



Children
First

Addressing Gender - based Violence
from the bottom-up

Comparative Report





Children First: Addressing Gender - based Violence from the bottom-up.

Comparative Report

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Center for Social
Innovation

WORK PACKAGE 2:

Challenging Attitudes and Norms Towards Dating
Violence – Children First Youth-led E-game.

Capturing the views of children and young people on
gender-based violence occurring in teen
relationships.

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Introduction

This comparative report has been developed under the [“Children First- Addressing Gender – based Violence from the bottom - up”](#) project, funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme of the European Commission. Children First is a children-led, transnational project that aims to address dating violence as a form of school-related gender-based violence. This study draws upon similarities and differences in regard to the views and attitudes of children and youth on gender-based violence (GBV) occurring in teen relationships in Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Lithuania and the UK. The information presented was collected from both desk-based and field-based research conducted in all partner countries under Work Package 2: Challenging attitudes and norms towards dating violence – Children First youth-led e-game.

To begin with, the overall objective of the project is to tackle gender-based violence in teen relationships by combating stereotypes and norms fuelling dating violence. The results of the project include:

- A children-led e-game for children to challenge gender norms and stereotypes focusing on dating violence
- Information sharing network among target groups of professionals
- Children-led communication campaign to challenge gender stereotypes with an emphasis on dating violence
- A CPD accredited course for professionals working in formal and informal educational settings that will be piloted and tested in all participating countries
- A children-led evidence base that will generate policy papers and recommendations of national and EU wider interest.

The intended outcomes include:

- Increase children’s awareness about gender-based violence and promote healthy relationships
- Increase professionals’ awareness and skills about best practices to prevent and safeguard children in schools and other educational settings
- Enhance cross-sector collaboration among stakeholders in the public, private and civil society.

The Objectives of *Work Package 2: Challenging attitudes and norms towards dating violence* are to:

- Establish the vehicle (Youth Advisory Board – YAB) that will ensure the active participation of the target group in the implementation of the project

- Capture the views of the end users of the online game on gender-based violence occurring in teen relationships
- Develop the project's youth-led prevention online game addressed to children, which will support them in challenging rigid norms and gender stereotypes while promoting gender socialization and healthy relationships.

The main purpose of this activity was to engage directly with children and teenagers aged 12-18 years old, with particular focus on children and teenagers from marginalized backgrounds who are at more risk of becoming victims of gender-based violence. Special attention was also given to gender-based violence which occurs within teen relationships; either these being friendships, romantic relationships, online relationships, students-teachers relationships or family relationships, both within and outside of the school environment. Work Package 2 (WP2) has involved both primary and secondary research aiming at capturing:

- the nature, frequency and dynamics of gender-based violence in teenage relationships and the contexts in which they occur and persist
- children and young people's own understandings, attitudes and evaluations of such violence
- children and young people's perceptions on the impact of violence on their wellbeing and their coping strategies
- children and young people's views on prevention and how support services could best respond to preventing violence
- the wider cultural and social processes that underpin experiences of exploitation of violence and
- a number of real-life scenarios to be integrated into the youth-led e-game of WP2.

More specifically, secondary research involved a short, but thorough interdisciplinary review of existing literature on the topic. The purpose of the analysis was to add to the limited information available on teen relationships in Europe with new statistical data, best practices, overview of existing schemes and practices, and policy recommendations. The primary research involved both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, initially including: youth-led focus groups with children and young people, interviews with children and young people and a pan European online survey that targeted youth from all partner countries. Due to the sensitivity of this topic, focus groups and interviews with children and young people were conducted following the Vignettes methodology, which means that we have used scenario-based stories that enabled participants to define the situation in their own terms when sensitive topics were explored. The survey was structured with the contribution of all partners and included both closed and open questions; while the interviews and focus group incorporated only open-ended questions. Questionnaires, scenarios and all material used, for instance the consent forms for parents with children under the age of consent to participate in research, were scrutinized by the Youth Advisory Boards (YAB) of Children First in all partner countries. Due to Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown which inevitably influenced the course of this project

