evaluations often fail to assess the causality between interventions and outcomes. Nevertheless, the following section brings together available research data on what makes certain approaches more effective than others.

In general terms, regarding effectiveness, a systematic literature review from 2017[196], in **Australia**, into what kinds of anti-bullying programs are effective, titled 'Anti-bullying interventions in schools – what works?' found that anti-bullying programs, in general, tend to reduce bullying behaviours by an average of 20 – 23 percent. This literature review noted that several clear themes emerged from the research. The evidence, according to the study, indicated that successful anti-bullying interventions: (a) take a holistic, whole-school approach; (b) include educational content that supports students to develop social and emotional competencies, and learn appropriate ways to respond to bullying behaviours; (c) provide support and professional development to teachers and other school staff on how best to maintain a positive school climate; and (d) ensure systematic program implementation and evaluation.

A meta-analysis from 2019[197] **(Gaffney, Ttofi, & Farrington, 2019),** relating to the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs in schools showed that the presence of a number of intervention components (e.g., whole-school approach, anti-bullying policies, classroom rules, information for parents, informal peer involvement), and work with victims, influenced school-bullying perpetration outcomes. The presence of informal peer involvement and information for parents were associated with school-bullying victimisation outcomes. This systematic review and meta-analysis built on an earlier meta-analysis from 2011 (Ttofi and Farrington, 2011), which revealed that '… overall, school-based anti-bullying programs are effective: on average, bullying decreased by 20–23% and victimisation decreased by 17–20%. Program elements and intervention components that were associated with a decrease in bullying and victimisation were more intensive programs, programs that included parent meetings, firm disciplinary methods, and improved playground supervision.'

A meta-analysis of 13 studies from 2016 **(Lee, Kim and Kim, 2015)** led to the conclusion that effective school-based anti-bullying programs should include training in emotional control, peer counselling, and the establishment of a school policy on bullying.[198] The most effective anti-bullying interventions, according to this review are the ones that take a holistic, whole-school and whole-community approach, which includes promoting awareness of anti-bullying interventions; include educational content in the classroom that allows students to develop social and emotional competencies, and to learn appropriate ways to respond to bullying – both as a student who experiences bullying and as a bystander. Additional conditions for interventions to be effective are providing support and sustainable professional development for school staff on how best to enhance understanding, skills and self-efficacy to address and prevent bullying behaviours and it is also necessary that systematic implementation and evaluation of the programme is ensured.

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[196] Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (2017). Anti-bullying interventions in schools- what works? New South Wales Department of Education. Australia.
[197] Gaffney, H., M. M. Ttofi, and D. P. Farrington (2021). What Works in Anti-Bullying Programs? Analysis of Effective Intervention Components. Journal of School Psychology 85 (April): 37–56.
[198] Lee S, Kim CJ, Kim DH. A meta-analysis of the effect of school-based anti-bullying programs. J Child Health Care. 2015 Jun;19(2):136-53.

Noteworthy is that bullying interventions do not impact all young people in the same way. For instance, an analysis of the KiVa program **(Garandeau, Lee, & Salmivalli, 2013)** showed that such programs might have a disparate impact on 'popular versus less popular bullies'. The study revealed that 'KiVa participation resulted in 'lower rates of bullying (indicated by fewer peer nominations) after one year for bullies with low and medium popularity. However, there was no significant effect for those high in popularity, suggesting that popular bullies are less responsive to anti-bullying interventions than less popular bullies.'[199] It is further important to note that not all findings point in the same direction.

Research on school climate and (cyber)bullying

School climate has been identified as a predictive factor in the prevalence of bullying, including cyberbullying, as well as the ability of schools to address this challenge. (Cyber)bullying has been identified as a factor that negatively impacts school climate by creating an environment of fear, mistrust, and disengagement among students and staff. The following studies look more closely at this issue.

A meta-analysis in **2025 (Li et al.),** examining the relationship between school climate and cyberbullying victimisation found that a negative school climate is associated with the prevalence of cyberbullying and that this applies more to the middle school years than the high school years.[200]

Bokhove et al. (2022) examined the literature on the influence of school climate on bullying. They conclude that 'school and classroom climate and culture may influence the prevalence of bullying behaviours, as it may influence the attitudes of bystanders towards bullying, and their willingness to intervene in the bullying situation, whether as a student or a teacher.' The authors also refer to a 2010 meta-analysis, suggesting that bullying is more prevalent in schools with a negative school climate. They quote a number of studies that show, for instance, that (1) in classrooms in which teachers were reported as directly intervening in bullying situations, less bullying was also reported, while the inverse was the case when class goals were strongly oriented towards attainment; (2) positive teacher–student relationships, policies for behaviour outside the classroom, partnerships, and evaluation of the school learning environment were significantly related to lower levels of bullying; (3) a significant positive relationship between lower levels of bullying and policies on behaviour, including specific policies on bullying.[201]

