

## PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS TOWARD BULLYING AND (PEER) VIOLENCE: EXISTING GOOD PRACTICES

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### ABSTRACT

*The promotion of human rights, the equality of all people and prevention of violence are central topics in European schools. With reference to evidence from the Children's Voices Project, this paper analyzes the most relevant good practices addressed to fight interethnic violence in schools. Indeed, specific activities have been organized to foster children's rights and to prevent generalized violence. Moreover, programs oriented to the promotion of integration of migrants or pupils belonging to ethnic minorities have been developed. Starting from these assumptions, selected good practices will be presented in a comparative way, in order to describe different characteristics, purposes and goals, within the context of the five countries involved in the project.*

**Key words:** Bullying, peer violence, good practices, school, education

## VIOLENZA TRA PARI E BULLISMO: PROBLEMI E SOLUZIONI. ANALISI DI ALCUNE BUONE PRATICHE

### SINTESI

*La promozione dei diritti umani, l'uguaglianza e la prevenzione della violenza sono certamente temi centrali, sui quali le scuole europee hanno impostato i loro programmi. Partendo da quanto emerso dal progetto europeo Children's Voices, questo paper ha lo scopo di analizzare le principali buone pratiche messe in atto dai cinque paesi europei coinvolti nel progetto (Austria, Cipro, Inghilterra, Italia e Slovenia) al fine di prevenire e contrastare qualsiasi forma di violenza, compresa quella interetnica, nell'ambito dei contesti scolastici. Le buone pratiche selezionate saranno di seguito presentate a livello comparato evidenziando le caratteristiche, gli scopi e gli obiettivi perseguiti da ogni singolo contesto in base alle peculiarità nazionali. La mappatura delle buone pratiche condurrà, infine, ad un'analisi delle componenti fondamentali per il contrasto della violenza tra pari fuori e dentro l'ambiente scolastico.*

**Parole chiave:** bullismo, violenza tra pari, buone pratiche, scuola, educazione

INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this paper is to produce an insight view through evidence from the Children's Voices Project<sup>2</sup> on the topic of interethnic peer violence, which is a concrete problem even if it still remains an under-researched and inadequately discussed topic/issue in many countries (Sedmak, Medarić, 2012, p. 9). The spotlight is on the related good practices implemented in each partner country (Austria, Cyprus, England, Italy and Slovenia). Starting from this point of view, Children's Voices research has meant to represent a new piece of this incomplete puzzle, focusing primarily on the role played by inter-ethnic issues in peer relationships at school. The project has benefited from a common methodological framework in which a selection of agreed topics was analyzed. Nevertheless, the importance of the different national contexts that play a key role in the analysis of causes and effects is undeniable, especially when the crucial issue is the interethnic aspect of a society.

To the present day, multi-ethnic societies are no longer a rarity. On the contrary, they are increasingly common and they are characterized by an ever-growing presence of ethnic and territorial differences in the same context (Cesareo, 2007, p.3). The debate on multiculturalism highlights the qualitative aspect of the transformation of society. The difference is increasingly an important issue, an interpretive key to describe, understand and justify reality and its contradictions, and is also an important tool to read and construe the contemporary age (Colombo E., Semi G., 2007, p.15). In fact, human history is the history of constant and intense intercultural, interreligious and interracial contacts (Sedmak, Medarić, 2012, p.14): the result of the mixture of all those elements may generate conflicts, especially among youths, in contexts where they spend most of their time like schools.

Starting from all these assumptions, a short description of insights into the society and historical characteristics of each of the five countries involved in the project might be useful since the European situation on the topic is very heterogeneous.

For example, due to its colonial past the United Kingdom shows a high presence of foreigners over the years, especially from countries outside Europe. Thus, the Country and its institutions and organizations have had the chance to establish a long tradition of political and aca-

democratic debates on cultural and racial pluralism, thus representing an example of different kinds of coexistence. for all European nations Moreover, despite its small territorial dimension, Cyprus<sup>3</sup> has a long and still ongoing history of interethnic conflicts especially between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. As regards the specific issue of racism and discrimination in Cypriot schools, various research studies have been conducted, exploring students' attitudes toward multiculturalism, their experience of marginalization, discrimination etc. (Partasi, 2010; Zembylas, 2010a; Zembylas, 2010b). This research is a symptom of the national public opinion's manifest interest in these topics; moreover, it is worth underlining how Cypriots are also facing problems of being in contact with students of other nationalities like, for example, Palestinians to whom a specific program is dedicated (Emergency Intervention Team- see the Annex I).

Although Slovenia has traditionally been perceived as culturally homogeneous, in its territory many historical differences are still present. Nowadays, three minority groups are legally recognized (Hungarian, Italian and Roma) and a considerable number of migrants from former Yugoslavia territories are still living within Slovenian borders. For this reason, an intercultural debate on differences is a current topic in the agenda of the Country. In Italy, where a debate on migration issues is on, it is very common to highlight how the Country has changed its position during the last decades. After being an emigration Country, it has progressively become a host Country for many migrants coming from many different countries in the world; as a consequence, it has been dealing with the many aspects of integration in daily life. Lastly, Austria is a country that shows a high percentage of economic migrants, from former Yugoslavia and Turkey, and a number of recognized minorities (Slovenian, Croatian, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak and the Roma and Sinti).

As mentioned above, all European countries including those involved in the Children's Voices project are facing with the challenges of modernity and multiculturalism: migration flows are constantly increasing, especially within the European borders, where boundaries are blurred and the free circulation of people and goods is not simply a characteristic of the modern age but also a chance for everyone. As Favell (2008) stated, observing Europe today is like watching a Rorschach test: you look at the continent as a whole and Europe is still divided up into distinctive nationalized societies. At the same

1 Though both equally involved in writing this research paper, Donatella Greco wrote Paragraphs: Introduction; Methodology; Good Practices in different national contexts.

Chiara Zanetti wrote: What are the school's perspective? (Peer education; Beside the schools: family, local authorities and ngo's; Interethnic violence practises and intercultural education).

Both authors wrote: Summing up: some important findings from European Children's Voices

2 The European project Children's Voices has represented an excursus on the subject of violence in schools with a particular focus on interethnic peer violence. It involved five countries (Austria, Cyprus, England, Italy, and Slovenia). Further information is available at [www.childrensvoices.eu](http://www.childrensvoices.eu).

