



# European Education Area Strategic Framework **Working Group on Equality and Values**

Input paper

WG meeting on (cyber)bullying, 8-10 October 2024, Brussels



# Input paper

## Addressing bullying, including cyberbullying

### Working Group Equality and Values in Education and Training

#### Introduction

This input paper<sup>1</sup> aims to set the scene in relation to the topic of the upcoming meeting of the Working Group Equality and Values in Education and Training, which will take place on October 8-10, 2024, focusing on the theme of bullying, including cyberbullying, in schools. The information provided here is intended to help participants prepare for the meeting, as well as help guide discussions during the meeting. It builds on the on-line Working Group meeting that took place on June 20-21, 2024, focusing on confronting hate speech, in and through education<sup>2</sup>. Both deal with the broader theme of 'confronting hate'.

The 2021 edition of the **Education and Training monitor**<sup>3</sup> 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'.
- Frequent bullying has a detrimental effect on students' life satisfaction as an element of well-being (the EU average share of students with low life satisfaction was nearly 15 pps higher if they also 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 pps higher than that of girls (24.4% vs 19.7%).
- Low-achievers in reading are twice as likely to be bullied as high-achievers.
- Compared with data on the high prevalence of bullying, school principals indicated "very little" hindrance to learning by students intimidating or bullying their peers.

The European Commission, in cooperation with NESET (Network of Experts on the Social Dimension of Education and Training) has created a series of **factsheets on well-being and mental health** through education, including two on bullying, and one on well-being in digital age, for participants to examine before the meeting.

- (1) **'What can schools do about bullying?'**<sup>4</sup>, which looks at types of bullying, signs and symptoms in victimized children, how schools, parents and communities can liaise to resolve the issue, and also a section on whole school approaches.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was prepared by **Barry van Driel**, in cooperation with **Zsuzsa Blaskó** and **Valentina Musso**, as part of the ICF Consulting Services Ltd support to the Working Group and in conversation with the Working Group coordinators.

<sup>2</sup> The input paper of this meeting can be found here: [Equality and Values Documents - EACGroups - EC Public Wiki \(europa.eu\)](#) and minutes here: [Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Education and training monitor 2021 – Education and Well-being, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8599033b-57d9-11ec-91ac-01aa75ed71a1> (pp 35-43)

<sup>4</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, What can schools do about bullying?, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/30a85458-e3e4-11ed-a05c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

- (2) **'What motivates children who bully, and can they change?'**<sup>5</sup>, which has sections on what motivates bullies, how can bullies be popular, incidence of bullying, signs and symptoms in bullies, persistent bullies, what role other children play in bullying, and what schools can do through a whole school approach.
- (3) **'Well-being in the digital age'**,<sup>6</sup> which looks at the tensions between the need for internet and technologies, and the various risks involved.

**This input paper is divided into the following sections:**

- A. Key definitions of bullying and cyberbullying.
- B. Research insights: short abstracts of findings coming from academic research relating to various aspects of bullying, including cyberbullying, especially in schools. The highlighted research can help participants acquire a deeper understanding of the dynamics of both, as well as insight into what approaches to bullying, including cyberbullying, have an impact and why. There is also a section on research into anti-bullying policies.
- C. Some European and international initiatives and other resources.

## (A) Key Definitions of Bullying and Cyberbullying

Definitions of bullying have evolved over time. Part of this is due to shifting contexts and cultural values<sup>7</sup>, and part due to the increasing prevalence of online bullying: young people are using digital tools to intimidate and harm each other. The original definition of bullying, put forward by Olweus (1993)<sup>8</sup>, stresses that bullying is not a single incident but constitutes a pattern. Key elements, in the earlier definition, include taking harmful actions with the intent to harm or upset another person. Perpetrators are physically or psycho-socially superior, creating an imbalance of power between the parties. A study by Tay (2023)<sup>9</sup>, focusing on higher education contexts, revealed that it is not always clear when bullying is taking place and if all parts of the original definition are clearcut and accurate. Tay found that when students are asked about bullying behaviour, the behaviours they *'identify as bullying are subtler and are intertwined with everyday interpersonal encounters, making identifying, reporting, and redressing them elusive. Students identified their limited awareness of anti-bullying structures, insufficient deterrence due to a lack of transparency in rule implementation, and noncommitment by authorities as favouring bullying.'*

James O'Higgins Norman, UNESCO Chair on Tackling Bullying in Schools and Cyberspace and Director of the Dublin City University Anti-Bullying Centre, points to a shifting paradigm in perspectives and research relating to bullying.<sup>10</sup> He notes that: *'children's voices have not been recognised as important either in research or in education and wider society. However, when we consider the perspective of children's rights and apply a new sociology of childhood approach, our work with children moves beyond traditional assumptions and begins to be underpinned by a view of childhood that recognises that children have agency, are diverse and develop meaningful relationships, ultimately creating their own view of the world around them.'*

Furthermore, many studies focus on the personality characteristics of both bullies and victims. Multiple studies and publications, such as the publication by the Committee on the Biological and Psychosocial

<sup>5</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, What motivates children who bully, and can they change?, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/bed5e1c9-e3e4-11ed-a05c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

<sup>6</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Well-being in the digital age, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/03746>

<sup>7</sup> Tay, E.M.K. Revisiting the Definition of Bullying in the Context of Higher Education. *Int Journal of Bullying Prevention* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-023-00199-1>

<sup>8</sup> Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Blackwell Publishers.

