

## Deliverable 4.4 Policy recommendations

*Deliverable 4.4 resumes and collects all national and European policy recommendations co-designed by partners together with students, school staff, parents, stakeholders*



Reporting and contributions: Maria Sole Piccioli and Corinne Reier AA Italy, Mara Ghidorzi Afolmet, Irina Sorescu CPE, Nele Kelchtermans UCLL, Maria Mourtsaki AAHE.

Supervision and coordination: Maria Sole Piccioli – ActionAid Italy

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## PROJECT'S OVERVIEW

The Youth for Love 2 project, co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union, aims to prevent, detect and address peer violence among adolescents (14-18 years) in 5 local communities in 4 European countries (Italy, Belgium, Greece, Romania), by promoting the adoption of positive behaviours and by involving youth, families, educational professionals and community members at large in community-based initiatives developed and led by youth to prevent and address the problem. The project is the consequential continuation of the previous one, Youth for love, realised between 2019 and 2021 in the same Countries, that had a strong focus on gender-based violence and school related gender based violence (SRGBV).

At European level, the project aims at:

- Developing and testing an integrated educational programme for the prevention and management of peer violence in **5 local communities** across Europe;
- Informing and training **190 school professionals** to strengthen their competences in preventing and managing peer violence and become the school's focal point on peer violence;
- Engaging **50 parents or tutors** in a specific training programme to strengthen their role in the prevention and management of peer violence at school and community level and strengthen their skills to ensure support;
- Providing **400 students** with a strong knowledge and understanding of peer violence through a participatory educational programme;
- Involving **200 youth** in mapping the needs of their local communities connected to peer violence, with particular attention to youth, and engage the entire educational community in actions to prevent and fight it;
- **Advocacy** at national and European level through a participatory process to co-design the project's policy recommendations involving school professionals, students and parents, youth, civil society organizations and movements and policy makers;
- Raising public awareness of the problem of peer violence among young people, and involving **1.5 million** of them across Europe through communication activities.

**The project partnership is composed of the following European organizations:** ActionAid Italia (Italy), ActionAid Hellas (Greece), UC Limburg (Belgium), AFOL-Agenzia Metropolitana per la Formazione, l'Orientamento e il Lavoro (Italy) e CPE - Fundatia Centrul Parteneriat Pentru Egalitate (Romania).

The project is co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union.

**Duration of the project:** May 2021 - April 2023

## Executive Summary

This report describes the main evidences and policy recommendations co-designed by the consortium with students, school staff, parents, stakeholders during the two years project and presented to policy makers at national level.

During the first year of the project, national advocacy strategies were written to ensure the participation of policy makers and stakeholders to the advocacy activities. Through **20 meetings with national stakeholders, 11 meetings with policy makers and a total of 5 national and international advocacy workshop**, the Consortium involved in the drafting of final recommendation a total of **323 beneficiaries**, including **17 educational expert, 8 gender experts, 3 psychologists, 49 CSOs members, 64 local, national, European policy makers, 24 parents, 98 teachers, 34 students/youth national/European role, 3 LGBT members, 1 journalist, 9 citizens and 1 child protection specialist**. Participants were involved to analyze and write final national recommendations to prevent and address peer to peer violence, that is the final output of advocacy activity.

## 1. Analysis at European level

Since the implementation of YFL1, partners collected data from literatures and research both for European and then National level. At both levels, reliable data on youth violence are insufficient and there are only a few studies available on the prevalence and the impact of youth violence. Moreover, frequently data detect only bullying and cyberbullying evidence that cannot be considered exhaustive of the problem, especially for adolescents.

The WHO acknowledges youth violence as a major public health issue. Youth violence can take up many forms including physical, verbal, psychological and sexual. The UNICEF 2018 Report “An Everyday Lesson: #ENDviolence in Schools” shows that half of the students aged 13–15 experiences bullying or physical fights within a year. The Council of Europe Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2016-2021 has identified violence prevention as one of the five priority areas to guarantee the promotion of children’s rights.