3 In this paper, the terms Cyprus and Cypriots will refer only to the part of the island under the control of the Republic of Cyprus, as since 1974 the Turkish and Greek parts are de facto separated. Thus the two educational systems have always been separated.

time, many identities and ethnic backgrounds are living together in a common European context which is the result of migration flows, historical changes and human mobility, all of which have created new horizons. Many countries in Europe have faced with issues connected to cultural and ethnic diversity in different ways based on their own historical background. School is definitely a place where all those differences are widely poured out in many different ways. As a result, schools are where a big portion of European diversities represented

#### METHODOLOGY

The methodology of Children's Voices has been supported by a common approach among the five national research teams. Their research has been developed at a quantitative and qualitative level: a combination of two methods was used to gain an in-depth, layered perspective on the analyzed issues (Sedmak, Medarić, 2012, p. 11).

The project started in January 2011 and finished in December 2012. The quantitative phase was performed with a self-administered questionnaire<sup>4</sup> designed in agreement by the five partners. It was administered in two classes of four primary and four secondary selected schools (sixteen classes for each Country) chosen according to common criteria (a considerable number of foreigners in the classrooms, preferably urban geographical location of the schools, and the interest of each single school in participating at the research)<sup>5</sup>. The questionnaire was addressed to 10 years old pupils and 16-18 years old students. On the whole 3,524 questionnaires were collected in the five countries<sup>6</sup>.

A combination of individual and semi-structured interviews and focus groups were the tools utilized during the qualitative stage of the research, which involved pupils and students as well as the participation of a number of selected experts and spokespersons from the school staff (headmasters, teachers, pedagogues etc...) as qualified witnesses.

As stated above, the pupils and students were also in some of the focus groups: each Country organized eight focus groups set in four selected schools (two primary and two secondary) where the quantitative survey had already been developed. The agreed topics on which focus groups were based were the perception of violence, the reasons for violence as well as the pupils' reactions to violent situations. In some cases, for younger children a number of warm-up techniques were used to help them feel comfortable sharing their experiences<sup>7</sup>. The choice of the members (four-six students) to be included in the focus groups was made in cooperation with school teachers with a goal to pursue a balance of gender and cultural diversities.

The qualified witnesses and their expertise have given an insight view of what the school's perception about the peer violence is and what the real emerging issues that have to be considered are. Each Country has sampled, through a one-to-one semi-structured in-depth interview, a selection of qualified witnesses<sup>8</sup> chosen among school staff (teachers, headmasters, counselors and pedagogues) and spokespersons of national and local authorities, institutions and organizations. The topics discussed during the interviews have also been agreed among the partners in the project in order to obtain contextual information related to their territories and critical emerging issues.

#### GOOD PRACTICES IN DIFFERENT NATIONAL CONTEXTS

Going deeper into the situation of each individual national situation a selection of projects and good practices implemented to fight school violence and bullying will be presented in a comparative way, in order to describe different characteristics, purposes and goals. The term *good practice* usually represents a *benchmark* in a specific context due to its proven efficacy of action: consequently, a good practice could be helpful to create other operative experiences suitable to solve and pre-

4 The questionnaire was written in English and thereafter every country translated and adapted it to the national context.

5 It is worth highlighting that, as regards the questionnaire, the choice of schools and their geographical location, each Country adopted specific correctives according to national specific framework. Moreover, within the agreed methodological framework, a number of peculiar situations have been analyzed such as case of the English partner who decided to focus on the Islamofobia issue as well, perceived as a matter of significant interest.

6 The number of collected surveys for each country was: 767 in Slovenia, 729 in England, 715 in Austria, 714 in Italy and 599 in Cyprus.

7 In Italian focus groups a short excerpt from the animation *The Ant Bully* was projected. The movie deals with the topic of diversity using a language suitable for children.

8 Following a short list of qualified witnesses interviewed. Slovenia interviewed eight among experts of public health, researchers, representatives of school students organizations and international organizations; Austria interviewed eight teachers and six experts among university professors, researchers, trainers, psychologist, chairmen/woman and spokespersons from local authorities and organizations; Cyprus interviewed five experts recruited from governmental and non-governmental organizations and eight among school staff members (teachers, counselors and headmasters); England sampled eight experts from school staff (senior manager and school teachers) and seven experts from representatives from Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), researchers, government agencies, schools and community organizations; Italy sampled eight among teachers and headmasters and six among pedagogues, spokespersons from local and national institutions and organizations.

9 Some factors characterize the experiences of good practices like, for example, the presence of positive and innovative ways and methods whose application can solve problems and the possibility to replicate the experience from time to time in different contexts and situations that can require a model to refer to.

vent a problem<sup>9</sup> (Stradi, 2005). Indeed, in each country a fundamental role is played by the national legislation that establishes the framework where all the interventions take place. On the other hand, projects are implemented also by each single school, a crucial space because in this context young boys and girls socialize with peers and adults and learn how to balance (or not) their behavior. According to Sharp and Thomson (2004), school policies influence a school's whole organization, including relations among students, teachers, school staff and families. Moreover, schools and teachers can play a relevant role in increasing the well-being of children and reducing bullying. In fact, when families and local communities fail in their educative task, schools can compensate for this lack. In addition, schools have a central role in strengthening and sensitizing the local institutional network and community in order to promote the well-being of children: therefore, they need support from the local community to succeed in this purpose. Beside, also NGO's and associations implement programs that promote the well-being of the population (and of children in particular) and combat anti-social behaviors: for this reason, in each country, a wide number of national or local organizations implement further specific projects.

The good practices mapped at national level are illustrated in table no. 1<sup>10</sup>: the two dimensions reported in the table are targets to whom the programs are directed and their purposes. Indeed, each country has a wide presence of specific programs promoting both intercultural values, and fighting and preventing bullying. However, it is harder to observe specific programs expressly designed to fight interethnic peer violence; in fact, when it occurs, the situation is treated more specifically. At any rate, selected intercultural programs are designed with a broader overall purpose in order to foster the integration of foreigners and to enhance children's intercultural competences: as a consequence, the prevention of any form of violence is pursued. More specifically, a considerable number of good practices was developed in support of both the students and the school staff; however, the family is also a notable target, as it has an important role in the socialization and education process. The involvement of family is a first step toward a whole community approach against any form of peer violence (Cowie, Jennifer, 2007). As tab no. 1 shows, in the selected programs the involvement of local authorities and institutions (i.e. social workers, protocols with judicial authorities) is actually less frequent although it is widely suggested in literature. As mentioned hereafter, teachers also recognize the value and usefulness of such involvement; however, school expertise and economic resources are often scanty. As an Austrian expert claimed:

*On the other hand it is important to know that violence and bullying are not individual problems but social. They develop in groups, there are the bullies, the victims but also those who let it happen, those who observe or participate. So in order to stop it we provide a culture of looking at a violent situation and helping to stop it." C.S. "We need to work not only with the bullies and the victims but also with others who are observe but do nothing to stop it. Those are also involved and they also support the bully by doing this. (Austria, R. Herzog, expert)*

Surely the implementation of such programs has an overall impact on tackling violence at school; however, a concrete and precise quantification of their impact is difficult to be achieved, as a formal assessment is not always provided. Indeed, the fact that such programs are on the agenda of almost each school policy is a positive sign itself.