Carretero et al. (2021) examined the impact of school climate on bullying by having students complete questionnaires gauging their opinions. They note that 'some of the most studied dimensions of school climate have been: the support that students perceive from their teachers, the clarity of the rules concerning bullying in schools, the communication channels enabled for students to report their problems, the student's perception of the acceptance of diversity within the people who live together in the schools, and the quality of the relationships between the students and their feeling of belonging to the school. Positive school climate has been associated with many adaptive consequences such as students' self-esteem, self-concept, physical health, mental health, effort, and academic achievement. Some characteristics of school climate such as supportive peer-peer and student-teacher relationships, connectedness and commitment to the school, sense of belonging in school, clear limits and consequences

[199] Garandeau, C. F., I. H. Lee, and C. Salmivalli (2013). Differential Effects of the KiVa Anti-Bullying Program on Popular and Unpopular Bullies. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology 35, no. 1: 44–55.
[200] Li, S., et al. (2025). School Climate and Cyberbullying Victimization: A Meta-Analysis. Children and Youth Services Review, 169, Article 108064.
[201] T Bokhove, C., Muijs, D., & Downey, C. (2022). The influence of school climate and achievement on bullying: Comparative evidence from international large-scale assessment data. Educational Research, 64(1), 18–40.

for unacceptable behaviour and normative beliefs concerning bullying, in the entire school have been related to a decrease in bullying.'[202]

Research on whole-school approach and (cyber)bullying

One area in which results point in different directions relates to whole-school approaches. **Wurf (2021)** summarised the evidence regarding whole-school approaches to preventing and managing bullying in schools.[203] He concludes that 'four decades of research have demonstrated that whole-school anti-bullying programs are effective in reducing school bullying and the negative health and well-being outcomes associated with victimisation. Effective whole-school programs are long-lasting and intensive. They incorporate multilevel strategies to address bullying at the individual student level, as well as preventative strategies targeted at the teacher/classroom level, and at the broad level of parents/school community. Whole-school anti-bullying interventions are underpinned by strong school policies that ensure bullying incidents are managed by restorative approaches and proportional, authoritative disciplinary consequences.

In terms of general anti- (cyber)bullying approaches, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP), created by the renowned psychologist Dan Olweus, has been implemented in more than a dozen countries, perhaps most extensively in Norway and the USA. It is a comprehensive whole-school approach that addresses bullying in schools with school-wide, classroom, individual, and community components, and has been found to reduce bullying among students, improve the social climate of classrooms, and reduce related antisocial behaviours, such as vandalism and truancy.[204]

Meta-analyses have highlighted that the fair, consistent enforcement of school rules and use of sanctions are key to school safety. However, earlier research by **Richard et al. (2012)** in France[205] also examined the impact of whole-school approaches to combat bullying. The authors came to different conclusions. They noted that whole-school approaches to bullying prevention operate on the assumption that bullying is a systemic problem, and therefore programs to reduce bullying need to be directed at the entire school context (and not just at individual bullies and victims). They conclude that 'unfortunately, recent meta-analyses that have looked at various bullying programs from many countries have revealed that whole-school interventions designed to combat bullying have had limited success in reducing bullying.' Looking closer at the data, they note that school climate variables such as school security and the quality of student-teacher relationships do have a positive impact. These somewhat contradictory findings point to the fact that it is important to examine what is meant by a whole-school approach and what aspects predict the level of success in addressing bullying.

Research on social emotional education and (cyber)bullying

Socio-emotional learning (SEL), as it relates to (cyber)bullying, has been shown to be a useful tool to address this issue. Various studies[206] have shown that SEL can help protect students from becoming targets of bullying and lower the risk of someone bullying others. SEL improves self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. One of the reasons

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[202] Consoli, C., Pace, U., Gatti, D., & Musso, P. (2021). School Climate, Moral Disengagement and, Empathy as Predictors of Bullying in Adolescents. Frontiers in Psychology, 12, Article 656775.

[203] Wurf, G. (2021). A whole school approach to preventing and managing bullying. In Building better schools with evidence-based policy (1st ed., p. 6). Routledge.

[204] Olweus Bullying Prevention Program website. Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.

[205] Richard, J. F., Schneider, B. H., & Mallet, P. (2012). Revisiting the whole-school approach to bullying: Really looking at the whole school. School Psychology International, 33(3), 263–284.

[206] For a short overview, see StopBullying.gov. website. Social Emotional Learning and Bullying Prevention.

for its effectiveness is that much SEL focuses on constructs such as personal responsibility, empathy, friendship skills, conflict resolution skills, and self-control.[207]

A recent meta-analysis **(Imuta et al., 2022)**[208] examined 128 studies involving children between 3 and 18 years of age, investigating how various aspects of social–emotional intelligence relate to different bullying roles. The authors highlight the importance of empathy development, noting that those who bully tend to lack sufficient empathy, and conclude that 'a successful antibullying program may entail a combination of motivating children and adolescents with bullying tendencies to care about others' feelings, and empowering their classmates to become strong perspective-takers who can stand up for those in need of help…'children and adolescents who defend the victims of bullying have both insights into other people's perspectives and empathy toward others in need.'