Research shows that there are numerous risk factors strongly associated with youth violence that occur at different levels: individual level (i.e. personality and behavioural factors), family and close relationship level (i.e. negative peer influence, lack of social ties, poor parent-child relationships, parents’ antisocial behaviours etc.) and community and society level (i.e. low social cohesion, inequality, insecurity, gender and cultural norms) (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, WHO, 2015). As with risk factors, also protective factors can be built at these different levels to reduce the likelihood of youth violence. ). Every day, students face multiple dangers, including fighting, pressure to join gangs, bullying – both in person and online, violent discipline, sexual harassment and psychological violence. In the short-term this impacts their learning, and in the long-term it can lead to depression, anxiety and even suicide. Violence is often a barrier to addressing other health and

social issues as individual, community and financial investment in affected areas is impeded by fear and instability. Consequently, preventing violence is often a prerequisite for the successful implementation of other health and social policies.

Peer and gender-based violence also takes on particularly complex and multifaceted characteristics in the adolescent target group. It includes various manifestations of physical, sexual and/or psychological violence, such as verbal abuse, bullying, sexual abuse and harassment, coercion and assault, and rape. In recent years, and particularly as a consequence of the closures caused by the pandemic, it is in part even more 'invisible', occurring online, with characteristics that make it even more complex to recognise, manage and prevent.

These different forms of violence often overlap and reinforce each other. Gender is a key factor behind many forms of violence, and using a gender lens to look at violence can help develop intersectional approaches to prevention and response that are useful in countering all types of discrimination.

Young people have different experiences of violence depending on their sex and sexual orientation, gender identity, origin and socio-economic background, and health status. International research shows that girls are more likely to experience psychological bullying, cyberbullying, sexual violence and harassment. On the other hand, boys often experience corporal punishment at a higher rate than girls. A growing body of evidence also indicates that most LGBT students report being bullied or subjected to violence on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. Individuals who are perceived as falling outside traditional or binary gender norms are at high risk of violence. Gender-based violence can occur in and around schools, as well as on the way to and from school. Social media, e-mail and mobile phones are used to perpetrate violence through new means, such as cyber-bullying, online grooming and trolling<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Youth for Love 2 Whole school diagnosis

YFL2 partners, since the first edition of the project, conduct a Whole school diagnosis on students, teachers and parents, to better detect and analyse the problems, causes and effects and to adapt YFL2 approaches and methodologies.

Beyond differences related to the national and local contexts, violence inside and outside the school context emerges as a widespread experience in the stories of students, teachers, and parents. The students' stories are populated with all forms of violence: physical, psychological, and verbal. Both online and offline types of violence are present, and it is also clear that the two mingle with each other: violence often develops back and forth between the online and offline life. Many reasons behind have been identified behind the violence, and often the focus is on the family problems of those who perpetrate violent acts, both girls and boys. According to this view, these girls and boys are seen as victims and perpetrators at the same time. Prevalent forms of violence vary depending on the country: for instance, while "cat-calling" (specific form of verbal sexual harassment lived by

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO and UN Women, Global guidance on addressing school-related gender-based violence, 2016



girls in the public space) are prevalent in both Belgium and Italy, in Romania being bullied for physical disabilities is prominent, finally, in Greece racism is one of the key issues which emerged in the focus groups.

Students, both girls and boys, describe violence as “inevitable”, something that you cannot really avoid. For example, girls experiencing catcalling often rationalize it saying that boys and men “always behave as men”, and there is not much to do to solve this situation. A similar attitude has emerged for violence on the ground of racism or ableism. According to all the collected data, the pandemic has worsened an already difficult scenario, in terms of increased anger, educational disparities and therefore, violence.

This is an important insight of the project which calls for specific intervention.

A transversal result across all schools and countries is the burden of responsibility placed on teachers, in the face of the lack of appropriate tools and specific training; as well as the request for additional efforts in preventing measures, besides the ones already in place to address the violence when it has occurred.