In detail, the selected good practices allow the identification of common lines of action. Schools have proven to be very sensitive toward multiculturalism: in fact, many of the activities aim at transmitting intercultural values, which are functional in improving tolerance and respect among children and teenagers. In order to achieve the integration of foreigners, programs usually focused on the inclusion of foreigners and on the promotion of diversity. Beside this, some interventions are focused on the prevention of violence (anti-bullying programs).

#### WHAT ARE THE SCHOOLS' PERSPECTIVES?

By looking at what actually happens inside schools, it is possible to analyze contextual variables which can prevent and tackle violent behaviors of children at school. Moreover, there is a relevant tradition of research regarding the analysis of interethnic relationships in classes and schools (D'Ignazi 2005; Zoletto, 2007; Agostinetto, 2008; Law, Swann, 2011).

At this point, a terminological aspect should be pointed out. Violence can occur in several shapes, but in order to mark the borders of the present analysis, it is worth giving a previous theoretical explanation of the relation between bullying and violent deviant behaviors. Smith (1999) describes bullying as a particularly cruel subcategory of aggressive behaviors directed repeatedly to a victim who is unable to defend himself, crushed by a number of younger, less strong or less secure attackers. Traditionally, literature identifies both physical and psychological bullying. Olweus<sup>11</sup> (1996) and Fonzi (1997) underlined the durable negative consequences of such behaviors in victims. On the other hand, the au-

10 Each national research team chose the projects listed in tab. no. 1 independently according to relevance in their own Country. For a wider explanation of contents of selected good practices see Annex I.

11 In particular, Olweus gave a first definition of bullying in 1993. He indicated in intentionality, persistence and asymmetry of power between bullies and victims the three fundamental characteristics that make it recognizable, compared to other aggressive behaviors.

**Table 1: Selected Programs and Good Practices implemented at the National Level****Tabela 1: Izbrani programi in dobre prakse implementirani na nacionalni ravni**

	Good Practice	Target	Purpose
Austria	Viennese Social Competence training WiSc	Students, teachers/school staff, family	Violence prevention program
	Faustlos	Students	Violence prevention program
Cyprus	Emergency Intervention Team	Students	Intervention team against violence and delinquency in schools
	Zones of Educational Priority	Students, teachers/school staff	Foster integration of students with different ethnic backgrounds in public schools
	Strategic Planning	Students	Increase awareness of multiculturalism and diversity in the school environment
England	EMAG	Students	Assist students from different ethnic backgrounds in schools
	SNL	Teachers/school staff, school and local authorities	Provide support and training to schools and local authorities
Italy	Smontailbullo	Students, schools, teachers/school staff, family, the whole community	Prevention, information and support
	Regional permanent observer on bullying	School and local authorities	Prevention, monitoring, dissemination of good practices
Slovenia	School Mediation	Students, teachers/school staff, family	Improve the culture of relationship between pupils and school staff
	School for peace	Pupils	Combat peer violence
	Preventive Programme for the Reduction of Violence in Primary School	Students, teachers/school staff, family	Violence prevention program
	My Peers and Me-Let's Talk	Students, teachers/school staff, family	Peer mediation - peer education
	Networks of Learning Schools	Teachers/school staff, school and local authorities	Systematic exchange of good practices: education in problem solving

thors pointed out that personal gratification, prestige in the peer group and eventually stealing other people's things can be motivations adopted by bullies. In this paper, the analysis focuses both on the bullying phenomenon and on *peer violence*, as suggested by the title. For this reason, a wider range of harassments are taken into account, even if, as mentioned below, sometimes adults do not recognize them as bullying acts.

In order to reduce peer victimization, many researchers (Besag, 1989; Sharp, Smith, 1994; Rigby, 1996; Rahey, Craig, 2002) agree on the importance of an ecological approach which tackles the issue of bullying behaviors in schools from different points of view. As underlined by Gini (2007), "The main goal of this kind of approach is to elaborate a school policy against violence and a rules system based on respect and co-operation". Therefore, the focus shifts from the social skills of victims and bullies to the prevention of harassment:

specific measures are addressed to pupils who do not play a central role in peer violence episodes. In particular, at least in theory, interviewed teachers emphasized courageous and severe answers against the harassing behaviours of students.

More in detail, in England and Slovenia the interviews point out the presence of a *zero tolerance policy* against violence. Besides having a clear formal school regulation setting out policies and tools to contrast bullying, in England school staffs reported the importance of promoting an overall inclusive and welcoming ethos in the school, where racist attitudes would not be tolerated. Slovenian teachers point out this element as well: a constructive dialogue seems to be one of the best ways to deter pupils from repeating bad behaviour:

*We've had anti bullying policy [...] I think people are very clear that this is a college where we want*

**Table 2: What do you usually do when you see that a pupil is treated badly because of his or her nationality/ethnic background (culture, language, religion)? (%)****Tabela 2: Kaj ponavadi storiš, ko vidiš učenca s katerim grdo ravna zaradi njegove narodne/etnične pripadnosti (culture, jezika, vere)? (%)**

	Cyprus	England	Italy	Slovenia	Austria
I help him or her	29,1	31,2	33,8	23,2	27,8
I tell a teacher or another staff member what is happening	18,1	31,0	18,6	29,2	19,5
I tell another adult what is happening	5,5	4,8	5,4	6,0	4,1
I tell them that this is not right	19,6	11,3	16,0	10,9	21,3
Nothing but I think I should help him or her	15,8	8,4	12,9	16,0	12,4
Nothing but I stay and watch	5,5	3,7	4,0	4,7	2,5
Nothing and walk away because this is none of my business	5,3	6,7	8,0	7,6	7,3
I join the ones who treat him or her badly	1,0	0,9	0,9	0,5	1,8
Other	0,0	2,2	0,7	1,9	3,3

*a warm, friendly, welcoming atmosphere and we won't tolerate anything that goes beyond that. (England, Vice Principal, School 15)*

*Constructive dialogue, this is the first step [...] but dialogue is the first thing. [...] Disciplinary sanctions are the last resort. You have to discuss such matters promptly, the minute it happens. Because zero tolerance means exactly that it shouldn't be tolerated, (Slovenia, teacher)*

Punishment and sanctions, followed by a scope of rehabilitation sessions in order to make students learn from their own mistakes, may be reserved for the more serious or persistent misbehaviours. In fact, scientific literature is sceptical about the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies unless they are integrated with "prevention, conflict resolution/peer mediation, improved classroom behaviour management, and early identification and intervention" (Skiba 2000). For this reason, school authorities try to explain to violent pupils that their behaviour will not only have a negative impact on others but on themselves as well.