<sup>9</sup> Tay, E.M.K. Revisiting the Definition of Bullying in the Context of Higher Education. *Int Journal of Bullying Prevention* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-023-00199-1>

<sup>10</sup> O'Higgins Norman, J. Tackling Bullying from the Inside Out: Shifting Paradigms in Bullying Research and Interventions. *Int Journal of Bullying Prevention* 2, 161–169 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-020-00076-1>  
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42380-020-00076-1>

Effects of Peer Victimization from the United States<sup>11</sup> remind us that bullying is (learned) social behaviour and a social process that takes place within social contexts. A way to approach bullying, according to this publication, is to focus 'on contextual factors that modulate the effect of individual characteristics'. Social contexts can either attenuate or exacerbate (i.e., moderate) the effect of individual characteristics on bullying behaviour.

A key aspect of bullying today is the advent of the internet and social media. Bullying nowadays has a much more anonymous nature, can take place online 24 hours a day and has gained many new dimensions due to social media and the ability to manipulate photos, stealing identities and creating for instance deep fakes of classmates. UNESCO news article *Defining school bullying and its implications on education, teachers and learners*,<sup>12</sup> reports that, globally, one in three learners is bullied at school every month. In the article, James O'Higgins Norman, UNESCO Chair on Bullying and Cyberbullying, notes that: '*many current anti-bullying programs in schools are rooted in early definitions characterizing bullying as an "unwanted aggressive behaviour that is repeated over time and involves an imbalance of power or strength"*', but that evolving realities and insights are leading to new perspectives. He also points to the pervasive character of bullying, noting that reducing school bullying has been challenging. Both perpetration rates and victimization rates have dropped only mildly (19% and 15% decrease) on a global scale. He concludes with a call to '*reassess 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.*'

Some of the often-used definitions:

#### (School) BULLYING

**UNESCO:** In 2023, UNESCO proposed a new definition of bullying to reflect a 'holistic and inclusion-driven approach to tackling bullying and violence in schools and in online spaces.' Their definition is presently as follows: '*school bullying is a damaging social process that is characterized 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*'.<sup>13</sup>

**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*'.<sup>14</sup>

#### 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. 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*'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Committee on the Biological and Psychosocial Effects of Peer Victimization: Lessons for Bullying Prevention; Board on Children, Youth, and Families; Committee on Law and Justice; Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education; Health and Medicine Division; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Rivara F, Le Menestrel S, editors. Preventing Bullying Through Science, Policy, and Practice. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2016 Sep 14. 3. Individuals within Social Contexts. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK390410/>

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO, *Defining school bullying and its implications on education, teachers and learners*, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023 (last update: March 2024) available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/defining-school-bullying-and-its-implications-education-teachers-and-learners>

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO, World Forum against school bullying, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/defining-school-bullying-and-its-implications-education-teachers-and-learners>

<sup>14</sup> Council of Europe Webpage on Children's Rights.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/bullying#:~:text=Bullying%20is%20unwanted%2C%20aggressive%20behaviour,to%20be%20repeated%2C%20over%20time>

<sup>15</sup> European Commission. Safer Internet Day 2009: Commission starts campaign against cyber-bullying [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO\\_09\\_58](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_09_58)

**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'*.<sup>16</sup>

**Cyberbullying Research Center:** Cyberbullying has been defined as *'wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones and other electronic devices'*<sup>17</sup>

### BIAS-BASED BULLYING

Many incidences of bullying relate to bias that stems from difference or perceived difference. So-called 'bias-based bullying' can be defined as *'bullying based on dimensions of an individual's identity, such as their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and/or disability status'*.<sup>18</sup>

### DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES OF BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING

A Research Review report on scientific review of school bullying and anti-bullying programs (2015) from the EU funded project ENABLE (European Network Against Bullying in Learning and Leisure Environments)<sup>19</sup>, points out to 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 report refers to different research showing, for example, that:

- 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 take place with much less adult and authority supervision. It can take place from the comfort of one's room at home. Wherever youth can take their smartphone, they can go online and engage in cyberbullying. In traditional bullying the perpetrators operate in school, en route to school or close to school;
- Traditional bullying tends to occur during school hours. Cyberbullying can take place 24/7 and anywhere.

## **(B) Research Insights<sup>20</sup>**

The following research overview looks at selected research related to various aspects of bullying, including cyberbullying in schools. In some cases, research from outside the EU has been included if deemed insightful. The following sections can be found below:

- Research on the impact of bullying/cyberbullying
- Research on who are the victims of bullying/cyberbullying
- Research on who commits bullying/cyberbullying

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF, *Cyberbullying: What is it and how to stop it* <https://www.unicef.org/end-violence/how-to-stop-cyberbullying>

<sup>17</sup> Cyberbullying Research Centre, *What is Cyberbullying?* <https://cyberbullying.org/what-is-cyberbullying>

<sup>18</sup> Bayram Özdemir, S., 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. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2024.2376047>

<sup>19</sup> ENABLE Project ran from 2014 to 2016 involving partners from UK, Denmark, Croatia, Belgium and Greece. The Research Review titled *A Scientific Review of the School Bullying Phenomenon and Anti-bullying Programmes - for Adolescent Health*, was published in March 2015, as one of the project deliverables.

[http://files.eun.org/enable/assets/downloads/D1\\_1%20Review%20of%20bullying%20and%20cyber%20bullying.pdf](http://files.eun.org/enable/assets/downloads/D1_1%20Review%20of%20bullying%20and%20cyber%20bullying.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> The following research was identified by Working Group members in the online survey conducted in May 2024 and by the ICF consultants supporting the Working Group on Equality and Values in Education and Training.

- Research on school climate and bullying/cyberbullying
- Research on effectiveness of programs that respond to bullying/cyberbullying
- Research on policies relating to bullying/cyberbullying

## **b.1 Research on the impact of bullying and cyberbullying**

There is a general understanding that bullying and cyberbullying negatively influence both academic performance and the mental health of young people who are bullied. The following studies look at this issue in more depth. They come primarily from the fields of psychology and medicine.

