ЗАШТИТА ОД ДИСКРИМИНАЦИЈА, БУЛИНГ И ГОВОР НА ОМРАЗА

PEER VIOLENCE (BULLYING), DISCRIMINATION AND HATE SPEECH AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

PUBLIC POLICY DOCUMENT

Institute for Human Rights

Auswärtiges Amt

HUMAN RIGHTS

PEER VIOLENCE (BULLYING), DISCRIMINATION AND HATE SPEECH AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS
PUBLIC POLICY DOCUMENT

Original Title:
ВРСНИЧКО НАСИЛСТВО (БУЛИНГ), ДИСКРИМИНАЦИЈА И ГОВОР НА ОМРАЗА МЕЃУ СРЕДНОШКОЛЦИТЕ
ДОКУМЕНТ ЗА ЈАВНИ ПОЛИТИКИ
https://www.ihr.org.mk/mk/novosti/dokument-za-javni-politiki-vrsnichko-nasilstvo-buling-diskriminacija-i-govor-na-omraza-meu-srednoshkolcite

Publisher:
Institute for Human Rights

Authors:
Neda Petkovska
Margarita Tsatsa Nikolovska

Editor:
Kristina Doda

Skopje, 2022

This report was prepared with financial support from the German Embassy. The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of the Institute for Human Rights and does not necessarily reflect the views of the German Embassy or the Government.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 4

DISCRIMINATION 5

LEGAL FRAMEWORK 5

MECHANISMS AND BODIES FOR PROTECTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION 8

Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) 8

Ombudsman 8

Judicial Proceedings 8

RESEARCH FINDINGS 9

Focus Group 11

HATE SPEECH 12

LEGAL FRAMEWORK 12

RESEARCH FINDINGS 13

Personal Experiences 15

Focus Group 15

PEER VIOLENCE / BULLYING 15

LEGAL FRAMEWORK 15

RESEARCH FINDINGS 17

Personal Experiences 19

Focus Group 20

CONCLUSION 21

DISCRIMINATION 21

HATE SPEECH 22

PEER VIOLENCE / BULLYING 23

RECOMMENDATIONS 24

INTRODUCTION

This document was prepared within the framework of the project *"Protection from Discrimination, Bullying and Hate Speech"*, financially and strategically supported by the German Embassy in Skopje and implemented by the Institute for Human Rights in Skopje. The document provides an overview of the national legal framework, as well as the findings of a comprehensive study on the topics of *peer violence/bullying, discrimination and hate speech*, with a particular focus on secondary school students in the City of Skopje.

In addition, the document offers recommendations addressed to the main stakeholders and decision-makers in North Macedonia, with the aim of raising awareness of the need for protective mechanisms to address the phenomena of peer violence, discrimination and hate speech among students, and to promote the adoption of targeted measures aimed at eradicating these phenomena.

The document is based on a number of previously implemented project activities and achieved results. Specifically, a digital course for teachers on the aforementioned topics was delivered, as well as a comprehensive quantitative survey entitled *"Bullying, Hate Speech and Discrimination among Secondary School Students in the City of Skopje"*, which examined the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and third- and fourth-year secondary school students from 22 secondary schools operating within the territory of the City of Skopje. The survey was conducted in the period from December 2021 to February 2022 and included 995 students and 255 teachers. In addition, in April 2022 a focus group was conducted with representatives of the Bureau for Development of Education (BDE), school staff, teachers, parents, representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, and representatives of the State Education Inspectorate (SEI). A total of 15 representatives from these groups and institutions participated in the focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to provide a qualitative dimension to the research, to examine the views of all participants from different perspectives, and to confirm or challenge certain findings of the quantitative research. All of these data and existing documents contributed to a detailed and comprehensive synthesis of information for the purposes of analysis within this document.

The document is structured into three main thematic sections: (1) discrimination, (2) hate speech, and (3) peer violence, i.e. bullying. Under each thematic section, the national legal framework is presented, as well as key data from the comprehensive research, together with analysis of certain information that reveals interesting correlations and opens space for further discussion. This data is included in order to present a broader picture of the issues addressed: namely, on the one hand, to review the legislative mechanisms regulating these areas, and on the other hand, to examine the situation in practice and thereby draw conclusions regarding the extent to which the legal framework corresponds to the everyday needs of students and other relevant stakeholders when it comes to addressing and reducing the presence of discrimination, bullying and hate speech among students.

Finally, the document provides conclusions and recommendations for the stakeholders and institutions responsible for addressing the challenge and eradicating these harmful phenomena.

DISCRIMINATION

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Equality of all citizens is a fundamental value of the socio-political order of the state. Article 9 of the **Constitution** of the Republic of North Macedonia states: "Citizens of the Republic of Macedonia are equal in their freedoms and rights, regardless of sex, race, colour of skin, national and social origin, political and religious belief, property and social status. Citizens are equal before the Constitution and the law." Furthermore, Article 110 of the Constitution explicitly refers to the prohibition of discrimination, assigning to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of North Macedonia the role of protecting the freedoms and rights of the individual and the citizen relating to freedom of belief, conscience, thought and public expression of thought, political association and activity, and the prohibition of discrimination of citizens on grounds of sex, race, religion, national, social and political affiliation[1]. Amendment XI further specifies the role of the Ombudsman in protecting the principles of non-discrimination, as well as appropriate and equitable representation of members of minority communities in government institutions, bodies of local self-government units, and public institutions and services[2]. Pursuant to Article 50 of the Constitution, every citizen may invoke the protection of freedoms and rights established by the Constitution before the courts and the Constitutional Court of the Republic of North Macedonia, in proceedings based on the principles of priority and urgency[3].