- since face to face interactions were prohibited - the consortium had to conduct some of the research activities with our target group online. Hence, each partner had to adjust the methodology based on their national contexts (e.g. replacing focus groups with online interviews or conducting both focus groups and interviews online). As a consortium, our priority was to respect and protect children's psychological, emotional and physical integrity, in line with the GDPR regulations and ethics in conducting research with minors. In that respect each partner, based on the age of their target group, expertise and national/EU regulations, had to choose the most efficient method to perform the research activities. Hence, some of the partners had chosen to conduct the interview questions online through skype or google forms. The decision was taken upon the fact that young people who happen to experience GBV will not necessarily feel comfortable nor have the privacy to talk about their emotions and experiences while at home.

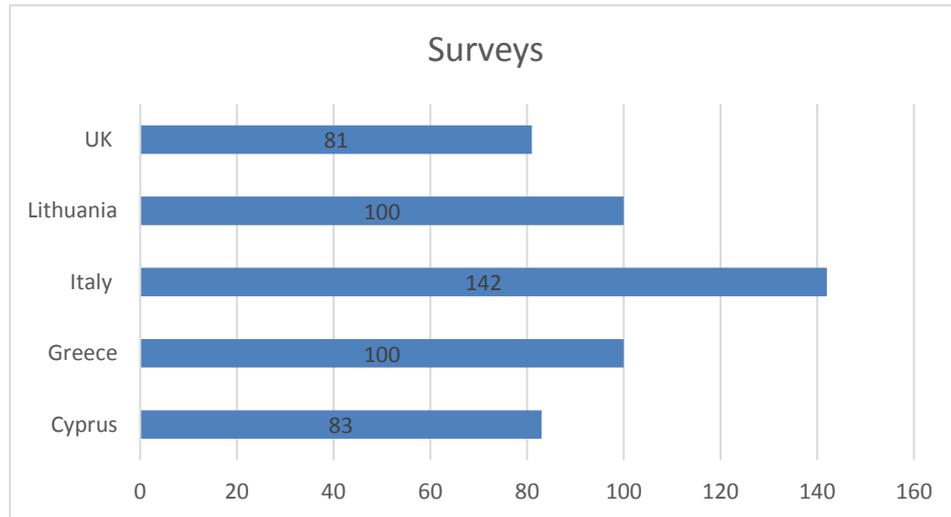
Hence, this report combines the information as it was provided by each partner in each "National Report" that you can also find available online for download on our Children First website. In order to standardise the presentation of the information collected, a uniform template was prepared for the national reports. For the purposes of each national report, each responsible project partner was asked to conduct their desk-based and field-based research based on a common report structure and survey, interview and focus group, prepared by CSI and reviewed by the consortium.

Methodology

The current desk research includes the collection and analysis of data from existing resources such as literature, reports, policy documents, previous surveys, and research studies; as well as existing practices and conditions regarding gender-based violence (GBV) among children and teenagers from all partner countries.

Specifically, the field- based research is a collection of:

a) 506 survey responses from the four participating countries



b) 77 overall interviews (online via skype/Google Forms or F2F) in the four participating countries



c) 3 focus groups (online via skype/Google Forms or F2F) with 12-15 children each conducted by the UK, IT and LT partners.

The research aimed to capture the nature, frequency and dynamics of GBV in teen relationships and the contexts in which they occur and persist; understand how children and young people

comprehend and evaluate GBV; as well as understanding the wider cultural and social processes that underpin experiences of exploitation of violence. All research material and data were translated in each partner's language and were disseminated through each partner's network and social media channels. The analysis of data was the responsibility of each partner. All partners have made sure that the questionnaires were anonymous and confidential, and that the data used in the analysis below concern only the purposes of our project. Lastly, we have made sure as a consortium that no response was discriminated against or judged and instead was approached with professionalism and with the ethical responsibility that the project entails.