Another meta-analysis **(Zhang and Chen, 2023),**[209] looking at 24 studies, examined the link between emotional intelligence and school bullying. Their analysis showed that improving students' emotional intelligence could be a crucial strategy to lower the students' risk of being bullied in school and online. The results point out that such approaches seem to be more effective among male students.

Research on diversity education and (cyber)bullying

Studies in both North America and Europe have found that DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) initiatives operate as an antidote to (cyber)bullying and reduce its prevalence. The relationship between bullying and intercultural education (usually referred to as multicultural education in North America) is connected to how education systems address diversity, inclusivity, and mutual understanding among students from different cultural backgrounds. Intercultural education promotes respect and dialogue across students from different cultures, which can serve as a protective factor against (cyber)bullying, especially when motivated by cultural, ethnic, or racial differences.[210] The findings of research examining 2018 PISA data **(Basarkod, 2024)**[211] suggests that when students are taught by teachers with positive intercultural attitudes, it can create a climate in which students feel safe and bullying behaviours are discouraged.

A study in the U.S. **(Eisenberg et al., 2022)** examined to what extent schools that offer diversity education activities have lower rates of bias-based bullying among students compared to schools that do not offer these activities. The authors conclude that 'students attending schools that offer a wider variety of diversity education opportunities had significantly lower odds of bullying about race, ethnicity, or national origin; among boys of colour, about sexual orientation for gay, bisexual and questioning boys; and about disability for boys with a physical health problem. Attending a school with more types of diversity education activities may protect vulnerable students against specific types of bias-based bullying and advance health equity.'[212]

[207] See, e.g., Nickerson, A., S. Fredrick, K. Allen, and L. Jenkins (2019). Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Practices in Schools: Effects on Perceptions of Bullying Victimization. Journal of School Psychology 73: 74–88

[208] Imuta, K., S. Song, J. D. Henry, T. Ruffman, C. Peterson, and V. Slaughter (2022). A Meta-Analytic Review on the Social–Emotional Intelligence Correlates of the Six Bullying Roles: Bullies, Followers, Victims, Bully-Victims, Defenders, and Outsiders. Psychological Bulletin 148 (3–4): 199–226.

[209] Zhang, Y., and J. K. Chen (2023). Emotional Intelligence and School Bullying Victimization in Children and Youth Students: A Meta-Analysis. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 20, no. 6: 4746.

[210] UNESCO (2006). UNESCO guidelines on intercultural education (Document code: ED.2006/WS/59).

[211] Basarkod, G., et al. (2024). Do Intercultural Education and Attitudes Promote Student Wellbeing and Social Outcomes? An Examination across PISA Countries. Learning and Instruction, 91.

[212] Eisenberg, M. E., Gower, A. L., Brown, C., Nam, Y.-S., & Ramirez, M. R. (2021). School-Based Diversity Education Activities and Bias-Based Bullying Among Secondary School Students. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 37(17-18).

Research on digital citizenship education and cyberbullying

Similarly, digital citizenship education, especially its components focusing on media and information literacy, has been shown to be a useful tool to combat cyberbullying. Digital literacy empowers individuals in the digital realm, equipping them with the necessary skills to understand appropriate online behaviour and ethical guidelines. This enables them to better recognise what constitutes cyberbullying and comprehend the potential consequences of their actions. It helps young people identify what is disinformation and what might constitute a deepfake or manipulated information that can be used in cyberbullying.[213]

Punishment versus reconciliation

Both punitive and restorative justice (RJ) approaches have been used to address (cyber)bullying, but they differ in their goals, methods, and long-term effects. Punitive models tend to focus on identifying the perpetrators of bullying incidents and then taking disciplinary measures such as detention, suspension, or expulsion. Generally, bullies are personally held accountable for their actions by authority figures such as teachers and school staff. Measures such as so-called zero-tolerance policies[214] fit well in this approach. Zero tolerance approaches have been used, as have other more punitive models, for decades in the U.S. and have been extensively evaluated. A key aim of punitive models is for punishment to serve as a deterrent and to discourage/deter those who exhibit bullying behaviour from continuing their behaviour. Those engaging in bullying behaviour (and their friends, family and others) see that bullying behaviour has negative consequences. Nevertheless, the results of multiple studies point to the relative ineffectiveness of punitive approaches, in general, and zero tolerance approaches in particular. Punitive approaches have been found to insufficiently address the root causes of bullying, sometimes unintentionally aggravating mental health concerns among those engaging in bullying behaviour, only having a short-term impact on the school environment and lacking a reconciliation component.[215]

In addition to early intervention, especially restorative justice (RJ) approaches have been put forward as an alternative to punishment to deal with bullying.[216] Key characteristics of restorative justice approaches are: (1) dialogue and mediation – those exhibiting bullying behaviour and their targets engage in structured conversations to address harm; (2) the bully is expected to acknowledge wrongdoing and works to repair damage rather than just facing punishment; (3) teachers, peers, and sometimes parents participate in conflict resolution; (4) the victim's emotional needs and safety are prioritised. RJ interventions tend to embrace values of empathy, respect, honesty, acceptance, and accountability among participants and those in the school community[217]. Such practices prioritise social engagement over social control.[218] A systematic literature review **(Lodi et. al, 2021)** showed that RJ practices in schools: 'can improve the school climate, discipline, positive conflict management through actions that aim at preventing suspensions, exclusions, conflicts, and misbehaviours (e.g., bullying). RJ practices promote positive relationships between peers and between

