



THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA



AD HOC REPORT

THE PROBLEM OF BULLYING IN RA PUBLIC EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS



YEREVAN 2023

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ABBREVIATIONS

RA	Republic of Armenia
HRD staff	Human Rights Defender staff
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
MOESCS	Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports
MoTAI	Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure
USS	Unified Social Service
RPC	"Republican Pedagogical-Psychological Center" State Non-Profit Organization
PRSC	"Regional Pedagogical-Psychological Support Center" State Non-Profit Organization
GTB	Guardianship and Trusteeship Body
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

INTRODUCTION

The study of the bullying problem is due to the increase in the number of complaints raised as a result of the Human Rights Defender's monitoring and the number of verbal and written complaints received by the HRD staff about bullying cases, as well as the need for the state to implement and improve mechanisms for the prevention, detection and response to the bullying problem in practice. In this regard, it is worth noting that over the years, the annual reports of the Human Rights Defender have repeatedly referred to the manifestations of bullying against children, including the ill treatment and violence against children.

Bullying is a periodic display of aggression by a social group against a member or members of that group. Verbal threats, mockery, physical attacks - pushing, beating, isolation of a person, exclusion from the environment, etc, are considered bullying¹. Bullying is a violation of children's rights regardless of its type and location.

Bullying is typically characterized by unwanted, negative, mostly repetitive action, speech, or behavior that may be overtly or covertly aggressive. As a result, such behavior leads to a real or perceived inequality between the bully and the bullied, which can lead to depression, low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence or a violation of dignity in the bullied. Bullying is often manifested by peers and/or adults in various situations in an environment where there is no concern for the bullied person, their characteristics, needs, and feelings.

It is noteworthy that not all bullies act intentionally. It is possible for a person to become a bully as a result of group behavior, public opinion, or dictates without the desire to harm the targeted person. There are also cases when a person does not realize that they are directly or indirectly a participant in bullying.

Bullying is divided into two groups according to its forms: direct and indirect. In the case of direct bullying, the behaviors are manifested in the form of hitting, beating, stealing, mocking, insulting and threatening, and in the case of indirect bullying, the victim of bullying is deliberately isolated and excluded from the environment.

¹ Available at: <https://ombuds.am/images/files/8cbe89fe58d54b6ba1ff2f6ac5255737.pdf>

It can manifest itself in the following ways:

- physical bullying by pushing, hitting, beating,
- verbal bullying through labeling and mocking,
- social or psychological bullying, in which they try to isolate the child from the latter's environment and deliberately exclude them from society,
- cyberbullying, which is carried out through the use of information technologies, using them as a tool to harm.

The main features of bullying are:

- the inequality of the parties' power,
- periodic nature of violence,
- the negative psychological impact on the victim of bullying.

In general, children who are bullied:

- have no parents or have a single parent,
- are temporarily or permanently deprived of family environment,
- are subjected to physical or mental violence in the family, are not surrounded by care and attention,
- are subjected to economic exploitation,
- have low self-esteem,
- have an active, sometimes even aggressive or passive behavior,
- stand out from the general public in any way, in appearance, height, physiological features,
- are moved from another place of residence (for example, from province to province, from village to city, etc.),
- are physically or emotionally weaker,
- are not self-confident and brave,
- depend on the opinion of others².

Studies show that bullying significantly increases the likelihood of a child being excluded from education processes and absent from school. Bullied children are more likely to experience self-isolation, insomnia, anxiety, panic, delinquent behavior, or thoughts of death or suicide.

² Available at: <https://ombuds.am/images/files/8cbe89fe58d54b6ba1ff2f6ac5255737.pdf>

Studies also show that bullying can be one of the reasons for a child's poor academic performance or failure to continue after compulsory education. It can also have a significant impact on children's mental health, quality of life, and child's behavior. Therefore, a child's self-isolation, discipline, low performance, frequent absences from school are possible signals for educators, parents and other competent authorities that the child is being bullied in school or outside of school. Therefore, it is not necessary to scold the child, instead, it is necessary to pay even more attention to the child, observe their behavior, try to find the reasons and provide a safe and effective environment for self-expression.

Bullying has a negative impact not only on the children exposed to it, but also on those who carry it out and, simply, onlookers.

Taking into account the above-mentioned, from the point of view of fully guaranteeing the exercise of the child's rights, the role of the state in implementing and ensuring effective mechanisms for the prevention, detection and response to bullying is particularly important.

Although the concept of "bullying" is not defined by the RA legislation as of the date of publication of the report, already in 1993, the Republic of Armenia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted on 20/11/1989 (hereinafter also the Convention), assuming the obligation to comply with its national laws and practices to the requirements of the Convention.

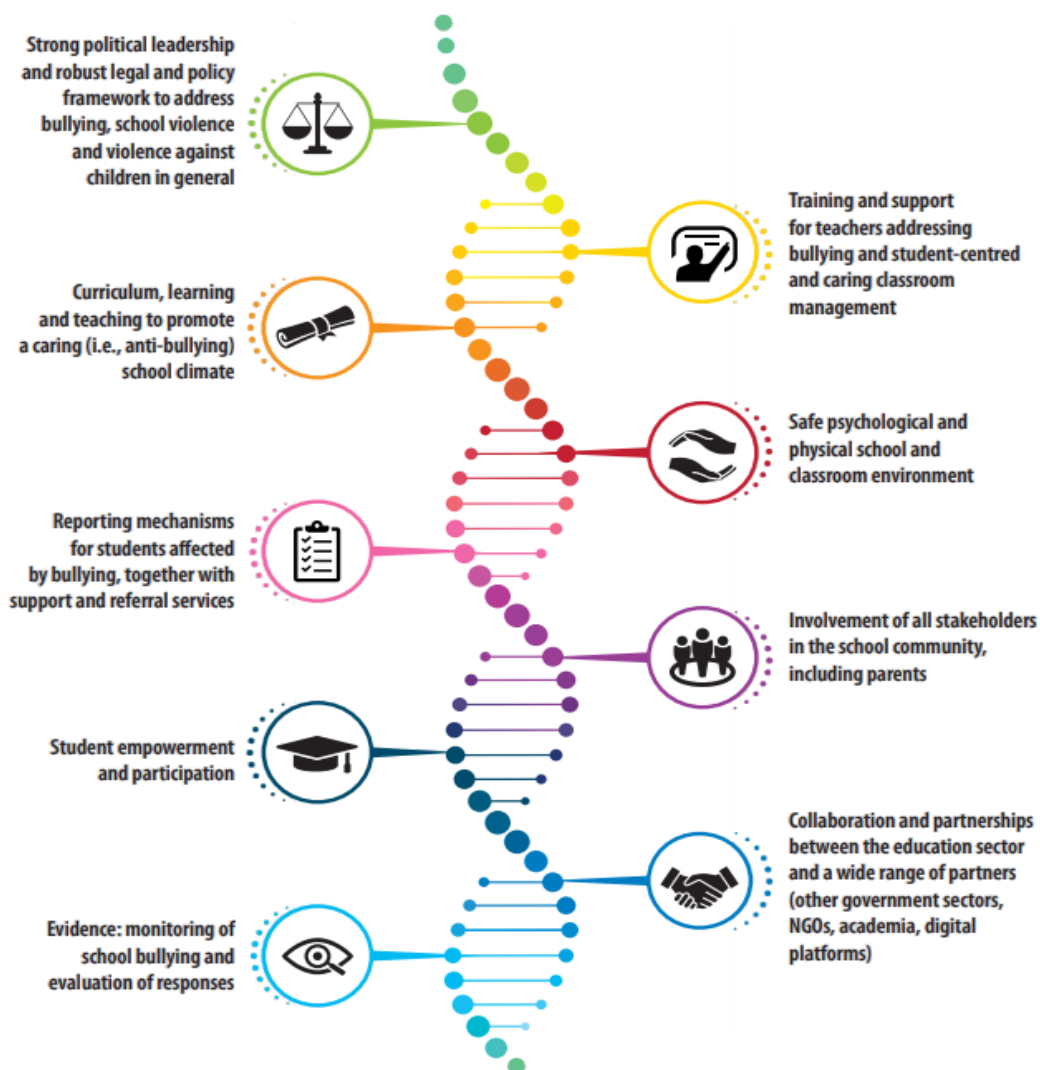
After the ratification of the Convention, many strategies and programs were developed, and toolkits aimed at protecting children's rights were created, while a targeted policy for the prevention, detection and response to bullying has not been introduced, the necessary tools have not been developed, and the supporting materials are few.

The fight against bullying also stems from UN Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 16³, namely to ensure inclusive and equal quality education, promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, and promote the formation of just, peaceful and inclusive societies.