Contribution to the existing literature

With this report, Children First hopes to raise awareness and contribute to the existing literature around GBV among children and teenagers; highlighting their attitudes and understanding towards GBV and the extent to which it occurs and persists – data which is often limited when it comes to this target group in Europe. Specifically, the research seeks to offer new research questions on the topic at stake and add to the statistical data available on the subject matter. Moreover, this research aims to contribute by suggesting relevant policy recommendations and conclusions on the topic that could in turn be used for further research, policy making, or the creation of future innovative projects to tackle the phenomenon of GBV among children and teenagers in Europe. Lastly, the general project contributes to the existing literature by providing evidence on the importance of gamification as an educational tool for lifelong learning, in this case by creating real life scenarios in which children and young people will be presented by a set of possible actions that could be taken for the purpose of allowing them to make their own decisions and encouraging healthy relationships by challenging their beliefs and gender stereotypes.

Recruitment of resources

The external desk research technique was used in order to analyse the online research and literature data as well as government published data. Particular emphasis was given to the reliability of sources gathered, as only research published by recognized research institutes or entities were included. To add, research included are recent, almost exclusively published during the last 10-year time period (2010-2020). Resources were included regarding the following subject-areas:

1. *Statistics: Statistical data and overviews of GBV towards women and girls (children and teenagers) in all partner countries*

2. *Legislation: Short overview on national legislation with a focus on the prevention legislations on GBV in all partner countries*
3. *Policy and practice: Review of existing state of policy and relevant schemes in all partner countries*
4. *Best practices: Short overview of local initiatives and/or programmes implemented on the topic in each partner country related to the objectives of this work package*
5. *Identifying the attitudes and behaviours of young people towards GBV: review of the Children First field-based research (surveys/interviews/focus groups) in all partner countries.*

Procedure

The resources gathered were analysed and interpreted using the theories and models that were included in the theoretical framework of the desk-based research. After reviewing and analysing resources and literature, interpretations were made regarding GBV among children and adolescents. Limitations of findings were also explored.

After field-based data was collected, it was analysed by each partner organisation through the use of demographic statistics for the closed answers of the questionnaires and through content analysis for the open-ended items.

Content of Responsibility

The information of each country provided below was solely the responsibility of the assigned partner of each country. Hence, Center for Social Innovation (CSI) bears no responsibility for the validity of data and content provided. The role of CSI in WP2 was coordinating – by providing the partners with guidelines so as to have a unified report structure and some provisional points on what kind of information should be included. Then, CSI has collected the executive summaries of the national reports and compiled the information in this document for the purpose of providing a comparative report on GBV among children and adolescents in the partner countries involved in the Children First project. Hence, CSI support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and CSI cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

This comparative report is divided into the following sections: desk-based research findings where the literature of each setting is presented; field-based research findings using the data from the surveys, interviews and focus groups; and finally conclusions and recommendations, as derived from all partner countries.

Desk based research findings

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is one of the most prevalent human right violations in the world. It is of 'pandemic proportions' with women and girls encountering physical, sexual and psychological abuses such as coercion and deprivation in an array of environments including the home, school and society. Globally, the terms "Violence against women" and "Gender Based Violence" (GBV) are used interchangeably depending on the context in which violence occurs and who the perpetrators are. Examples of such violence include acts of domestic violence and abuse, sexual violence, psychological and emotional violence, online violence, gang related violence, child sexual abuse, honour-based killing, stalking and female genital mutilation (FGM). Gender-based violence (GBV) has significant effects on children's development, and can cause them to run away from home, self-harm and other psychological consequences. Children that experience GBV within their families or close environments may transmit this toxic relationship model to their future personal and public relationships.