[213] Cyberbullying Research centre website. How Media Literacy Can Prevent Online Harm
[214] Borgward, K., and H. Theis's (2013). Bullying the Bully: Why Zero-Tolerance Policies Get a Failing Grade. Social Influence 8, no. 2–3: 149–60.
[215] Skiba, R. J., & Peterson, R. L. (2000). School discipline at a crossroads: From zero tolerance to early response. Exceptional Children, 66(3), 335–346.
[216] Reineke, R. P. (2019). A Restorative Approach to Address Cyber Bullying. In Rethinking Teacher Education for the 21st Century: Trends, Challenges and New Directions, edited by M. Kowalczuk-Walędziak, A. Korzeniecka-Bondar, W. Danilewicz, and G. Lauwers, 340–354. Leverkusen: Verlag Barbara Budrich.
[217] European School Education Platform website. Restorative Practices for Conflict Resolution in Schools.
[218] Morrison, B. & Vaandering, D. (2012). Restorative Justice: Pedagogy, Praxis, and Discipline. Journal of School Violence, 11(2), 138-155.

students and teachers, as well as to prosocial behaviours through the development of social and emotional skills.[219]

The **Anti-Bullying Alliance in the UK** points to several key studies on combating bullying looking at restorative practices as a way of responding to bullying.[220] Studies included: (1) a report published by the Department for Education (UK), which gave whole-school restorative approaches the highest rating of effectiveness at preventing bullying, with a survey of schools showing 97% rated restorative approaches as effective. This is because such approaches seek to increase the opportunities for dialogue at every level; (2) Goldsmith's University research (2010) into anti-bullying strategies, which listed the conditions required to develop effective restorative practice in schools. These include: (a) all-staff training; (b) the embedding of restorative practices, with students making restorative practices transparent in policies and procedures; (c) having direct sanctions as a back-up if the restorative process fails.

RJ practices have shown to be most effective when school staff are willing to reflect on their daily interactions in school and review their values. They are also more effective when they involve active learning for all children and for staff across the school. There needs to be visible commitment, enthusiasm and modelling by the school management team and significant staff development is also needed.[221]

6.2.6. Research on policies and bullying

There is limited research on the impact of national policies on the prevalence of bullying, including cyberbullying. There is more research on the impact of specific school policies. The research below looks at both levels.

Bokhove et al. (2022) looked at the influence of school climate and achievement on bullying.[222] The authors also looked at the impact of country and school policies. They concluded that 'we find little evidence of a relation between country policies and levels of bullying, though there are differences in the extent to which school and pupil factors are related to bullying.' The findings indicate that 'one size fits all' school policies might not be the best course of action, and individual support might be a more fruitful avenue.' The authors do not explain the finding that the prevalence of bullying appeared to be unrelated to differences in country policies addressing bullying.

A U.S. study **(Nikolaou, 2017)** looked at whether anti-bullying policies deterred in-school bullying victimisation[223], essentially the effectiveness of bullying laws on decreasing the share of students who experience in-school bullying victimisation. The results showed, according to the authors, clear evidence that anti-bullying legislation has an impact. For instance, schools in U.S. states with anti-bullying laws reported fewer school bullying incidents (up to 8.4%) compared to schools in states without anti-bullying laws. These effects were much stronger in states where there was a specific clause in the law defining the term bullying. The authors also point to research that has shown that, in the United States at least, most bullying takes place at the middle school level.

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[219] Lodi, E., L. Perrella, G. L. Lepri, M. L. Scarpa, and P. Patrizi (2021). Use of Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices at School: A Systematic Literature Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 19, no. 1: 96.

[220] Anti-Bullying Alliance website. What Is Restorative Practice?

[221] McCluskey, G., G. Lloyd, J. Kane, J. Riddell, and E. Weedon (2008). Can Restorative Practices in Schools Make a Difference? Educational Review 60, no. 4: 405–17.

[222] Bokhove, C., Muijs, D., & Downey, C. (2022). The influence of school climate and achievement on bullying: Comparative evidence from international large-scale assessment data. Educational Research, 64(1), 18–40.

[223] Huang, F. L., & Cornell, D. G. (2017). Do Anti-Bullying Policies Deter In-School Bullying Victimization?. International Review of Law and Economics, 50, 1–6.

In a systematic review from the USA relating to the effectiveness of (mostly school) policy interventions in addressing bullying behaviour, **Hall (2018)[224]** notes that policy intervention strategies have included: 'suspending and expelling bullies, training teachers on intervening, teaching empathy and respect to students through classroom lessons, maintaining constant adult supervision throughout school settings, collaborating with parents about student behaviour, and enacting school-wide policies about bullying. The author concludes that despite the plethora of school bullying policies,' several studies show that the presence or quality of policies is associated with lower rates of bullying among students but that other studies found no such associations between policy presence or quality and reductions in bullying'. Especially effective according to this author, have been interventions that support LGBTIQ youth.