It is important to emphasize that the implementation of the "Comprehensive Educational Approach" format in the education system is of fundamental importance from the point of view of the effectiveness of the fight

³Available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

against and prevention of bullying` based on the recommendations of the UNESCO Scientific Committee on the fight against and prevention of bullying and cyberbullying⁴, which consist of the following nine main components:



Each of the nine components mentioned is important and necessary, and their effectiveness depends on the simultaneous provision of each of them. Therefore, it is necessary to plan and carry out coordinated actions that are regular and periodic in nature, integrated in a single toolkit. This means that all bodies with a function to protect children's rights or guarantee the realization of rights should be part of a single strategy and action plan.⁵

The report has been prepared in the context of the above-mentioned nine components and within their scope an in-depth study has been carried out, a legal

⁴ Available at:

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374794?fbclid=IwAR0RY3nCw7hXcNR3dIaZ6wHKmY8TqHJOWdL91DdKCbPe5iYUgEjt8TheMY>

⁵ Available at <https://ombuds.am/images/files/8cbe89fe58d54b6ba1ff2f6ac5255737.pdf>

analysis has been carried out, the existing problem of bullying has been highlighted, and proposals have been presented according to each component.

Thus, the Ad-hoc report is dedicated to highlighting the problems of bullying in the RA and was developed, giving primary importance to the children's views. The report included the positions of specialists working with children in public education institutions, as well as the positions of competent state bodies. The support materials developed by the HRD staff on bullying were also used for the development of the report.

Within the scope of this study, the HRD staff sent requests to the competent state bodies, held discussions with the members of the Public Council on the Rights of Children and Youth adjacent to the Human Rights Defender. The analyzes of individual complaints submitted to the staff of the Human Rights Defender, as well as the results of visits to public education institutions within the scope of the Defender's convention mandate, were taken into account.

The HRD staff representatives and independent experts included in the framework of the "Improving Protection of Children and Youth and Promoting Participation" joint project with the UNICEF office in Armenia were involved in the development of the Ad-hoc report.

The core of the Ad-hoc report is the problem of bullying in public education institutions, but it is also relevant in preschool education institutions.

The report reflects the problems of bullying and its prevalence in public education institutions of the Republic of Armenia as of April 2023, including information and clarifications received from competent state authorities.

METHODOLOGY

A clear methodology and toolkit was used for the development of this eAd-hoc report. The purpose of using the toolkit is to find out the main types of bullying in the school environment, the main indicators of its monitoring, its intensity, as well as to enable the HRD staff and experts to carry out situational monitoring through studies and information collection.

In general, the information sources and applied methodology for monitoring bullying within the framework of the report are as follows:

- a standardized survey among pupils using a self-assessment scale of aggression shown by them,
- an interview questionnaire with teachers,
- an observation card developed for specialists making a monitoring visit,
- focus group discussions with children,
- references made on the basis of visits,
- individual case or complaint investigations.

940 children, 100 teachers, 15 school principals, 8 psychologists and 5 social pedagogues participated in the survey. Cases and complaints received in the Office of the Human Rights Defender in the period from 01/01/2021 to 01/04/2023 were considered.

The sample of the study is 15 schools randomly selected from all provinces of the Republic of Armenia and the city of Yerevan, and some schools were selected based on the data of bullying cases recorded by the HRD staff. The visits to schools within the framework of the study were unannounced.

The information obtained as a result of the methodology used in the study was analyzed in a generalized version, excluding the identification of schools and the targeting of cases.

In the methodology of the study, the ways and main features of bullying were taken into account.

The information obtained by the methodology was analyzed in the context of the above-mentioned 9 components.

CHAPTER 1. STRONG LEGAL AND POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

The importance of the component of having a strong legal and political framework is due to the need to exclude dual approaches and express the state's absolute intolerance towards bullying in practice. To this end, the state must take a consistent and unequivocal position regarding the appropriate response to bullying incidents.

The concept of "bullying" is not defined by the RA legislation, but the norms regulating legal relations related to bullying have found their confirmation in the Convention and domestic normative legal acts.

Thus, for example, the child's right to protection from all forms of physical or mental violence is defined by Article 19 of the Convention and Article 9 of the Law "On the Rights of the Child" (hereinafter also the Law). In particular:

According to Article 19 of the Convention, States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

According to Article 9 of the Law, every child has the right to protection from all kinds of (physical, mental and other) violence. Any person, including parents or other legal representatives, is prohibited from subjecting a child to violence or degrading punishment or other similar treatment. In case of violation of the rights and legal interests of the child, the violator bears responsibility in accordance with the procedure established by the Law of the Republic of Armenia.

The child's right to protection from bullying in public education institutions, for example, is defined by Article 28 of the Convention, Articles 5, 20, 27 of the Law on Public Education, and Articles 22 of the Law. In particular:

According to Article 28 of the Convention, school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity.

According to Article 5 of the Law "On Public Education", general education is aimed at the intellectual, spiritual, physical and social development of each learner, the preservation of human dignity and their social adjustment in the educational environment in accordance with the latter's abilities, abilities and health, therefore, the state guarantees in the field of general education ensuring the fundamental principles.

According to Article 20 of the Law "On Public Education", a pupil in an education institution has the right to be protected from any physical and psychological pressure, exploitation, actions or inaction of pedagogical and other workers and pupils, which violate the rights of the pupil, or encroach on their honor and dignity.

According to Article 27, Part 2, Clause 1 of the Law "On Public Education", the pedagogical worker is obliged to respect and protect the rights and freedoms, honor and dignity of the pupil, to contribute to the realization of the child's right to education, taking into account the peculiarities of each person's educational needs.

According to Article 22 of the Law, every person who violates the honor and dignity of a child, including parents or other legal representatives, other persons carrying out the upbringing and education of the child, are responsible in accordance with the procedure established by the Law of the Republic of Armenia.

For example, the right to protection of a child from bullying on the basis of discrimination is defined by Article 2 of the Convention and Article 4 of the Law. In particular:

According to Article 2 of the Convention, States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

According to Article 4 of the Law, children have equal rights, regardless of their nationality, race, gender, language, religion, social origin, property or other status, education, place of residence, circumstances of the child's birth, state of health or other circumstances of their parents or other legal representatives.

From the analysis of the above-mentioned legal regulations, it follows that the RA at the legislative level recognizes the right of the child as a full member of society with rights and responsibilities appropriate to their age and development, to be under the patronage and protection of the state, and the duty of every member of society to respect the honor and dignity of the child. Any manifestation of violence, discrimination and differential approach against each child is prohibited by law and causes responsibility.

Thus, the HRD notes that although the RA legislation does not directly define the term "bullying", the current legal regulations address the manifestations of bullying and are sufficient to protect the rights of the child from such manifestations and to properly respond to actions that violate their dignity.

The HRD also notes that regardless of the existence of the aforementioned legislative regulations, the legislative definition of the term "bullying" is also important from the point of view of ensuring legal certainty, and in that context, the HRD considers the legislative definition of the term "bullying" as part of the legislative changes by the state to be welcome and the implementation of works aimed at the provision of clear legislative regulations for the purpose of prevention, detection and response to bullying.

In addition, the HRD referred to the above-mentioned issue, including the need for a legislative definition of the term "bullying", both within the framework of the research "Highlighting Systemic Problems Related to the Protection of Children's Rights and Proposing Solutions"⁶, as well as the opinion given on the draft law "On Adopting the Law on 'Child Rights and Child Protection System'".

It should be noted, however, that the provision of the right to protect the child from bullying by the law is still not enough to ensure that right in a proper way.

Taking into account that the creation of favorable conditions for the full and multifaceted development of children's personality is one of the main goals of the state's policy, and its provision is possible only by ensuring the child's right to protection from bullying, the HRD notes that it is important to include prevention and disclosure of bullying in strategic documents. and planning of response actions.

⁶ Available at: <https://ombuds.am/images/files/ad651ecbb0930b69dedbb2699b56c839.pdf>

Moreover, the HRD has repeatedly referred to the need to include such actions in the strategy in the opinions presented on the draft strategic documents.

Thus, the Government's Decision No. 1978-L as of 26/12/2019 (hereinafter also Decision No. 1978-L) approved the national strategy for the protection of human rights and the deriving action plan for 2020-2022

Clause 25 of Appendix 2 of the 1978-L Decision envisages the legislative prohibition of corporal punishment against children, while there is no reference to actions to be carried out in the direction of prevention, detection and response to manifestations of psychological and any other forms of violence against children.

In the 2023-2025 action plan stemming from the National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights, approved by Annex 3 of the Government Decision No. 1978-L as of 26/12/2019, as an expected result, it is planned to define the concept of "violation of children's rights" and to improve the mechanisms of registration and management of cases of violation of children's rights, to introduce and apply a unified statistical system of registration and management of violations of children's rights. In this regard, it is important to emphasize that in order to achieve the specified expected result, it is necessary to directly envisage in the strategy the scope of actions to be carried out in the direction of prevention, detection and response to manifestations of psychological and any other form of violence.

Certain measures aimed at protecting children from any form of violence are provided by the Government's decision No. 1622-L as of 30/09/2021 "On Approving the 2022 Annual Plan and List of Measures for the Protection of Children's Rights".

It should be noted, however, that both by the Government's decision No. 1606-L as of 29/09/2020 "On Approving the 2021 Annual Program for the Protection of Children's Rights and the List of Measures", as well as by the Government's decision No. 1526-L as of 29/09/2022 "On Approving the 2023 Annual Plan for the Protection of Children's Rights", no measures regarding bullying issues are planned.

In order to get more detailed information about the state's policy regarding the problem of bullying in public education institutions, the HRD staff requested clarifications from the competent state bodies.