Cyprus

Cyprus in 2006 was ranked 4th among the EU states in relation to the discrimination and violence that people face due to their gender. Moreover, LGBTQI+ people have described their social acceptance low in the context of Cyprus since they are often excluded from people within their family setting. In Cyprus, women and girls are more vulnerable and affected by GBV. It is specifically estimated that at least the 22% of Cypriot women above 15 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lives, whereas 39% have experienced psychological/emotional violence from their partners (FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). The Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family in Cyprus has a 24-hour helpline where victims can report incidents of violence and ask for help. They maintain a record of these incidents for statistical purposes. In 2017 alone, there were 1680 incidents of violence, of which 48.8% were cases with a history of abuse and reporting and 32.6% were new cases ("Helpline 1440 Statistics 2017", 2017). Of these cases, 89.1% of the victims were women and 9% men while 10.2% of the victims were over 18 years old and only 1.2% of the perpetrators were under 18 years old (ibid). 45% of the victims of abuse came from the victims' partners while 61.4% of these victims are still living with the perpetrator and 68.5% of the victims had children. 30.1% of victims reported that the abuse was emotional, 53.7% emotional and physical, and 11.3% that the abuse involved emotional, physical, and sexual violence.

Furthermore, there is limited research data for Cyprus on the phenomenon of GBV among adolescents, especially for some forms of violence. A study conducted by the Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies entitled "Connecting offline and online risks among young people" (2014) on the manifestations of GBV among adolescents aged 14 to 17 years showed that almost 1 in 5 teenagers (18%) had experienced some form of violence from their close partners. In addition, 13% of the participants had experienced domestic violence (3% physical), while

21% stated that they had been bullied. 17% of the sample reported being bullies and 40% were negative about gender (gender stereotypes). The study also showed that the increased use of new technologies among adolescents led to a new and unexplored dynamic in GBV, as 44% of respondents surveyed reported some form of cyberbullying and online gender-based violence (ibid).

Specifically, according to the first Pancyprrian survey conducted in 2012 regarding the violent behaviour in the interpersonal relationships of young adults in Cyprus aged 18-25 in which a total of 667 women and 333 men participated, it appeared that:

- 70% of the participants in the survey had perceptions and attitudes that favoured violent conditions, through frequent criticism of the victim and the view that violence from a close partner is a "private" issue. According to some participants, in some circumstances to forgive the use of force or certain behaviours is reasonable (Andronikou, A., Erotokritou, K., & Hadjiharalambous, D., 2012: 195). An example is the perception that when a woman is dressed in a "certain" way or if her behaviour is "inappropriate" she may be considered provocative by her partner.

- Finally, many of the participants in the research understood violence as a pattern of behaviour, agreeing with the idea that if someone acted violently towards their partner in the past, they may present the pattern of this behaviour in their general relationships (ibid).

Despite the above mentioned, in the last few years especially after the accession of Cyprus to the European Union and as a member of the United Nations, significant efforts and actions have been made by both the Government of Cyprus and independent organisations at a local level regarding the development of strategic plans and response policies for the prevention of this gender-based violence. The legal framework that covers the rights of children and adolescents and protects them from all forms of violence are practices that usually stem from conventions of the European Union and the United Nations. Despite the efforts, there is still work to be done on a governmental level to safeguard children's rights and prevent GBV.

Greece

In Greece, gender equality is nowadays recognized as a fundamental human right through a series of legislative acts and enactments. In reality though, the country demonstrates very low performance in gender equality in several key areas such as equal access to education, equal opportunities in the labour market, distribution of work in the home and childcare, which implies that there is still much room for improvement in order to achieve gender equality in our country.