Also at the school level, a content analysis of 200 anti-bullying school policies across the UK looked at polices from 2008 to 2022 **(Kidwai & Smith, 2023)**. The research pointed to a noticeable increase in mentions of cyberbullying and many types of bias-based bullying.[225] The conclusions of the study were that 'despite good coverage in some areas, fewer than 25% of policies mentioned responsibilities of other school staff, suggested how to help the pupil(s) doing the bullying to change their behaviour, gave advice to parents about bullying, or discussed specific powers to deal with cyberbullying and out-of-school bullying. Only one-third of school policies mentioned adult/teacher-pupil bullying or vice versa. For 131 schools, correlations of self-report scores on bullying victimisation and perpetration, with the overall policy score, were negative but very small. Primary school policies were more likely to include criteria references to consultation with parents, the role of school governors and the role of playground supervisors. Secondary school policies were more likely to include references to homophobic bullying, bullying outside school, what victims of bullying should do, legal documents and standards and those who deal with out-of-school bullying'.

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[224] Hall, W. (2017). The Effectiveness of Policy Interventions for School Bullying: A Systematic Review. Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research 8, no. 1: 45–69.
[225] Kidwai, I., & Smith, P. K. (2023). A Content Analysis of School Anti-bullying Policies in England: Signs of Progress. Educational Psychology in Practice, 40(1), 1–16.

7. Appendix 2: Inspiring Initiatives Relating to Confronting Hate in and through Education

The following inspiring initiatives and projects were identified through two WG meetings, a webinar and a survey sent to WG members at in 2024, along with a Peer Learning Activity event in 2025.

Addressing hate speech examples

The establishment of the **Strategic Council for the Prevention of Hate Speech**[226] in 2023 represented an important effort in **Slovenia** to prevent and counter hate speech. It was initiated by the Prime Minister and endorsed by the Ministry of Education. The Council created recommendations for preventing hate speech and, more broadly, addressed psychological, physical, and peer violence. This Council aims to integrate its activities with those of other stakeholders working to combat various forms of hate speech, including online violence. The goal is to consolidate efforts, by providing clear guidelines and tools. The Ministry informs schools in advance about mitigation and prevention strategies, focusing on both hate speech and online violence. It has also developed step-by-step manuals to facilitate cooperation with other institutions like the police and social services. Preventive measures in Slovenia include using public figures to promote ethical behaviour and mindfulness, encouraging responsibility from multiple perspectives, and informing parents in advance. Additionally, podcasts are being created, and an online platform is being maintained to provide training and resources for schools.

In **Sweden**, the Education Act[227] guides how schools deal with bullying and harassment. The Act makes it clear that all children and students have the right to feel safe and be treated with respect in the school environment. It emphasises the importance of addressing bullying, reflecting the country's commitment to creating a safe educational environment. Schools are required to report all incidents of bullying to the school board, without the need for evidence. Principals are required to investigate the reported incidents. These incidents include cyberbullying and hate speech, which schools must address even if they occur outside school hours. The **Swedish Child and School Student Representative** (BEO) is an institution that children can contact to report hate speech. The BEO determines whether an incident constitutes discrimination or hate speech, but schools retain the responsibility for addressing such incidents. Failure to address hate speech appropriately can lead to financial repercussions and damage claims.

Speak for Unity[228] is an Erasmus+ project that will run from 2025 through 2027. The project partners come from Ireland, Cyprus, Austria, Italy, and France. The overall objective of this project is to bridge intercultural, intergenerational, and social divides by promoting mutual respect and acceptance between national and migrant youth. The project highlights the impact of hate speech in communities and encourages young people to foster an inclusive and welcoming society. In terms of methodology, the project builds the capacity of youths to address and mitigate hate speech.

Selma Hacking Hate[229] was co-funded by the EU Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020) and targeted young people aged 11-16, primarily in schools, but also in out-of-school communities that impact their well-being. Project partners

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[226] The Slovenian government website. Prime Minister's Office's launch of the Strategic Council for the Prevention of Hate Speech. [News].
[227] Swedish Education Act SFS no: 2010:800: Skollag.
[228] Speak for Unity webiste. Addressing hate speech through non-formal education.
[229] Hacking Hate website.

included European Schoolnet and various organisations from Greece, UK, Germany and Denmark. The project built on a social and emotional learning approach and aimed to empower young people to become agents of change. It helped them to better understand the phenomenon of online hate; and it provided them with tools and strategies to take action and make a difference. Activities included empirical research, training and counselling, Education Task Force meetings for EU policymakers, Ministries of Education and IT companies, and a Toolkit. The project's Toolkit is very action oriented and contains nine themes, including: *'what's my role and what can I do'; 'how can I effect change in my community'; and 'changing the world'*.