In addition to the Constitution, the principle of equality and the protection of citizens' freedoms and rights are guaranteed and regulated by numerous domestic laws and by-laws, such as the **Law on Child Protection, the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men[4], the Law on Social Protection, the Law on Labour Relations, the Law on Primary Education, the Law on Secondary Education, the Criminal Code**, and others. This last one means that discrimination is not only a misdemeanour but also constitutes a criminal offence under Articles 137 and 417 of the **Criminal Code**. These provisions stipulate that a person who, "on the basis of a difference in sex, race, colour of skin, gender, membership of a marginalised group, ethnicity, language, citizenship, social origin, religion or religious belief and other forms of belief, education, political affiliation, personal or social status, mental or physical disability, age, family or marital status, property status, health status, or any other ground provided by

[1] Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, November 1991, as amended by Amendment XXXIII published in the Official Gazette No. 6/2019.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] This law is expected to be annulled shortly and replaced by the Law on Gender Equality, which is aligned with European Union directives and international standards for the advancement of gender equality.

law or a ratified international treaty, deprives or restricts the rights of a person and citizen established by the Constitution of the Republic of [North] Macedonia, by law or by a ratified international treaty, or who, on the basis of such differences, grants privileges to citizens contrary to the Constitution of the Republic of [North] Macedonia, law or a ratified international treaty, shall be punished by imprisonment of three months to three years" (Article 137), and "anyone who, on the basis of a difference in sex, race, colour of skin, gender, membership of a marginalised group, ethnicity, language, citizenship, social origin, religion or religious belief, other forms of belief, education, political affiliation, personal or social status, mental or physical disability, age, family or marital status, property status, health status, or any other ground provided by law or a ratified international treaty, violates fundamental human rights and freedoms recognised by the international community, shall be punished by imprisonment of six months to five years" (Article 417). In addition, imprisonment of six months to three years is prescribed for spreading ideas of racial superiority, propagating racial hatred, or inciting racial discrimination.

Given that North Macedonia is a member state of the Council of Europe, it should be noted that, in addition to domestic law, the state may and should apply the provisions of ratified international human rights instruments, such as the **European Convention on Human Rights** (ECHR), as well as the standards established by the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) relating to protection against discrimination.

More specifically, as *lex specialis*, protection against discrimination, as well as its prevention, is primarily regulated by **the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination**[5]. This law, initially adopted in 2019 and subsequently annulled, and then re-adopted in 2020, provides the most comprehensive protection of citizens against discrimination, in line with international standards on protection from discrimination. The law is harmonised with the directives of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, as well as with the principles of Council of Europe conventions and the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

The Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination[6] regulates the prevention/protection and prohibition of discrimination, the forms and types of discrimination, procedures for protection against discrimination, as well as the composition and functioning of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. Article 5 of the Law prohibits any discrimination on grounds of race, colour of skin, origin, national or ethnic affiliation, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, membership of a marginalised group, language, citizenship, social origin, education, religion or religious belief, political belief, other belief, disability, age, family or marital status, property status, health status, personal characteristic and social status, or any other ground. Furthermore, Article 6 defines discrimination as: "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on a discriminatory ground, by action or omission, which has the purpose or effect of preventing,

[5] Also currently undergoing amendments, with the aim of alignment with international standards.

[6] Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, adopted on 30 October 2020, Official Gazette No. 258/2020.

limiting or denying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of the rights and freedoms of a particular person or group on an equal basis with others. This includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation and denial of accessibility and availability of infrastructure, goods and services[7]."

The main novelties and provisions of this law, which were not present in the previous legal solution, include the explicit inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity as grounds of discrimination. Furthermore, the types of discrimination are more clearly and progressively defined; in addition to covering a wider range of forms of discrimination, such as harassment, victimisation and segregation, the law also recognises more severe forms, such as multiple and intersectional discrimination. The Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination is a professional equality body that meets European standards of independence and expertise and represents one of the primary mechanisms available to citizens for prevention of and protection against discrimination. The burden of proof lies with the perpetrator of discrimination. Citizens who initiate court proceedings in cases of discrimination are exempt from administrative court fees. Finally, the possibility of a public interest lawsuit (*actio popularis*) has been introduced, allowing joint actions by various organisations and associations that consider, or can make it plausible, that discrimination has been committed against a (group of) citizens and that there is a public interest in protecting the rights of this group.

Given that this public policy document focuses, inter alia, on discrimination among secondary school students, it is important to note that Article 3 of **the Law on Secondary Education**[8] prohibits "discrimination based on sex, race, colour of skin, national and social origin, political and religious belief, and property and social status[9]".

In addition to laws and their by-laws, the principle of equality and non-discrimination is also reflected in national strategic documents adopted by the state, thereby expressing political will to act in accordance with these principles. Such a document is **the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2016–2020**, which has expired, and the preparation and adoption of a new strategy is currently underway. The Strategy represents the state's declarative efforts to advance human rights through prevention of and protection against discrimination, and promotes specific thematic objectives and activities to be undertaken within a defined period in order to achieve full equality and non-discrimination. It further defines measures, indicators, key policy-makers for advancing rights and equal opportunities, responsible actors and all relevant stakeholders in establishing equality and non-discrimination, as well as the financial implications for achieving the strategic objectives.

[7] Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, adopted on 30 October 2020, Official Gazette No. 258/2020.

[8] Law on Secondary Education, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, Nos. 44/95, 24/96, 34/96, 35/97, 82/99, 29/02, 40/03, 42/03, 67/04, 55/05, 113/05, 35/06, 30/07, 49/07, 81/08, 92/08, 33/10, 116/10, 156/10, 18/11, 51/11, 06/12, 100/12, 24/13, 41/14, 116/14, 135/14, 10/15, 98/15, 145/15, 30/16, 127/16, 67/17 and 64/18, and Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 229/20.

[9] Ibid.

MECHANISMS AND BODIES FOR PROTECTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD)

The CPPD is an independent body operating in accordance with the competences established by the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. The Commission has a broad range of powers, including acting upon complaints submitted by persons who consider themselves victims of discrimination, regardless of whether the discrimination was committed by state bodies, public institutions or the private sector. It may also initiate proceedings for protection against discrimination ex officio, and, at the request of a party or on its own initiative, may act as *amicus curiae* in judicial proceedings. Where discrimination is established, the Commission recommends measures to remedy violations of the right to equality. The opinions and recommendations of the Commission are not legally binding; that is, the perpetrator of discrimination may fail to act upon them. In such cases, the CPPD submits a request for the initiation of misdemeanour proceedings before the competent misdemeanour court.

Ombudsman

As noted above, Amendment XI of the Constitution establishes the role of the Ombudsman, whose competences are regulated by the Law on the Ombudsman and relevant by-laws, rules of procedure and internal regulations. The Ombudsman is competent to act in cases of discrimination only when the discrimination has been committed by state or public institutions. Upon receipt of a complaint, the Ombudsman may decide to initiate proceedings, and where discrimination is established, recommends measures to remedy the violation of rights.