**Salmivalli (2023):** In a review of school-based bullying prevention programs this author concludes that after some four decades of such programs they have shown (looking at meta-analyses) to have positive average effects.<sup>21</sup> However, the effects are small to moderate, and they are especially weak among some specific groups, such as adolescents. Too many young people still suffer from being bullied. Salmivalli also mentions findings suggest that the remaining victims may be even worse off, a phenomenon known as the Healthy Context Paradox. Looking at average effects of prevention is not enough since it does not give the full picture. More attention, she argues, 'should be devoted to targeted interventions that address specific cases of bullying; who are the youth who continue to be victimized or continue bullying others despite interventions and why do certain interventions fail these youth?'

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**Ozyildirim and Karadağ (2024)** conducted a meta-analysis, utilizing the data from 793 independent studies in 77 countries.<sup>22</sup> They investigate the effect of peer bullying on academic achievement. The findings revealed that peer bullying had a significant effect on academic achievement, especially among younger students (4<sup>th</sup> grade).

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**Yu and Zhao (2021)** looked at PISA data across students in 51 countries. The authors were interested in the causal effect of bullying victimization on adolescents' academic literacy and social integration.<sup>23</sup> The authors found, among other things, that '*bullying victimization is associated with poor academic achievement and social integration problems such as bad classmate relations, lack of school belonging, and sense of loneliness*'.

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**Johander et al., (2023):** this study examined how often teachers' targeted interventions fail in stopping bullying and to what extent this varies between schools vs. between students involved.<sup>24</sup> The study looked at data from 2011-2016, and showed that during the study period, 27% of students who were victims in the cases of bullying addressed by adults reported no improvement in their situation. Among the bullying perpetrators who were targeted by an intervention, 21% said they did not bully less as a result. This points to possible intervention failures. Victim-perceived failure was more likely when the victimized student was in higher grades, had been victimized more frequently and, for a longer time, had been victimized also online, had bullied others, and had fewer friends in the class. Bully-perceived failure was more likely when the bullying student was in higher grades, bullied more frequently, and was victimized.

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**Holstein et. al., (2005):** an international comparative study in 28 countries, mostly located in Europe, looked at bullying and various accompanying health-related symptoms among school-aged children

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21 Salmivalli, C.(2023) Focus on targeted interventions addressing bullying: what explains their success or failure? European Journal of Developmental Psychology, 20(5):1-17; DOI:[10.1080/17405629.2022.2156857](https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2022.2156857)

22 Ozyildirim, G. and Karadağ, E. (2024) The effect of peer bullying on academic achievement: A meta-analysis study related to results of TIMSS and PIRLS. Psychology in the Schools 61(38) DOI:[10.1002/pits.23159](https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.23159); see: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377547439\\_The\\_effect\\_of\\_peer\\_bullying\\_on\\_academic\\_achievement\\_A\\_meta-analysis\\_study\\_related\\_to\\_results\\_of\\_TIMSS\\_and\\_PIRLS](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377547439_The_effect_of_peer_bullying_on_academic_achievement_A_meta-analysis_study_related_to_results_of_TIMSS_and_PIRLS)

23 Yu, S. and Zhao, X. (2021) The negative impact of bullying victimization on academic literacy and social integration: Evidence from 51 countries in PISA. Social Sciences & Humanities Open 4(1):100151; 4(1):100151 DOI:[10.1016/j.ssho.2021.100151](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssho.2021.100151); see: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351026684\\_](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351026684_)

24 Johander et al., (2023) Interventions That Failed: Factors Associated with the Continuation of Bullying After a Targeted Intervention. International Journal of Bullying Prevention, DOI:[10.1007/s42380-023-00169-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-023-00169-7); [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369923902\\_Interventions\\_That\\_Failed\\_Factors\\_Associated\\_with\\_the\\_Continuation\\_of\\_Bullying\\_After\\_a\\_Targeted\\_Intervention](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369923902_Interventions_That_Failed_Factors_Associated_with_the_Continuation_of_Bullying_After_a_Targeted_Intervention)

who had been bullied.<sup>25</sup> This international cross-sectional survey included 123,227 students 11, 13 and 15 years of age from nationally representative samples of schools in 28 countries in Europe and North America in 1997-98. The study is therefore relatively old but given the nature of the study still relevant. The researchers examined the prevalence of symptoms (among those who were bullied) such as headache, stomachache, backache, feeling low, bad temper, nervousness, difficulties in getting to sleep, and dizziness, loneliness, being tired in the morning, feeling left out of things and feeling helpless, etc. 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.'*

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**Nixon et al., (2014):** A review of the literature focusing on correlational studies, examined the consequences of cyberbullying. The review revealed that cyberbullying poses a threat to adolescents' health and well-being,<sup>26</sup> and 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, and somatic symptoms. Perpetrators of cyberbullying are more likely to report increased substance use, aggression, and delinquent behaviours.'

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**van Thiel (2020):** according to a report authored by Jarno van Thiel for *KidsRights*, an international children's aid and advocacy organization based in Amsterdam, the available research reveals that bullying in both its physical or digital form can have lasting psychological effects on children.<sup>27</sup> The report references an impact study by IPSOS from 2019 that showed that teens that were cyberbullied were also more likely to suffer from poor sleep and depression. The report further points to evidence that bullied children are more likely to be anxious and to think about committing suicide. Such problems are not only psychological and emotional, but also harm the bullied child physically. The report notes that studies have shown that the effects lasted 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.