The first questioning was aimed at finding out what mechanisms and tools the competent authority has for responding to bullying cases in public education institutions, including non-state education institutions.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, in response to the question, stated that the term "bullying" has not yet been legislated and the MoESCS does not have an authorizing norm to establish a legal act on violence and bullying, public education institutions do not have systematic mechanisms, documentation and recording means for identifying and responding to bullying. Nevertheless, the RPC operating under the MoESCS has an available telephone number, e-mail address, website and other social platforms, through which it receives reports on cases of violence and responds to them.

Referring to the ESCS Ministry's position on the lack of systematic mechanisms for identifying and responding to bullying due to the lack of a legal formulation of the term bullying, the HRD once again emphasizes that the existing legal regulations are sufficient to protect the rights of the child from the manifestations of bullying and to adequately respond to actions that violate their dignity.

As for the use of available telephone, e-mail, website and other social platforms as mechanisms and tools for responding to bullying cases, it should be noted that during the visits to education institutions, the HRD staff and the experts included within the framework of the program have recorded that no child was informed about opportunities to report incidents of violence through the above-mentioned website, available telephone, email or other social platforms.

The studies of the "<https://hmk.am/>" website referred to by the MoESCS and the test calls made to the phone number prove that they do not serve the intended purpose and are not adapted to the needs of children with disabilities.

In particular, the website does not provide children with information about the possibility of filing a complaint in an accessible form, does not ensure the confidentiality of filing a complaint, does not contain voice instructions, etc. And in response to the test call made to the phone number mentioned on the website, the RPC employee said that a child cannot apply without a parent and added that "... they cannot imagine a case where a child would submit such an application without a parent".

The above-mentioned indicates that in case of bullying, the child cannot file a complaint without a parent and in a depersonalized way. Meanwhile, there may be cases when the child does not want to tell the parent about it, and if told, the parent will be an obstacle to filing a complaint.

Yerevan Municipality, in response to the question, stated that one of the mechanisms for responding to bullying cases is cooperation with both republican and regional pedagogical and psychological support centers with the involvement of relevant specialists. According to clarifications, there is no mechanism implemented by the municipality to receive reports on bullying.

The RA MoTAI, in response to the questioning, presented clarifications regarding the general education institutions operating under province subordination. The study of the presented clarifications proves that in the majority of public education institutions, no mechanism has been developed for children to submit reports about bullying. In some cases, the "Hotline" telephone call was cited as such a mechanism, and in some education institutions, the appropriate questionnaire "Google form", but in some cases they are of a formal nature, because as it was recorded as a result of the visits and inquiries, the majority of pupils and teachers was not aware about them.

Summarizing the aforementioned, it is necessary to state that public education institutions lack mechanisms and tools for proper response to bullying cases.

The second question was aimed at finding out what policies have been developed and implemented against the discriminatory attitude that is the cause of bullying in public education institutions, what work is being done to identify and prevent the causes of bullying.

It follows from the clarification provided by the MoESCS on the mentioned issue that the actions carried out to identify and prevent the causes of bullying are mainly regular events organized as part of the activities of the RPC in the formats of courses, interactive presentations, awareness events, organized as for pupils, as well as pedagogues and specialists.

It follows from the clarification provided by Yerevan Municipality on the mentioned issue that the relevant topics provided by the curriculum of a number of taught subjects, the materials discussed in the framework of the classroom

hours and various educational events are aimed at preventing the discriminatory attitude that is the cause of bullying.

According to the analysis of the clarifications presented by the MoTAI, there is no clear policy of combating discriminatory treatment, which is mainly the cause of bullying, in the education institutions operating under province subordination. The activities carried out in that direction are mainly the conversations held during the lesson and some events aimed at raising awareness.

Taking into account the above-mentioned, it is necessary to state that, according to the data presented, the actions against the discriminatory attitude that causes bullying in public education institutions, as well as the detection and prevention of the causes of bullying, are limited within the framework of courses and various awareness events, the role of which will be addressed in more detail below. It should be stated, however, that regardless of the implementation of such courses and events, conversations with school principals and pedagogues within the framework of the study testify to the misperception of the term "bullying".

Meanwhile, in addition to courses and various awareness measures, the policy directions of the state should consider the creation of a compassionate, psychological and physical safe educational environment, the introduction of accountability mechanisms, documentation and monitoring institutions, strong inter-departmental cooperation, the involvement of all actors of bullying and the raising of the child's legal awareness. development and implementation of steps.

Considering the aforementioned, it is necessary to:

- ❖ ***define the concept of "bullying" by legislation,***
- ❖ ***plan the actions to be carried out in the direction of bullying prevention, detection and response in strategic documents and annual, complex and other programs related to the sector,***
- ❖ ***to implement effective mechanisms and programs to distinguish bullying from other cases in legal practice, as well as to increase the legal awareness of both children and pedagogues and all actors involved in bullying in relation to the problem,***

- ❖ *implement effective programs aimed at creating a compassionate, psychologically and physically safe educational environment,*
- ❖ *to introduce reporting mechanisms, documentation and monitoring institutions on the issue of bullying, as well as to form strong inter-agency cooperation,*
- ❖ *develop mechanisms for identifying and preventing bullying cases in public education institutions and introduce rapid response tools,*
- ❖ *launch a clear policy for combating discriminatory attitudes that are the cause of bullying,*
- ❖ *take steps to introduce mechanisms for confidential and self-reporting of bullying by children and to improve existing mechanisms.*

CHAPTER 2. COURSES AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Professional training and capacity building of the stakeholder institutions are of key importance in preventing incidents of bullying, as well as in avoiding the targeting and violence of children in this process.

In addition, the study of international experience proves that the implementation of the monitoring institution in education institutions, that is, the availability of professional and advisory guidance opportunities both among children and pedagogues, contributes to the development of effective practice. This implies that the effectiveness of the measures aimed at the development of professional abilities is determined not only by the preparatory work for necessary trainings, but also by the need for continuous professional support and advice to apply the acquired knowledge and skills in practice.

The trainings, regardless of their content, thematic orientation, should provide the participants with a clear "Who? What? How? Why?" toolkit, that is, clear explanations of who is involved in the fight against bullying, what powers or what means they have, as they should cooperate with other actors and what mechanisms should be implemented for the implementation of specific works, as well as what the goal of the specific action or intervention is and what indicators should be used to evaluate the result. Therefore, regular feedback between actors is essential in this process, both to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention/action and to revise it if necessary, and to collect and study the necessary data and information about the process facts, expected and actual results.

In order to obtain information about the work done by the state in the direction of this component, relevant inquiries were sent to the competent authorities with the question of of what events, trainings and courses were organized for children and employees involved in their education and upbringing in the period from 2021 to 01/04/2023 to raise awareness about bullying and how many people participated in them.

In response to the mentioned questions, MoESCS informed that RPC conducts courses, discussions, awareness events, makes videos and implements other activities regarding bullying. Awareness activities are continuously carried

out for parents, children, as well as professionals through regional pedagogical and psychological support centers, as well as through the media, press conferences, public discussions and other means.

In response to the same question, Yerevan Municipality informed that separate discussions were organized with the involvement of teachers and tutors on the need to exclude manifestations of violence against children, including bullying, in the educational environment. Children's rights awareness events under the title "My Rights Through My Eyes" were organized in all schools of Yerevan, in the framework of which issues related to ensuring a violence-free educational environment were also discussed.

The information provided by the competent authorities indicates that there are no sustainable programs to address the problem of bullying and to train teachers, which would ensure the training and capacity building of professionals with a continuous and integrated approach to the topic.

In addition, during the visits carried out within the framework of the study, the experts recorded that teachers of some schools operating in the RA had never participated in trainings on bullying, and there were even education institutions where teachers were unaware of bullying and its harmful consequences. In addition, school principals stated during conversations with experts that there are few trainings on bullying or they take place on a voluntary basis, and teachers "do not want to go to voluntary training".

It should also be noted that during the visits there were specialists who stated that they participated in similar courses and developed their professional abilities in handling bullying cases.

Thus, taking into account the information presented by the state bodies and the studies carried out within the framework of this project, the HRD emphasizes that the organization of courses and trainings in the RA should be universal and teachers should be given special professional support to properly respond to bullying incidents and to be guided by the principle of "not causing harm".

Considering the aforementioned, it is necessary to:

- ❖ ***organize awareness activities about bullying at a universal level,***

- ❖ ***conduct ongoing training for staff in both public and non-public education institutions to raise awareness of children's right,***
- ❖ ***develop guidelines, professional manuals, supporting materials for specialists, organizing appropriate courses on their application,***
- ❖ ***introduce mandatory courses on bullying in the faculties implementing pedagogical educational programs of the universities operating in the RA.***

CHAPTER 3. CREATING A COMPASSIONATE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

In order to create an educational environment, first of all, child-centered approaches and flexible, supportive tools, which can be used in particularly difficult situations, are needed.

It should be noted that the issue of the almost absence of child-centered approaches in schools and the need to implement them was repeatedly raised with verbal alerts about bullying cases addressed to the Defender. For example, a verbal complaint was received that the physical education teacher of the school does not allow a child with special educational needs to participate in the lessons because, according to them, the child is not able to do the exercises.

In this context, it should be noted that differential treatment of a child is unacceptable and the school must provide a compassionate and needs-based environment for all children.