Judicial Proceedings

Protection against discrimination may be sought through civil proceedings before the basic courts. A person who considers themselves discriminated against may file a lawsuit before the competent civil court, and such proceedings are urgent. As noted above, persons who initiate court proceedings for protection against discrimination are exempt from paying court fees[10], which are covered by the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia. The burden of proof shifts to the defendant accused of discrimination, in order to prove that discrimination did not occur, provided that the claimant has presented facts making the claim of discrimination plausible. In discrimination proceedings, in addition to evidence provided for under the Law on Civil Procedure, statistical data and/or data obtained through situation testing may also be used as evidence. Third parties, i.e. interveners, whose activities involve the protection of equality and non-discrimination, may also participate in the proceedings where the rights of such parties are being decided.

[10] This refers to exemption from administrative fees only, and not from other types of costs (e.g. legal fees, or costs incurred in the event of losing the case).

In addition, the Constitutional Court may decide upon a request for protection of freedoms and rights[11] submitted by any citizen who considers that a right or freedom established under Article 110 of the Constitution has been violated, within two months from the date of delivery of a final or enforceable act, or from the date of becoming aware of the action by which the violation was committed, but no later than five years from the date of such action. The request must state the reasons for seeking protection, the acts or actions by which the violation occurred, the facts and evidence on which the request is based, and other information necessary for the Constitutional Court's decision.

Since discrimination is also prohibited under the Law on Secondary Education (among other education laws), the State Education Inspectorate is also competent to take action to prevent discrimination. Furthermore, given the provisions of the Criminal Code criminalising discrimination, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the police are also competent to act in cases of discrimination, through the submission of a criminal complaint to the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office (BPPO) or to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA). However, these mechanisms are among the least frequently used for protection against discrimination.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

As noted in the introduction to this policy document, the Institute for Human Rights conducted a quantitative survey on bullying, hate speech and discrimination among secondary school students in Skopje, in the period from December 2021 to February 2022, involving 995 students and 255 teachers.

More specifically, the discrimination component of the survey covers the attitudes of students and teachers and their perceptions of the presence of discrimination in their school, as well as their views on the most common grounds on which discrimination occurs.

The research shows that **more than one third of students believe that discrimination is present or very present in their school**. In this regard, there are gender differences in perceptions of the level of presence of discrimination in schools. Namely, girls, compared to boys, consider discrimination to be a much more frequent phenomenon in their school. Almost 31% of girls believe that discrimination is present, and 16.4% believe it is very present. By contrast, nearly 20% of boys believe that discrimination is present, and only 7.3% believe that it is very present in their school. This indicates that perceptions of the extent of discrimination in schools differ between girls and boys. Although these responses reflect perceptions rather than personal experience of discrimination, two possible scenarios can nevertheless be inferred: either girls possess greater knowledge and skills to recognise discrimination and its various forms, or they are in fact more exposed to discrimination and are therefore more likely to perceive it as more prevalent in their school compared to their male peers.

[11] Constitutional Court of the Republic of North Macedonia, "Submission of a Request for the Protection of Freedoms and Rights". Available at: http://ustavensud.mk/?page_id=5668

With regard to students' perceptions of discrimination based on their ethnicity, the research does not identify significant differences in their attitudes. That is, differences in perceptions of discrimination are almost entirely independent of ethnic affiliation.

When asked to what extent **teachers** believe discrimination is present among students in the schools where they teach, a significant difference is observed between teachers' and students' perceptions. Specifically, only 16.4% of teachers believe that discrimination is present, and only 1.3% believe that it is very present. This substantial discrepancy between teachers' and students' views indicates either that teachers' awareness and skills for recognising discrimination are insufficiently developed, or that discrimination does not occur as frequently in their presence, which may be due to their authority as teaching staff and their role as behavioural role models.

Interestingly, while there are significant gender-based differences in students' perceptions of discrimination, this is not the case among teachers. However, a statistically significant difference and a clear correlation do exist in teachers' perceptions based on ethnic affiliation. The research shows that teachers of Albanian ethnicity consider discrimination among students to be significantly less prevalent compared to Macedonian teachers and teachers from other ethnic backgrounds. Specifically, 46.2% of Albanian teachers believe that discrimination among students is not present at all, compared to 19.9% of Macedonian teachers and 12.5% of teachers from other ethnic communities. This is an interesting finding and may appear counterintuitive, particularly in light of the common perception that non-Macedonian ethnic communities have historically had less favourable access to education. Similar to the overall perceptions of teachers, this finding may be more attributable to a lack of awareness of the presence of discrimination among students than to the actual absence of discrimination.

On the other hand, when asked: *"Which, in your opinion, are the most common grounds for discrimination?",* **teachers responded** that ethnic or religious affiliation was the most common, with 25.4% of teachers selecting this response. Other frequently cited grounds included gender (24.6%), economic status (22.4%), sexual orientation (6%), place of residence (3%), while 11.2% responded "other" without specifying further.

With regard to **exposure to discrimination**, i.e. perceptions of how many students were exposed to some form of discrimination, it is important to note that while there are no significant differences in students' responses based on gender and/or ethnic affiliation, there are substantial differences between students' and teachers' perceptions. Specifically, students' responses are structured as follows: 50.5% believe that discrimination occurred among fewer than 30% of their peers or affected them personally during the past year; 39.5% believe that discrimination affected between 30% and 70% of students; while 10% believe it is a very common phenomenon that affected more than 70% of students in the past year. By contrast, the majority of teachers consider discrimination to be a rare phenomenon, with 85.5% stating that it affected fewer than 30% of students in the past year. The only notable difference among teachers is a tendency for younger teachers to perceive discrimination as more widespread compared to older teachers.

These findings are consistent with earlier data regarding perceptions of the presence of discrimination. Logically, if teachers perceive discrimination as less prevalent in schools compared to students, they would also consider fewer students to have been exposed to discrimination. However, the question remains open: what is the cause of this discrepancy in perception? Are teachers less open, less aware, and less capable of recognising discrimination, or are they simply not witnessing discrimination as frequently as it occurs among students? In any case, this data leaves room for further in-depth research into the causes of differing perceptions and potential solutions at this level, in order to ensure a more objective approach to addressing the problem of discrimination.

