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SUPPORT FOR POLICY REFORM

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The **European Anti-bullying Network (EAN)** was set up in 2014 and comprises 22 members (civil society organizations, public institutions and schools) from 15 European countries, actively involved in and committed to the combat against bullying and cyberbullying.

The purpose of **SociAl competences and FundamEntal Rights for preventing bullying – SAFER project** is to develop and implement an innovative method for preventing school violence and bullying, aimed at fostering inclusive education and based on the enhancement of the acquisition of social and civic competences and on the knowledge, promotion and ownership of common positive values and fundamental rights, not only at the level of students and schools but also at the level of community.

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Context

The SAFER project has offered the fundamental insight that

- the combat against bullying requires a collective and comprehensive policy well beyond the mere sharing of good practices.
- such policy needs to target the wider community, implying an involvement and engagement of social actors beyond the mere school context: the Whole School and Community Approach (henceforth WSC Approach).

The need for this more comprehensive and wider approach predominantly, but not exclusively, stems from the fast-growing phenomenon of cyberbullying, which is far more invasive and aggressive than traditional bullying.

In this context, the SAFER project has resulted in a set of Recommendations, based on the leading conclusions that

- there is a need for an organisational framework on which a policy can rely on, which in turn stresses the need for a common vision on what is bullying and what it implies in terms of potential/likely consequences.
- the awareness must be enhanced that preventing and handling bullying is a shared responsibility of all, not only the actors who are directly involved and not only the physical/immediate by-standers.

On the above premises the SAFER project has elaborated tools and manuals, which provide guidance to students, teaching staff and parents, allowing for flexible adaptation according to a specific context.

Current situation in EU member states and other European countries

During the last decade the attention on bullying of European institutions, as well as member states, considerably grew. This led to a more in depth understanding of the phenomenon and its peculiarities. Bullying is not just violence nor is a conflict resulted in fights. Bullying occurs when people **repeatedly and intentionally** act against someone to **cause distress**. It involves power imbalance and repetition, and it is manifested in different forms and in several situations. Bullying may be physical, verbal and social, affecting people's reputation. On another hand, distinguishing elements characterize cyber-bullying: it is persistent, as the access to the internet is possible at any moment; it can happen anonymously, letting the perpetrator free from accountability; it is highly damaging as the offences are available to a potentially infinite audience and it is permanent: once something is shared on the internet, it is often available to everyone, everywhere and it can be challenging to completely delete information. Not for nothing, the extreme but sadly not rare consequence of cyberbullying is suicide. Several studies demonstrate that victims of cyberbullying are at a greater risk than nonvictims of both self-harm and suicidal behaviors (source: <https://www.jmir.org/2018/4/e129/>).

The European Union (EU) has developed comprehensive strategies to combat violence against children, including bullying and peer violence. The EU's approach is embedded in broader child protection frameworks that emphasize the development of integrated child protection systems and legislative measures to protect children from various forms of violence, including gender-based violence and cyberbullying, combating violence against children and ensuring child protection.

EU Policies

1. **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021-2024):** The strategy emphasizes the need for the prevention of violence against children, including bullying and cyberbullying. It incorporates proposals for strengthening child protection systems, improvement of cooperation among relevant authorities, and promotion of child participation in decision-making processes regarding their protection (European Commission) (EEAS (European External Action Service)).
2. **EU Anti-Bullying Initiatives:** The EU supports various programs and networks, such as the **European Antibullying Network (EAN)**, the purpose of which is to reduce bullying through raising awareness campaigns, scientific research, policy recommendations, best practices collection, advocacy activities. The EAN organizes events and conferences to spread knowledges about the issue, share best practices and promote strategies to combat bullying in schools.
3. **Council of Europe Involvement.** The Council of Europe (CoE) complements EU efforts by promoting human rights and citizenship education. The CoE's **Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)** includes specific actions to combat bullying through education and awareness-raising. The CoE Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, adopted by all member states, requires them to address all forms of discrimination and violence, including bullying.

International Collaboration and Awareness

The EU and CoE also participate in international campaigns like the **International Day Against Violence and Bullying at School Including Cyberbullying**, held annually on the first

Thursday of November. This day aims to raise global awareness and foster international collaboration to combat bullying.

Through these comprehensive policies and initiatives, the EU and its member states are actively working to create safer and more supportive environments for children, both online and offline.

In addition to that, a quick examination of anti-bullying policies within the states of the European Union shows a further and huge number of programmes and practices created for preventing and combating bullying and cyber bullying. As a matter of fact, various initiatives have been implemented and many guidelines established, all around Europe at a national and subnational level (local bodies and school administrations, etc). A Whole School and Community Approach is the innovative contribution offered by the SAFER project to the fight against bullying. The proposed method requires cooperation and a shared view on the problem. The entire world in which victims and perpetrators are living must be involved in contrasting bullying, because this particular and highly destructing kind of prevarication flourishes in the unawareness of its signals.

Schools are not the only places when bullying behaviours may occur and teachers and parents are not the only players in the youth educational system. Children and adolescents live their lives also out of the schools and their homes, that is why youth organizations, religious associations and sports clubs too, represent places and opportunity for bullying behaviours to happen and, for this reason, according to the SAFER WSC Approach, they must be taken into consideration.