In Greece, the issue of school violence is being addressed both by the official state and civil society. To that end, a wide variety of initiatives and institutional interventions currently take place and various relevant projects are carried out across the country with the aim to raise awareness on the issue of school violence on the one hand and eliminate and prevent the phenomenon on the other. Since 2000 research on school violence and bullying has been focused on child abuse and victimization, yet very little research has been conducted on gender-based violence within the school setting at national level. Despite that, in recent years growing research interest has been placed on cases of bullying and domestic violence. In this respect, a national survey (2012) on gender stereotypes, norms and attitudes regarding violence in Greek schools showed the following results:

1. Both girls and boys support stereotypical views on gender;
2. Young people do not consider sexual violence an issue that directly affects them, but generally consider it a problem that primarily affects adults;
3. A very small percentage of boys consider that it is acceptable for a boy to put pressure on a girl to have sex if they date.

A transnational survey on the subject concluded that young people still continue to support certain stereotypes about gender, tolerate certain forms of gender-based violence, and accept the prevailing myths about the causes of gender-based violence. Another national study on school violence (2013) revealed that girls participate in violent incidents either as victims or perpetrators, or both as perpetrators and victims. On the same issue, the findings of the most recent survey (2016) among primary and secondary school students in Greece did not showcase any significant difference in the frequency of verbal violence between boys and girls – in contrast to physical violence, which appears to prevail amongst boys. Also, according to the same survey, 56.5% of the research participants (students) reported that the most common form of bullying is verbal bullying, which includes insults and taunts.

According to an older study that was conducted in 2003 with a sample of 486 young girls (15-21 years old), more than half of the participants (61.5%) reported that they had suffered at least one form of violence (physical, sexual or psychological abuse) in the context of their current or former intimate relationship. One (1) out of three (3) girls reported being a victim of physical abuse (35.2%) and almost four (4) out of ten (10) (37.9%) were self-identified as victims of sexual abuse. The most frequent form of violence appeared to be psychological abuse (threats, verbal abuse, controlling behaviour by their partners). Last but not least, it is of note that 20% of young women appeared to believe that under “specific conditions” (e.g. if they have been unfaithful to their partner), physical abuse by their partner, as well as forced sexual contact within a marital relationship, is acceptable.

Italy

In Italy, gender-based violence (GBV) is used as a synonym of violence against women, and is defined as violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman, or involves violence that affects women disproportionately. The Italian legislation has made great steps forward in the last decade, following three main objectives: preventing crime, punishing offenders, protecting victims. However, the specific phenomenon of dating violence remains poorly addressed. As for gender equality, despite being formally recognized by law, the country still faces some problems especially in terms of access to work, equal pay and work-life balance, scoring under the European average in the Gender Equality Index (EIGE, 2019).

However, there is no specific reference to the fact that children and adolescents could also experience violence within their first relationships; neither in official statistics nor in legislation (with the obvious exception of statistics and legislation about child sexual abuse, where referring to a romantic relationship is not possible). The limited data available, mainly collected by associations and private institutes, show that the phenomenon is however present in Italy: 5 out of 10 boys would not hesitate to hit their partner (Istat, 2014) and 2 out of 5 girls think that hitting a girl is an act of virility (Istat, 2015). 22.7% of a sample of over 1,500 Italian adolescents between 11 and 18 years suffered screams from the partner and 13.9% have been insulted (Telefono Azzurro e Doxa Kids, 2014). Finally, on a sample of 11,500 adolescents between 11 and 19 years, 20% check the partner's phone, 16% have been forced to delete social contacts due to the partner's jealousy, and 7 out of 100 have been forced to share social network passwords with their partner (Osservatorio Nazionale Adolescenza, 2017). Concerning the legislation, a growing attention on the issue of gender equality among youth can be observed, mainly linked to the role of the school in gender education. The Italian law no. 107 of 2015, the so-called "Good School Reform" has partially addressed the issue, by promoting education on gender equality, prevention of GBV and any kind of discrimination; and raising awareness on these issues among students, teachers and parents. The reform has been followed by the "National Plan for Education to Respect" aimed at promoting more concrete educational and training actions in line with art.3 of the Italian Constitution¹. Moreover, in recent months campaigns have been raised in order to review the contents of several textbooks, often vehicles of sexism and gender stereotypes, and a series of draft laws are under discussion at this moment. However, it should be noted that very often, in Italy, similar measures concerning school are criticized by the most conservative wings of society and considered "harmful for students".