Surveys conducted with teachers within the scope of this study indicate that teachers have stereotypical approaches to responding to bullying, which are essentially not child-centered and do not provide a compassionate environment. For example, conversations with children in schools have a formal disciplinary nature, in case of conflicts between children, parents are invited to complain about the child's behavior.

The fact that, according to some teachers, there are pedagogues who communicate with pupils through insults is noteworthy. It should be noted that, according to surveys, pupils do not communicate with the school psychologist. The psychologist is perceived by the pupils as a "psychiatrist" whom it is embarrassing to address.

Schools generally lack an information platform for parents. Children's discipline issues are discussed with parents as needed. The way to raise awareness about bullying among children is to organize an event on the topic 1 or 2 times a year. However, building a compassionate environment is an ongoing process and must be accompanied by constant, non-stop actions.

In this context, the interaction of senior pupils with junior pupils is also important, excluding senior pupils from exerting any pressure on younger pupils and encouraging caring approaches towards each other.

The results of the observation show that in most schools, issues related to children's behavior are discussed with the school managerial staff. There are no books containing information on children's behavior at schools.

Another problem is the question of ensuring proper work and approaches with pupils with disabilities. The nature of the work with pupils with disabilities is mainly to conduct conversations, in some schools it is to ensure participation in sports and cultural events.

In the majority of the 15 schools observed during the study, the school environment was tense and conflictual.

The children reported cases of ear pulling, slapping and other forms of physical punishment by the vice principal at the school. The teachers reported about the cases of regulating the behavior of pupils in schools and calling the police to talk with the children.

The analysis of interviews with teachers shows that the common manifestations of bullying among children are physical attacks and communication with each other with offensive words. Under these conditions, the response of the school staff to the fight against school bullying is rated average by the teachers. The assessment is justified by the fact that the school needs a psychologist, and the employees do not have sufficient skills in the fight against bullying, because daily work is not carried out to develop a consistent attitude of the staff and to develop a tool to quickly respond to the problem.

The analysis of the results of the self-assessment sheets used among the pupils proves that the majority of the pupils show an intolerant attitude towards each other. Pupils use both physical and psychological violence against each other. Physical violence is manifested in the form of hitting, slapping, pushing and shoving, and psychological violence in the form of nicknames or bad names.

Bullying, in most cases, is used by pupils as a way of having fun. Most of the pupils, as a means of self-defense, retaliate in case of physical violence by using physical violence, and the reaction of psychological pressure is mainly

manifested in the form of retaliatory insults and mockery. Aggression escalates during recess as pupils leave the classrooms and teachers' control weakens.

The results of the study indicate that the rate of cyberbullying is also high. Pupils threaten or make fun of other users through social networks, and they themselves become victims. In total, almost 20 percent of the pupils who took part in the surveys indicated that they threaten or make fun of someone via social networks at least once a week. The children also reported about Internet games where they were pressured by Azerbaijani and Turkish users in the form of threats and insults, the reason for which was their nationality, being Armenian.

Another problem is the presence of manifestations of violence in public education institutions and the attitude of teachers towards these manifestations. The results of the study indicate that some teachers consider the manifestations of violence at school as a normal phenomenon, which excludes the provision of a compassionate educational environment. According to some pedagogues, mocking among children is a natural phenomenon. A large number of teachers believe that the family is the one to educate a child, and school is only for gaining knowledge, so they cannot educate children themselves.

The results of the study show that awareness of the concept of "bullying" is low among both pupils and teachers. Some of the teachers who participated in the study are not aware of the existence of such a concept at all, the majority have just heard the word, but do not know the explanation and interpretation. Most of the pupils heard the concept of bullying for the first time. In this regard, the level of awareness was almost the same in the schools of the provinces and Yerevan. At one of the schools, for example, as a result of the focus group discussion, it was recorded that the pupils had never heard of the concept of "bullying", but they were familiar with the existence of the phenomenon and stated that it is widespread in the school.

According to the overwhelming majority of the pupils who participated in the focus group discussions, one of the main reasons for bullying a person is the tendency to be higher than everyone else, to assert oneself, unequal conditions. According to the children, among the most vulnerable groups are those with low achievement, "bad pupils", "bad" clothes, special appearance and disabilities.

There is a widespread attitude among children that the person who is being bullied is to blame for their status because they are unable to defend their rights. There are separate groups of pupils who exert psychological and physical pressure on "weaker" pupils.

It is noteworthy that during the focus group discussions, the children mentioned that cases of physical and psychological violence are recorded in the school not only by pupils, but also by teachers.

In the majority of schools, there is a discriminatory attitude of teachers towards pupils, which is manifested in the form of assigning a low grade. The results of the study show that trust in the teacher is low in schools, and children are wary of being criticized and labelled. Conversations with children show that the latter often hide the incidents that happen at school from the teachers, because the reaction of the teachers in such cases has a negative effect on the pupils. For example, a teacher may have a different approach towards them, and among children, pupils may be labeled as a traitor, a "snitch" and be bullied because of that.

The existence of a differentiated and unsympathetic environment in schools for children with special educational needs is obvious. There have been cases where, for example, parents have come together and protested the removal of a child with special educational needs from the classroom, or when parents of pupils in a class have claimed that the behavior of a child with special educational needs is having a negative effect on their children and offered to provide a specialist at their expense, a "tutor".

In the framework of the study, the teachers noted that it is more difficult for them to handle the situations when the child's parents do not want to and avoid cooperating with the school staff or excuse their child without wanting to reveal the reasons for the bullying.

The above-mentioned indicates that appropriate work should be done in schools with parents as well. It is noteworthy that no mechanism of work with parents was implemented in any of the schools considered in the scope of the study.

In some cases, the lack of a compassionate educational environment has also led to a change in the child's school. A case was recorded when the

classmates and school became aware of the child's homosexuality, and the teachers considered transferring the given child from that school to another school as the preferred option for solving the problem. For example, in one of the schools, two children from the same family studied, and one of the children had a homosexual orientation. As a result, the classmates treated that child negatively, did not want to communicate with them, made fun of them, etc, so the other child in the family was also bullied indirectly. As a result, the parent wanted to transfer both children to another school, however, one of the teachers who participated in the survey told the experts as a success story that they urged the parent to transfer only the child with homosexual orientation, and the parent agreed.

It should be noted that during the study, both the children and teachers who participated in the surveys also mentioned the cases of bullying due to sexual orientation, and the latter considered the negative and discriminatory approaches and manifestations of bullying to be normal in such cases.

In order to make a comprehensive analysis in this report, a letter was sent to the competent state bodies with the request to provide information on the steps of the state aimed at creating a compassionate educational environment, as well as the methods used in the development of relations between pupils and teachers based on child-centered approaches.

In response, the MoESCS informed that the RPC is continuously carrying out activities aimed at modernizing and strengthening the professional abilities of teachers and specialists and creating a child-centered educational environment (trainings, master classes, consultations, mentoring support, development of educational materials, etc).

In response to the same question, the other competent bodies, Yerevan Municipality, the governor's staffs also presented the events organized by them, as well as informed about separate discussions with the involvement of teachers and tutors.

It should be noted that some measures are implemented in schools, but a unified approach has not been implemented and the work carried out in the direction of the bullying problem is of a non-periodic nature.

According to the answers presented by the competent bodies, the formation of child-centered approaches between pupils and teachers is carried out by means of explanatory works, activities planned by the work plans of pedagogical and pupil councils, and organization of movie viewings. Meanwhile, in this regard, it should be emphasized that, according to the observation of the HRD staff, most of the schools do not have appropriate technical equipment, due to which properly organizing of film screenings is almost impossible.

Thus, the comparison of the studies carried out in the context of this component allows us to come to the conclusion that despite the steps being taken, the state is not working with a sufficient and unified approach towards the formation of a compassionate educational environment in education institutions. Cases of violence against children at school are generally difficult to detect, so it is necessary to create a favorable environment where the child will feel safe and speak up about what happened to them.

Thus, the combination of the studies carried out in the context of this component allows us to come to the conclusion that the studies of the HRD office show that children generally avoid reporting violence or ill-treatment applied to them at school, fearing to receive more discriminatory treatment in the future. This is evidenced by the cases when the parent, due to the mistreatment of their child at school and not receiving a proper response, changes the child's education institution, trying to find a more favorable environment for the child and free from all types of violence.

Considering the aforementioned, it is necessary to:

- ❖ ***take active steps in the direction of eliminating stereotypes formed among education professionals,***
- ❖ ***ensure proper awareness of the persons involved in the educational process or in any way related to that process, including parents,***
- ❖ ***promote the formation of relationships between pupils and teachers based on child-centered approaches,***
- ❖ ***introduce mechanisms and methodology for evaluating both education institutions and the child-centered environment used by children.***

CHAPTER 4. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL SAFE ENVIRONMENT

For the effective fight against and prevention of bullying, a safe psychological and physical environment is of fundamental importance, where it will be possible to practically provide child-centered approaches, comprehensible, accessible and available tools for children to raise their concerns, problems and expect their possible solutions.

Based on the above-mentioned, the cases of physical and psychological violence in schools and their possible causes were considered during the study.

Interviews were conducted with teachers and pupils in schools.