Focus Group

Participants in the focus group partially confirmed the findings of the quantitative analysis. First and foremost, only a small number of participants actually spoke about discrimination in schools. Many more focused on the topic of *"peer violence/bullying"*, which gives the impression that discrimination is not perceived as a priority issue or challenge, or that it is not recognised as one of the main problems.

One of the representatives of the teaching staff in the focus group, of Albanian ethnic affiliation, confirmed the view that discrimination is not particularly prevalent in his school and that discrimination based on ethnic affiliation has decreased compared to earlier periods. The COVID-19 pandemic did not have a negative impact in terms of increasing discrimination; rather, it primarily led to an increase in peer violence among students. This is an interesting finding, indicating that despite the key role played by digitalisation in the education process during the pandemic, school staff do not perceive unequal treatment or access to digital education based on ethnic affiliation. On the other hand, despite the absence of in-person teaching, an increase in peer violence was observed, though again not on ethnic grounds.

In addition, a representative of the State Education Inspectorate noted that discrimination by adults (school staff and parents) towards children is far more common than discrimination among students themselves. This is essentially discrimination involving power relations. Furthermore, representatives of the Inspectorate and the Bureau for Development of Education believe that there are shortcomings in the legal framework for secondary education, since although discrimination is prohibited, there are no provisions establishing liability or financial sanctions for school principals in cases where non-action is established in situations of discrimination.

The main problem highlighted by all participants in relation to this issue in secondary schools is the insufficient implementation of legal provisions, as well as the continued absence of developed and applicable by-laws. In addition, there is a discrepancy in the planning and implementation of school programmes. Some schools include discrimination as a topic in their annual programmes and within certain teaching activities, while others do not include this area in their planning unless explicitly instructed by higher authorities. As a result, teaching

staff and professional services are left to act on their own initiative in relation to issues addressed by this topic.

Another issue identified concerns the work of professional services, specifically students' perceptions of the role of pedagogues and psychologists. Professional services are often viewed as a disciplinary measure, existing primarily to punish students, rather than as services providing psychological and counselling support.

Finally, most participants believe that discrimination begins as early as primary education and continues throughout secondary education. Consequently, greater attention needs to be paid to this issue in primary schools, particularly in terms of data collection and the introduction of preventive measures from an early age.

HATE SPEECH

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Republic of North Macedonia has a partially developed legal framework for monitoring, preventing and sanctioning hate speech. The framework consists of a combination of criminal, administrative and civil law measures and provides competences to several institutions authorised to take action against hate speech.

Within the national legal framework, hate speech constitutes a criminal offence and is covered by several criminal offences stipulated in the **Criminal Code** (CC). Amendments to the CC in 2018 further regulated and prohibited various forms of hate crimes, including hate speech, defined as: "a criminal offence committed against a natural or legal person and related persons or property, committed wholly or partly due to an actual or assumed (imagined) characteristic or association of the person relating to race, colour of skin, nationality, ethnic origin, religion or belief, mental or physical disability, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation and political belief" (Article 122, paragraph 42).

Hate speech is prohibited through several provisions of the Criminal Code, including: *Endangering Security* (Article 144); *Ridiculing the Macedonian People or Members of Communities* (Article 179); *Inciting Hatred, Discord or Intolerance on National, Racial, Religious or Other Discriminatory Grounds* (Article 319); *Dissemination of Racist and Xenophobic Material via a Computer System* (Article 394-d)[12]; *Approval or Justification of*

[12] This is one of the most important provisions concerning the prohibition of the dissemination of hate speech and reads as follows: "(1) Any person who, through a computer system, publicly disseminates racist or xenophobic written material, images or other representations of an idea or theory that aids, promotes or incites hatred, discrimination or violence against any person or group, on the grounds of sex, race, skin colour, gender, membership of a marginalised group, ethnic origin, language, citizenship, social origin, religion or religious belief, other beliefs, education, political affiliation, personal or social status, mental or physical disability, age, family or marital status, property status, health condition, or any other ground provided for by law or by a ratified international treaty, shall be punished by imprisonment of one to five years."
(2) The same penalty under paragraph (1) of this Article shall apply to any person who commits the act through other means of public information.

Genocide, Crimes against Humanity or War Crimes (Article 407-a); and *Racial and Other Discrimination* (Article 417, paragraph 3). These offences essentially prohibit any humiliation, incitement and dissemination of intolerance and hatred, endangering security, and ridiculing of different groups in society based on their personal characteristics or group affiliation, most commonly on grounds of race, religion, ethnic affiliation, national origin, language, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, class/social origin, and physical and/or intellectual disability.

The Law on Misdemeanours against Public Order and Peace regulates offences committed by behaviour or actions that disturb public peace, work or the customary way of life of citizens, endanger their safety in public places, create insecurity, interfere with the exercise of rights and obligations, or otherwise disturb public order and peace. The law also treats as misdemeanours the unauthorised removal, tearing, defacement, damage or any other act that exposes state symbols or symbols of communities to ridicule.

The Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, adopted in 2013, is also of significant importance, as it transposes the EU Directive on Audiovisual Media Services. The law prohibits programmes that endanger national security, incite violent overthrow of the constitutional order, call for military aggression or armed conflict, or incite or spread discrimination, intolerance or hatred on grounds of race, sex, religion or nationality. These prohibitions must be interpreted in line with the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. Under this law, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AAVMS) is competent to act in cases of violations. The Agency may issue written warnings, requests for the initiation of misdemeanour proceedings, proposals to the AAVMS Council for revocation of licences, or decisions on deletion from the Register, in accordance with the law. In addition to broadcasters, the AAVMS also has jurisdiction over on-demand audiovisual media services, but it does not have competence over print and online media.

Hate speech is also prohibited under **the Law on Prevention of Violence and Misconduct at Sports Events**, which regulates violence, participant safety and inappropriate behaviour during sports events. Furthermore, the **Law on Media** prohibits media content that endangers national security, incites violent overthrow of the constitutional order of the Republic of North Macedonia, calls for military aggression or armed conflict, or incites or spreads discrimination, intolerance or hatred on grounds of race, sex, religion or nationality. Hate speech is also regulated under **the Law on Primary Education** as grounds for referring a parent or guardian to counselling if a student uses hate speech.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The *Hate Speech* section of the quantitative research conducted by the Institute for Human Rights focused on similar aspects as the sections on discrimination and bullying.