It is therefore worth have a cursory examination of the experiences and activities already carried out in the **member countries partner in the project** as well as in some of the other European countries, also with the aim of understanding where and to what extent the SAFER experience can fit in and collaborate in the improvement of national policies.

Italy

Italy implemented, on a national and on a local level, multiple programs aimed at coping with the bullying phenomenon: national awareness campaigns, anti-bullying week, anti-bullying protocol, good practices. To target bullying on a systemic level, Italy established comprehensive guidelines and law provisions. The "**Linee di orientamento per la prevenzione e il contrasto del bullismo e del cyberbullismo**" (*Guidelines for the prevention and contrast of bullying and cyberbullying*) provides schools with frameworks to develop their own anti-bullying policies and intervention strategies. Additionally, **Law No. 71/2017** specifically addresses cyberbullying, mandating educational institutions to implement preventive measures and designate a teacher responsible for these issues. In fact, every school must choose among teachers a **bullying and cyber bullying contact person**. This person coordinates and supervise the in-school initiatives about bullying and collaborate with associations and youth aggregation centres in the school area. The protocols established under the guidelines, emphasizes the importance of creating a safe and inclusive school environment, early intervention, and collaboration between school staff, students, and parents. That is why Italian schools conduct workshops, seminars, and training sessions for teachers, students, and parents. These programs aim to raise awareness, foster a positive school environment, and equip individuals with proper skills to identify and intervene in bullying situations.

Other initiatives that deserve to be mentioned are:

- The **National Programme against Bullying (PNCB)**. It focuses on promoting positive relationships, empathy, and respect among students. PNCB provides resources, training, and support for schools to implement evidence-based strategies to prevent bullying and foster a culture of inclusion.

- **"Telefono Azzurro"** is a national helpline dedicated to children and adolescents which includes a specific line for bullying prevention and support. The **Linea Anti-Bullismo** provides counseling, advice, and referrals to resources for children, adolescents, and families affected by bullying.
- **Italian Regional governments** may have their own anti-bullying initiatives tailored to local needs and priorities. These initiatives may include funding for prevention programs, partnerships with community organizations, and support for schools implementing anti-bullying strategies.
- **Educational Campaigns and Workshops:** Various organizations and NGOs in Italy conduct educational campaigns, workshops, and awareness-raising activities to address bullying. These initiatives often involve collaboration with schools, communities, and media outlets to raise awareness about the impact of bullying and promote positive behaviors.
- A growing number of Italian schools is implementing **peer mediation programs** – students trained to act as mediators in conflicts among peers- to foster a culture of dialogue and mutual respect among students. This approach proved to change school climate, reduce the occurrence of bullying incidents and it could be used to solve less serious cases.
- **Counseling and support** services are available in schools to assist victims of bullying. These services provide psychological support and help in the rehabilitation of affected students, ensuring that their well-being and academic performance are not compromised.



- **Training programs for teachers and school staff** are available to increase awareness of bullying, improve intervention skills, and promote a culture of respect and inclusion. These training sessions may cover topics such as conflict resolution, communication skills to create a positive classroom and school climate.
- **Florence Victimization and Bullying Scales**, and similar research tools, are used to assess the prevalence and nature of bullying in Italian schools. These scales help in understanding the extent of bullying and the effectiveness of implemented policies.

Cyprus

Cyprus primary policy for addressing peer violence and bullying in schools is the "National Strategy for the Prevention and Management of Violence in Schools (2018-2022)", a strategy developed by the Observatory on Violence in School and approved by the Council of Ministers in January 2018.

It encompasses a comprehensive approach aimed at both preventing and intervene in cases of school violence and bullying. Key elements of the strategy are:

- **Whole-School Approach:** The strategy emphasizes the creation of a positive school environment where violence is less likely to occur. This involves promoting inclusivity, respect for diversity, and a cooperative culture within schools.

- **Student Involvement:** students are engaged in identifying vulnerable areas within the school. Involvement in discussions about safety and violence prevention is a crucial part of the strategy. This helps in tailoring specific measures to address issues effectively.
- **Teacher Training:** Providing ongoing professional development for teachers to help them recognize and appropriately address various forms of violence is a significant component. This includes training in conflict resolution and peer mediation techniques.
- **Multi-Sectoral Collaboration:** The strategy advocates for collaboration among different stakeholders, including parents, local communities, and governmental bodies, to ensure a cohesive and supportive approach to violence prevention.
- **Policy Development and Monitoring:** Developing clear policies and guidelines for reporting and monitoring incidents of violence and bullying is emphasized. This includes establishing protocols for intervention and support for victims.

Overall, the Cypriot approach to preventing peer violence and bullying in schools is holistic, involving various stakeholders and focusing on creating a safe and supportive educational environment.

Greece

Greece focuses on educational reforms and incorporation of anti-bullying policies into the national curriculum. Main initiatives are teachers' training to recognize and handle bullying,

creation of a supportive environments for students, implementation of a comprehensive school-based programs to support inclusivity and respect among students.

Greece has implemented several key policies and initiatives to address peer violence and bullying in schools, focusing on prevention, intervention, and education.