According to the teachers of one of the schools, physical and psychological violence is mainly manifested in the form of pushing, beating, mocking and calling each other by nicknames, isolating and pressuring the child. Some teachers noted that bullying at school is mainly manifested by aggressive behavior disguised as a joke or game, using fingers or other parts of the body to gesture and hit each other. The latter also noted that the cases of bullying are mostly recorded in the upper classes, in the form of psychological pressure, and sometimes cases of taking phones from each other and demanding money are recorded. As a reason for bullying, the teachers mentioned the circumstance of being bullied at home, as a result of which the child who was bullied at school becomes either a bully or a victim of bullying.

During the interview, the teachers also highlighted the situations that are difficult to manage. Thus, for example, it is difficult to control the cases when the violence is the result of the child not being able to forget the bad treatment shown to them or when the child has problems in the family that affect them psychologically, or when the parent does not accept that the child is a participant in the conflict and does not allow their child to communicate with other children. According to some teachers, it is difficult to manage situations in school when the behavior of the participants in the conflict is due to the characteristics of age development, or is related to keeping or using mobile phones. According to the teachers, it is easier to fight against the cases that they witness, in contrast to the

cases when bullying takes place using information technology. Teachers also noted as a difficult situation to manage the cases when children do not receive enough attention in the family and spend their free time on the street, thus acquiring disrespectful and unruly behavior towards both teachers and classmates.

In some schools, the presence of support staff, including a psychologist, has been emphasized by teachers in order to ensure a psychologically safe school environment. During the study, psychologist positions were either absent or vacant in some schools.

Most of the teachers stated during private interviews that in difficult manageable situations, they never turn to involve a psychologist, because as they say, "based on experience, we are also psychologists". In this regard, it should be emphasized that despite the practical skills of educators with years of experience working with children, the latter, having no professional education and qualification as a psychologist, in many cases can harm instead of helping, due to not mastering special professional methods. For example, one of the teachers said: "...when they do not behave smartly, I scare them that I will tell the parents and the principal and they will be punished." It should be emphasized that such an approach in children, instead of solving the problem, can form a feeling of fear and a behavior of hiding the problem as much as possible or rebelling and showing intentional aggression.

Focus group discussions were conducted with the pupils, within the framework of which information was collected about various situations in schools.

For example, one of the pupils recorded a video of their classmate and threatened to show it to the head teacher. After seeing the video, the head teacher informed that the video would be shown to the child's mother. The child, who was captured on video, kept making jokes that other children did not like. They did not communicate with their classmate, and subjected them to bullying, harassing and oppressing their classmate. All this led to the fact that the child wanted to commit suicide. However, now the relations with that child have improved.

In the course of the focus group discussions with the pupils, it became clear that the latter are often witnesses and participants in bullying incidents.

During the discussion, they pointed out the cases when they labeled a classmate and did not interact with the latter as a whole group. The pupils noted that children who are physically weak, quiet, have specific physical features, different appearance, speech difficulties, and wear cheap clothes are most often bullied. According to the children, pupils aged 14-18 are bullied more often.

It is worth noting the fact that, according to the pupils, when they notice a case of bullying, they generally do not intervene, but they realize that in order to prevent it, at least one should talk to the bully, explain its harm and, if no result is achieved, inform the head teacher and principal about it.

As for the causes of bullying, according to children's views, bullying is mainly done in order to increase self-confidence and lower the self-esteem of the victim of bullying, which can lead to poor learning, isolation from the environment, and even suicide. According to the children, mostly the children with modest behavior are bullied.

During the focus group discussions, the children also mentioned the actions that are necessary to prevent bullying. According to the children, in order to prevent bullying, it is necessary to:

- know the reason for the fight,
- analyze the situation,
- unite in fighting the problem; for example, "if only one person intervenes, there is a risk that they will also become a victim of bullying",
- talk to both the bully and the bullied,
- not to ignore the problem and make necessary remarks.

During the discussions, the children also pointed out cases of being bullied by teachers. For example, it was found that children with special educational needs are often called "KAPKU" (Armenian abbreviation for "special educational needs") by teachers in schools. As a result of this, instead of addressing the children by their name, their classmates also started addressing them as "KAPKU", considering it a nickname and in many cases, not realizing its harmfulness.

In this regard, it is extremely important that teachers realize the possible negative consequences of using similar nicknames and exclude their use in their activities.

Alarms about the cases of psychological and physical violence occurring in public education institutions were also received in the HRD staff.

So, for example, the child's parent called the HRD staff and reported that the head teacher had brought their child to such an emotional state that latter tried to jump out of the window. According to the parent, as a result of the teacher's wrong and critical approach, the child has become introverted, has a feeling of insecurity, expressed fears and low self-esteem.

One of the persons who applied to the HRD staff, asking to keep the information about them confidential, said that the school principal slapped a child and threatened to remove them from the school.

Within the framework of the report, in order to obtain comprehensive information on the psychological and physical safe environment, the staff of the RA human rights defender requested clarifications from the competent authorities about what steps are being taken to ensure a psychological and physical safe environment in education institutions. At the same time, the competent authorities were asked to report whether all schools have a psychologist or not, and if so, to clarify how a safe psychological environment is ensured and a proper response to bullying incidents is provided.

In response to these questions, the MoESCS informed that there are psychologists in 419 schools, and in schools where there are no psychologists, psychological support is provided by psychologists of the regional pedagogical and psychological support center serving the given region. According to the MOESCS Minister's order No. 79-N as of 07/12/2022 "On Approving the Coefficients and Norms of Financing Public Education Institutions from the State Budget", starting from 01/09/2023, all public education institutions will have at least one psychologist.

The results of the study prove that the few involvement of psychologists in schools has a significant impact on the implementation of the prevention and detection of bullying among children.

Below is the information provided by the competent authority regarding the number of psychologists in schools as of 01/04/2023:

Province	Number of public education institutions	Number of public education institutions in which psychologists are included	Number of schools served by the RPSC
Aragatsotn	118	52	66
Armavir	111	30	as needed
Gegharkunik	116	22	as needed
Ararat	107	15	The rest
Kotayk	88	28	as needed
Lori	149	96	as needed
Shirak	146	36	as needed
Syunik	111	It is planned to include from 01/09/2023	as needed
Vayots Dzor	45	7	as needed
Tavush	80	24	as needed

In response to the above-mentioned questions, the Municipality of Yerevan announced that, on the initiative of the Municipality, professional capacity development courses were organized for 329 pedagogues in 163 kindergartens on the topics of creating a child-centered educational environment free of violence.

Thus, the results of the study show that manifestations of both physical and psychological violence are widespread in the RA, and their causes are multifaceted, unanalyzed, and sometimes unrevealed. Although the state-initiated improvement to have at least one psychologist in all public education institutions starting from 01/09/2023 is an important step, effective and comprehensive measures are still needed to solve the problems.

Considering the above-mentioned, it is necessary to:

❖ *organize discussions about bullying by psychologists in education institutions for both children and pedagogical staff,*

❖ introduce clear programs and measures to ensure psychological and physical safe environment in schools,

❖ take into account the sensitivity factors due to the age, gender and other characteristics of children and introduce the necessary procedures that will be used to properly record each case of bullying,

❖ ensure accessible awareness among children about the functions of the school psychologist,

❖ develop the capacity of the school psychologist to prevent, detect and respond to bullying.

CHAPTER 5. ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS: SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

To make the fight against bullying more effective, clear mechanisms for providing guidance and support are needed. When the anti-bullying chain lacks the feedback and identification and response component of suspected incidents, it is not possible to prevent or reduce recurrence of incidents in the long term and work effectively to address root causes.

Taking into account the importance of the role of teachers in identifying and responding to suspicious cases, their approaches were considered in the framework of the study.

As a result of the study, it became clear that according to the teachers, their activity in providing guidance and support should be mainly aimed at forming a field of mutual understanding between teachers, pupils and their parents, organizing informative conversations and improving teachers' professional skills.

According to some teachers, it is necessary to increase the role of the teacher. The mechanism of remarks has become ineffective, the best way to fight against bullying is to form a warm friendly relationship between the teacher and the pupil. Moreover, it is also important to strengthen tolerant and tension-free relations among the teaching staff. In this regard, it should be emphasized that in some cases teachers, not possessing effective teaching and classroom management skills and methods, lower their own authority. At the same time, there have been cases where parents of pupils discredit educators with their behavior. For example, according to pedagogues, there was a situation when a pupil's parent insulted a teacher in the presence of children in the classroom.

In this regard, it should be emphasized that the child's parent is obligated by law to cultivate respect for the education institution and pedagogical workers, in order to ensure which the introduction of communication and awareness programs with parents is extremely important.

According to teachers, one of the difficulties encountered in working with parents is that many of them go to work abroad or work extra, as a result of

which they are often unavailable for communication with the school. Such phenomena have a negative impact on the child's behavior and upbringing.

Teachers also presented problems with keeping the child's bad behavior and low achievement latent. In particular, it was reported that the school administration forbids assigning a low grade to a low-achieving pupil on the grounds that some pupils would not be promoted to the next grade, resulting in classroom closures, reduced hours, and teacher layoffs or pay cuts.