All in all also pupils believe that "severe" sanctions for improper behaviour are the best way to prevent (interethnic) violence in the school environment. This confirms that disciplinary punishment is "powerfully symbolic" (Skiba, 2000) because it makes students feel sure that something is actually going to be done.

*Teachers should be stricter; they should give the bully some severe punishment. (Slovenia, Male, 10) [Unsaid: It could be useful employing] CCTV surveillance, for example. (Slovenia, girl, 10)*

Indeed, teachers and other schools authorities have the ethical and legal responsibility to create and maintain a protective atmosphere in their schools: for this reason, when episodes of violence occur, the adequate involvement of teachers and other school staff is crucial. When

teachers fulfill their role of leadership and become reference points for the students, they are among the first confidants for the students. In this way, students see them as those who can really solve their problems. In particular, as Table no. 2 shows, in each Country the respondents claimed that they mostly either actively stepped in or helped the victim of violence, or they informed a teacher about the episode. Teachers seem to be strongly involved by students in English and Slovenian schools, whose interviews have revealed the popularity of a policy of zero tolerance against violence. Indeed, as already highlighted in paragraph 1, in the English case the credibility of teachers is also supported by well-established traditions in managing difference. However, this attitude seems to produce a positive impact on students' confidence with their teachers (especially in the case of primary schools): as a matter of fact, in these two countries, students are also more willing to involve teachers when violent episodes occur (see Fig. 1). Therefore, this kind of policy may possibly generate confidence and respect in students towards the effectiveness of teacher intervention:

*We have a zero tolerance policy towards violence. Violence shouldn't be tolerated...we react immediately, decisively and we stop it the moment it happens. (Slovenia, Teacher, Secondary School)*

Referring to the survey (Table no. 3), around 40% of the responding students (both from primary and secondary schools) think teachers always intervene when episodes of bullying or violence occur. It is worth noticing that, in each country, primary school students stated that teachers always intervene. On the contrary, a greater number of secondary school students affirmed teachers never interfere. As regards the reasons for non-intervention of teachers, in all countries the majority of students who claimed that teachers do not intervene specified they do not step in because they are not aware of what is actually happening. This is also confirmed by some focus groups. For example, this appeared in a Cypriot focus group:

*In our school there are teachers but I do not know how much they will help because these things are among the students, if no solutions are found between peers they could not help because they are older you won't pay proper attention. (Cyprus, female, 17-18)*

However, as some pupils stated that sometimes teachers tend to minimize or not to recognize the presence of interethnic violence, especially when it is not easy to distinguish verbal violence from shared jokes or teasing between friends. Olweus (1993) underlined that sometimes teachers and parents are not aware of harassment happening in school. This has been confirmed by several focus groups, for example:

*I would not go to teachers because they don't do anything, they don't try to find the reason and to solve the problem (Austria, female, 18)*

On the other hand, both primary and secondary school students are sometimes afraid of exposing themselves to even further harassment and retributive measures by bullies if they refer to an adult about violent behaviour:

*You can tell the teacher, but then they [E.d. the bullies] will go after you. Or they can block your way and you have nowhere to go. (Slovenia, boy, 10)*

In the project countries, teachers and other school staff members suggest that interethnic violence does not occur in their schools (at the time the data was collected). As a matter of fact, in order to maintain a positive climate and to prevent peer violence and bullying, the role played by adults working at the school is crucial. Indeed, since they spent lots of time with students, they were more aware of the problems in their school. Moreover, teachers can facilitate the integration of children having a different ethnic background by redirecting aggressive behaviour and supporting vulnerable pupils. Furthermore, as reported in many interviews, teachers can explore the issue of diversity thanks to specific projects and activities designed to promote interest toward different cultures and to foster mutual coexistence. However, all the experts interviewed pointed out that not all teachers are able to create a favourable environment for mutual exchange and tolerance. Sometimes, teachers lack adequate training or they underrate violence or bullying.

### Peer education

If teachers play a relevant role in order to prevent bullying, peer education is also very important in developing social competences and cooperation among children (Cole, 1987; Cowie and Sharp, 1996). In fact, peer education interventions are based on the "ability of children to give and receive help" (Gini, 2004). In particular, several examples of this are presented in En-

**Table 3: Do teachers step in when someone gets bullied by his/her schoolmates? By kind of school (%)**  
**Tabela 3: Ali učitelji odreagirajo, ko gre za nasilje nad sošolcem/ko? Glede na tip šole (%)**

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Secondary			
Austria	29,1	60,3	10,6
Slovenia	18,3	66,3	15,4
Italy	29,9	59,5	10,6
England	26,9	61,4	11,7
Cyprus	23,6	63,8	12,6
Primary			
Austria	43,9	49,3	6,8
Slovenia	65,5	30,2	4,3
Italy	58,7	36,6	4,7
England	46,6	49,5	3,8
Cyprus	50,2	41,2	8,6

glish and Austrian cases. In England, teachers and pupils mentioned the so-called *anti-bullying ambassador program* and *Circle time*.

The former is a sort of peer-helper (*befriending*): some pupils are trained to help their mates when violent behaviours occur. As a head-teacher explained:

*the anti-bullying ambassadors, is ... so they're children who have been selected and gone to training, how to deal with bullying, and have come back and shared that in assembly with other, and talked to their class about it. (England, headteacher, School 2)*

While teachers deemed this measure really effective, during focus group sessions pupils said that they preferred talking directly to their teachers about the peer violence episodes they had experienced or witnessed. Moreover, since the bullying ambassador is a child, he or she has no real authority over his schoolmates:

[...]  
*Pupil1 [...] the adults don't realise that most of the...bullying ambassadors are kind of silly.*

[..]  
*Pupil2 Cos they don't take their jobs seriously*  
[...]

*Pupil1 Some of them just like slack off their... they just erm, they just say bring the bully to me and then, they say...and then they say don't do it again. Erm, but then they do it again and the anti-bullying ambassadors don't notice it. That's why I talked to my teacher instead because she does her job properly, she cares about our health.*

*Pupil2 Yeah because they're the same age as us, they're year 6 so they're like a bit lazy too.*

[...]  
*(England, School 2, FG2)*

*Circle time*, the second best practice cited by pupils of English primary schools, emphasized the importance of speaking about these issues with their teachers, who became a sort of mediator. In fact, they appreciated the chance to talk about diversity and about the consequences of violence during class time.