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**Arseneault (2017):** a publication by Louise Arseneault for King's College in London looked at the long-term consequences of bullying victimization on mental health.<sup>28</sup> The author notes, using longitudinal data, 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, among other things, 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 victimization on individual lives and societal costs'*.

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<sup>25</sup> Due P, Holstein BE, Lynch J, Diderichsen F, Gabhain SN, Scheidt P, Currie C; Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Bullying Working Group. Bullying and symptoms among school-aged children: international comparative cross sectional study in 28 countries. *Eur J Public Health*. 2005 Apr;15(2):128-32. doi: 10.1093/eurpub/cki105. Epub 2005 Mar 8. PMID: 15755782. Access: [pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15755782/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15755782/)

<sup>26</sup> Nixon CL. Current perspectives: the impact of cyberbullying on adolescent health. *Adolesc Health Med Ther*. 2014 Aug 1;5:143-58. doi: 10.2147/AHMT.S36456. PMID: 25177157; PMCID: PMC4126576. Access: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4126576/>

<sup>27</sup> Van Thiel (2020) Cyberbullying, an overlooked and ever growing danger to the development of children. Report for KidsRights. Access: <https://files.kidsrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/24103147/KidsRights-Cyberbullying-report-2020.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Arseneault, L. (2017). The long-term impact of bullying victimization on mental health. *World Psychiatry*, 16(1), 27-28. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20399> See also:

[https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/76299577/The\\_long\\_term\\_impact\\_of\\_ARSENEAULT\\_Publishedonline26January2017\\_GREEN\\_AAM.pdf](https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/76299577/The_long_term_impact_of_ARSENEAULT_Publishedonline26January2017_GREEN_AAM.pdf)

**John et al., (2018):** this study looked at associations between cyberbullying involvement and self-harm or suicidal behaviours.<sup>29</sup> An electronic literature search examined any association between cyberbullying involvement and self-harm or suicidal behaviours and reported empirical data in a sample aged under 25 years. 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.'*

## **b.2 Research on who are the victims of bullying, including cyberbullying**

**PISA 2018:** the study shows that *'socio-economically disadvantaged groups and students from disadvantaged schools are disproportionately affected'*.<sup>30</sup>

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**Basilici (2022):** this study entailed a systematic review of ethnic diversity and bullying in schools.<sup>31</sup> It investigated the role of both classroom and school ethnic diversity in relation to bullying and victimization. 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 victimization...In North America, focusing on race, ethnic diversity has shown a protective role for victimization; in Europe, where the focus is on immigrant backgrounds, diversity may constitute a risk factor. About victimization, ethnic diversity represents a risk factor at younger ages and turns into a more protective factor in secondary school.'*

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**Bokhove et al. (2022):** this study looked at various (individual-related) correlates of bullying.<sup>32</sup> The authors concluded 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, while bullies tend towards aggressive behaviour patterns, a need for power, and display more positive attitudes towards violence as well as a lack of empathy towards the bullied.'*

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**Sapouna et al. (2023):** this systematic review of the literature examined the risk of bullying victimization among racial, ethnic and/or religious minority youth.<sup>33</sup> 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 victimization.'* The review also found that *'racist bullying victimization is associated with a wide range of negative outcomes including poor mental health, lower academic engagement, and an increased risk of involvement in delinquent behaviours, especially among older pupils. They also found that in terms of gender, males, in most studies, were reported to be at higher risk of being victimized due to race, ethnicity, citizenship status and/or religion though a couple of studies showed no significant gender differences in bullying victimization due to race/ethnicity'*.

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<sup>29</sup> John A, Glendenning AC, Marchant A, Montgomery P, Stewart A, Wood S, Lloyd K, Hawton K. Self-Harm, Suicidal Behaviours, and Cyberbullying in Children and Young People: Systematic Review. *J Med Internet Res* 2018;20(4):e129 doi: [10.2196/jmir.9044](https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.9044) PMID: [29674305](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29674305/) PMCID: [5934539](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/5934539/) Access: <https://www.jmir.org/2018/4/e129/>

<sup>30</sup> Access to chapter entitled 'Students' perspective: PISA data on student feelings and bullying': [https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2021/downloads/1.3%20Students%20perspective%20-%20PISA%20data%20on%20students%20feelings%20and%20bullying.pdf?ref=newsletters.holonq.com#:~:text=In%20additio n%20to%20the%20socio.\(24.4%25%20vs%2019.7%25\)](https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2021/downloads/1.3%20Students%20perspective%20-%20PISA%20data%20on%20students%20feelings%20and%20bullying.pdf?ref=newsletters.holonq.com#:~:text=In%20additio n%20to%20the%20socio.(24.4%25%20vs%2019.7%25))

<sup>31</sup> Basilici M.C, et al. (2022) Ethnic diversity and bullying in school: A systematic review, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, Volume 65, ISSN 1359-1789, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2022.101762>. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S135917892200043X>

<sup>32</sup> 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. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2021.1992294>. Access: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00131881.2021.1992294#abstract>

<sup>33</sup> Sapouna, M., de Amicis, L. & Vezzali, L. Bullying Victimization Due to Racial, Ethnic, Citizenship and/or Religious Status: A Systematic Review. *Adolescent Res Rev* 8, 261–296 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-022-00197-2> Access: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40894-022-00197-2>



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**Schultze-Krumholz et al. (2020):** this study examines whether cultural diversity and perceived teacher support for diversity (TSD) are protective factors against bullying and victimisation, either directly or mediated by empathy.<sup>34</sup> Participants were 897 students in Germany from Grades 7 to 10. The study found that *'more perceived TSD and affective empathy were associated with less bullying. Moreover, the effect of perceived TSD on bullying was partly indirect through affective empathy. Victimisation was not predicted by the study variables. Class level showed no effects. The authors conclude that bullying and victimisation are complex phenomena, which seem to be linked more to individual than to cultural class characteristics'*.