Lastly, students’ families seem to play an important role in the fight of violence among students. Indeed, in all countries, students, teachers, and even parents themselves, recognize that what happens inside the family has a great impact on the life of both boys and girls.

Therefore, based on this evidence and the lessons learnt from the previous project, the “Youth 4 Love 2” project promotes the adoption of a comprehensive multi-stakeholder approach that involves actors that do not typically cooperate such as youth, parents, educational professionals (school and community), associations, private service providers (private and third sector), public services and authorities (public sector) at local, national and EU level.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

At European level the prevention of peer and gender-based violence in school and outside is recognized as a priority for each Country and for European guidelines education plays a key role in challenging the negative social norms that drive youth violence. EU recognize that addressing all forms of school violence including Bullying is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, and SDG 16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies. Even though legislative initiatives have been taken in all EU Member States, also after various recommendations by EU, to combat violence and abuse, adolescent years remain largely uncovered due to the lack of policies targeting this age group and the fact that many of the actions put in place do not integrate a wider perspective about violence and do not consider the cultural contexts of reference.

Over the last few decades, there has been increasing recognition and evidence that teaching about the cognitive, emotional, social and physical aspects of sexuality can have positive impacts on children and young people’s sexual and reproductive health. Emerging evidence also suggests that delivering

sexuality education programmes to children and young people at school can have a positive effect on larger societal issues, such as gender equality, human rights, and the well-being and safety of children and young people. According to UNESCO, effective sexuality education should adopt a comprehensive approach: a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. Sexuality education programmes can tackle a wide range of topics, including sexual and reproductive health (including sexually transmitted diseases and youth pregnancy), relationships, sexual orientation and gender roles. International bodies – including the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other agencies of the United Nations (UN) – have set out various targets and standards around sexuality education that European Union Member States, amongst others, are expected to meet. However, as education remains a Member State competence, there are considerable differences in its content, delivery and organisation between Member States. fewer Member States focus on issues of gender roles and stereotypes, mutual consent, teach about LGBTQI issues and address the issue of online media and sexuality. All of these are also topics included in the WHO and UNESCO guidance.<sup>2</sup>

Even if EU has mainly a guidance role for members on education, the consortium knows that in 2023 a specific working group inside EEA (The European education area) has been created to support the implementation and follow-up of the forthcoming Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success by promoting mutual learning and the exchange of best practices, including on issues related to well-being at school.

For this group and also other education stakeholders at EU level, the specific points that the project recommend on education area across the Countries are:

- Co-designing with student's and teacher's representatives the future Curricula for the 21st Century and especially consider that all students should be provided with affectivity and sexuality education. Students, but also teachers claim to deep these arguments, included differences among gender, sex, sexual orientation and transfeminism principles. When they ask for this education, they intend a sexuality education that involves learning about the cognitive, emotional, social, interactive and physical aspects of sexuality<sup>3</sup>.
- Stressing in new guidelines for all school staff to promote active methodologies, like peer to peer and participative methodologies that enhance student's protagonist and consequently their wellbeing during learning processes and life school to prevent any form of violence;

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<sup>2</sup> European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC), Sexuality education across the European Union: an overview, November 2020

<sup>3</sup> WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA (2010). 'Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe: A framework for policy makers, educational and health authorities and specialists'. World Health Organization: Cologne. Available from [https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/WHO\\_BZgA\\_Standards\\_English.pdf](https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user_upload/WHO_BZgA_Standards_English.pdf)



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- Considering that youth (And especially adolescents) are demanding more physical spaces to be protagonist, and continuous psychological support also to deal with Covid consequences but also with actual changes and tragedies;
- Reflecting that it would be interesting to appoint at European level a Commission Expert Group on promoting wellbeing at school to explore existing practices and develop guidelines for schools in order to create positive school environments based on equity, non discrimination, inclusive language;

## 4. COMMON RECOMMENDATIONS AT NATIONAL LEVEL FOR THE FOUR COUNTRIES

As outlined in the final international workshop, the consortium identified specific advocacy points that synthesized in common recommendations, as follows:

