3.1 Introduction

Bullying in schools is a serious issue that can have a negative impact on the mental and physical health of students. It can also lead to a decrease in academic performance, increased absenteeism and decreased school safety. Schools should take a proactive approach to address bullying by implementing anti-bullying policies, providing teacher and staff training, creating a safe school environment and providing counselling and support services for students who have been affected by bullying.

Educational context of bullying and cyberbullying in schools can vary depending on the target's age and background. In European schools and educational institutes bullying can take the form of physical aggression, name-calling, exclusion and intimidation. It is often target-oriented and it has a distressing effect and negative consequences for both victim and the aggressor.

A large number of EU Member States do not have any national school bullying and violence prevention strategy. Moreover, most have no integrated focus between early school leaving and bullying prevention. Even in Member States with a national anti-bullying strategy for schools, there are a few systematic procedures to make students' voices heard in the education system. There is a need for a much stronger focus on student participation in the design of anti-bullying approaches, especially for older students. Students are often in the best position of both to prevent and stop bullying and cyberbullying incidents and other types of mistreatments. Because students see, hear and know things that teachers can't see that often, and they can intervene in ways that adults and school's management can't. They are aware when these types of incidents are occurring before adults are informed. They are the main spectators and unfortunately, participants of these incidents. These factors are placing them in the best position to effectively prevent and help combat bullying. The students have a power in setting social norms of kindness, connectivity and to create a bully-free classroom. As a response to the rising prevalence of bullying in European schools, many countries have implemented measures to address the issue.

Research that can be found in PISA 2018 has underlined that bullying in school has devastating impacts on student's health and academic achievements. All this, of course, has serious consequences for students' development and their educational performance, it also increases the risk of students leaving school prematurely and reduces their potential to live fulfilling lives.

The various types of bullying that are occuring in European schools are highlighted in the chapter 1.6 Types of bullying and cyberbullying.

A study conducted by UNESCO (2018) demonstrates that in Europe, 25% of the students were victims of physical bullying. According to this study, physical bullying is the most frequent type of bullying that is occurring in European schools. The second most frequent type of bullying is sexual bullying, followed by psychological bullying with a prevalence of 15%. Cyberbullying is becoming an increasing problem in Europe. The European Commission has been at the forefront of efforts to

tackle the problem, working with Member States, schools, civil society, and the private sector to help prevent, detect and combat cyberbullying.

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