Act Against Hate[230] was an Erasmus+ non-formal education project, that included partners from Greece, Spain, Italy, Croatia, Switzerland, Belgium, Lithuania, and North Macedonia, and ran from 2022- 2024. The main goal was to prepare and strengthen youth workers in the fight against hate speech, both in person and in online environments. The specific objectives of the project, according to the website, were to: (1) encourage youth workers to take action against hate speech and provide methods to do so; (2) develop youth workers' skills in preventing and combating hate speech, as well as in educating for equality and acceptance; (3) equip youth workers with non-formal educational tools to promote equality; (4) map the current situation of hate speech in Europe and identify trends; (5) promote social inclusion, active citizenship, and democracy - especially among disadvantaged groups; (6) promote intercultural dialogue; and (7) build capacity for participating organisations in the areas of hate speech and sensitivity training.

The project **Educational Inclusion into diversity, facing early school leaving: Innovative methodologies to support ethnic minority students and stop hate speech in Europe**[231] builds on the knowledge and realities experienced by secondary school students who are victims of harassment and hate speech. This Erasmus+ co-funded project ran from 2020 through 2022. The partners came from France, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain. The aim of the project, with a strong focus on Roma, was to provide teachers with the necessary tools to detect hate speech and harassment in their classrooms, work effectively with their students, and promote inclusion.

HateLess. **Together against Hatred**[232] is a German program that focuses on building cohesion within a class or school with a special focus on young teenagers (7th-8th grade). Through five connected modules, students learn what makes hate speech dangerous, its origins, the harm it causes, and how they can use the most appropriate strategy to free their school from hatred and hate speech. Students also learn to distinguish between hate speech, verbal abuse, and bullying. A variety of examples help them understand how systematic attacks in words, images, and videos encourage people to violate someone's dignity often because they belong to a disadvantaged background group, such as refugees or people with disabilities. The concept of moral courage to confront hate speech is also a key element of the programme.

SMASH[233] is an Erasmus+ project that running from 2024 to 2026. The project aims to empower youth with migrant backgrounds and youth workers through the SMASH method, which integrates newspaper theatre, critical incident methodology, process work, the DigComp framework, and the UN guide against online hate speech. More broadly, the project focuses on contributing to the creation of a more inclusive online environment for minority groups.

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[230] Act Against Hate website.
[231] Education Against Hate website.
[232] Preempting Hate Speech website.
[233] SMASH – Journalistic theatre for Social Media Action against Online Hate Speech.

Love Storm[234] was an EU co-funded platform, that ran until 2020. The project was initiated in Germany by INACH (International Network Against Cyberhate) and was '*designed to help citizens build skills and resilience in fighting online hate speech through roleplays that teach soft skills, mediation, and non-violent communication in a safe and controlled environment.*' It seeks to address hate speech through education, awareness, and the use of practical tools. The roleplay-based approach allows people to experience realistic scenarios and practice their skills safely and effectively. Participants take on the roles of haters, targets or (intervening) audience and try out different strategies to counter hate speech. The goal is to help people develop the skills needed to handle difficult conversations and promote empathy and understanding.

Be Kind[235] is an initiative of ALL DIGITAL[236] and part of the Erasmus+ co-funded project Amelie (I and II) which focuses on media literacy and counteracting online hate speech. AMeLie stands for 'Advanced Media Literacy to Counter Online Hate Speech'. The project addresses online hate speech with a focus on training teachers and representatives of school communities in specific methodology for tackling it. The *Be Kind* consortium is led by EGinA and brings together six partners from five countries: Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Romania.

The **REACT**[237] project **- Respect and Equality: Acting and Communicating Together** was a joint partnership funded by the EU, involving partners from the UK, France, Spain, Germany and Italy. The project, which ended in 2019, aimed to counter hate speech, hate crimes and other forms of intolerance by improving media literacy among educators and young people, and by developing a counter-narrative campaign. The project also involved creating a system of best practices for implementing training activities designed to promote media literacy among young people. An educational toolkit[238] aimed at younger audiences and dedicated to educational activities was published in 2019.

The Digital Academy for Parents (ADP)[239] in Portugal, which started in 2020, is an initiative of E-REDES in partnership with the Directorate-General for Education (DGE). The program offers parents and guardians of children in elementary and secondary education the opportunity to participate in training sessions that promote digital skills. Among other objectives, the programme encourages the safe use of the Internet, the digital empowerment and the development of critical, thoughtful, and responsible attitudes toward digital technologies. Children and young volunteers are involved in organising these sessions, which cover topics such as digital security and citizenship, as well as addressing online hate speech.

The Adult Education Centre VHS (Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband) in Germany co-developed a toolkit with various modules titled *Responding to Hate Speech and Fake News.*[240] The toolkit is designed specifically for the adult education centre context features a curriculum alongside concrete teaching ideas. The ongoing initiative has also produced materials addressing 'war and media', focusing on disinformation and war propaganda.

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[234] About Love-Storm website.
[235] Be Kind websie.
[236] All Digital website.
[237] React website.
[238] React project - Educational Toolkit.
[239] The Digital Academy for Parents website.
[240] The Adult Education Centre VHS website. Toolkit Political Media Education for Young People. Responding to Hate Speech and Fake News.