- At High school level each actor of the community recognize that it would be necessary that each High school works on a Co-designing of internal procedures and mechanism on prevention and management of peer violence and SRGBV through a participative process that involves each community school member, inside a Whole school approach. Some elements seems to be common among Countries:
- It would be crucial the presence of specific professionals (as a tutor) to build a bridge between students and school's organization and school staff, between school staff and parents, between schools and community stakeholders.
- Inserting participative mechanism for students to have physical and free psychological spaces but also an active power to co-decide procedures in order also to create positive interaction with peers and teachers,
- Strengthen psychological support in partnership with the educational community, but also in a peer to peer perspective, always identifying safe spaces to talk and share.
- Strengthen teacher's training on sexuality and affectivity in terms of compulsory and life long learning training, in order to be better equipped to detect and manage situation of violence.
- Strengthen concrete protocol at local level between schools and local services to build a better cooperation with different actors and act following shared values and procedures to prevent and manage peer and gender based violence cases.

**At National level, it is evident that each Country has different system, guidelines and governance, but it seems that all agree in:**

- Asking for the introduction on national curricula for compulsory sexuality education for students, that should adopt a comprehensive approach: a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality



#### 4.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATION IN GREECE - AAHELLAS

In Greece the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is the competent state authority for all the education-related issues at all grade levels. It should be noted that the Greek educational system is divided in three levels, of which the first two are compulsory: six years of primary school, three years of middle schools and three years of lyceum or vocational studies. The Ministry is responsible for exercising control over schools, identifying gaps, drafting, suggesting and implementing the relevant legislative and policy measures, setting up the curricula and coordinating in general all the teaching related issues. Concerns around bullying and peer violence in Greek schools are rising over the past decade with more and more incidents being reported against LGBTQ+ students, young girls and in some cases against extremely vulnerable students with disabilities. On February 2011, the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Deputy Ombudsman for Children's Rights, issued a circular proposing good practices and measures that could contribute to the prevention and elimination of violence among students. Provisions of the penal code apply in cases of perpetrators as young as 15 years old including cases of school violence.

Additionally, the Observatory for the Prevention of School Violence and Bullying that was established in 2013 under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education but is not active today. Currently, most activities targeting at raising awareness and preventing peer violence and bullying at schools are organized and implemented by the Regional Centers of Educational Designing (ΠΕ.Κ.Ε.Σ.) that are operational at a local level having the responsibility of strengthening the autonomy of school units by introducing measures and practices that respond to existing needs. Each school adopts an internal School Regulation that is based on the principles of unhindered, equal access to the school processes for all the members of the school community, mutual respect, solidarity and democracy. In Greece there is no Education Strategy or Education Action Plan. A very solid characteristic of the educational system in Greece is the lack of a coherent strategic vision. It is very common that any new government introduces significant –even structural sometimes- changes whose effect is short or medium term and is not properly measured with the aim of being adjusted/ improved/ removed based on specific evidence. Lack of reliable updated evidence is a persistent gap for monitoring the developments around education in the country.

In terms of other legislative and policy measures on preventing and combatting peer violence and bullying in Greek schools it would be an omission not to mention the Law 4531/2018 that transposed the Istanbul Convention in the Greek legal system. According to article 14 of the Convention, education is critical in preventing and combatting Gender Based Violence. Although sexual education and human rights related classes are not fully integrated in the Greek School system, the recently adopted Skills' Labs (Εργαστήρια Δεξιοτήτων: <http://iep.edu.gr/el/psifiako-apothetirio/skill-labs>) include key pillars the activities of which seek to instil the values of respect and empathy and awareness on human rights to the students. Despite this being a positive step, it is evident that it is not applicable in a uniform way throughout the country.

Moreover, the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2021-2025) and the National Action Plan for the Rights of the Child (2018-2020) both include a chapter on preventing and combatting Gender

Based Violence. Public agencies such as the Institute of Educational Policy, the Research Centre for Gender Equality – KETHI, and the General Secretariat for Gender Equality have issued guidelines and reports, have organized trainings and awareness raising events for educators on topics concerning gender and education. However, in most cases, these activities lack continuity and coherence.