*Erm, sometimes with Miss X on Mondays, we do circle time, like about bullying now but, like last year we had like if something bad happened to us and we told the teacher in circle time and they told the person to stop it. (England, School 12, FG1)*

Interviews and focus group sessions in other countries also showed the relevance of dialogue in order to prevent violence. In Italy, where the circle time initiative is not widespread, when acts of violence occurred in primary schools, teachers usually started a class discussion about the incidents. Many students from Italian secondary schools underlined the importance of talking with experts too about this topic:

*In my opinion what we should do is just that to make us stay together and talk, but not with our teacher. With other people outside the school that can understand us and make us think. (Italy, female, 17)*

Furthermore, in Slovenia, students from primary and secondary schools talk about diversity (culture, religion and human rights) during class time as a way of preventing (interethnic) peer violence. They highlight the importance of speaking and discussing with their teachers and other experts about various forms of violence in order to recognize them and learn how to react. In this regard, many schools have developed programs and individual measures<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, most schools provide peer mediation programs, where peers are trained to solve conflict situations among pupils. If necessary, some teachers organise special activities like, for example, outdoor weeks in order to strengthen the team spirit of a particular class.

In fact, acts of bullying with an ethnic component represent a deeper attack addressed to pupils with a different ethical background. For this reason, training students to become responsible and self-confident students, who can become representatives of anti-bullying themselves, appears to be a good strategy.

#### **Beside the schools: family, local authorities and NGO's**

A systemic and ecological approach involves the school community as a whole; it should therefore also include family, local authorities and external agencies

(Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, Isava 2008; Vreeman, Carroll, 2007; Cowie, Jennifer, 2007). In fact, bullying is a phenomenon that involves several individual and social dimensions: that is why, in order to prevent and solve conflicts, a holistic approach is indicated as the most incisive method to achieve a positive outcome (Gini, 2011).

In particular, Randhal (1996) argues that the behaviour of bullies and victims may be correlated to out-of-school factors, like the family's educational style. For this reason, the involvement of family plays an important role in resolving and promoting non-violent behaviour among young people, as also many students and teachers highlighted. A fortiori if the reason of the peer violence is racial: in fact, negative stereotypes at the basis of violent episodes could be reproduced in family.

*I do not know. By my opinion, this starts inside the family (Slovenia, male, 18)*

*[...] and if [the Head] deems it to be serious then the parents are to be involved and then there's to be, where possible and where it will benefit the students, there is to be some, conflict resolution between the two of them. (England, Staff member, School 3)*

*I first try to talk it out with the children, [...] then I talk to the parents. [...] (Austria, teacher)*

But the relation with family is not always easy. For example, Italian teachers pointed out a number of problems that occurred during family meetings with parents that do not have an Italian cultural background. In fact, Italian parents tend to defend their children and ultimately transform the aggressor into the victim. The general difficulty is to interact with parents of pupils of non-Italian origin as they do not speak Italian and sometimes they do not understand the rules of Italian schools. In such cases teachers may also have to have the role of linguistic and cultural mediators; due to the lack of economic resources real cultural mediators are often missing.

Families are not the only actors with whom schools cooperate in order to prevent bullying. In fact, interaction with the local authorities can help to solve the most serious cases of racial violence. In particular, teachers usually refer to the Social Services or the police. For example, in Italy, sometimes, protocols are established at local level between schools, the Social Services, the local police and Juvenile Courts. These protocols usually do not focus on interethnic violence, but are addressed to all kinds of bullying. In English schools the requirement to report racial incidents to the local authorities exists as well:

*It's reported to the local authority. So we have a standard form that we would fill in. Erm, where we have to list the ethnicities of the children in-*

<sup>12</sup> Some examples of mediation programmes are "Together for a Safe School", "From Quarrel to Tolerance", "Violence is Out, We are In!", "Safe Point School Project". In some cases, these projects form a part of the school curriculum (ie. the unit "Let's Silence the Violence", under the primary school subject Civic and Homeland Education and Ethics).

*involved, and their age, and the kind of erm, incident it was and some detail about what was said and the action that was taken by the school. So whether that was to inform the parent or carer, or speak with the child, and take some sort of restorative action, erm, so we fill in all of that. And then also it's reported to the governing body. (England, head teacher, School 2)*

Besides local authorities, also other institutions work in favour of children like NGOs and voluntary associations which have also developed *programs, workshops and measures against violence in schools*. These organizations support school activities in different ways, depending on their specific institutional mission. In fact, some of them operate in order to promote the rights of children or to develop an inclusive society against racism and discrimination. In particular, a good example is represented by the Austrian Child/Youth Ombudsman, which is present in each of the nine Federal States of the country and which acts in the sole interest of children and young people. It mediates in conflict situations and provides rapid help. Furthermore, it promotes the organization of workshops and projects which focus on the improvement of the social conditions of children and young people in order to help them to avoid violence and to ensure professional mediation. Another example is SOS Il Telefono Azzurro Onlus, the first association in Italy committed to the prevention of child abuse and neglect. In particular, these institutions contributed to arousing the public opinion to the issue of violence between and against children also, also thanks to the high impact of media campaigns. This aspect is particularly relevant as it shows how the media can contribute to breaking negative ethnic stereotypes and not only to perpetuating it, as they usually do<sup>13</sup>.

Other projects proposed by NGOs and associations are similar to the practices implemented at national level or by schools (peer education/mediation strategy, counsellor interventions, etc.)<sup>14</sup>.

### **Interethnic violence practices and intercultural education**

As stated above, good practices against interethnic violence at school also include the improvement of intercultural skills, in order to enforce a cross-cultural perspective. For this reason, the “others” are a precious

resource for an education with an inclusive purpose. Consequently, intercultural education is undertaken to support students in the construction of cultural identities, also including the local and the intercultural traditions. In particular, all teachers and experts emphasize the importance of applying the principles of multiculturalism and tolerance in the school curricula.

Learning the local official language can favour integration (Caravita, 2004). For this reason, each country promotes activities focused on teaching the host country language to students having a different ethnic background and who are enrolled in the national school system, following the assumption that sharing a common language is the very first vehicle of integration (Santerini, 2010; Pattaro, 2010). As a consequence, additional hours dedicated to language teaching are a tool for integration and, indirectly, help prevent ethnic violence, especially among young people who, hopefully, will become more aware and integrated adults in the future. In addition, as regards intercultural tolerance, the interviewed teachers reported intercultural seminars at school as opportunities where to discuss diversity and interculturality and to receive training.