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**Llorent et al. (2016):** research in Spain looked at the bullying and cyberbullying and the relationship between majority group and minority group students, both in terms of ethnicity and sexual identity.<sup>35</sup> 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 victimization. Especially belonging to a sexual minority predicted higher levels of bullying victimization. Belonging to a double minority (ethnic-cultural and sexual) was also related to higher levels of victimization (but also perpetration)'*.

### **b.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.

**Statista<sup>36</sup> (2018):** Statista refers to the results of a survey by IPSOS<sup>37</sup> on those responsible for cyberbullying in Europe that indicate that when the survey took place in 2018, the majority of cyberbullying stemmed from a classmate of the child being bullied (57% of those who indicated they had been bullied).<sup>38</sup> This survey by IPSOS looked at young people 16 and older.

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**Cosma et al. (2022):** this study examining gender differences in bullying behaviour in 46 countries, primarily in Europe, found that bullying others and cyberbullying others were more prevalent in males than in females in most countries, while gender differences in victimization were mixed.<sup>39</sup> The study concluded more specifically that: *'boys had higher odds of perpetrating both traditional and cyberbullying and victimization by traditional bullying than girls. Greater gender inequality at country level was associated with heightened gender differences in traditional bullying. In contrast, lower gender inequality was associated with larger gender differences for cyber victimization.'*

### **b.4 Research on school climate and bullying behaviour**

School climate (social context) 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. Bullying, including cyberbullying, has also been identified as a factor that impacts the school climate in a negative way. The following studies examine this issue.

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<sup>34</sup> Schultze-Krumholz et al, (2020) The association between in-class cultural diversity with empathy and bullying in adolescence: A multilevel mediation analysis. *International Journal of Psychology*. Volume 55, Issue 5, 769-778 Access: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ijop.12700>

<sup>35</sup> Laurent, V.J., et al., *Front. Psychol.*, 18 October 2016 *Bullying and Cyberbullying in Minorities: Are They More Vulnerable than the Majority Group?*sec. *Educational Psychology* Volume 7 - 2016 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01507> Access: <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01507/full>

<sup>36</sup> Statista is a German online platform that specializes in data and business intelligence platform with extensive collection of statistics and reports : see: <https://www.statista.com>

<sup>37</sup> Global Views on Cyberbullying; <https://www.ipsos.com/en/global-views-cyberbullying>

<sup>38</sup> Statista, Persons responsible for cyberbullying in 2018 Published by [Ani Petrosyan](#), Jan 9, 2024 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/941034/europe-persons-responsible-for-cyberbullying/>

<sup>39</sup> Cosma, A (2022) Gender Differences in Bullying Reflect Societal Gender Inequality: A Multilevel Study With Adolescents in 46 Countries *Journal of Adolescent Health* Volume 71, Issue 5, Pages 601-608. Access: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1054139X22004633>

**Carretero et al. (2021):** the authors examined the impact of school climate on bullying by having students complete questionnaires gauging their opinions.<sup>40</sup> 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 for unacceptable behaviour...and normative beliefs concerning bullying in the entire school...have been related to a decrease in bullying.'*

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**Bokhove et al. (2022):** the authors examined the literature on the influence of school climate and achievement on bullying.<sup>41</sup> 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 atmosphere. They also 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.

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**Nikolaou (2019):** this study investigated school bullying in relation to ethnic diversity in Cyprus.<sup>42</sup> The research involved 8–14 years old pupils of both Cypriot origin and non-Cypriot origin. The findings showed that 'ethnic diversity seems to be a factor that can precipitate school bullying and victimization in Cypriot primary and secondary schools, that non-Cypriot students feel more victimized than their Cypriot classmates and that they prefer to share their experiences relating to bullying with someone outside of the school. Additionally, the study revealed that verbal and psychological bullying were the most common kinds of bullying that Cypriot and non-Cypriot students faced, and that both groups limit their knowledge of each other to 'songs, language, food and games'. The study also showed that *'the teacher's role in facing and preventing bullying related to ethno-cultural diversity is critical. Finally, citizenship education and the use of mediation techniques are proposed to foster non-Cypriot students' social inclusion and, thus, prevent their victimization'*.

## **b.5 Research on effectiveness of programs relating to bullying**

There are hundreds of anti-bullying projects across the EU. 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). Some programs focus on prevention while others focus on interventions. Many have components of both. The following research looks at what makes certain approaches in anti-bullying programs more effective than others.

**Gaffney, Ttofi, & Farrington (2019):** this meta-analysis relating to the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs in schools showed that the presence of a number of intervention components (e.g., whole-

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<sup>40</sup> C.M Carretero et al. (2021) School Climate, Moral Disengagement and, Empathy as Predictors of Bullying in Adolescents Front. Psychol., 04 May 2021 Sec. Educational Psychology Volume 12 - 2021 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.656775>  
Access: <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.656775/full>

<sup>41</sup> 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.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2021.1992294>. Access:  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00131881.2021.1992294#abstract>

<sup>42</sup> Nikolaou, G., Kaloyirou, C., & Spyropoulou, A. (2019). Bullying and ethnic diversity: investigating their relation in the school setting. *Intercultural Education*, 30(4), 335–350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2019.1582208>;  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14675986.2019.1582208>

school approach, anti-bullying policies, classroom rules, information for parents, informal peer involvement), and work with victims influenced school-bullying perpetration outcomes.<sup>43</sup> The authors conclude that *'the presence of informal peer involvement and information for parents were associated with school-bullying victimization outcomes.'* Bullying decreased in these instances. This meta-analysis built on an earlier meta-analysis from 2011 by Ttofi and Farrington<sup>44</sup>, which revealed that overall, school-based anti-bullying programs are effective with on average bullying decreasing by 20–23% and victimization decreasing by 17–20%. Program elements and intervention components that were associated with a decrease in bullying and victimization were more intensive programs, programs that included parent meetings, firm disciplinary methods, and improved playground supervision.