- **Legislation:** a new draft law titled "Living Harmoniously Together - Breaking the Silence" has been introduced by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The legislative novelty aims to prevent and address violence and bullying in primary and secondary schools. It includes measures such as School Life Advisors and action groups composed by psychologists and social workers to handle incidents at various administrative levels.
- **Digital Reporting Tools:** The new law also introduces digital platforms for anonymous reporting of bullying incidents. This measure is designed to make it easier for victims or witnesses to report bullying without fear of retaliation.
- **Educational Programs and Campaigns:** The organization "The Smile of the Child" has launched the "Speak Now" (Mila Tora) campaign to raise awareness and educate students, teachers, and parents about bullying. This campaign includes workshops and many other interventions involving volunteer students to create a safer school environment.
- **School Environment and Curriculum:** Schools are encouraged to engage in whole-school conversations about violence and bullying all stakeholders—students, teachers, parents, and community. This inclusive approach helps to develop a common understanding and a supportive policy environment.

Additionally, schools are invited to understand what practices may produce frustration and low self-esteem among students and to foster, on another hand, an environment that values inclusion and cooperation.

- **Teacher Training and Support:** Highly recommended measures are regular teachers' training about bullying and psychologists' presence in schools. Psychological intervention, in fact, is considered essential to provide support to bullying victims, handle the incidents and implement preventive strategies. These policies and initiatives reflect Greece's comprehensive approach to tackling school violence and bullying, aiming to create a safer and more supportive educational environments for all students.

North Macedonia

North Macedonia has adopted policies that include educational campaigns and programs designed to reducing peer violence and bullying. The country emphasizes the role of school counselors and psychologists to address bullying and provide support to victims and educating students about the impacts of bullying and the importance of empathy and respect. The prevention of peer violence and bullying is supported through several key policies and initiatives aimed at enhancing child protection and promoting safe school environments. Here are the main aspects of these efforts:

- **Legislative Framework and National Policies:** North Macedonia has a legal framework that addresses violence against children, including bullying and peer violence. The laws are designed to protect children from all forms of violence and

abuse: the Country is engaged in enhancing these legislative measures and in ensuring their better implementation and effectiveness. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy plays a significant role in the implementation of the reform and in the creation of a more supportive environment for children.

- **Coordination and Support Services:** coordination between different state institutions and community-based services is considered essential to better prevent, detect and respond to violence against children. This includes linking education, health, justice, police, and social welfare sectors. UNICEF supports these efforts by promoting improved coordination and helping to develop an effective national legal framework.
- **Education and Awareness:** Educational initiatives are considered fundamental in preventing peer violence and bullying. They consist in dissemination programs about the importance of a violence-free environment designed for parents and children. Training and resources are provided to professionals working with children to ensure they are equipped to effectively handle cases of violence.
- **Psychological Support and Counseling:** Psychological counseling and support services are being implemented in schools to provide students with individual and group counseling. These services are part of broader efforts to address children mental health and well-being, both essential in preventing and mitigating the effects of peer violence and bullying.
- Overall, North Macedonia is working towards a more integrated approach to child protection, involving legal reforms, coordination services improvement, and

educational programs to prevent and address peer violence and bullying effectively.

Bulgaria

Bulgaria's approach to bullying issues consists in legislative measures, national programs, and school policies. The country launched national awareness campaigns and provided training for educators to better manage bullying incidents. Schools are encouraged to develop their own anti-bullying strategies and to include in the programmes parents and the community.

Bulgaria has implemented several policies and initiatives to address and prevent peer violence and bullying in schools, with a particular focus on creating a safer and more supportive educational environment.

- **Legislative Framework:** Bulgaria's legislative measures introduced changes to the Pre-school and School Education Act, to strengthen the protection of children from all forms of violence. These regulations require schools to implement policies and strategies for prevention and contrast of bullying and violence.
- **National Programme Against School Violence:** This programme, developed by the Ministry of Education and Science, is focused on a comprehensive approach that includes preventive measures, timely interventions, and support for victims, training for teachers and school staff to recognize and appropriately handle instances of violence and bullying.
- **UNICEF and Ministry of Education Initiatives:** UNICEF Bulgaria, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, runs the "Together Against Violence in Schools" campaign. This initiative raises awareness about the different forms of school

violence, promotes non-tolerance towards bullying, and supports schools in developing effective prevention and response strategies. It also involves innovative approaches like virtual reality installations to sensitize the public about the impacts of bullying (source: UNICEF).

- **Training and Professional Development:** Continuous professional development for educators is a key component. Teachers and school staff receive training on identifying signs of bullying, intervening effectively, and supporting both victims and perpetrators to address underlying issues and prevent recurrence.

These policies and initiatives reflect Bulgaria's commitment to reducing peer violence and bullying, ensuring that schools are safe places for all students to learn and grow.

Portugal

Portugal addresses bullying through a combination of national policies and school-based programs. The Ministry of Education has introduced guidelines for schools to prevent and manage bullying, including the establishment of anti-bullying committees and the promotion of positive school climates. Portugal also focuses on integrating social and emotional learning into the curriculum to foster better peer relationships and reduce bullying incidents, focusing on creating a safe and supportive school environment. Here are the main initiatives and measures:

- **National Programme for School Success Promotion:** This programme, established by the Ministry of Education, is intended to enhance educational

success by promoting a positive school climate. It includes measures to prevent and address bullying through teacher training and the development of intervention strategies within schools.