Regarding the individual countries' experiences, Austria sets aside an important role for interculturality in school, especially in bigger cities like Vienna or Linz, characterized by a multicultural environment.

*We have a lot of measures targeting interculturality [...]. We have recently implemented a pupils' initiative called 'Mentoring 4 Students', we have the subject Intercultural seminar, and provide also many journeys (Austria, Teacher)*

In Italy, interculturality also plays an important role in schools. In fact, Italian schools can benefit from special funding to implement intercultural activities<sup>15</sup>: projects can be promoted alongside with experts (cultural and linguistic mediators, psychologists) and opportunities can be offered to learn about different cultures (trips, multicultural festivals with the presence of children's families and representatives of the local community).

Interviews in England emphasized the role of all school members in promoting an ethos of inclusion of diversity, with particular attention to the different expressions of socio-cultural belonging, such as religion, customs and traditions. Finally, in Cypriot schools too, intercultural activities can be found.

13 Another example from Italy is the media campaign Smontailbullo, related to a web platform where teachers, families and students can find useful information and several materials on the topic of bullying.

14 For example, in Austria, the Zara organization developed a series of workshops, named Mut zur Vielfalt, for sixteen year-old students with the aim to train teenagers to become anti-discrimination trainers and mediators. Other relevant actors promoting the integration of human rights in schools in countries all around the world can be identified in Amnesty International (i.e. Friendly Schools Project in the United Kingdom) and UNICEF (i.e. Speak Up! Let's Talk About Violence among Children in Slovenia).

15 The national legislation defines, with art. 9 of the National Supplementary Collective Agreement - School Compartment for 2006-09, the way through which the State may finance incentives for projects relating to risk areas with a very high percentage of immigration and for projects against school exclusion.

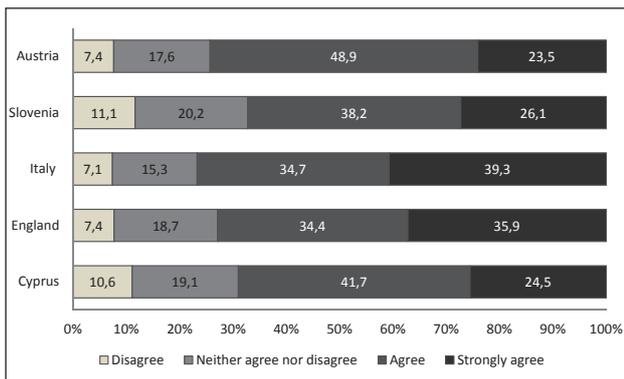


Figure 1: In the classroom we learn about different cultures and religions (%)

Slika 1: V razredu se učimo o različnih kulturah in verah (%)

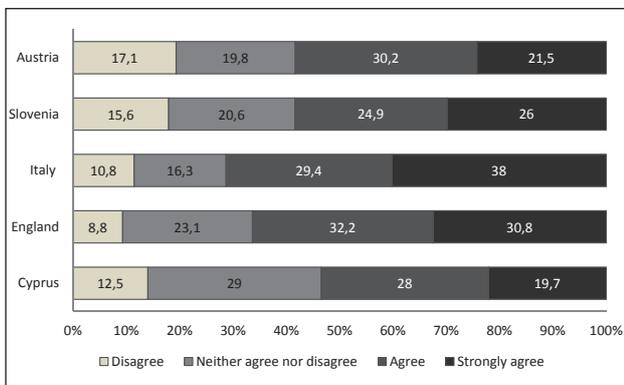


Figure 2: In the school we have special activities that encourage us to be equal and understand the differences between us (%)

Slika 2: V šoli imamo posebne aktivnosti, ki spodbujajo enakost in razumevanje medsebojne različnosti (%)

We have a special topic in our syllabus on racism and there are various discussions in class and essay writing (Cyprus, male, secondary school)

In Slovenian schools, teachers try to integrate the topic of interethnic tolerance in their curricula, especially in several compulsory subjects (usually geography, history, the official language and foreign languages). On the other hand, interethnic tolerance and the civic rights of minorities are compulsory subjects<sup>16</sup>. Nevertheless, some experts underline that these activities are not enough.

In conclusion, it might be useful to consider what the students' perception is about the activities described so far. Do they contribute to encouraging equality and the inclusion of linguistic, cultural and religious differences in schools? We asked pupils whether or not they agreed with the following statements (a. In the classroom we learn about different cultures and religions?; b. In school we have special activities that encourage us to be equal and understand our differences?). The majority gave a positive response which confirms that schools are "a place where everybody can be themselves whatever their ethnic background" (Fig.1). Therefore, at school children can learn about different cultural identities, which is essential to remove discrimination and stereotypes. The encounter with ethnically and culturally different people represents an opportunity for children and teachers in order to reflect on the level of values, rules and behaviours.

SUMMING UP: SOME IMPORTANT FINDINGS FROM EUROPEAN CHILDREN'S VOICES

As mentioned above, ethnic bullying is a multidimensional phenomenon which requires an integrated approach. The selected analyzed good practices gave ev-

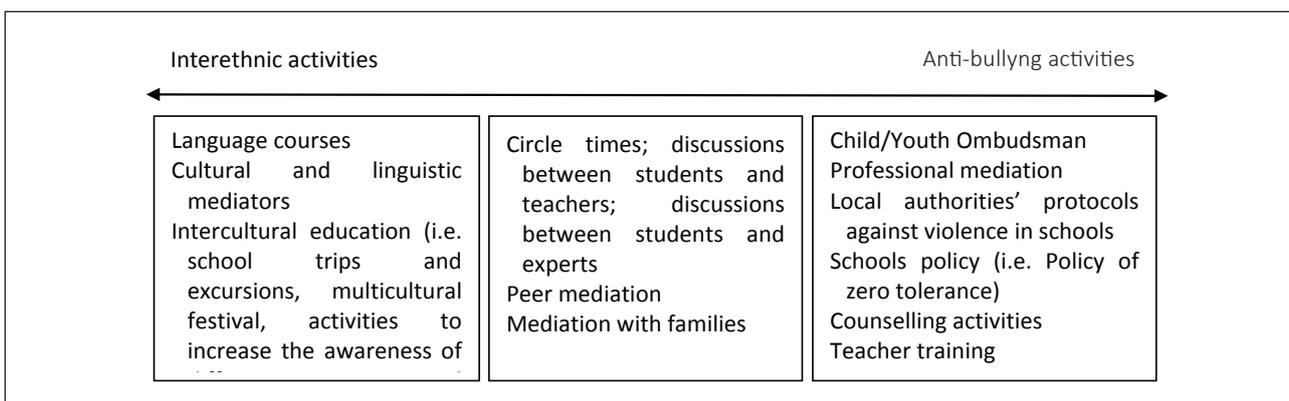


Figure 3: Typology of interethnic anti-bullying activities

Slika 3: Tipologija medetničnih antibulging aktivnosti

16 In detail: *Ethics and Civic Education* in the 7th and 8th grade of primary school and *Education for peace, family and non-violence* in the 3rd year of the secondary school.