In order to make the fight against bullying more effective, the teachers also put forward the issue of improving their social situation, increasing their salaries. According to them, the social status of teachers has a direct relationship with the effectiveness of the fight against bullying, because a teacher with social problems cannot help but focus on their own problems, instead, they should be attentive and consistent in solving the problems of other people, even children. At the same time, the teachers emphasized the need to improve the social condition of the population in the fight against bullying.

From the point of view of ensuring the fight against bullying, the teachers emphasized the implementation of activities aimed at bringing the pupils closer together, noting the need to organize events and assign various group works. According to them, it is necessary to create such an environment where children and school staff, regardless of strict and consistent approaches of teachers, communicate with each other as equals. According to the teachers, in order to create such an environment, it is necessary to organize regular conversations with children, especially with those who have a strong character.

In this regard, it is necessary to state that conversations should also be organized in a consultative manner, ensuring the confidentiality of the information provided by the children and excluding any tension between the children as a result.

The impact of repeated military conflicts on children is also significant. According to the teachers, such situations directly affect children's behavior. In such situations, children mature earlier or become sensitive and vulnerable.

In this regard, the HRD notes that the state is obligated to provide the necessary psychological support especially to the children of families affected by

military operations, including those displaced from Nagorno Karabakh, as well as the children of persons whose whereabouts are unknown or who were captured.

In order to obtain comprehensive information on the issue discussed within the framework of this report, the HRD staff addressed a letter to the competent state bodies about whether there is a monitoring staff in education institutions, whose function is to carry out regular work with all the stakeholders, employees and other interested persons, structures of the institution, that including case studies, development of possible solutions to problems.

In response to the inquiry, the MoESCS informed that the RPC is carrying out monitoring activities, in which specialists from different departments are involved. In order to study the cases identified as a result of monitoring, as well as received from other sources, a working group is formed in the RPC for the purpose of studying cases and developing possible proposals for solving problems. In response to the same question, Yerevan Municipality informed that coordination of work with all stakeholders, employees and other interested persons, structures in education institutions is entrusted to the managerial staff of the school. The study of cases and the development of possible proposals for solving problems are carried out in coordination with the school managerial staff, involving as necessary the interested parties: pupils, class teachers, subject teachers, specialists, parents, representatives of cooperating structures. As for the schools operating under province subordination, it should be noted that there are no monitoring staffs in the schools of Tavush, Armavir and Aragatsotn provinces of the RA, and no answer was submitted to this question about Shirak province.

In general, the answers given by the competent authority indicate that clear mechanisms for identifying and responding to bullying cases are not implemented in the provinces, employees responsible for monitoring are not separated, and the work is organized only by the staff of public education institutions, including, as necessary, the bodies responsible for child protection.

Thus, summarizing the studies of this component, it should be emphasized that the state, in the form of responsible structures, does not have reporting mechanisms in the process of combating bullying.

Considering the above-mentioned, it is necessary to:

❖ provide a monitoring staff in each education institution, whose function will be to carry out regular work with all stakeholders, employees and interested structures of the institution, including case studies, development and presentation of possible proposals for solving problems,

❖ introduce monitoring mechanisms for long-term use, including in the form of written records, which will have a permanent nature and will not be formed as needed, that is, on a case-by-case basis,

❖ introduce mechanisms accessible to all, regardless of age, ability and other personal characteristics. During the development of such mechanisms, the needs and characteristics of the most vulnerable groups should be taken into account,

❖ ensure the credibility of the implemented mechanisms for all the parties involved in the process, taking into account the needs and concerns of the stakeholders.

CHAPTER 6. INVOLVING ALL ACTORS AND PARTNERS

In order to effectively combat and prevent bullying, the involvement of all actors, regardless of their position, function or degree of participation, is of particular importance. In this context, it is necessary to take into account that the bullying chain in education institutions has at least seven actors: initiators, targeted persons, witnesses, supervisors, teachers (teaching staff), responsible (administrative staff) and external actors (local, regional and state government bodies, NGOs, family and friends).

In the course of the study, it was recorded that in the presence of bullying, teachers generally intervene and demand an end to the situation, then talk with the children who have committed violence and are victims of violence, and the least number of teachers try to find out the reality of the problem from other sources, then report to the principal of the education institution and in order to regulate the situation, they invite other specialists: social pedagogues, psychologists, etc. Regarding the freedom to approach the principal in case of a problem in the education institution, in this regard, teachers and support staff in almost all schools are free to approach the school administration to discuss issues related to children's behavior.

Some teachers presented that the involvement of parents is important for solving problems. Meetings with parents are mostly formal in nature, as only children's progress and behavioral issues are discussed with them. Some teachers reported that there were cases when the parent made the situation even more complicated and aggravated. For example, in the case of a teacher reprimanding a pupil, some parents do not even want to know the reason for it, on the contrary, they insist steadily and without justification that their child's behavior is completely normal. There was even a case when the parent interrupted the school process and in the presence of other pupils showed a contemptuous and rude attitude towards the teacher and stated the following. "... my child will no longer attend your classes, I am transferring them to another group."

In connection with what has been said, it is necessary to state that the reason for the mentioned, among others, is mainly the absence of a cooperative, participatory environment with parents in schools, an information corner intended

for parents, ensuring the involvement of parents in the effective organization of the child's education.

It should be emphasized that the results of the focus group discussion survey also indicate that violence against children is also practiced by teachers in schools, including psychological and physical violence. For example, a parent reported that they transferred the child to another school due to bullying because of health problems. According to the parent, the head teacher made the child sit alone, then organized a vote in the class and urged the children to raise their hands in order to vote on the issue of removing the child from the school. The principal of the school informed the parent that "the institution operates on a private basis and its activity is purely business for them and they not interested in the condition of the child". To the question of the representatives of the HRD's office, what is the reason for not having children with special educational conditions and mental and physical problems in the school, the principal stated: "... I do not need such children and I am not going to admit such children to school".

It should also be noted that in the course of the study, the staff of non-state public education institutions, in comparison to state education institutions, were not aware of the role and significance of the Convention mandate of the HRD, not paying attention to the principle of excluding discriminatory approaches and ensuring the "best interest" of the child. In addition, there were cases when the staff of non-state public education institutions refused to talk with the HRD staff, citing the circumstances of being non-state and beyond any control.

In order to obtain comprehensive information on the issue discussed within the framework of this report, the HRD staff addressed a letter to the competent state authorities, demanding to clarify how the involvement of the education institution and external actors is carried out in the cases of bullying disclosure and response, as well as whether an encouraging or stimulating mechanism is implemented to strengthen the school-family connection.

In response to the mentioned question, the Municipality of Yerevan informed that in the case of bullying, the involvement of the education institution and external actors is carried out by official documentation, and various initiatives

aimed at strengthening the school-family relationship are planned and implemented within the framework of the annual work plan of all schools.

According to the information provided by the MoTAI, there is no mechanism for strengthening the school-family relationship in schools. The school-family connection in education institutions is carried out in accordance with the internal disciplinary rules and the model charter of the education institution, through the cooperation of the school principal, class leader and parents. If necessary, specialists from the family, women's and children's rights protection department of the governor's staff are also involved in the work of strengthening the school-family relationship: a psychologist, a sociologist, a doctor, a lawyer, as well as specialists from partner public organizations. In addition, in some schools, sports grounds, excursions, trips dedicated to family day are held, school-wide parent meetings, regular classroom parent meetings, individual and group counseling are provided to parents.

It is noteworthy that the information provided by the MoTAI regarding some provinces indicated the absence of bullying cases. Meanwhile, contrary to the mentioned information, the HRD staff received complaints about bullying from the pupils and their parents of the schools of those provinces. For example, one parent reported that their child did not want to attend school because the child was sexually abused several months ago, and because of this, they were treated badly at school. According to the parent, the information about what happened to the child was spread both in the community and in the school, and the child's teacher told them by phone: "... sell your house, run away...". With this complaint, the parent requested the support of the HRD in transferring the child to another school and stated that they were transferring the child to another school for the third time. In this case, the representative of the HRD staff explained to the child's parent that transferring the child to another school due to the bad attitude at school is not in their best interest and it is necessary to show a different methodological approach to the problem. Moreover, it was explained to them that the state has an obligation to ensure the child's right to education in an environment free from all kinds of violence. Necessary steps were taken by the HRD staff, as a result of which the child was not transferred to another school.

In another case, a parent reported that their child had special educational needs, and the school's deputy principal told them that the child was disrupting the peace of the school and threatened that if they did not want the situation to escalate, they would have to transfer the child to another school. According to the child's parent, the deputy principal also noted that the state does not support the school in any way for the implementation of inclusive education and did not provide special specialists. The problem was resolved with the intervention of the HRD staff, the representatives of the governor's office worked with the school staff, the child and the parent within the scope of the governor's powers, as a result of which the child continued their education in the given school.

The MoESCS, in response to an inquiry said that bullying is reported to the RPC, and if necessary, specialists are provided. Regarding the mechanisms for identifying bullying, the MoESCS noted that due to the lack of an authorizing norm, public education institutions do not have systematic mechanisms for identifying and responding to bullying, documenting and recording.