In conclusion, initiatives to prevent and combat peer violence and bullying in Greek schools do exist. However, not all the schools' population has the same access to the information and the activities that are implemented. The lack of a strategic long-term vision on education as well as the budget constraints that are imposed are critical in working against peer violence and bullying. Based on the aforementioned information, the advocacy activities for Youth4Love 2 are listed below.

Gender issues, child protection, school policies alongside the policy recommendations that emerged during the implementation of the project were brought to the discussion table. The participants identified different policy recommendations that address all the areas of interest that intersect in peer school violence and involved all the members of the school community as well as professional, services and institution outside school. Fragmentation of interventions and public policies in Greece were a central part of the discussion but the steps that have been taken in addressing gender inequalities and stereotypes (as part of the #MeToo movement in Greece) have led to some changes that a few years ago would be rather impossible to take place.

Among the most important points/ recommendations that were raised during the meeting-workshop, the following were agreed on as the most effective:

#### **At school level :**

- Conduct regular assessments to identify needs of the members of the school community.
- Provide lifelong education (trainings e.tc.) and opportunities for new skills development to teachers on a permanent basis.
- Strengthen the psychosocial services inside the school units.
- Develop a network of stakeholders that will work together to prevent and combat peer school violence.
- Reduce the number of students per classroom to ensure that teachers will have adequate time to develop quality relationships with them.
- Set up a prevention and protection group with the mandate to conduct activities inside school units.
- Provide opportunities for parents to be more engaged in school life and build meaningful alliances with students, teachers and other key stakeholders to prevent and combat peer school violence.
- Cooperation between teachers of different classes of the same school or / and cooperation between different school units.

#### **At National level:**

- Ensure that programs to prevent and combat school violence will be implemented in all schools across the country.
- Adopt and implement programs for addressing peer school violence in early childhood.

- Organize awareness raising activities for the general population.
- Currently, the Greek school system does not provide neither adequate space nor time for members of the school community to work together. Developing a culture of collective co-existence and a sense of solidarity would have a positive impact not only on preventing and combatting peer school violence but also on overcoming a series of other challenges inside school.
- Identification of opportunities to promote messages on human rights respect and equality provided by school curricula (i.e. literature or history classes).

## 4.2 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS IN ITALY – AA ITALY and AFOLMET

In Italy there are not comprehensive and recent data and investigations on peer violence and school related gender-based violence<sup>4</sup>. According to data from the ELISA platform, a MIUR-funded monitoring tool for bullying and cyberbullying phenomena, in the school year 2021-2022 22.3% of students were bullied and 18.2% actively took part in bullying episodes against a classmate. Still considering the increased difficulty of monitoring online, 8.4% of male and female students have been cyberbullied; 7% have actively taken part in cyberbullying. Interesting data also emerges: A high percentage of teachers report that their school has appointed a reference teacher (76% of primary school teachers, 83.4% of secondary school teachers and 74% of secondary school teachers), but this figure does not always seem to be known in the school community, especially by students and especially in High schools. These data are interesting but insufficient, but we need always to consider as detected by YFL2, that adolescents (14-18) unfortunately live different forms of peer violence respect to bullying.