¹ "All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions. It is the duty of the Republic to remove those obstacles of an economic or social nature which constrain the freedom and equality of citizens, thereby impeding the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organisation of the country."

Lithuania

Lithuania declared 2020 as the year of children emotional well-being. In 2019, every tenth victim of domestic violence was a child under 18 years of age.

Gender-based violence is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality. In Lithuania there is no legal definition of GBV; domestic violence is defined as a gender-neutral offence. Also, there are no nationwide statistics on the prevalence of School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV). Therefore, most prevention strategies and programmes are aimed at reducing violence in general, domestic violence or bullying at school, and do not tackle SRGBV. Nevertheless, some research on public attitudes towards GBV conducted in Lithuania show prevalence of this issue among youth. According to a survey conducted by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, 45% of respondents agreed with the statement “If a boy pulls a girl’s hair or lifts up her skirt, this is only an innocent show of affection”. These gender stereotypes have an impact on GBV rates among youth. In 2012, the Women’s Issues Information Centre conducted research involving 501 students (aged 15-17), which showed students’ attitudes towards gender stereotypes and the prevalence of GBV in teen relationships. 39% of students agreed with the statement “It is normal if a guy forces a girl to have sex if she has been flirting with him all night.” 78% of girls and 80% of boys agreed that “If a guy is jealous of his girlfriend, it means that he really cares for her.” This survey also showed that young people have a low tolerance towards physical violence but tend to tolerate jealousy and controlling behaviour in relationships. 70% of students agreed that “Girls sometimes provoke sexual aggression by boys through the way they dress,” demonstrating the prevalence of victim-blaming attitudes. Some students face multiple forms of discrimination, e.g. discrimination based on their gender and sexual orientation. Research conducted by the Lithuanian Gay League in 2015 with the participation of 166 students (13-20 years old) in Lithuania revealed that 52% of respondents hide their sexual orientation in school. 30% of LGBTQ+ students do not feel safe in school, with boys feeling less safe than girls.

UK

Within the context of the United Kingdom, gender-based violence affects women, regardless of their age, race, religion, socio-economic background, sexual orientation, or marital status. Although it is evident these acts of violence are disproportionately gendered towards women and girls, the UK government understands and acknowledges that men and boys can also be victims of violence and abuse. This is evident within the Home Office pledge to help men and boys who are victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence through the Male Victims Position Statement.²

² Home Office (2019) ‘Male Victims Position Statement’. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/783996/Male_Victims_Position_Paper_Web_Accessible.pdf. Accessed: 29/08/2020

In the UK it is widely recognised that the Gender Based Violence/Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a manifestation of systemic and unique forms of discrimination, which can occur in different stages of lives and among different communities such as the Black, Asian and Minority (BAME) and LGBT+ communities. Statistics from leading UK GBV and abuse charities such as Against Violence and Abuse (AVA)³ state that on a whole 1 in 4 women experience domestic violence in their lifetime, with 1 in 5 women experiencing stalking from the age of 16. Similarly according to another UK-based organisation, Action breaks Silence, one fifth of young people are exposed to physical violence and experience similar levels of abuse in relationships in their adult lives.⁴ In addition to this, half of all young people report emotional abuse in the form of verbal abuse such as being shouted at or being catcalled.

Despite the concerning statistics, real progress has been made in tackling and addressing gender-based violence in the UK. Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) have shown the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence has dropped, while the total number of persecutions for VAWG reached the highest level ever recorded.⁵ This has been the result of the UK government setting out ambitious policies and provisions relating to the elimination of all forms of GBV/VAWG in the UK.