Addressing (cyber)bullying examples

In **France**, the **anti-bullying Law** No. 2022-299[241] has introduced changes to the French Code of Education, expanding the scope of prevention and response to bullying. The Law adopts a broad definition of bullying, including acts committed on the fringes of school or university life and by staff. School bullying and related penalties are now part of the French penal code, with sentences of up to ten years in prison and fines of 150 000 EUR in case of suicide or attempted suicide of the victim. Educational institutions are required to take appropriate measures to prevent, detect and deal with cases of bullying, including guidelines, the referral of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders to support services and associations, and yearly awareness-raising activities for students and parents. These measures complement **pHARe,**[242] an experimental program to prevent and fight against bullying.

In September 2024, the **Portuguese government** formed a task force to address and prevent bullying in schools.[243] Also, under the Portuguese Penal Code, cyberbullying can be classified as a crime or a combination of crimes. In addition, Law No. 51/2012 established the Student's Statute and School Ethics, criminalising school violence.

In **Greece**, the **Law 5063/2023, titled 'Living Harmoniously Together - Breaking the Silence'** was introduced to prevent and address violence and bullying in educational settings.[244] The law aims to create a safer, supportive school environment, by focusing on preventing and managing physical, verbal, psychological violence, and (cyber)bullying. It establishes guidelines and protocols for identifying, reporting, and handling bullying incidents. The law mandates the integration of anti-bullying education into curricula, involving students, teachers, and parents, and requires ongoing training for school staff on bullying management and fostering a positive climate. School Safety Committees (comprising teachers, students, and parents) oversee bullying issues, supported by safe reporting channels and counselling services. Emphasising restorative practices over punishment, the law encourages collaboration with external agencies for severe cases.

In 2023, **Slovakia** began implementing a national project to address bullying in schools and school facilities, 'Systemic support of mental health and prevention among children, pupils, and students through the system of counselling and prevention'[245]. The project was developed by the Ministry of Education, Research, Development, and Youth of the Slovak Republic. The official document outlines three main objectives, namely: (1) education of pedagogical and professional staff working in education; (2) strengthening cooperation with state administration bodies; and (3) creating measures to eliminate future risks, including special attention to crisis management for school principals.

In **Belgium**, the **Pact for Excellence in Education**[246] of the French Community includes improving well-being and the school climate among its objectives. Well-being is addressed systemically through a structural policy aimed at enhancing school climate and prevent bullying, including its online dimension. This policy led to the creation of an **Observatory of School Climate**[247], which monitors bullying and provides schools with tools and professional support. Additionally, a framework programme - personalised for

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[241] French LAW No. 2022-299 of March 2, 2022, aimed at combating school bullying. Loi contre le harcèlement scolaire.

[242] French Ministry of Education website (2023).

[243] Murphy, C. M. (2024). Briefing - Cyberbullying among young people: Laws and policies in selected Member States. European Parliamentary Research Service. See also: The Portugal News article Government creating task force to combat school bullying.

[244] Greece - Stop Bullying platform.

[245] European Commission. Eurydice website. Slovakia: National Reforms in School Education.

[246] Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles website. Pacte pour un Enseignement d'excellence.

[247] Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles website. Le climat et le bien-être à l'école.

each school on a voluntary basis - has also been established to help schools become more self-sufficient in addressing bullying.

In **Ireland**, the **Cineáltas Action Plan**[248] aims to provide a comprehensive approach to preventing and addressing bullying. The Action Plan emphasises community involvement and focuses on four key areas of well-being: culture and environment; curriculum (teaching and learning); policy and planning; and relationships and partnerships. Anti-bullying procedures for primary and post-primary schools have been updated to take account of gender identity bullying, cyberbullying, racist bullying, sexist bullying, and sexual harassment. The procedures provide guidance on when a bullying incident becomes a Child Protection concern, and ensure appropriate oversight at the school level. Related publications are designed in child-friendly language to educate schools and parents without labelling students. All schools have been required to implement the Cineáltas procedures. Developed by DCU, the **Anti-Bullying Centre FUSE**[249] in Ireland is a research-based anti-bullying and online safety programme focused on primary and post-primary schools. The goal of the programme is to connect all stakeholders in the school community and promote collaboration in order to confront bullying and promote online safety (whole-education approach).

EAN,[250] the European Anti-Bullying Network, was created in 2014 as part of the project 'European Anti-bullying Network, EAN', funded by the EU. EAN was conceived as an umbrella organisation, aiming to provide members with a platform and framework to collaborate, exchange good practices and materials, and develop common actions for various stakeholders: children who suffer from bullying, teachers and educators, parents, as well as children who engage in bullying behaviour, but may not be aware of its serious consequences. As of 2025, it comprises 20 members from 13 countries.

KiVa[251] is a state-of-the-art anti-bullying program developed at the University of Turku, Finland, with funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture. The program is evidence-based and has been implemented in dozens of countries worldwide. It is built on 3 core elements: prevention, intervention and monitoring. KiVa offers a wide range of concrete tools and materials for schools to confront bullying including presentation graphics and ready-made lesson plans. Widely evaluated, the program has been shown to effectively reduce bullying behaviour by increasing empathy, self-efficacy, and peer support among students.