During the 17th legislature, the Houses of Parliament have already approved several legislative initiatives to combat gender-based violence and peer violence. Italy ratified the Istanbul Convention in May 2013 and converted it into law No. 77 of 27 June 2013. The Italian National Anti-violence Plan 2017-2020 aimed at combating male violence against women in all areas of both public and private life. In the course of the 18th Legislature, further laws on the subject were approved, including Law No. 69 of 19 July 2019 (the so-called 'red code') and Law No. 134 of 27 September 2021, on the reform of criminal proceedings with reference to gender-based violence. In 2017, the Ministry of Education developed the *Educate to Respect Plan and Guidelines* to promote gender equality and prevent GBV and all forms of discrimination in schools. Also a law against Bullying and Cyberbullying, Law 71/2017 was passed, entitled 'Provisions for the protection of minors for the prevention and fight against the phenomenon of cyberbullying'. In addition, a 2021 update of the Guidelines for the Prevention and Combating of Bullying and Cyberbullying (Ministerial Decree 18 of 13 January 2021 issued by note 482 of 18 February 2021) has been introduced to enable managers, teachers and school operators to understand, reduce and combat the negative phenomena affecting children, girls and boys with new tools. By contrast, the bills aimed at extending the regulation of preventing and countering hate speech and hate crimes to misogynistic, homoleophobic and ableist conduct were not passed definitively. Countering stereotypes - in particular those related to

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<sup>4</sup> The national Institute for statistics (ISTAT) dated a last survey only on bullying in 2015, while presented strong data on violence against minors in research dated 2020. More info [HERE](#)

sex, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity - is also indispensable to address the structural conditions of inequality.

In all these policies, Education is one of the main priorities and the only one measure that seems to be efficient in the Prevention of violence, however, the cultural roots of violence are not comprehensively addressed. Mainly due to political reasons, the implementation of these law processes were interrupted and the government changes in 2022, is causing strong debates on gender issues in Italy, also by hitting educational measures that are essential to prevent violence, as for example Alias carrier, and sexual education but also there are discussion to change the law on bullying and cyberbullying, in a more punishing sense for minors and for families of perpetrators of this kind of violence.

At national level it's quite evident the existence of numbers of gaps: as a matter of fact, for example, no specific focus on GBV and gender issues are included in the civic education guidelines recently introduced as a mandatory subject (2020). Also initiatives which were already in place, such as the Observatory on SRGBV within the Ministry or the appointment of Focal point schools (*scuole polo*) at local level for preventing and contrasting SRGBV in terms of training and capacity building, expertise and sharing of best practices, have been stopped. Also, national guiding for schools focused only on bullying and cyberbullying that are only specific aspect of peer violence, and especially on adolescents are not exhaustive of the different experiences that they live inside and outside school's environment. With regards to sexuality education, In Italy, despite the many indications by WHO and European institutions, this subject remains optional. While a few schools do provide sexuality education to adolescents in school, this is dependent on the will of school leaders and tends to focus solely on the biological aspects, rather than on any wider psychological, societal, or emotional aspects of sexuality education, as defined by the WHO and UNESCO.

The huge work in Italy carried out with students, teachers, stakeholders, parents and also policy makers on co-designing advocacy requests pointed out these specific recommendations:

#### **At National level (Education Ministry and Members of the Parliament):**

- The introduction of affectivity and sexuality education for students and at all education degrees, developed in synergy with local actors (such as counselling centres, anti-violence centres, transfeminist associations) and with the active involvement of students to detect needs and priorities;
- Revision of the National Plan for Respect Education, in order to integrate it with additional protection tools to combat discrimination, such as the activation of psychological support desks and centers, Anti-Harassment Codes, Alias Careers Regulations and gender neutral bathrooms;
- Systematisation of funds and resources for psychological support and spaces in each school, in connection with local authorities.

#### **At school and local level:**

Clear, transparent and compulsory procedures and regulations for each higher education institution that provide for both prevention and management actions and compulsorily that need to include:

- Compulsory training for all teaching staff in affectivity and relationships management as well as in the prevention and management of violence in cooperation with relevant actors of educational community
- guidelines for an inclusive and shared language
- Child protection and safeguarding measures to protect the privacy of and for minors
- Alias careers, gender free bathrooms, anti-harassment code
- Tutors (and not only bullying and cyberbullying referees) recognised by students and able to be a reference point for all problems that involve violence but also discrimination problems
- Listening and help/support spaces, linked to psychological support, co-designed and possibly co-managed by student peers, together with tutors and external experts on sexuality, violence and transfeminist methodologies.