- **Legal Frameworks:** Portuguese law explicitly addresses bullying through various statutes. The Penal Code includes provisions against physical and psychological violence, including bullying. Schools are required to have anti-bullying policies and protocols in place.
- **Safe School Program:** This initiative, in collaboration with the Ministry of Internal Administration, requires the presence of police forces to work along with schools to ensure a secure environment. It includes dissemination and training activities about the dangers of bullying and the promotion of respectful relationships.
- **National Plan for Equality and Non-Discrimination:** This plan includes specific actions to contrast bullying, particularly focusing on issues related to gender and sexual orientation. It promotes inclusive education and affirm the rights of all students to learn in a safe environment.
- **Awareness Campaigns and Educational Materials:** The government and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) regularly run campaigns to raise awareness about the effects of bullying and how to prevent it. These campaigns often include educational materials distribution to inform students, teachers, and parents.
- **Support Services:** Schools in Portugal provide psychological and counseling services to support students affected by bullying. These services aspire to help

victims cope with the emotional impact and to rehabilitate perpetrators through behavioral interventions.

- These policies are part of Portugal's broader commitment to ensure that all students can learn in a safe and supportive environment free from violence and bullying (source: World Health Organization).

Other European countries Anti-Bullying programmes

Spain

In the recent years, anti-bullying initiatives are receiving increasing attention in Spain too. Here are some specific strategies and programs:

- **Protocolo de Actuación Contra el Acoso Escolar (PACE):** the Spanish government has implemented the PACE protocol, to provide guidelines for schools on how to prevent and respond to bullying incidents. PACE emphasizes the importance of early intervention, collaboration between school staff, support for victims and accountability for perpetrators.
- **Programa Ciberconvivencia:** The "Ciberconvivencia" programme is purposely designed to target cyberbullying. It provides resources and training for teachers, students and parents on how to surf the Internet safely and responsibly. This programme emphasizes digital citizenship, netiquette (online correct behaviour) and strategies for dealing with cyberbullying.
- **SOS Bullying:** it is a helpline and a support service for children, adolescents and families experiencing bullying. It offers counseling, advice and referrals to resources for those affected suffering bullying consequences.
- **Educational Campaigns and Workshops:** Several organizations and NGOs in Spain conduct educational campaigns and workshops to raise awareness about bullying and to promote a positive school environment. These campaigns often

consist in school visits, presentations and interactive activities created to help train students, teachers and parents about bullying prevention and intervention.

- **Regional Initiatives:** In addition to national efforts, many regions in Spain have their own anti-bullying initiatives tailored to local needs and priorities. Regional governments may provide funding, resources and support to schools and organizations engaged in preventing and addressing bullying.
- **Training for School Staff:** Training programs for teachers and other school staff are available to help them recognize the signals of bullying, respond effectively to incidents and create a supportive and inclusive school environment. These training programs often cover topics such as conflict resolution, peer mediation, empathy promotion and respect among students.

Overall, Spain has taken significant steps to combat bullying in schools through a combination of policy measures, educational initiatives, support services, and community partnerships.

United Kingdom:

The UK developed a wide range of anti-bullying initiatives, including the government-funded "**Anti-Bullying Alliance**" (ABA) which coordinates nationwide efforts. The Anti-Bullying Alliance is a coalition of organizations and individuals working together to stop bullying and create safe environments for young people. ABA coordinates Anti-Bullying Week annually, which raises awareness of bullying and promotes kindness and respect among young people, parents, and educators. Many schools implement programs like the "**Diana Award Anti-**

Bullying Programme," which provides training for staff and students, as well as resources for schools to address bullying effectively. Named after Princess Diana, this program provides training and resources to schools to help them tackle bullying effectively. The program empowers students to take a stand against bullying through peer support and intervention.

PSHE Curriculum: Personal, Social, Health, and Economic (PSHE) education is a compulsory part of the curriculum in UK schools. PSHE lessons cover topics such as relationships, emotions, and conflict resolution, providing opportunities to discuss bullying and its impact.

Cyberbullying Awareness and Prevention: Given the rise of cyberbullying, many initiatives focus specifically on raising awareness and preventing online harassment. Organizations like the UK Safer Internet Centre provide resources and guidance to schools, parents, and young people on staying safe online.

Parental Engagement: Engaging parents and caregivers is crucial in addressing bullying. Schools often provide resources, workshops, and information sessions to educate parents about bullying and how to support their children.

Sweden

Sweden has a strong focus on promoting a positive school environment through many programs. The Swedish National Agency for Education provides guidelines and resources for schools to develop their anti-bullying policies. In Sweden, combating bullying in schools is a significant priority, and the country has implemented various initiatives and programs to address this issue effectively. Here are some specific strategies and programs:

- **Friends Program (Friends Föräldralösa Barns Riksförbund):** The Friends Program is one of Sweden's most well-known anti-bullying initiatives, focusing on creating a safe and inclusive school environment. The program provides training,

resources, and support to schools, teachers, students, and parents to prevent and address bullying. Friends emphasizes the importance of empathy, respect, and bystander intervention in tackling bullying behavior.