In this regard, the HRD staff emphasizes again that it is possible to develop and introduce effective mechanisms to combat bullying within the context of existing legal regulations. In this case, it should be noted that such an interpretation of the responsible structure of the education sector may contribute to stereotypical approaches to bullying cases and become an example among the public with such approaches.

Considering the above-mentioned, it is necessary to:

- ❖ ***ensure the involvement of all actors in the processes of identifying and responding to bullying,***
- ❖ ***plan clear actions in order to ensure the involvement of all actors in the processes of identifying and responding to bullying,***
- ❖ ***introduce encouraging or stimulating mechanisms to establish or strengthen the school-family connection.***

CHAPTER 7. INCREASING CHILDREN'S LEGAL AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT

According to Article 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice. In addition, The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or

(b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

From the conversations with children during the study, it became clear that they are generally not aware of bullying, its inadmissibility and harmful effects.

After providing information about bullying to the children, they presented data about the many manifestations of bullying that occur in their schools and classrooms.

The opinions expressed during the discussion with children indicate that the manifestations of bullying often occur between representatives of the same sex and cases of bullying by boys towards girls are almost non-existent. The children who participated in the surveys also mentioned that children with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities, are most often bullied in their classes.

The study also shows that according to a significant part of the pupils, the person who is being bullied is to blame, because the latter should not allow bad attitude towards them, and on the contrary, they should respond.

Principals mentioned cases when the problems that arose between pupils were solved more easily as a result of the involvement and intervention of senior pupils.

In this regard, it should be stated that solving problems in such a way contains a high risk both in terms of solving the problem and creating preconditions for the emergence of new bullying manifestations and interpersonal conflicts among the children involved.

It should be noted that the proper implementation of psychological work in schools is also important, which will create a healthy psychological environment for children, the ability to effectively overcome conflicts, as well as to sympathize and support others. As for raising children's legal awareness, it should be noted that awareness-raising activities should be carried out among pupils and it should be clarified that every manifestation of violence is unacceptable.

It should be noted that in one of the schools, where awareness activities were carried out, during the focus group discussion, the pupils were quite informed about bullying and its harmful effects. According to the children, school staff initiated bullying awareness courses organized by the Pupil Council. The children who participated in the discussion were aware of the types of bullying, particularly cyberbullying. According to one of the participating children, they were subjected to cyberbullying. They stated that their photo was altered electronically, after which it was sent to the child and the latter was threatened, in connection with which their father contacted the police.

During the mentioned discussion, some children mentioned that the cause of bullying can be the disrespectful attitude towards the other person. Referring to the manifestations of bullying towards people with disabilities, the children noted that bullying is not practiced in their school, as both teachers and pupils show a conscious attitude, moreover, everyone is willing to help them.

When asked if they turn or will turn to the teachers in cases of bullying, the children answered no, because such a move would be qualified as bullying, and some indicated that their failure to report bullying was due to their indifference. When asked who they would turn to in case of a problem, if not the teachers, the children said that they would try to solve the problem themselves at the beginning, and then, if it is not solved, they would turn to their older brothers or acquaintances, but not to their parents or teachers.

In order to obtain comprehensive information on the issue discussed within the framework of the report, the HRD staff requested clarifications from the

competent authorities regarding the question of how education about bullying among children is carried out in education institutions.

In this context, MoESCS said that awareness about bullying among pupils is carried out through watching videos and discussions about them, interactive presentations, during which children become active participants in the presentation.

The Municipality of Yerevan answered the above-mentioned question that in all schools operating under Yerevan's jurisdiction, children's rights awareness events were organized under the title "My Rights Through My Eyes", in the framework of which issues related to ensuring a violence-free educational environment were also discussed.

The MoTAI responded to the mentioned question that the awareness of bullying among children in the schools operating under the region's subordination is carried out through courses, classroom hours, awareness meetings, conversations, discussions, pupil council sessions, watching videos, making posters. Discussions on the theme "Let's Replace Violence with Love" were held in the schools of some provinces, posters were prepared within the scope of the subject "Social Studies".

A quantitative analysis of the pupils' self-assessment scale was carried out based on the surveys carried out within the framework of the study. The results of the analysis show that the highest rates were shown in the responses to the survey for being angry and hitting each other, and the lowest for encouraging others to fight.⁷

Considering the above-mentioned, it is necessary to:

- ❖ ***raise awareness among children about bullying,***
- ❖ ***organize joint events with the involvement of bullying participants,***
- ❖ ***ensure the development of children's abilities and exclude the use of double standards,***

⁷ See Appendix 5.

- ❖ *pay special attention to the involvement of children in the development and implementation of bullying prevention strategies,⁸*
- ❖ *in the event of bullying, work not only with the bullied child, but also with other actors.*

⁸ Members of the Public Council on the Rights of the Children and Youth adjuct to the HRD consider that in order to decrease cases of bullying in schools, it is necessary to create informative games, songs aimed at tackling bullying, as well as include small articles in school books.

CHAPTER 8. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

The effectiveness of the implementation of the "Comprehensive Educational Approach" format for the purpose of combating bullying is practically possible only in the conditions of regular and targeted interdepartmental cooperation. Taking into account the need for coordination of actions to be carried out, all interested parties should unite their efforts in the matter of quick response to the problem, prevention of negative consequences and exclusion of recurrence of incidents. Moreover, the "Comprehensive Educational Approach" format implies not only interagency (for example, between education institutions, local self-government bodies, territorial and state administration bodies), but also inter-sectoral (for example, between educational-social spheres) and sectoral (between education institutions, non-formal education non-governmental organizations - extra-curricular groups) active cooperation.

In this context, it is necessary to regulate interagency cooperation in practice, that is, to clarify the procedure for exchanging information and data, including developing a single standard for data accounting, to introduce an effective mechanism of mutual assistance, which will also enable the quick identification of beneficiaries, to determine the relevant structures and actors, excluding action/repetition or conversion of programs.

Thus, based on the results of the teachers' survey within the scope of the study, it was recorded that schools generally do not cooperate with specialists from other departments, except for the cases of cooperation with social pedagogues and psychologists due to the necessity assessed by the staff in some schools.

According to the majority of the teachers of the schools included in the study sample, there is no need for cooperation due to the absence of bullying cases in their schools. Only one case was recorded when a teacher reported cooperation with a psychologist during the surveys.

As part of the study, cases of schools referring pupils to the police were also recorded. For example, in one of the schools, the teachers informed that they cooperate with the police representatives in cases of children hitting each other turn into beatings. One such case resulted in the parent transferring the child to

another vocational college, which is a non-constructive approach to problem solving and not in the best interest of the child.

Summarizing the results of the survey, it should be noted that there is a lack of inter-agency, sectoral and inter-sectoral cooperation between the staff and other competent authorities of the majority of schools involved in the sample.

In order to obtain comprehensive information on the issue under discussion within the framework of the report, questions were sent to the competent state bodies about which structures cooperation is established in the process of managing bullying cases and what problems appear during that process. At the same time, information was requested on whether discussions were held with other agencies on bullying and, if so, what mechanisms were put in place as a result of the discussions.

In response to the above questions, the MoESCS said that the Ministry cooperates with various departments, in particular, relevant departments of Labor and Social Affairs, Health, Internal Affairs Ministries, community structures, inspection body, as necessary, with public and international organizations. According to the MoESCS, the RPC has the most substantive role, which actively cooperates with education institutions, PRSCs, structures with different roles in the field of education, and other interested bodies.

In response to the same questions, Yerevan Municipality stated that the scope of cooperation during the handling of the bullying case includes the MoESCS, the Education Inspectorate, PRSCs, RPCs, the Police and other agencies.

As for the schools operating under the province subordination, in this regard, the MoTAI has informed that the staff of the governor cooperates with the municipal administration, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the USS, the relevant units of the Police during the management of bullying cases. also with public organizations. According to certain clarifications given by the governor's staff, there are no cases of bullying in the schools operating under the province subordination, and accordingly, interagency cooperation has not been formed.

Summarizing the results of the study carried out within the framework of this component, it should be noted that there are many situations when, instead of creating a cooperative environment, state authorities and school staffs try to

hide bullying cases and assign the responsibility of solving the problem to other bodies.

Considering the above-mentioned, it is necessary to:

- ❖ regulate interagency cooperation in practice, that is, to specify the procedure for exchanging information and data, including developing a single standard for data accounting, introduce an effective mechanism of mutual assistance, which will also enable the quick identification of stakeholders, to determine the relevant structures and actors, excluding the repetition of actions, programs or the conversion,*
- ❖ regularly organize interagency discussions and cooperation mechanisms regarding bullying,*
- ❖ raise the problems of interagency cooperation that appeared during the resolution of bullying cases and jointly develop steps aimed at solving the problem.*

CHAPTER 9. DOCUMENTATION AND MONITORING

From the point of view of ensuring the effectiveness of the fight against bullying against children, periodic monitoring in education institutions and other parts of the education system and the presence of effective, accessible mechanisms for rapid response are essential. For this purpose, it is necessary to develop preventive and interventional tools, a clear methodology for their application and indicators for the assessment of cases. Moreover, it is particularly important that the monitoring and evaluation process includes children, teaching staff and specifically addresses the school environment.