#### 4.3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AT NATIONAL LEVEL IN BELGIUM - UCLL

Belgium has a federal/national government and a Flemish government. Education is governed solely by the Flemish government while the domains of gender equality and justice are governed both at federal and national level. In 2016, Belgium ratified the Istanbul Convention at federal level and also at Flemish and Walloon community level. To assure the implementation of the Convention into legislation and policy, the Institute for Equality of Men and Women was founded. The latter also gives judicial assistance to victims of sexual violence but does not directly deal with education. Currently, the National Action Plan against Sexual Violence and the Flemish Action Plan against Sexual Violence are being implemented (2020-2024).

The Belgian educational system is governed at regional level, so each community has its own separate policy. In the Flemish region, where Youth for Love is implemented, the educational system is structured in the following way: kindergarten (which is not mandatory), six years of elementary school, two years of middle school, and four years of high school choosing between academic, technical or vocational.

Awareness raising on gender-based violence targeting students, teachers, and education professionals is a priority. The National Action Plan against Violence underlines that education plays a key role in the prevention field. In this view, it provides for training on GBV for school professionals and suggests training activities on the equality of men and women in the form of educational material integrated in the official curricula. It is stressed that education plays a key role in the prevention of violence and that healthy sexual relationships should be discussed at all ages throughout the whole school career.

The following areas of recommendations have been identified through the participative process among students, policy makers, stakeholders, and school staff. No major gaps were identified on the point of view of national educational policy by stakeholders.

#### **National Level:**

- Today, policy invests in after care (i.e. centre for sexual violence, reformation of sexual law), It's recommended to invest in broad care and prevention of violence for youth;

#### **School and local level:**

- Community actors and stakeholders need to form the missing link between specialised care and schools/teachers so that they can invest in prevention, peer support and a supportive environment. This will help schools in preventing problems and violence among youth but also at a later stage.
- School procedures would need to be improved to support teachers in being able to offer care on a daily basis. Normalise talking about subjects that are important to young people, outside of the subject matter. Make teachers aware that this is also important and that they don't have to be professionals to talk about students' wellbeing.
- It's recommended to organise a wellbeing week at the start of the school year: draw up action points and class rules together with the students, to work on for the rest of the year.
- To include societal topics such as gender diversity, race and wellbeing in everyday reality, instead of discussing this for a 'special' week just once a year.
- To start from the framework and world view of young people and gently ease in difficult topics, instead of imposing new views that are too different from their own views.

## **4.4 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AT NATIONAL LEVEL IN ROMANIA - CPE**

Over 95% of the students who participated to the project activities faced various forms of peer to peer violence: 64% verbal violence, 18% physical violence, 13% emotional violence and most of them had great difficulty managing these situations.

The Istanbul Convention has been ratified by Romania in March 2016 and entered into force in September 2016. Romania also has a National Strategy for the Promotion of Equal Opportunities and Treatment for Women and Men and Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence for the period 2018-2021. Its action has focused on domestic violence, with the passing of the Domestic Violence Law, while no specific legislation on other forms of violence against women exists. The Romanian educational system consists in pre-school education (kindergarten), which is optional for children aged 3-4 and compulsory for children aged 5, five years of primary education, four years of middle school and four years of high school choosing between vocational or technical. The Romanian law states that the Ministry of Education is obliged to introduce, in the educational curricula, contents on equal opportunities and treatment between women and men, mutual respect, nonviolent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, GBV, as well as combating discriminatory stereotypes based



on gender roles, adapted to the age and understanding of students. Extracurricular activities can be developed by professionals working on the topic of domestic violence in pre-university education. Additionally, each school also has the obligation to conduct educational programmes for teachers, parents, and children in order to prevent domestic violence, harassment, and sexual violence.

Although it exists a permanent commission at the level of each educational unit, responsible for combating violence and, starting September 2021, each school must have an anti-bullying action group, which include a maximum of 10 members (the school director, three teachers with specific skills, the school counsellor, representatives of students, parents, the local authority and the teacher advisor), most of this commissions and groups are only formal. In their work, the teachers who are members of the anti-bullying action group should organize short information activities during the management hours of the classes in the educational unit, in order to present the anti-bullying action group and to encourage the positive behaviours of the students.