idence of several paths implemented in preventing bullying and (peer) violence in and out of schools. In particular, several kinds of good practices can be represented along a *continuum* having two main facets (Fig. 3): intercultural aspects and an anti-bullying dimension. The former (on the left side of the continuum) represents activities whose main aim is the development of an intercultural ethos in schools. The latter (on the right side of the continuum) shows measures mainly addressed to the protection of children and young people from violence. Between the two extremes, other measures with the general aim to develop inclusive and cooperative relations between children in and outside schools can be positioned. Indeed, borders between these two aspects are blurred but they help to present an analytical framework.

Notwithstanding the national context of a country, which may lead to different kind of experiences due to differing traditions of racial pluralism, heterogeneous migration histories and several levels of ethnic cohesion (Medarić, Sedmak, 2012), a selection of common elements providing an improvement of the situation can be listed (Gini, Pozzoli, 2011).

A common topic which has emerged in this research is the role played by teachers in the school system due to their constant interaction with students. As underlined in many interviews, the reinforcement of the teachers' interpersonal skills through lifelong training is desirable in order to strengthen the identification and the treatment of violence and bullying episodes. In particular, what strongly emerges is the importance of a common and clear set of guidelines and specific training for teachers provided by national states or schools. Therefore, external support for teachers provided by experts from outside of the school environment, perhaps coordinated at a national/central level, may be useful. However, while these aspects are commonly acknowledged, each country pointed out different elements based on their own national context. In particular, Austrian, Slovenian and Italian evidence shows that teachers should not be the only ones responsible for the management of conflicts and for anti-violence measures in school. In fact, they state that referring to experts would be preferable (psychologists and social workers, for example).

*[...] There is no one to help teachers to find the right strategies, methodologies needed to manage this relationship, to handle the leadership and then make it a democratic and distributed leadership. (Italy, Pedagogue)*

Cypriot teachers underline the lack of a common policy in schools regarding how to deal with the inter-ethnic violence. Some interviewees stated that, most of the times, counselors and head teachers deal with violent acts in school using only their own personal knowledge and perceptions:

*Every teacher follows his/her own procedures (Cyprus, Teacher)*

The importance of teacher development and training on issues of violence is also underlined in the English experience where teachers reported feeling confident in giving institutional support on the topic of interethnic violence, also thanks to their long-term experience. However a problematic aspect related to islamofobia emerges. As Allen (2010) empathised "islamofobia affects all aspects of Muslim life": as a consequence, violence against Muslims can be expressed through discrimination in education. This is also confirmed by some of the interviewed teachers and experts:

*I don't think there is much training of new teachers. There needs to be coherent programme. Teachers lack confidence as it [Islamophobia] is a sensitive issue. With awareness training and discussion, teachers would feel more confident in dealing with these issues (England, Representative from an Islamic NGO)*

Moreover, teachers are a part of the school community, which must be considered in its broadest sense (students, teachers, headmasters and all the collaborators that have a role in daily life at school). Basically, if a positive ethos is established all around the school setting, students will perceive it and their awareness of security and their self-confidence will pour out again in their daily lives as well. Literature underlines the importance of school policies against bullying and violence (Gini, Pozzoli, 2011). Furthermore, by involving the entire school community, teachers and students alike will not be alone in front of violent behaviour: help can be provided by all members of the community, each with its own specific competences:

*"What is missing is the approach that the whole school as a team has to work to solve the problem (Austria, C. Spiel, expert)*

Outside schools, the collaboration with families is useful to pursue the common goal of preventing peer violence and enforcing their respective educational functions. Families should be constantly informed about what happens to their children and what the school provisions are in order to prevent and manage violence and in particular ethnic one.

Finally, these research results give the chance to reflect on how to improve the prevention of (interethnic) violence at schools. First of all, an improvement of school activities designed to strengthen student awareness on the topics of violence and multiculturalism needs to be made. Consequently, students should constantly share their emotions, feelings and experiences (as with, for example, the "Circle time" technique) since it has been reported by

students and teachers as a good practice. The purpose of these methodologies is to make students aware of their behavior and, at the same time, to make them feel empowered. Another aim is to promote the establishment of a positive environment characterized by a culture of respect and solidarity among peers (Croce, Lavanco, Vassura, 2011). In this sense, strengthening the students' social skills can be a tool in fighting and preventing bullying and violence among peers<sup>17</sup>. A second point could be represented by the enforcement of effective cooperation with national and local authorities and external agencies such as, non-governmental organizations or other policy makers. Consequently, a reticular perspective would be

desirable. This could lead to several advantages like the chance to exchange knowledge with other institutions regarding problems and possible solutions to them (Gini, Pozzoli, 2011). However, a successful network among all the aforementioned actors requires a long-term perspective and a suitable quantity of economic resources.

A appropriate combination of the tools, methods and actors mentioned insofar appears to be the most effective strategy to combat general and interethnic peer violence in schools. Following the evidence that has emerged across the five countries, the above elements seem to confirm that this kind of approach is, despite the national context, the basis on which any other measure can be taken.



*Sl. 1: Equal treatment for all, Thinkstock*

*Fig. 1: Enaka obravnava za vse, Thinkstock*

<sup>17</sup> Nowadays the World Health Organization of United Nations (WHO) considers teaching methods based on life skills education as an incisive technique against aggressiveness and, at a general level, any form of dependence.