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**UK Anti-Bullying Alliance (n.d.):** the Anti-Bullying Alliance in the UK points to several key studies on combating bullying. Several studies looked at restorative practices as a way of responding to bullying.<sup>45</sup> For instance, the following studies are referred to: (a) a report published by the Department for Education (UK)<sup>46</sup> 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. They seek to increase the opportunities for dialogue at every level; (b) Goldsmith's University research (2010)<sup>3</sup> into anti-bullying strategies, which listed the conditions required to develop effective restorative practice in schools. These are: (1) whole staff training; (2) the embedding of restorative practices, with students making restorative practices transparent in policies and procedures; and (3) having direct sanctions as a back-up if the restorative process fails.

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**Australian Center for Education Statistics and Evaluation (2017):**<sup>47</sup> a systematic literature review in Australia looked into the kinds of anti-bullying programs that are effective (measured in different ways). The review found that *'anti-bullying programs, in general, reduce bullying behaviours by an average of 20 – 23 per cent'*. The most effective anti-bullying interventions, according to this review:

- 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;
- provide support and sustainable professional development for school staff on how best to enhance understanding, skills and self-efficacy to address and prevent bullying behaviours;
- ensure systematic implementation and evaluation.

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**Richard et al. (2012):** this research from France examined the impact of whole school approaches to combat bullying.<sup>48</sup> The authors 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*

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<sup>43</sup> Gaffney H, Ttofi MM, Farrington DP. What works in anti-bullying programs? Analysis of effective intervention components. *J Sch Psychol.* 2021 Apr;85:37-56. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2020.12.002. Epub 2021 Jan 28. PMID: 33715780. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33715780/>

<sup>44</sup> Ttofi MM and Farrington DP (2011) Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 7(1):27-56. DOI:10.1007/s11292-010-9109-1; [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227312060\\_Effectiveness\\_of\\_school-based\\_programs\\_to\\_reduce\\_bullying\\_A\\_systematic\\_and\\_meta-analytic\\_review](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227312060_Effectiveness_of_school-based_programs_to_reduce_bullying_A_systematic_and_meta-analytic_review)

<sup>45</sup> Anti-Bullying Alliance (n.d.) What is Restorative Practice. <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/responding-bullying/restorative-practice/what-restorative>

<sup>46</sup> The Use and Effectiveness of Anti-Bullying Strategies in Schools. Department for Education (DFE), May 2010 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/182421/DFE-RR098.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182421/DFE-RR098.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Center for Education Statistics and Evaluation of New South Wales, Australia (2017) Anti-bullying interventions in schools – what works? [https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/en/home/student-wellbeing/attendance-matters---resources-for-schools/anti\\_bullying\\_in\\_schools\\_what\\_works\\_AA.pdf](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/en/home/student-wellbeing/attendance-matters---resources-for-schools/anti_bullying_in_schools_what_works_AA.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> Richard, J. et al., (2012) Revisiting the whole-school approach to bullying: Really looking at the whole school. *School Psychology International* (33) DO - 10.1177/0143034311415906 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258189419\\_Revisiting\\_the\\_whole-school\\_approach\\_to\\_bullying\\_Really\\_looking\\_at\\_the\\_whole\\_school](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258189419_Revisiting_the_whole-school_approach_to_bullying_Really_looking_at_the_whole_school)

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.

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**Wurf (2021):** his study summarized the evidence relating to whole school approaches to preventing and managing bullying in schools.<sup>49</sup> It 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 victimization...effective whole school programs are long-lasting and intensive. Such programs 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...meta-analyses have highlighted that the fair, consistent enforcement of school rules and use of sanctions are key to school safety.’*

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**Eisenberg et al. (2022):** in a study from the United States, Eisenberg and his colleagues 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.<sup>50</sup> 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 color ... 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’.*

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**Lee, Kim and Kim (2015):** a meta-analysis of 13 studies<sup>51</sup> led to the conclusion that: *‘effective school-based anti-bullying programs should include training in emotional control, peer counseling, and the establishment of a school policy on bullying’.* The authors note that ‘programs and outcomes are complex, broad, and diverse, depending on many factors, including available finances and the cost of programs’.

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**Day, J.K. et al. (2020):** this study looked at Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) and school policies focused on support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning youth, and the extent to which they may reduce bias-based bullying and enhance social supports in schools.<sup>52</sup> Youth reported higher classmate support in the presence of GSAs and higher teacher support in the presence of LGBTQ-focused policies; the presence of both GSAs and LGBTQ-focused policies were associated with less bullying and higher perceived classmate and teacher support. The findings indicate that GSAs and LGBTQ-focused policies are distinctly and mutually important for fostering safer and more supportive school climates for youth.