(3) Any person who commits the acts referred to in paragraphs (1) and (2) of this Article by abusing their position or authority, or where such acts result in public disorder and violence against persons or in large-scale property damage, shall be punished by imprisonment of one to ten years."

Initially, students and teachers were asked about their perceptions of the presence of hate speech in their school, followed by questions on the scope and exposure of students to hate speech, as well as the causes of this phenomenon. In addition, students were asked to share information about personal experiences with hate speech. Significantly fewer students anticipated responses and shared experiences, given the sensitivity of the topic and reluctance to discuss it at a personal level. Although this aspect is not the main focus of the research, it serves as a useful indicator of the level of awareness and fear that prevail when it comes to expressing personal experiences on sensitive issues such as hate speech.

The majority of students believe that hate speech is either present (35.3%) or very present (15.9%), amounting to a total of 51% of students. This means that more than every second student shares this view. This is not only a concerning finding, but one that points to an urgent need for measures to address the problem. By contrast, teachers are again less inclined to believe that hate speech is present among students in their school. Approximately one quarter of teachers believe that hate speech is present (23.7%) or very present (2.1%). A much larger proportion of teachers believe that hate speech is not present at all or is only slightly present, with a total of 46.3% sharing this view. Thus, while every second student believes hate speech exists, every third teacher believes that such speech does not exist at all. Only 2% of teachers believe that hate speech is very present.

This discrepancy once again suggests either that teachers lack the capacity to recognise when hate speech occurs among students, or that students are less inclined to engage in hate speech in the presence of teachers. In any case, students' assessments of the magnitude of the problem, combined with teachers' perceptions of its unrecognisability by key figures in the education system, constitute truly alarming data.

With regard to exposure to hate speech in the past year, generally speaking, nearly half of teachers believe that hate speech is a very rare phenomenon in schools. Students, however, consider hate speech to be more prevalent: 45% stated that fewer than 30% of their peers, or themselves, had been exposed to hate speech; 44.1% believe that between 30% and 70% of students had been exposed; and 10.8% believe that between 71% and 100% of students had been exposed to hate speech. While differences between teachers and students exist, the structure of responses largely overlaps. Only a small proportion of both teachers and students believe that hate speech is omnipresent in terms of how many students experienced it in the past year.

When asked about the form or location in which hate speech is most widespread, both students and teachers identified social media. This may also be one of the reasons why teachers perceive hate speech as less prevalent among students in schools. If teachers tend not to view the online space as part of the school environment, they may not associate what happens online with problems occurring within schools and among students.

Personal Experiences

When asked about their personal experiences, as previously noted, students were less open to discussing the topic and expressing their own views. As a result, 22.6% of the total number of surveyed students did not provide any response. Among those who did respond, approximately one quarter (25.2%) reported having been exposed to some form of hate speech during the previous year. This experience refers to hate speech regardless of where it occurred, whether at school, outside school, or on social media. When disaggregated by gender, no statistically significant differences were observed in the responses. This means that both girls and boys equally consider themselves to have been victims of hate speech during the past year. When disaggregated by ethnic affiliation, a statistically significant difference is observed; however, the correlation between these differences is weak. It is notable that students of Albanian ethnic affiliation are less inclined to state that they have been victims of hate speech, compared to students of Macedonian or other ethnic affiliation.

Focus Group

During the focus group discussions, participants addressed the challenge of hate speech in schools only marginally, and primarily through the other two thematic areas examined in this analysis, namely peer violence/bullying and discrimination. While discrimination was explicitly mentioned and discussed, albeit to a limited extent, hate speech was largely linked to the other two phenomena and was not identified as a separate challenge or topic for focused discussion. For these reasons, the findings related to hate speech from the focus group are described through the other thematic areas and are reflected in the concluding observations and recommendations.

PEER VIOLENCE / BULLYING

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The national legal framework for the protection of children from violence is broad and is regulated through several laws. Some of these laws, particularly those in the field of education, explicitly include provisions regulating peer violence/bullying, while others regulate the prevention of and protection from all forms of violence against children, including peer violence, where it may be interpreted as such.

One of the objectives of **the Law on Juvenile Justice** and its implementation is the realisation of the best interests of the child and the protection of children from crime, violence and any form of endangerment of their freedoms, rights and proper development. Children's freedoms and rights are guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other international treaties relating to the status of children.

The Law on Child Protection prohibits all forms of discrimination, psychological and physical violence against children, and abuse (Article 12). While the Law does not regulate peer violence in detail, it provides for measures to protect children from violence, as well as fines for individuals and institutions that abuse children.

The Criminal Code of the Republic of North Macedonia, following the latest amendments in 2018, includes psychological violence, online violence, peer violence, as well as stalking and following a child within the definition of violence against a child (Article 122, paragraph 41). If peer violence is of a more serious nature and there is suspicion that a criminal offence has been committed or is being committed, or if it persists over a longer period and the school fails to take appropriate steps to prevent the violence and protect the victim, school staff are obliged to involve another institution. This most commonly includes the Ministry of Interior, the Public Prosecutor's Office, Centres for Social Work, or the Ombudsperson.

According to **the Law on Primary Education**, employees in primary schools are obliged to promote equality and fairness among all students and to actively oppose all forms of discrimination and violence (Article 5). Furthermore, one of the obligations of schools is to develop a Development Programme for their work, which must include the promotion of student well-being, protection from violence, abuse and neglect, and the prevention of discrimination (Article 49). Article 66 directly regulates the prevention of violence against students and obliges the school principal to report any form of violence, abuse or neglect committed against a student by another student, parent or guardian, teacher, professional associate, or any other person employed at the school, to the competent institutions prescribed by law. Failure to do so results in misdemeanour fines. The procedure for reporting and protecting a student victim of any of the listed forms of violence, abuse or neglect is regulated by a by-law. When reporting violence, schools must follow the Manual for Reporting and Protecting a Student Victim of Any Form of Violence, Abuse or Neglect, which also includes peer violence. According to this Manual, every primary school must designate a contact person for reporting violence and ensure reporting mechanisms, which may include written reports, telephone reporting, as well as anonymous reporting through a marked box allowing students to report violence anonymously. In reporting violence, the process must always be guided by a victim-centred approach, meaning that the victim is not blamed, and that the victim is consulted in the preparation of the violence prevention plan. If a student participates in various forms of violence, Article 76 of the Law obliges the parent or guardian to attend counselling.