**Annex 1 -Profile of the Selected Programs and Good Practices implemented at the National Levels**

**Priloga 1- Profil izbranih programov in dobrih praks implementiranih na nacionalni ravni**

	Good Practice	Description of activities
Austria	Viennese Social Competence training (WiSc)	Both programs are designed to foster social and emotional competences in pupils in order to create a positive school atmosphere. In detail, WiSc designs a holistic approach including the whole school environment (students, teachers, but also parents and school headmasters). Faustlos is also a violence prevention program with the aim of fostering children's social and emotional competences in kindergarten, primary and middle school. Both programs are implemented within a national strategy that represents itself as a good practice. From 2007, it encloses projects that differently pursue the same aim of prevention and intervention against violence in kindergartens and schools
	Faustlos	
Cyprus	Emergency Intervention Team (EIT)	In 2007 the Ministry of Education and Culture developed Strategic Planning in order to improve the general quality of the educational system. The specific purpose was to increase awareness regarding multiculturalism and diversity in school environments. Consequentially, national measures that provide support to schools in their everyday activities combating all forms of violence and delinquency were established. An example is EIT designed for students who provide various kinds of activity: assignment of school escorts (for educational, linguistic and psychological purposes), supportive lessons, grants for extracurricular activities, assignment a of psychological support and financial assistance.
	Zones of Educational Priority	National program launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture with the main purpose of helping students to gain trust and self-confidence through specific projects, even in multiculturalism. It has a double mission: to give assistance to students from different ethnic backgrounds when joining public school environments and reinforcing teachers' awareness on the topic of multiculturalism.
	Strategic Planning	National program launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture with the aim of improving the quality of the educational system and increasing awareness regarding multiculturalism and diversity in school environments. For example, it proposed to adapt the educational materials to students' needs and to support the students regardless of any ethnic, socioeconomic and religious difference in status.
England	Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG)	In 1998 EMAG was established to focus on satisfying the specific linguistic needs of pupils from minority ethnic groups. Since 2011, it is no longer directly available for schools, but Local Authorities may sponsor EMAG services for schools.
	School Linking Networks (SLN)	The overall aim of SLN is to facilitate links between schools in England in order to help children and young people explore their identity, celebrate diversity and develop dialogue in order to support them in becoming active citizens. SLN adopts the network approach useful in preventing and spreading knowledge and good practices. The project was firstly implemented in Bradford in 2001 and then in Tower Hamlets in 2006.
Italy	Smontailbullo	National public educational campaign: it promotes events in schools and a toll-free number where children can seek help (it is also possible to ask for advice by e-mail). The related website is also an operative support for educators thanks to the availability of free collected materials (films, books etc.) which deal with issues such as peer violence from a psycho-sociological and cultural point of view.
	Regional permanent observer on bullying	Regional observers have aimed to exchange experiences among schools. Their purpose is to provide teachers, headmasters and other members of the territorial network with support in establishing projects useful for monitoring, preventing and combating bullying and peer violence.
Slovenia	School for Peace - Knowledge and Teaching of Children's Rights	National program divided into two sections: the first with the aim to improve mutual respect in heterogeneous groups; the second with the aim to teach children how to express their opinion regarding equality and choice, to listen to each other and to talk about mutual relationships and rules. It is based on the use of peer mediation and peer education.
	Preventive Program for the Reduction of Violence in Primary School	National program deals with the issue of bullying and violence in a systematic and structural way, foreseeing its implementation in school curricula (teaching, class work, etc.). It aims to increase awareness on different forms of violence in schools and on how to react and manage it. It includes every segment of the school staff (management, teachers, counseling staff, etc) and the students' parents.
	My Peers and Me-Let's Talk	National project addressed to pupils, parents and teachers. It is based on the use of peer mediation and peer education.
	Networks of Learning Schools (1 and 2)	National programs that stimulates the systematic exchange of good practices between teachers/pre-school teachers and schools/pre-school institutions that participate in education in order to implement the so-called "co-operation network". This system fosters the exchange of experiences, problems and solutions among the hubs of the network in order to establish systematically cooperative activities in schools and inter-schools levels. A specific objective of this Slovene program called <i>Strategies for Preventing Violence</i> deals specifically with the analysis of violence in pre-primary and secondary schools acting on the assessment of the situation, the development of a strategy for improvement in the field of the prevention of violence and the execution of the established activities. It also analyzes episodes of violence that already occurred and, at the same time, emphasizes the importance of preventive actions.

## PROBLEMI IN REŠITVE MEDVRSTNIŠKEGA NASILJA: PREGLED DOBRIH PRAKS

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## POVZETEK

*Spodbujanje človekovih pravic, enakosti med ljudmi in preprečevanje nasilja so osrednje teme v evropskih šolah. V članku analiziramo relevantne dobre prakse preprečevanja medetničnega nasilja v šolah preko rezultatov projekta Children's Voices: Exploring Interethnic Violence and Children's rights in the School Environment/Glasovi otrok: Preučevanje medetničnega nasilja in otrokovih pravic v šolskem okolju. Šole so običajno že vpeljale določene ukrepe za promocijo otrokovih pravic in preprečevanje nasilja ter programe, usmerjene k integraciji migrantskih otrok oziroma manjšin. Izhajajoč iz navedenega bo v primerjalni perspektivi predstavljen izbor dobrih praks z opišom značilnosti, namena in ciljev ob upoštevanju nacionalnega konteksta.*

*Izbrane dobre prakse so bile analizirane s treh vidikov udejanjanja: programi, ki jih izvaja država na nacionalni ravni, projekti, ki jih izvajajo šole, in programe, ki jih izvajajo nevladne organizacije in društva.*

*Nacionalne vlade postavljajo okvir, v katerem prihaja do intervencij, šole dejansko udejanjajo pobude, prakse in mreženje za preprečevanje (medetničnega) nasilja, nevladne organizacije in društva pa preprečujejo asocialno vedenje s promocijo blaginje celotnega prebivalstva (predvsem otrok). Preko analize dobrih praks je bilo identificiranih več skupnih smernic delovanja, ki jih lahko strnemo v naslednje točke:*

- nekateri programi so bolj usmerjeni k preprečevanju nasilja (programi za nenasilje), drugi pa k prenosu medkulturnih vrednot;*
- v vsaki državi so bili programi usmerjeni k vključevanju otrok drugih narodnosti in k promociji različnosti, z namenom njihove integracije;*
- večina izbranih programov se dogaja v šolskem okolju in vključuje tako učence kot šolsko osebje (učitelje, ravnateljce);*
- nekateri programi vključujejo starše in družine, saj so pomemben del procesa socializacije in izobraževanja;*
- nekateri programi vključujejo predstavnike lokalne oblasti (socialne delavce, protokol s pravniki) z namenom organizirati širšo mrežo, ki bi zaščitila otroke in mladostnike in spodbujala varno okolje v šolah.*

*Zaradi vseh navedenih dejavnikov je bil skupnostni pristop identificiran kot osnova za razvoj različnih programov in dobrih praks proti nasilju v šolah.*

**Ključne besede:** buling, medvrstniško nasilje, dobre prakse, šola, izobraževanje

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