During the visits carried out within the framework of the study of this component, it was found that according to the opinions of the majority of teachers, bullying among children is manifested several times a year or every month, or there are no cases of bullying in their school at all. At the same time, teachers' views were recorded that bullying happens every day or every week or twice a week at school.

It should also be noted that none of the schools included in the study sample had a document containing information on children's behavior, including cases of bullying. Discussion areas for pupils are also not separated in schools.

The lack of clarity and lack of documentation of such information indicates the lack of a clear mechanism for documenting bullying cases.

In order to obtain comprehensive information on the issue discussed within the framework of the report, questions were sent to the competent state bodies about how the state documents bullying cases and how many bullying cases were recorded and properly processed by the responsible bodies from 2021 to 01/04/2023.

In response to the mentioned question, the MoESCS informed that public education institutions do not have systematic mechanisms for identifying and responding to bullying, do not implement documentation and recording.

Within the framework of the study of the component, in response to the same questioning, Yerevan Municipality informed that during 2022, one case of bullying was recorded in one of the schools under Yerevan's jurisdiction, which

was documented by official notation. In connection with the above, there is a need to record that the HRD staff has repeatedly received complaints about both school bullying and bullying incidents in pre-school education institutions. For example, according to the parent, the teacher of "Mathematics" subject hit the child on the back with a stick and bullied the child by repeatedly labeling and insulting them. One parent reported that their child was regularly humiliated by the teacher and emphasized their superiority over the child. In another example, a child was bullied at school by isolating them from their environment because the child had certain health problems. Speaking about the manifestations of discrimination caused by health problems, it should be noted that it is also widespread in kindergartens. For example, the parent informed that their child attends a kindergarten in Yerevan and has diabetes, so it is very necessary for the child's health to be treated conservatively in the kindergarten. According to the parent, due to the illness, the staff of the kindergarten did not allow the child to attend the kindergarten and showed bad attitude. The kindergarten staff offered the parent to stop the child's attendance at the kindergarten, because the kindergarten staff cannot provide the necessary care for the child (glucose measurement, calculation of the amount of carbohydrates in food, insulin injection). With the intervention of the HRD staff, the problem was resolved and the competent state body sent a circular to all preschool education institutions operating in RA, according to the legal provisions stipulated by Sub-point 7 of Paragraph 2 of Appendix 12 of the order of the Minister of Health of October 7, 2019 "On the Approval of the Procedure for the Organization of Primary Health Care Medical Care and Service for Children Within the Framework of Free Medical Care and Service Guaranteed by the State" No. 2860-L in order to enforce the regulations in practice.

In connection with the above-mentioned questions, the information provided by the MoTAI proves that the schools under the province jurisdiction generally lack clear and unified mechanisms for documenting and monitoring bullying cases.

The lack of documentation and monitoring by the MoTAI in schools operating under province jurisdiction was justified by the absence of bullying in those schools and the preventive measures implemented by the regional staff.

Meanwhile, it is necessary to state that it is the implementation and operation of a clear documentation and monitoring toolkit that ensures the discovery of bullying phenomena. This is also evidenced by the many complaints received by the MoTAI about such incidents in schools in provinces that have not registered bullying incidents.

According to the information presented by the MoTAI, in some provinces, cases of bullying were recorded. For example, 7 cases were recorded in Kotayk province, and the pupils involved in those cases continued their education in their education institutions, and this documentation was carried out based on the letters addressed to the governor's staff.

9 cases of bullying were recorded in public education institutions under Shirak subordination. 11 cases of bullying were recorded in the schools under Ararat subordination and the problems arising as a result of the implemented works were resolved. Moreover, the recording of bullying cases in Ararat province was carried out on the basis of the relevant instructions given for the management, prevention, and organization of awareness activities of bullying cases.

Summarizing the above-mentioned, it should be emphasized that the state and local self-government bodies responsible for the field have not implemented a unified mechanism for collecting, documenting and monitoring data on bullying cases. Therefore, the information recorded by the latter about the incidents of bullying does not reflect the full picture of these incidents.

Considering the above-mentioned, it is necessary to:

- ❖ ***introduce clear and unified mechanisms for documenting and monitoring bullying cases,***
- ❖ ***keep statistics of bullying cases according to the causes of the cases,***
- ❖ ***create a monitoring committee of bullying cases in education institutions, which will be members of both teachers and pupils.***

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

MONITORING TOOLS

Pupils' self-assessment scale

For the past 7 days	0 times	1 time	2 times	3 times	4 times	5 times	6+ times
1. I mocked other pupils to make them angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+
2. I was easily angered by someone	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+
3. I hit back when someone hit me first	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+
4. I spoke ill of other children to entertain the pupils	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+
5. I encouraged other pupils to fight	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+
6. I pushed other pupils	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+
7. I was angry most of the day	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+
8. I got into a physical fight because I was angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+
9. I slapped or hit someone	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+

10. I called other pupils bad names	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+
11. I threatened to hurt or hit someone	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+
12. I sent messages/pictures through social media that contained insults and threats	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+

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Appendix 2

Observation card

The observation card is used during the school visit.

Incidents and situations related to the possible manifestation of bullying in the school environment are recorded here.

In case of main described situations, we can carry out classifications according to three types.

Situations subject to OBSERVATION		
School environment and socio-psychological climate	YES	NO
The overall environment of the school is relaxed and inclusive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pupils are free in class to respond to teachers' questions and observations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
During breaks, pupils leave the classrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers are interested and motivated in organizing and implementing education, there is no noise or shouting during classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pupils' behavior, communication with one another	YES	NO
Pupils communicate freely, they can also joke with one another	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pupils mock one another, push and shove on purpose	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is noticeable that some groups of pupils are isolated and marginalized	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is conflict and tension between pupils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pupils hit each other and use violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disciplinary measures applied	YES	NO
Pupils are punished with reprimand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical means of punishment are applied to pupils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pupils are temporarily removed from the classroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pupils are referred to the police	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children are being released from the school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parental involvement, participation	YES	NO

Parents participate in the organization of education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are parents in classrooms and hallways	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children's discipline issues are discussed with parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is a parent corner or an information platform for parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication of teachers with pupils	YES	NO
Teachers communicate with pupils only during class time, about the material related to the class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conversations with teachers are also outside the classroom, in the hallways and in the teacher's room	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other specialists, school support staff also talk with the pupils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children have never communicated with the school psychologist or social pedagogue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication with vulnerable children	YES	NO
At school, some children are generally segregated and isolated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conversations with children with disabilities are not observed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Certain groups of children are not included in sports and cultural events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mentoring by senior pupils	YES	NO
Senior pupils help junior pupils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is noticeable pressure from senior pupils on junior pupils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior and junior pupils have joint activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff consultation on child behaviour, bullying and response actions	YES	NO
Staff maintain a register of children's behaviour, including a register of incidents of child abuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is a professional discussion room and pupil reception is organized	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children can refer to support professionals as needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers and support staff may contact the school administration to discuss children's behavior issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix 3

Focus group among teachers

1. Perceptions of bullying among pupils

- What is bullying?
- How does it manifests itself at school, online?
- Main types
- Forms

2. What are the main causes of bullying?

- Lack of inclusiveness
- Discriminatory approaches
- Authority coordination

3. Who are most vulnerable in the school environment?

- Children living in poverty
- Children with disabilities
- Other children

4. What are the main problems with bullying in your school?

- Which children are most often stressed?
- How does this oppression and abuse manifest itself?
- How often are there school fights, involving physical attacks?
- In which age groups is it especially manifested?
- How does it manifests itself among boys and among girls?

5. Bullying trends that disturb pupils

- The last online bullying incident they will remember
- Pressures on children
- Authority

6. How to prevent and effectively intervene?

- How do you see bullying intervention?

- Who is primarily responsible?
- What teachers and school staff can do?
- What can others do?

7. Children's participation in overcoming bullying

- What is the role of children?
- How can they can achieve a more inclusive and safer environment?
- To what extent bullying incidents and manifestations can be reduced?

Appendix 4

Questionnaire survey for teachers

1. Bullying is manifested among children /mark all possible answers/.

- a/ in the form of physical blows
- b/ in the form of threats
- c/ in the form of bad words, curses
- d/ in the form of psychological pressure
- e/ through online threats
- f/ through sexual violence
- g/other/specify/

2. The main manifestations of bullying that you witness in your environment

3. The frequency with which children are bullied by others

- 1. Every day
- 2. Every week
- 3. Twice a week
- 4. Every month
- 5. Several times a year
- 6. Never

4. Teachers' attitudes and role in bullying

- 1. I immediately intervene and demand to stop the situation
- 2. I call the abused child and talk to them
- 3. I talk with the abused child, understand the situation from their point of view
- 4. I report to the school administration
- 5. I try to find out the situation from other sources
- 6. I do not interfere, I think it is not a teacher's duty
- 7. I invite other specialists, social pedagogues, psychologists, to solve the situation

5. What are the situations in which you immediately cooperate with other specialists?

1. With the police
2. With social pedagogues
3. With psychologists -----

6. Which situations in your school are the most difficult to manage?

7. How often do these situations recur?

8. On a scale of 0-10, how would you rate the response of the general staff at your school to deferring school-wide bullying?

9. Please justify

10. What is needed to make bullying more manageable and less likely?

Appendix 5