The Law on Secondary Education provides for pedagogical measures against students in cases of breaches of duties and obligations. Peer violence is considered a breach of duties and obligations and, depending on its form, may constitute grounds for expulsion from school. The Law also provides for mandatory counselling of the parent or guardian in cases of violent and unethical behaviour by a student (Article 58-a).

In addition to laws and by-laws, the State adopts national strategies, action plans and policy concepts in the fields of education and child protection from violence, including peer violence/bullying. One such document is the **National Strategy (2020–2025)**, accompanied by

an **Action Plan (2020–2022) for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence**, which defines peer violence/bullying as: "A persistent and intentional abuse of power in relationships among peers through repetitive verbal, physical and/or social aggressive behaviour, intended to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. Bullying may occur in person or online, through various digital platforms and devices, and may be overt (visible) or covert." The Strategy further provides data on the prevalence of bullying among students and plans activities aimed at strengthening conflict resolution skills, non-violent communication, and children's resilience to adverse childhood experiences.

The National Youth Strategy 2016–2025 also recognises peer violence, gender-based violence and bullying as key challenges in the field of youth health. In order to address this problem, the Strategy envisages: "Enhanced cooperation of professional services in schools to identify violent behaviour and victims of violence (gender-based and other forms of violence)."

The 2021 Concept for Primary Education also identifies as a priority objective the provision of safe educational and training institutions, free from violence, hate speech, disinformation and discrimination. According to the Concept, schools should contribute to creating a supportive climate for all students and stakeholders in the educational process and should be engaged in the continuous improvement of physical conditions, resource availability, safety, and the creation of an overall environment free from discrimination and violence.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

With regard to perceptions of the presence, scope and personal experiences of peer violence or bullying, the research conducted by the Institute for Human Rights shows that nearly two thirds of secondary school students in Skopje confirm the presence of bullying among students in their school. Specifically, 27.8% of students stated that bullying is present, while 9% stated that it is very present. Only 13.9% of students reported that there is no bullying in their school. The main conclusion is that approximately one third of students agree that bullying is present or very present.

When disaggregated by gender, girls, unlike boys, perceive bullying as more prevalent in their school. Specifically, 44.7% of girls believe that bullying is present or very present in their school, compared to 26% of boys. The percentage of girls who believe that bullying is present, particularly when including those who stated that it is slightly present, is significantly higher than that of boys. The result is highly statistically significant, and the relationship between gender and perception of bullying is moderately strong. This indicates a strong correlation between gender and perceptions of peer violence, with girls perceiving bullying as more prevalent in their school. As with discrimination, this finding may be due either to girls having more direct experience with bullying or to greater awareness and capacity to recognise when bullying occurs.

With regard to ethnic affiliation, the research does not indicate significant differences in students' attitudes.

Another interesting finding concerns teachers' perceptions. Unlike discrimination and hate speech, where students perceive these phenomena as significantly more prevalent than teachers do, teachers perceive bullying as more prevalent than students do. However, the average responses of teachers and students who stated that bullying is present in any form are too close for the difference to be statistically significant.

In terms of **scope, or the level of exposure to bullying**, approximately two thirds (61.9%) of students believe that fewer than 30% of students in their school were subjected to verbal or non-verbal bullying during the past year. There are no differences in perceptions of the scope of verbal and non-verbal bullying based on students' gender or ethnic affiliation.

Physical bullying is less widespread than verbal and non-verbal bullying, while students believe that bullying on social media is the most prevalent form. A considerable proportion of students believe that between 30% and 70%, or between 71% and 100%, of their peers have been subjected to bullying on social media. Only 16.1% of students believe that the scope is nearly total (71–100%). In relation to this form of bullying, a significant gender difference is observed: approximately one fifth of girls believe the scope is nearly total (71–100%), compared to around one tenth (9.5%) of boys.

Among teachers, the vast majority (86.7%) believe that physical bullying in their school is limited and affects fewer than 30% of students, and that bullying on social media is the most widespread form. For comparison, 77.4% of students expressed the same view. Overall, teachers' and students' perceptions of the scope of physical bullying are relatively similar. The research concludes that teachers have a good level of insight into what students experience within the school environment.

Another notable finding relates to perceptions of reporting peer violence. In this regard, teachers' and students' perceptions are almost identical, with 75% of students sharing the same view.

Regarding the **causes of bullying**, students stated that the victim's inability to defend themselves (whether verbally or physically) is one of the main reasons for bullying. According to students, the victim's grades and place of residence (i.e. whether the student is from Skopje or from the periphery) are among the least frequent reasons for bullying. It should be noted that due to the methodological approach of the research, some precision in these responses is lost, as the data presented are averages of students' responses. A more detailed analysis shows that many students identified physical disability, intellectual disability, religious affiliation and ethnic affiliation as significant factors contributing to bullying; however, opinions differ regarding the extent to which these factors are considered causes. The greatest disagreement among students relates precisely to these aspects. While a substantial proportion of students believe these are frequent causes of bullying, an equally substantial proportion believe they are not. In any case, students agree that the victim's inability to protect themselves is one of the primary causes of peer violence, which fully corresponds with the theoretical understanding of power relations in society. Peer violence, like all forms of

violence, is primarily about the exercise and demonstration of power rather than achieving any other outcome.

Notably, teachers' responses are generally consistent with those of students. The same or similar categories rank highest and lowest among both groups in terms of factors contributing to bullying. Unlike attitudes towards discrimination and hate speech, teachers' and students' views on the causes of bullying are largely aligned.

Personal Experiences

With regard to students' **personal experiences of bullying**, only 12.7% of respondents stated that they had experienced bullying at school during the previous year. In this respect, the focus of the question was not on the type of bullying (verbal versus physical), but rather on whether bullying had occurred at all. This means that 87.3% of students stated that they had not experienced bullying, which is a significant proportion and could form the basis for the claim that bullying in schools during the previous year affected only slightly more than one in ten students.