## **b.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. Both types of research are touched upon below.

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<sup>49</sup> Wurf, G. (2021) A whole school approach to preventing and managing bullying. Routledge <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/oa-edit/10.4324/9781003025955-27/whole-school-approach-preventing-managing-bullying-gerald-wurf>

<sup>50</sup> Eisenberg, M. E., Gower, A. L., Brown, C., Nam, Y.-S., & Ramirez, M. R. (2022). School-Based Diversity Education Activities and Bias-Based Bullying Among Secondary School Students. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(17-18), NP15992-NP16012. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211025016>

<sup>51</sup> 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. doi: 10.1177/1367493513503581. Epub 2013 Oct 3. PMID: 24092871. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24092871/>

<sup>52</sup> Day, J.K. et al. (2020) Gay-Straight Alliances, Inclusive Policy, and School Climate: LGBTQ Youths' Experiences of Social Support and Bullying, *Research on Adolescence*, [Volume30, IssueS2](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jora.12487) 418-430 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jora.12487>

In June 2024, the European Parliament published a European Parliamentary Research Service report entitled *Cyberbullying among young people: Laws and policies in selected Member States*.<sup>53</sup> In addition to providing short summaries of multiple international documents, and outlining the position of the European Parliament over the past decade, the cyberbullying policies of selected Member States are outlined (Austria, France, Ireland, Italy, Romania and Slovakia). This is done to illustrate various clearly defined policies and frameworks which have been put in place at the national level. They provide a snapshot of current approaches to cyberbullying across the EU. The document also notes that *'there are EU initiatives that address elements of the issue, but there is currently no EU-wide anti-online bullying law'*.

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**Bokhove et al. (2022):** the authors looked, among other things, at the impact of (country and school) policies.<sup>54</sup> 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 most consistent relationship was between gender and bullying, with prevalence higher among boys, while school factors were not significant. 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 prevalence of bullying appeared to be unrelated to differences in country policies addressing bullying.

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**Kidwai and Smith (2023):** this study involved a content analysis of 200 anti-bullying school policies across the UK, looking at policies from 2008 to 2022.<sup>55</sup> The research pointed to a noticeable increase in mentions of cyberbullying and many types of bias-based bullying. 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 behaviours, 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. Correlations of self-report scores on bullying victimization 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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**Nikolaou (2018):** a US study looked at whether anti-bullying policies deterred in-school bullying victimization.<sup>56</sup> The study looked at the effectiveness of anti-bullying laws on decreasing the share of students who experience in-school bullying victimization. The results showed, according to the authors, *'clear evidence that anti-bullying legislation has an impact. For instance, schools in US 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'*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Briefing European Parliament in June 2024: Cyberbullying among young people: Laws and policies in selected Member States. See: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/762331/EPRS\\_BRI\(2024\)762331\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/762331/EPRS_BRI(2024)762331_EN.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> 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. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2021.1992294>. Access: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00131881.2021.1992294#abstract>

<sup>55</sup> 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. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2023.2250258> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02667363.2023.2250258#abstract>

<sup>56</sup> Nikolaou, Dimitrios. (2017). Do Anti-Bullying Policies Deter In-School Bullying Victimization?. *International Review of Law and Economics*. 50. 1-6. 10.1016/j.irl.2017.03.001. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314232544\\_Do\\_Anti-Bullying\\_Policies\\_Deter\\_In-School\\_Bullying\\_Victimization](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314232544_Do_Anti-Bullying_Policies_Deter_In-School_Bullying_Victimization)

## (C) Some European and International Initiatives and Other Resources

### European Commission

- The European Commission launched the *2021-2027 Digital education action plan* at the end of 2020 to address the benefits and risks of digitalisation.<sup>57</sup>
- In 2020 the European Commission (2020) published *Anti-bullying practices from the repository of the European platform for investing in children (EPIC)*<sup>58</sup>
- In 2021, the European Commission put forward the *EU strategy on the rights of the child*, which addresses challenges and proposes actions on the protection and fulfilment of children.<sup>59</sup>
- In 2022, the European Commission published a new *European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+)*, designed to protect children online.<sup>60</sup> This followed a Press Release entitled: 'New EU strategy to empower and protect children in the online world'.<sup>61</sup>
- In 2022 the *Digital Services Act* (Regulation – 2022/2065) was launched and seeks, among other things, to offer stronger protection for children online.<sup>62</sup>
- In 2023, the European Commission published a *Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health, focusing on mental health*.<sup>63</sup> A comprehensive approach here implies the recognizing the influence of biological and psychological factors, as well as the importance of the family, community, economy, society, the environment and security.
- The European Commission's *Erasmus+ Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport*<sup>64</sup>, as well as the *European Solidarity Corps Programme*<sup>65</sup> and the *Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme* (CERV)<sup>66</sup> support numerous projects that deal with bullying, including cyberbullying.

### Council of the European Union

- In 2022, The *Council of the European Union* published its conclusions on supporting well-being in digital education, which looks at the digital risks that learners and educators are exposed to and the consequences for well-being.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> European Commission. Digital Education Plan (2021-20276). <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan>

<sup>58</sup> European Commission, *Anti-bullying practices from the repository of the European platform for investing in children (EPIC)*, Released on EU Publications 2020-12-10. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/476cda91-3b5f-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

<sup>59</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0142>

<sup>60</sup> European Commission, A European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+) <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/strategy-better-internet-kids>

<sup>61</sup> European Commission, New EU strategy to protect and empower children in the online world [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_22\\_2825](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_2825)

<sup>62</sup> Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (Text with EEA relevance) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/2065/oj>

<sup>63</sup> [https://health.ec.europa.eu/document/download/cef45b6d-a871-44d5-9d62-3cecc47eda89\\_en?filename=com\\_2023\\_298\\_1\\_act\\_en.pdf](https://health.ec.europa.eu/document/download/cef45b6d-a871-44d5-9d62-3cecc47eda89_en?filename=com_2023_298_1_act_en.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

on a comprehensive approach to mental health <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>

<sup>65</sup> European Solidarity Corps webpage [https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/european-solidarity-corps\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/european-solidarity-corps_en)