- **KiVa Program:** The KiVa program is an evidence-based anti-bullying program developed in Finland and implemented in several countries, including Sweden. KiVa aims to reduce bullying by changing the school culture and promoting positive relationships among students. The program includes both universal interventions for all students and targeted interventions for those involved in bullying incidents.
- **National Action Plan Against Bullying (Plan mot kränkande behandling):** Sweden has a National Action Plan Against Bullying, which outlines the government's strategies for preventing and addressing bullying in schools. The action plan emphasizes collaboration between schools, parents, municipalities, and other stakeholders to create safe and supportive learning environments.
- **Student Health Teams (Elevhälsoteam):** Student health teams, consisting of school counselors, psychologists, nurses, and other professionals, play a crucial role in supporting students' mental and emotional well-being. These teams provide counseling, guidance, and intervention services to students who are experiencing bullying or other challenges.
- **Research and Evaluation:** Sweden invests in research and evaluation to better understand the prevalence and impact of bullying and assess the effectiveness of anti-bullying interventions. This evidence-based approach helps inform policy and

practice to ensure that efforts to combat bullying are evidence-based and impactful.

- Through these various initiatives and programs, Sweden is working to create safe, respectful, and inclusive school environments where all students can learn and thrive without fear of bullying. Collaboration between schools, government agencies, NGOs, and communities is essential to effectively address this issue.

Norway

Norway's **"Olweus Bullying Prevention Program"** is widely used in schools, focusing on creating a safe and inclusive school environment through interventions at multiple levels including school-wide, classroom, individual, and community. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is one of the most well-known anti-bullying initiatives globally and has been widely implemented in Norway. The program focuses on changing the school environment to prevent bullying by promoting positive relationships, increasing adult supervision, and providing clear rules and consequences. It includes school-wide, classroom, individual, and community-level interventions to address bullying comprehensively.

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Utdanningsdirektoratet): The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training provides guidance, resources, and support to schools and municipalities in implementing anti-bullying strategies. It develops and disseminates materials, conducts research, and organizes training for educators and school staff on bullying prevention and intervention.

"Zero" Program: The "Zero" program, implemented by the Norwegian government, aims to create a school culture where bullying is not tolerated. The program emphasizes the

importance of early intervention, student involvement, and cooperation between schools, families, and the local community.

Student Councils and Peer Support: Many schools in Norway have student councils or peer support programs where students take an active role in promoting a positive school environment and supporting their peers. These programs empower students to take ownership of anti-bullying initiatives and encourage peer-to-peer support and intervention. Through these various initiatives and programs, Norway is working to create safe, respectful, and inclusive school environments where all students can learn and thrive without fear of bullying. Collaboration between schools, government agencies, NGOs, and communities is essential to effectively address this issue.

Finland

Finland emphasizes the importance of comprehensive school well-being, which includes addressing bullying. Schools often implement their own anti-bullying strategies tailored to their specific needs. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture provides guidance and resources for schools on preventing and addressing bullying. In Finland, addressing bullying in schools is a priority, and several initiatives and programs have been implemented to prevent and respond to bullying effectively.

The **KiVa program** is an evidence-based anti-bullying program developed in Finland and widely implemented in Finnish schools. KiVa aims to reduce bullying by changing the school culture and promoting positive relationships among students. The program includes both universal interventions for all students and targeted interventions for those involved in bullying incidents.

National Action Plan against Bullying (Koulukiusaamisen vastainen toimintaohjelma): Finland has a National Action Plan against Bullying, which outlines the government's strategies for preventing and addressing bullying in schools. The action plan emphasizes collaboration between schools, municipalities, parents, and other stakeholders to create safe and supportive learning environments.

Student Well-being Teams (Oppilashuoltoryhmä): Student well-being teams, consisting of school counselors, psychologists, nurses, and other professionals, play a crucial role in supporting students' mental and emotional well-being. These teams provide counseling, guidance, and intervention services to students who are experiencing bullying or other challenges.

Through these various initiatives and programs, Finland is working to create safe, respectful, and inclusive school environments where all students can learn and thrive without fear of bullying. Collaboration between schools, government agencies, NGOs, and communities is essential to effectively address this issue.

Germany

In Germany, anti-bullying actions vary by state and school district. Some states have implemented comprehensive anti-bullying programs, while others rely on individual school initiatives. The following are some of the initiative present in the Country.

"Nummer gegen Kummer" (Number Against Grief): it is a helpline providing support and counseling for children and adolescents experiencing bullying or other difficulties. Trained counselors offer confidential advice and assistance to young people in need, helping them cope with bullying and navigate challenging situations.

Peer Mediation Programs: Some German schools implement peer mediation programs, where trained student mediators help their peers resolve conflicts peacefully. Peer mediation empowers students to take an active role in addressing bullying and promoting positive relationships within the school community.

"Mobbingfrei" (Bullying-Free) Campaigns:

Various organizations and NGOs in Germany run anti-bullying campaigns and initiatives to raise awareness and promote positive behaviors among young people.

These campaigns often include educational materials, workshops, and events aimed at preventing and addressing bullying.

Online Resources and Support: A wide number of online resources and support networks are available for students, parents, and educators to learn about bullying prevention and intervention strategies.