A similar situation is observed with regard to bullying outside school. The percentage of those who confirmed that they had experienced bullying outside school is slightly higher, with 16.5% of students responding affirmatively to this question. Likewise, 15.7% of students confirmed that they had experienced bullying on social media. There are no statistically significant differences among students based on gender or ethnic affiliation.

However, as was also the case with questions relating to personal experiences of hate speech, the proportion of students who did not respond to these questions is relatively high. Approximately 20% of research participants did not provide answers to the questions overall, while as many as 35% of students did not respond to the question on personal experiences of bullying on social media, which is more than one third. The research notes: *"It is observed that when questions move from perceptions of what generally happens to what happens to students personally, students react by refusing to respond."* Furthermore, when examining whether this non-responsiveness is random in the context of sensitive topics related to students' personal experiences, the research shows that this behaviour is not random. The study concludes that this phenomenon indicates two interrelated issues: first, the seriousness of bullying in schools, and second, the likelihood that a large proportion of those who did not respond to questions on personal experience were, in fact, victims of some form of bullying.

Despite all of the above factors, when considering the cumulative number of students who confirmed that they had been victims of bullying, regardless of the type or location of the incident, the research shows that approximately one third of students (31.8%) were victims of some form of bullying during the previous year. This figure must be considered alongside the large proportion of non-responses, which cumulatively amounts to 30.6%. Additionally, it is noted that students of Albanian ethnic background are less inclined to state that they were victims of bullying (similarly to the case of hate speech), compared to students of Macedonian or other ethnic backgrounds.

The majority of bullying experiences consisted of insults and mocking (59% of students reported this), but the proportion of those who confirmed that they had been victims of physical abuse is also significant (21%). Physical abuse shows a clear gender dimension, as it is far more common among boys than among girls. Among other responses provided by students who were victims of peer violence were: creation of a fake social media profile for the victim (2.8%), spreading rumours (2.8%), and sexual harassment (0.7%). Once again, it must be emphasised that although sexual harassment was reported by a small number of students, 100% of the respondents who reported this experience were girls, indicating that the gender dimension plays a significant role here as well.

Focus Group

Participants in the focus group devoted the greatest attention to the issue of peer violence, i.e. bullying. Bullying, as well as its consequences, was perceived as the most pressing problem, requiring urgent strategic and practical solutions.

A large proportion of participants spoke about their personal experiences and about how they address bullying, regardless of whether they participated as school employees or as parents. School staff pointed to an increase in peer violence, particularly after students returned to classrooms following the easing of restrictive measures related to the pandemic. In addition, the view was confirmed that bullying often occurs, or at the very least is shared, through digital tools or social media. Some representatives of the school staff spoke about "hidden bullying", noting that such violence is rarely reported, that they do not personally witness it, and that students do not habitually speak openly about this phenomenon with them. An interesting insight was shared by one participant, a school psychologist, regarding the reactions received from students when the topic of peer violence is raised in school. Specifically, he stated that students perceive this as an issue they should resolve themselves, and that the more "adults make a fuss", the more reluctant students become to discuss the topic. Additionally, it was highlighted as a problem that some students are not familiar with the term "bullying" and are unable to clearly distinguish between what constitutes "problematic behaviour" and what is "common and acceptable behaviour".

The issue of failure to recognise bullying and the need for education on this topic was also identified as a problem among teachers. Participants specifically indicated that a significant proportion of teaching staff lack the capacity to recognise and distinguish bullying from play among students. This points to the need for training and further education of teaching staff and professional services in recognising peer violence and acquiring techniques for addressing this phenomenon.

In response to the question *"What is being done to prevent bullying?"*, all participants described different approaches and methods applied within their institutions. These include organising public discussions, counselling and educating students during class sessions, applying specialised techniques for which some school staff members are trained, and developing programmes and guides for peer mediation. From this, it can be concluded that

there is no homogeneous, standardised method applied to awareness-raising and education among students; rather, each school applies its own tools with which it is familiar or trained.

Nevertheless, representatives of the Bureau for the Development of Education emphasised that the Bureau prepares standardised manuals and programmes for the training of teaching staff. It was noted that problems arise during implementation. Specifically, despite the existence of annual training programmes for teaching and professional staff, participants stated that schools do not prioritise them in their annual programmes. One limitation of these programmes, identified by the Bureau as a clear need, is the inclusion of students in programme development. This is a key factor in addressing the problem, particularly given students' perception that only adults speak about this issue. This points to the need for a participatory approach, i.e. involving students' voices in the development of potential solutions.

Regarding the reporting of violence, all participants agreed that incidents are rarely reported. While views differ as to why reporting is low, explanations generally range from lack of trust in the system and lack of awareness of reporting mechanisms, to fear of reporting, both among students and parents.

As with discrimination, participants believe that peer violence begins in primary school and continues throughout secondary education. Therefore, greater attention must be devoted to this issue in primary schools, both in terms of data collection and the introduction of preventive measures from an early age. Similarly, work with professional school services was identified as a challenge, with students continuing to perceive these services as disciplinary mechanisms rather than sources of psychological and counselling support.

Finally, with regard to bullying, focus group participants highlighted the need for the exchange of good practices, i.e. successful case examples of addressing bullying that would be shared through partnerships among schools. The need to establish networks and platforms among schools is evident and could play a significant role in efforts to reduce peer violence/bullying.

CONCLUSION

DISCRIMINATION

Every third student holds the view that discrimination exists in schools. The fact that one third of students consider discrimination to be present or very present in schools is concerning. Additionally, it is worrying that a large proportion of teachers do not share this perception, instead believing that discrimination is significantly less prevalent. In percentage terms, 17.7% of teachers consider discrimination to be present or very present among students, with only 1.3% considering it to be very present. This significant discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions indicates either a lack of awareness and capacity among teachers to recognise discrimination, or that discrimination occurs "behind closed doors", which represents an even greater challenge to address.

Focus group participants partially confirmed the findings of the quantitative analysis. First and foremost, only a small number of participants devoted attention to the topic of discrimination in schools. Many more focused on peer violence/bullying, creating the impression that discrimination is not perceived as a priority issue or challenge, or is not recognised as one of the main problems.