The **KID_ACTIONS** EU project,[252] funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, ran from 2022 to 2024. It aimed to address cyberbullying among children and adolescents through interactive education and gamification within formal and non-formal learning settings across the EU. Using an evidence-based approach, the programme supported teachers, educators, and youth workers, by focusing on the risks and consequences of cyberbullying. It promoted dialogue among education stakeholders to prevent and counter cyberbullying through education. The key output was a Digital Education Platform, which includes an advanced social media monitoring system. The project emphasised a whole-community strategy for the prevention, intervention and treatment of cyberbullying-related risks.

The **Classrooms against Bullying** project,[253] developed by the organisation Solidarity Now with the support of the Council of Europe's Wergeland Centre, was implemented in Greece from 2023 to 2024. The focus of the project was on the prevention of school violence, based on cultivating an atmosphere of inclusion and democratic citizenship

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[248] Ibid.
[249] Dublin City University Anti-Bullying Centre. FUSE - Anti-Bullying & Online Safety Programme.
[250] European Antibullying Network website.
[251] The Internationl KiVa Antibullying Program website.
[252] Kid Actions website.
[253] The European Wergeland Centre (EWC) website. Greece - Classrooms Against Bullying.

values in children, encouraging a zero-tolerance attitude towards bullying and violence. Adopting a whole-school approach, the project aimed to help young people develop democratic competences.

The **ABC - European Anti-Bullying Certification** project[254] was an Erasmus + project that aimed at developing a certification process to help schools create effective antibullying policies. The project, which ended in 2020, involved reviewing written anti-bullying procedures, conducting social analyses, and performing needs assessments. A key goal of the certification process was to promote ownership of the process. The project included staff and student training, as well as a guide outlining effective measures to improve the learning environment and foster a positive school climate. Another focus was on learning of non-violent problem-solving skills and methods. Evaluation showed that the project had a positive impact, although school management sometimes struggled to accept criticism from students and staff during self-evaluation regarding the process and outcomes.

Stop Cyberbullying[255] was an Erasmus+ project that involved partners from Cyprus, Austria, Slovenia, and Slovakia. As part of the strategic partnership 'Initiatives against Cyberbullying and Hate in Social Media', the project ran from 2019 to 2021. Its main aim was to identify and collect effective strategies and practices to address cyberbullying and to provide an effective and integrated approach to prevention. Specifically, the project aimed to: (1) raise awareness about cyberbullying among young people and educators; (2) support them in reacting against online discrimination, hostility and violence; (3) build skill among children and juveniles to protect themselves against bullying and victimisation; (4) reduce racism and xenophobia among young people; and (5) enhance school anti–bullying strategies by incorporating 'user' led action research to identify current needs and solutions. A final output of the project was the creation of the catalogue of best practices focused on preventing and addressing both cyberbullying and hate speech.[256]

Be a buddy, not a bully[257] was an Erasmus+ project that ran from 2020 to 2022, involving partners from France, Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania. The project took a multifaceted approach, making significant use of the Arts. It aims were to: (1) strengthen support for educational staff, youth workers and teachers by helping them acquire and improve their competences in recognising the causes and effects of bullying, as well as developing and applying strategies and methods to prevent it in schools; (2) improve understanding, recognition and prevention of bullying and its negative impact on school and student's life through non-formal methods and participation in three short-term joint staff trainings; (3) significantly change the behaviour of aggressive pupils and victims of bullying, increase integration among pupils, and prevent early school leaving through participation in twelve training workshops; (4) increase anti-bullying using ICT and media education, and strengthen networking between partners by creating and using the 'Be a Buddy not a Buddy' web TV, which showcases best practices on the issue; (5) raise awareness of bullying by organising the anti-bullying campaign 'Three Days of Activism', initiated by all partners; (6) facilitate the exchange of experience and knowledge between partner institutions through peer to peer learning.

The Anti-Bullying Alliance[258] is a coalition of organisations and individuals in the UK, working together to prevent bullying and respond effectively to incidents. A key aim is to create a safe environments, with a strong focus on restorative justice approaches as a response to bullying. The Alliance's work focuses on three main areas: (1) supporting

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[254] ABC website - European Anti-Bullying Certification.
[255] Stop Cyberbullying website.
[256] Stop Cyberbullying Catalogue of Best Practices.
[257] Be a buddy not a bully website.
[258] Anti-bullying Alliance, UK website.

learning and sharing best practice through its membership network; (2) raising awareness of bullying via Anti-Bullying Week and other campaigns; and (3) delivering programmes at national and local levels to help deter bullying and foster sustainable change.

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE EU

In person

All over the European Union there are hundreds of Europe Direct information centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you at: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en

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EU law and related documents

For access to legal information from the EU, including all EU law since 1952 in all the official language versions, go to EUR-Lex at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu

Open data from the EU

The EU Open Data Portal (http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en) provides access to datasets from the EU. Data can be downloaded and reused for free, for both commercial and non-commercial purposes.