<sup>66</sup> Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/cerv>

<sup>67</sup> European Commission, The Digital Services Act [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act_en)

## **European Parliament**

- In 2023, the European Parliament published Proceedings entitled: *Fighting cyberbullying of young people across the EU* (debate).<sup>68</sup>
- In 2024, the European Parliament published a briefing entitled: *Cyberbullying among young people: Laws and policies in selected Member States*.<sup>69</sup>
- In 2024, the European Parliament's LGBTI Intergroup held a 'Bullying event'. The Intergroup on LGBTI Rights is an informal forum for Members of the European Parliament who wish to protect the fundamental rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people.<sup>70</sup>

## **Council of Europe**

- The Council of Europe's 2022-2027 *Strategies on the Rights of the Child* contains multiple references to bullying.<sup>71</sup>

## **Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)**

- In 2024 the Fundamental Rights Agency published its third LGBTIQ survey entitled *LGBTIQ at a crossroads: progress and challenges*<sup>72</sup>

## **Other key European Initiatives**

- The [European Antibullying Network](https://www.antibullying.eu) coordinates anti-bullying actions and initiatives at the European level.<sup>73</sup>

## **United Nations**

- The 2022 [UN General Assembly Resolution on protecting children from bullying](#) reaffirms the Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>74</sup>
- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child published [General comment No 25 \(2021\) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment](#).<sup>75</sup>
- The UN General Assembly adopted a [Resolution on protecting children from bullying](#) in 2014.<sup>76</sup>

## **UNICEF**

- UNICEF launched a campaign in 2020 entitled: [Cyberbullying: What is it and how to stop it; What teens want to know about cyberbullying](#).<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-05-10-ITM-016\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-05-10-ITM-016_EN.html)

<sup>69</sup> European Parliament, *Cyberbullying among young people: Laws and policies in selected Member States* 13-06-2024 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI\(2024\)762331](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2024)762331)

<sup>70</sup> European Parliament, The Intergroup on LGBTI Rights, bullying event <https://lgbti-ep.eu/bullying-report-graphic-page-001/>

<sup>71</sup> Council of Europe, Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/strategy-for-the-rights-of-the-child>

<sup>72</sup> LGBTIQ at a crossroads: progress and challenges, FRA, May 2024 <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2024/lgbtiq-crossroads-progress-and-challenges>

<sup>73</sup> European Antibullying Network webpage <https://www.antibullying.eu>

<sup>74</sup> Protecting children from bullying : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, UN General Assembly , 2022 <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3999502?v=pd>

<sup>75</sup> UN General comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, March 2021 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-25-2021-childrens-rights-relation>

<sup>76</sup> Protecting children from bullying : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, UN General Assembly, 2014 <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/787813?ln=en&v=pdf>

<sup>77</sup> UNICEF, Cyberbullying: What is it and how to stop it <https://www.unicef.org/end-violence/how-to-stop-cyberbullying>

- A [UNICEF poll](#) from 2020 found that: 'More than a third of young people in 30 countries report being a victim of online bullying'.<sup>78</sup>

## **UNESCO**

- In 2017, UNESCO published its '[School violence and bullying: global status report](#)'.<sup>79</sup>
- In 2019, UNESCO published a program and meeting document entitled '[Behind the numbers' ending school violence and bullying](#)'.<sup>80</sup>
- In 2020 UNESCO hosted an international conference on school bullying entitled: '[International Conference on School Bullying: recommendations by the Scientific Committee on preventing and addressing school bullying and cyberbullying](#)'.<sup>81</sup>
- UNESCO Member States declared the first Thursday of November, the [International Day against Violence and Bullying at School Including Cyberbullying](#), recognizing that school-related violence in all its forms is an infringement of children and adolescents' rights to education and to health and well-being.<sup>82</sup>

## **OECD**

- In 2017 the OECD published a policy paper entitled: '[How much of a problem is bullying at school?](#)'<sup>83</sup>
- In 2022, the OECD published a working paper entitled '[Cyberbullying: An overview of research and policy in OECD countries](#)'<sup>84</sup>

## **Other Global Initiatives**

- The [World Anti-Bullying Forum](#) was created in 2017. The next forum will be from June 11-13, 2025 in Stavanger, Norway.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>78</sup> UNICEF poll: More than a third of young people in 30 countries report being a victim of online bullying, UNICEF, September 2019 <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-poll-more-third-young-people-30-countries-report-being-victim-online-bullying>

<sup>79</sup> School violence and bullying: global status report, UNESCO 2017, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246970>

<sup>80</sup> Behind the numbers: ending school violence and bullying, UNESCO 2019

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366486>

<sup>81</sup> International Conference on School Bullying: recommendations by the Scientific Committee on preventing and addressing school bullying and cyberbullying, UNESCO 2020 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374794>

<sup>82</sup> UNESCO, International day against violence and bullying at school including cyberbullying, 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of November <https://www.unesco.org/en/days/against-school-violence-and-bullying>

<sup>83</sup> OECD (2017), "How much of a problem is bullying at school?", PISA in Focus, No. 74, OECD Publishing, Paris, [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/how-much-of-a-problem-is-bullying-at-school\\_728d6464-en.html#:~:text=These%20data%20show%20that%20bullying,frequently%20left%20out%20of%20things.](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/how-much-of-a-problem-is-bullying-at-school_728d6464-en.html#:~:text=These%20data%20show%20that%20bullying,frequently%20left%20out%20of%20things.)

<sup>84</sup> Gottschalk, F. (2022), "Cyberbullying: An overview of research and policy in OECD countries", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 270, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f60b492b-en>.

<sup>85</sup> World Anti-Bullying Forum webpage <https://worldantibullyingforum.com>