Teacher Training and Professional Development: Teachers and school staff receive training on recognizing, preventing, and responding to bullying incidents. Training programs cover topics such as understanding the dynamics of bullying, implementing anti-bullying policies, and fostering a positive school climate.

Local Initiatives and Partnerships: they may include awareness campaigns, counseling services, and support networks tailored to the needs of the local community.

These examples demonstrate the variety of approaches to address bullying across Europe. Countries adapt their initiative to their cultural, educational, and societal context.

Next Generation funds in Anti bullying strategies

The Next GenerationEU (NGEU) funds, part of the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), are designed to support member states in recovering from the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These funds emphasize the need for a green and digital transitions, for social and territorial cohesion and support resilience to get back up after the crises (European Commission) . Despite the primary focus of NGEU regards the above mentioned broad objectives, anti-bullying projects can also be funded under the umbrella of social and educational initiatives aimed at creating safer and more inclusive environments.

Several member states have included educational reforms and initiatives in their national Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs), which can encompass anti-bullying measures. These initiatives often involve the digitalization of education, training for educators, and the implementation of comprehensive school safety programs. For instance, educational reforms and investments in digital tools can provide schools with better resources to prevent and address bullying.

While specific examples of anti-bullying projects funded directly by NGEU are less detailed in the broader documentation, the focus on creating inclusive and supportive educational environments suggests that many projects related to social cohesion and educational improvement likely contribute to anti-bullying efforts indirectly.

Next Generation EU (NGEU) funds have been used to finance a large variety of projects across Europe, including those designed to address bullying and to promote safe educational

environments. The following are some of the initiatives funded by NGEU regarding contrast to bullying:

- **Spain:** the Spanish government utilized NGEU funds to support projects under the *Strategic Projects for Recovery and Economic Transformation (PERTE)*. These projects include investments in digitalization and education, which encompass programs to create safer and more inclusive school environments. Specific initiatives have targeted improving digital skills and resources for students and teachers, indirectly supporting antibullying measures by fostering better digital literacy and online safety ([CaixaBank Research](#)).
- **Italy:** in Italy, the *Recovery and Resilience Plan* includes substantial investments in education and social inclusion. These funds have been allocated to enhance school infrastructure, promote digital learning, and support programs aimed at preventing violence and bullying in schools. Italy's approach emphasizes creating supportive educational environments and improving psychological support services for students
- **Portugal:** Portugal's recovery plan also highlights investments in education and social cohesion. The focus includes enhancing school facilities, promoting mental health programs, and implementing comprehensive antibullying strategies. These initiatives are designed to foster safer school environments and provide adequate support for students facing bullying

- **Greece:** The *Greek Recovery and Resilience Plan* outlines investments in education that include measures to prevent and address bullying. These initiatives are part of broader efforts to modernize educational infrastructure, improve digital capabilities, and promote inclusive education. By integrating these measures into their national plan, Greece aims to create safer and more supportive school environments for all students

Overall, Next Generation EU funds are being strategically deployed across member states to enhance educational environments, support mental health, and implement comprehensive antibullying strategies, contributing to the creation of safer and more inclusive schools. More detailed information on specific national plans and their allocations can be found in governmental websites ([NextGeneration EU tracker](#)).

How SAFER project's outcomes and principles can contribute to the implementation of anti-bullying intervention and activities

Importance of the community. The project is based on an innovative methodology. One of its purposes is to enhance the level of the social competences moving from a “**learning to be**” idea to “**learning to live together**” concepts.

According to the studies conducted on the subject it is essential to adequately address the problem, to include in tackling bullying all the education agencies plus the community. The community is not only a wider context for bullying to happen, but also a place where exercising social competences, feeling accepted by the others, understanding what accountability is. Community is a concept fundamental in Restorative Justice programmes, because it is affected by the consequences of misbehaviors just like the victims, although to a lesser extent. Community can, therefore, cooperate in creating more secure situations for children and adolescents, potential victims of bullying, and help in dealing with the consequences of bullying incidents, also giving the perpetrators the opportunity to make amends for their actions. Community means also participation and cooperation. This implies that all the parties, members of the educating community should know that is pivotal operating in a circular way.

An educating community is also an open system, articulated and complex that tries to adapt itself to a continuous evolution, to fit the improved, new organizational models. Schools, families, and other members of the community are active participants of the youngsters' development. In this way they could have a deep understanding of the contextual factors shaping their children. What **clearly emerged from the SAFER project and its piloting phase**, is that the prevention and tackling bullying in a **holistic way**, cannot be separated from supporting young people at home, at school, in class and **in their community**.

Adaptable interventions. Schools and youth community are always different. Despite the essential structure of bullying incidents may not vary, age, sex, ethnicity, cultural level, and group dynamics can make a huge difference while observing the phenomenon. That is why simply using ready-made programs rarely works. So, to target the problem in the most effective way it is necessary to develop intervention plans which consider the peculiarities and the unique needs of each school/association/community. It is therefore necessary to establish a **shared vision about bullying** in the community, understanding its impact and distinctive features; identify audiences to create and adjust messages as appropriate; identify the role of each partner to help prevent and respond to bullying; and identify the best tools to be used.