On the other hand, national anti-discrimination legislation is harmonised with the majority of international standards for the prevention of and protection against discrimination. At least "on paper", there is currently a comprehensive approach to protecting citizens from discrimination, encompassing multiple levels, from constitutional, criminal and civil law to the most recent Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (2020) [13].

Despite this, the qualitative component of the research showed that some respondents believe that the laws contain shortcomings, and that many by-laws related to this issue and covering the education process have not been adopted. Some respondents consider that there are gaps in the legal framework for secondary education, as although discrimination is prohibited, provisions establishing responsibility or financial penalties for school principals in cases of failure to act have not been included.

HATE SPEECH

Although the national legal framework accords significant importance to hate speech, given that it is most often considered a criminal offence, this research showed that hate speech represents an extremely important issue to which educational institutions appear to devote the least attention.

The majority of students believe that hate speech is either present (35.3%) or very present (15.9%), amounting to a total of 51% of students. This means that every second student holds this view, which is not only alarming but also indicates an urgent need for measures to address the problem. In contrast, teachers are less inclined to believe that hate speech is present among students in their schools. While every second student believes hate speech exists, every third teacher believes that such a phenomenon does not exist at all. Only 2% of teachers consider hate speech to be very present.

This divergence once again indicates either that teachers lack the capacity to recognise hate speech when it occurs among students, or that students are less likely to engage in hate speech in the presence of teachers. In any case, students' perceptions of the scale of the problem, particularly when combined with teachers' perceptions of its invisibility, represent worrying findings.

Furthermore, the research points to significant difficulty in speaking about personal experiences of hate speech from the victim's perspective. On the one hand, many students believe that hate is frequently expressed through speech in schools; on the other hand, only

[13] Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, adopted on 30 October 2020, Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 258/2020.

a small proportion are willing to speak about it and, consequently, to report being victims. Although this aspect is not the central focus of the research, it provides an important indicator of awareness levels and the fear that prevails when expressing personal experiences related to sensitive issues such as hate speech.

Both students and teachers believe that hate speech is most prevalent on social media. Of the students who responded, approximately one quarter (25.2%) were exposed to some form of hate speech during the previous year. There is no difference in this experience based on whether hate speech occurred in school, outside school, or on social media.

PEER VIOLENCE / BULLYING

The national legal framework for the protection of children from violence is broad and encompasses several laws. Some of these laws, particularly those in the field of education (such as the Law on Primary Education and the Law on Secondary Education), explicitly include provisions regulating peer violence/bullying, while others regulate prevention and protection from all forms of violence, including peer violence where applicable. In addition, the state has developed several national strategies, action plans and concepts providing activities and methods for eradicating peer violence and protecting children's psycho-physical health, including the National Strategy (2020–2025) and Action Plan (2020–2022) for Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence, the National Youth Strategy (2016–2025), and the Concept for Primary Education. Thus, institutions increasingly recognise peer violence within the education system and, at least declaratively, take measures to address it.

The research confirms the conclusion that bullying is a regular occurrence in the lives of secondary school students in Skopje. Nearly two thirds of secondary school students believe that peer violence exists in their schools, and approximately one third were victims of some form of peer violence during the previous year. The majority believe that only a small proportion of bullying is reported, and that it occurs most frequently in primary school.

There is a strong correlation between gender and perceptions of peer violence, with girls more likely to believe that bullying is prevalent in their schools. As with discrimination, this may be due either to girls having more experience of bullying or to greater awareness and capacity to recognise it.

Students agree that victims' inability to protect themselves is one of the main causes of peer violence, which aligns fully with theoretical understandings of power relations in society. Most bullying experiences involved insults and mocking (59%), while a significant proportion involved physical abuse (21%). Although sexual harassment was reported by a small number of students, 100% of those who reported such experiences were girls.

Unlike perceptions of discrimination and hate speech, teachers' views on bullying are consistent with those of students. Their perceptions regarding prevalence, exposure, causes and reporting of bullying align with students' views, leading to the conclusion that teachers are familiar with the phenomenon and have the capacity to recognise it when it occurs within schools.

However, a gap is evident between recognition and response, particularly in terms of taking action, as highlighted during the qualitative phase of the research. Many focus group participants pointed to the problem of non-response by teaching staff. In addition, professional staff in schools is perceived by students as disciplinary rather than supportive, limiting their involvement in addressing bullying.

Furthermore, the research shows that there is no homogeneous, standardised method for awareness-raising and education on peer violence; schools apply their own tools. This is contrary to the national legal and strategic framework, as well as the regulations and guidelines developed by the Bureau for the Development of Education.

Finally, the focus group highlighted the need for further research, early-age interventions, and the exchange of good practices, i.e. successful cases of addressing bullying, to be shared among schools. Establishing networks and platforms among schools could therefore play a significant role in reducing peer violence/bullying.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Urgent adoption of all envisaged laws and by-laws in the field of education related to peer violence (bullying), discrimination and hate speech;
- Introduction of misdemeanour fines for management staff in educational institutions in cases of failure to act in situations involving discrimination, hate speech or peer violence;
- Raising awareness and strengthening the capacities of teaching staff and professional services to recognise and appropriately respond to discrimination, hate speech and/or peer violence (bullying) through standardised training;
- Active monitoring and consistent implementation by schools of all adopted education policies, including manuals, guides and instructions developed by competent authorities for addressing and reporting peer violence, discrimination and hate speech;
- Systematic inclusion of topics related to discrimination, bullying and hate speech in school curricula and teaching content, in order to build students' capacities to recognise these harmful phenomena;
- Integration of gender-sensitive education into curricula, taking into account the evident gender dimension and differences in experiences and perceptions identified by the research;
- Measures by schools to encourage students to report cases of discrimination, bullying and hate speech;
- Substantive and active promotion of the work of professional services in schools (pedagogues and psychologists) to reduce stigma associated with their role as disciplinary mechanisms and to promote their psychological and counselling support functions;
- Conducting comprehensive research on the prevalence and scope of discrimination, hate speech and peer violence among primary school students;

- Exchange of good practices and establishment of networks and platforms among schools for sharing methods and tools to address and eradicate discrimination, bullying and hate speech;
- A multi-sectoral approach to addressing discrimination, hate speech and peer violence, including the involvement of services beyond the education sector, such as social work centres, civil society organisations, social workers and special education professionals.