The anti-bullying action group should receive notifications, in writing or verbally, from teaching staff, students, parents or auxiliary staff regarding identified bullying situations and immediately proceeds to investigate them, so that the process of evaluating and establishing the seriousness of the facts does not take longer of 48 hours, collaborates with teachers and head teachers to solve reported problems and adopt appropriate measures to protect the victim and correct the bullying behaviours of the author, ensures the protection of students who have reported bullying situations against any form of discrimination or revenge from students or teachers, but, in reality those action groups are not functional.

Although all teaching staff designated to become anti-bullying reference persons should benefit from training in the field, with the support of teaching staff houses, resource centers and psycho-pedagogical assistance and active non-governmental organizations, accredited to carry out courses to prevent and combat violence in the school environment, accredited by the Ministry of Education, only few teachers benefited from training in the field. În România, is operational, starting with January 2022, The Child Phone, a call center non stop with unic number -119. This unique number can be called by children in a vulnerable situation, but also by other people who know about children abused, exploited or subjected to a form of violence. Calls signalling different situations affecting children are answered by counsellors specialized in social assistance and child protection. In just three weeks since the unique number for children, was established, more than 3,000 girls and boys reported physical and emotional abuse, neglect, and harassment. The main purpose of the unique number is to provide immediate assistance in situations where there is a risk to their lives or when their health and/or physical and mental integrity is endangered. However, it is a tool used by adolescents even in situations that are difficult for them to manage, especially in relationships with parents.

### **At National level:**

- Introducing and promoting school subject *Health education* that is only optional, which includes developing healthy relationships, prevention of interpersonal conflicts, social maladaptation and crisis situations, mental health, sexual education.
- Promote a greater popularization of the unique number January 2022, The Child Phone and encouraging adolescents to use it can be useful in managing situations of violence.

### At local and school level

- To increase cooperation between stakeholders and community actors and schools in order to create a supportive environment for teen-agers.
- Creating safe spaces for teen-agers meetings/activities/socialization inside the school and in the school yards, self-administrated by students and in connection with community centers for young people
- To put in place the Anti bullying Action Group. In the anti-bullying group in each school should be the head of the school, the school counselor teacher, three teachers trained in the issue of violence, including psychological violence-bullying, two or more representatives of students, a representative of parents, representatives of the local authority.
- To support teachers in participating in training programmes on preventing and managing situations of peer to peer violence.
- Including constant group activities moderated by the school psychologist/counselor during which should be addressed topics connected with peer to peer violence (what are the triggers, conflict management, how to react as witnesses of peer to peer violence)
- Introducing special measures especially to protect girls that are much more victims of gender based violence: self-defense lessons in the school curriculum, possibly in sports classes, more public illumination everywhere in the neighborhood, number of civilian police on the streets.



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**PER UNA SCUOLA ATTIVA CONTRO  
LA VIOLENZA TRA PARI E DI GENERE**

**1**

Prevenzione del  
bullismo e della  
violenza tra pari

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**2**

Educazione  
sessuale e  
all'affettività

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**3**

Spazi di supporto  
psicologico

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LA VIOLENZA TRA PARI E DI GENERE**

**4**

Codici  
antimolestia,  
carriere alias e  
bagni neutri

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LA VIOLENZA TRA PARI E DI GENERE**

**5**

Formazione del  
corpo docente  
all'affettività e alla  
prevenzione della  
violenza

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**6**

Linguaggio  
inclusivo

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**7**

Spazi di ascolto e  
supporto tra pari

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LA VIOLENZA TRA PARI E DI GENERE**

**8**

Attenzione  
all'intersezionalità  
e ai principi  
transfemministi  
nella didattica

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**9**

Inserimento di un  
tutor referente  
nel contrasto alla  
violenza

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LA VIOLENZA TRA PARI E DI GENERE**

**10**

Coinvolgere la  
comunità  
educante

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