The WSCA methodology proposed by the SAFER project is based on social and civic competences, common positive and democratic values and fundamental rights and it is a framework. So, any school can use and adapt this framework to design its own system of prevention/intervention choosing the most suitable pedagogic/didactic tools and actions (research-based and school-wide curriculum).

Importance of responsibility. *Be the HERO, for reducing the bullying to ZERO* is a SAFER project's claim. It clearly refers to the need for more active bystanders, i.e. students that take action by choosing to step in and intervene when witnessing bullying situations.

As a matter of fact, a positive school climate is everyone's responsibility. Being a hero in school or youth communities could mean being present with a friend doing any helpful act of kindness or helping another friend from a bully. Bullying usually happens when a vulnerable person is alone so, **learning to STAND BY instead of being just a bystander** can make a huge difference. On another hand, there are evidences that defending may cost a high price as regarding popularity, so it is fundamental to promote moral engagement.

Systemic approach. Whole School and Community Approach means also a systemic way to target the problem. Every player - adults, children and young people - should understand the role that they have in addressing bullying and cooperate, sharing the same vision and purposes. **Parents have to learn to pay attention to and recognize early** signals, they must learn to have open conversations with their children, avoiding judgement. During the **piloting implementation phase of the project** some of the schools involved actively engaged some parents, encouraging them to listen to their children's experiences and to become active participants in bullying prevention efforts. The crucial role of parents as a source of support in addressing bullying incidents effectively and promoting a culture of respect and empathy within the school community was enlightened through this collaborative experience. The three manuals – for teachers, parents, and students- were purposely designed to provide all the actors of the educating community with useful tools and shared knowledge.

[SAFER project](#) was a 36-month Erasmus + KA3 project that involved 8 partners from 7 European Countries: Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Portugal, North Macedonia, and Cyprus. The Lessons Learned also contain some key recommendations for the better design and implementation of new projects and policies for combatting bullying. The piloting phase involved 20 schools, approximately 200 teachers and 1000 students and 500-600 members and organizations of the communities where the schools are, plus parents.

Policy Support

One of the main questions for the future is which are the requirements

- to carry forward the insights acquired through the SAFER project and the Recommendations it has formulated
- to secure a broad implementation of the tools and manuals it has produced

a. the European level

SAFER identifies a need for common European guidelines, European campaigns of awareness raising (on bullying and on shared responsibility), community-wide mobilisation and structural ways at European level to prevent and combat bullying. In other words, there is a need for a common European policy on bullying, recognising the particularities and the seriousness of the phenomenon. All levels of EU decision-making carry a responsibility in this regard, Commission, European Parliament and Council of Ministers.

The fact that the SAFER project was financed and monitored by the Erasmus Key Action 3 constitutes a legitimate basis for EU instances to claim co-ownership of the SAFER project conclusions and proposals, as an input for a common European policy on bullying. Its development, promotion and monitoring could for instance be effectively embedded in the European Child Guarantee, including in the country assessments which the latter framework implies.

This could also apply to another SAFER project's activity, the SAFER Observatory on Antibullying Policies in Europe. The Observatory's work could become permanent and help in keeping track of the national policies and best practices.

b. the national level

Based on the conclusion that a WSC Approach policy is determining, national political decision-making instances have a broad role to play, given the multi-dimensional complexity of bullying in its roots and consequences. Obviously, education authorities are called to take the lead in this process, but also other sectors of national policy making have to enclose prevention, combat and handling of bullying into their policies, such as the ones regarding Health (mental health), Justice, Home Affairs, Social Affairs and even Labour Affairs (bullying exists in the working environment too).

- the tools and student/teacher/parent manuals produced by the SAFER project according to the WSC Approach can be directly used by individual schools and institutions. National campaigns and efforts to enhance awareness of bullying will therefore gain in effectiveness when including the promotion of the SAFER principles and the materials produced within the project. On this point, it is useful to recall that manuals and other tools have been developed with EU financial support and EU monitoring.
- The tools and student/teacher/parent manuals produced by the SAFER project are flexible and can be adapted to national contexts and specific needs. They thus provide an effective base for national educational authorities to develop national guidelines: a model code of conduct subsequently to be adopted by individual educational institutions, a mechanism to facilitate monitoring and a support structure to prevent and

handle cases of bullying.

- In the spirit of the wide WSC Approach, that aims to include in the combat against bullying every actors involved in youth education- national policy makers should also consider to introduce of a code of conduct and a monitoring and support mechanism in the evaluation procedures to grant subsidies, financial or material help to youth organizations or young people dedicated activities. In fact, sports associations, youth associations, religious and political organizations, are contexts in which bullying is very likely to occur. The student/teacher/parent manuals developed in the SAFER project provide an appropriate and concrete base in this respect too.
- Enhancing the community-wide dimension of the combat against bullying, the tools and manuals of SAFER can also constitute a base for raising awareness of co-responsibility in environments beyond the educational one: mental health workers, police, social workers and judicial personnel confronted with youth delinquency, labour inspectors (as the phenomenon of bullying also exists among adults) are bound to benefit from the SAFER tools and manuals and will strengthen their capacity to identify (potential) cases of bullying, evaluate, judge and act accordingly upon them. The inclusion by the competent national authorities of materials based on the SAFER tools and manuals into the instruction and training curriculum of said personnel would be a significant step in the right direction.



- In support of action to be taken as mentioned above by instances of the Executive branch of government, legislators should be made more actively aware of their co-responsibility as well, so that the phenomenon of bullying be taken into proper consideration whenever legislation is being drafted and enacted with potential implications of bullying and/or cyberbullying, regardless whether this is in a school context or otherwise.

c. the sub-national level

Regional and municipal authorities are often the 'organising' instance of school education and associative life. They too are therefore supposed to take on the responsibilities for concrete action in order to prevent and handle bullying in all its forms. Within the framework of these competences, our observations made in heading b, supra, are valid for regional and municipal authorities as well.

d. the level of individual institutions

The tools and manuals produced by SAFER are designed for use at the level of individual institutions. consequently, they can be put directly into practice by schools, cultural associations, sports clubs, etc, also in the absence of a top-down promotion by national, regional or municipal authorities. In view hereof, public notoriety of the SAFER tools and manuals will be significantly enhanced by their accessibility through the public communication channels of the EU, the public communication channels of the EU Commission which financed and monitored the SAFER project.

Policy Recommendations

The **SAFER project Consortium** is fully convinced that the phenomenon of bullying is a complex social issue that is influenced by myriad diverse factors. It's not merely restricted to the conflictual dyadic relationship between a bully and his or her victim, but that it's viewed as an aspect of group processes. Maybe, because the "virus" of bullying has not yet been isolated, a common strategy that could fit with the multifaceted phenomenon of bullying is not the way to follow. The persistently high rates of bullying, despite numerous attempts from the sociological and pedagogical points of view, suggest that, while consistency and coherence in schools' approaches to bullying prevention and wellbeing are important, there is no silver bullet for bullying prevention. Even if bullying happens mainly at school, any of the most salient drivers of bullying may be beyond schools' direct control, related to parental attitudes, the community where our children live and the broader societal issues.

Addressing school bullying is an issue of concern for many Member States, among them some with particularly high bullying rates. Media attention, heightened concern on the part of lawmakers, educators, and families, the results gathered from the Safer project allow us to say that policies that can foster bullying and cyberbullying prevention are key elements for advancing anti-bullying strategies.

Policy makers should by no means be distracted from the overwhelming reality that bullying has grown into a major public issue, requiring an urgent, comprehensive, and coherent response on the side of grass-root society, public instances and policy makers alike. For, although awareness and preparedness to combat bullying has increased substantially, many

children are still confronted with the phenomenon, often with devastating and lasting effects on their physical and/or mental health and integrity.

In this framework, and based on the positive impact determined by the Safer project in the local areas where it has been implemented, the Safer Consortium suggests the following Policy Recommendations:

1. to map and review funded projects which focus on or include bullying. The outcomes of such interventions could be at the basis of a guide to build future anti-bullying projects. As bullying and cyberbullying are long-standing and growing issues, it is necessary, to successfully deal with them, to go beyond the mere sharing of subjective good practices. The state of things shows that a more systematic and coordinated approach and a development program are needed to combat bullying in Europe.
2. the above mentioned European “map” of national anti-bullying policies and related best practices could also be used to establish a mechanism of country assessments to promote national dialogue and cooperation to enhance such policies. In this effort, the EU and EAN could team up with organizations which are already working on this type of mapping.
3. To consider the opportunity to create European level guidelines for social safety and inclusion in schools, agreed on by Member States; strengthening the strategies to combat early school-leaving, gender/racial-based violence and social exclusion.
4. To set up an ongoing European campaign to stimulate awareness of bullying and structural ways to combat it. To proclaim an EU-“Day Against Bullying” that could be the focal point in annual campaigns and have a recurrently mobilizing effect.

5. Part of such a campaign could be the development of a clearing house of projects and methods. In this effort, the EU and EAN could collaborate and also involve other organizations which are already working on a similar global database, for instance in the context of the World Anti-bullying Forum.
6. The EU should consider developing a coherent view on how to deal with political hate speech and exclusion. Tendencies to legitimize ideological and political hate speech and systematic social exclusion of social groups should be more concretely recognized as a serious threat to anti-bullying, violence and in general, human rights and democracy.
7. To explore the potential of the Manuals produced within the Safer project such as Teachers' Manual, Students Handbook and Manual for Parents and Members of the educating communities that, being open educative tools, already translated into several languages, can be widely disseminated for fostering the Whole School and Community approach framework with the aim of preventing and addressing bullying and cyberbullying.
8. Starting from the work realized in the Safer project, that takes into account previous best practices, implement some European level guidelines.
9. To establish a mechanism of country assessments to stimulate national dialogue and cooperation to enhance anti-bullying policies and practices. In this effort it's very important to make connection amongst bullying, cyberbullying, teen dating violence, violation of human and children rights and other forms of peer violence, on-line and in the real life.
10. Establishment of a permanent **SAFER Observatory on Antibullying Policies in Europe hosted by the EAN European Antibullying Network** that will identify

and generate evidence that Europe’s decision-makers need for better harmonize the Antibullying policies in all the EU countries. The Observatory will share these evidences on Education systems – acting as a knowledge broker and bridging the gap between civil society and policy.