Examples of these protections have included legal provisions such as Modern Slavery Act⁶, Domestic Violence Protection Orders⁷, the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme⁸, the FGM Protection Orders and Duty report and the Violence against Women, and the Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Act in Wales⁹ to tackle offences such as stalking, forced marriage, FGM, revenge pornography, domestic abuse. Alongside these items of legislation, there have been a common consensus that “GBV/VAWG is everyone’s business” and that the only way to tackle gender-based discrimination is through a strategy of collaboration between communities, organisations, schools, charities and agencies, and local and national governments working together. This strategy has been particularly important when addressing GBV on a localised level within schools and institutions which are under the obligation of both the 1998 Human

³ Against Violence Action (AVA) ‘AVA Project’ Available at: <https://avaproject.org.uk/>.. Accessed: 01/09/2020

⁴ Actions break Silence (2020) Engage, Educate and Empower communities to End Gender Based Violence. Available at: <http://www.actionbreaksilence.org/>. Accessed: 01/09/2020

⁵ Crime Survey For England and Wales (CSEW). Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>

⁶ The Modern Slavery Act 2015. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/contents/enacted>

⁷ Domestic Violence Protection Order. Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575363/DVPO_guidance_FIN_AL_3.pdf

⁸ Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-violence-disclosure-scheme-pilot-guidance>

⁹ Violence against Women, Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse (Wales) Act, 2015 Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/3/contents/enacted>

Rights Act¹⁰ and 2010 Equality Act¹¹ to protect the physical and psychological integrity of pupils and promote access to educational tools and services.

Early intervention and prevention have been key tools in addressing and tackling gender-based violence. One of the most important ways in tackling and addressing GBV involves preventing violence and abuses from happening in the first place. For many policymakers and activists, the education sector plays an important role in this, especially when trying to challenge the deep-rooted social norms, attitudes and behaviours that discriminate individuals based on their genders. Examples of these strategies include nationally acclaimed campaigns such as *This is Abuse* campaign¹² which ran from 2010 to 2014 and targeted 13 to 18-year-old boys and girls. Key facets of the campaign involved encouraging teenagers to rethink their views on violence, abuse, controlling behaviour and the meaning of consent, which is a common theme within teen relationships. Similarly, within Scotland campaigns such as *Equally Safe at School* were introduced developed in preventing gender-based violence in schools through working with students and staff in identifying and responding to incidents of harassment and gender based violence and providing support to victims of such abuse.¹³

Field based research findings

A template of an interview scenario was agreed upon by the consortium and each partner was responsible for adapting it based on the reality of their national context. Here is the example of a scenario that young people were asked to comment on, and the data analysed below is based upon the following storyline:

Maria is 16 years old. She has been in a romantic relationship with Christos, 18 years old, for six months now. Christos is sometimes manipulative with Maria and is jealous when she goes out with her friends, without him. Christos often comments on the way she dresses so she feels insecure about herself and she avoids this discussion with her friends, who disagree with Christos' attitude. This behaviour of Christos, however, makes Maria feel special because she believes that this is how he expresses his love for her. Many times, during their romantic relationship, Christos attempts to take their relationship to the next level. But Maria has not have sexual experiences in the past and is not yet ready to take that step. So, when they discussed this issue, he claimed that it is something very important for him especially with her, whom he has feelings for. Maria, wanting to show him her love and appreciation, agreed to have sexual intercourse with him for the sake of their relationship.

¹⁰ 1998 The Human Right Act. Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/human-rights/human-rights-act>

¹¹ 2010 The Equality Act . Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

¹² *This is Abuse' campaign 2010 to 2014* <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/this-is-abuse-campaign>

¹³ *Equally Safe in Schools: A whole school approach to Gender Based Violence*. Available at: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/researchinstitutes/healthwellbeing/research/mrccsocialandpublichealthsciencesunit/programmes/relationships/fisir/genderbasedviolencewholeschoolsapproach/>

Cyprus

In Cyprus, Center for Social Innovation collected 83 online survey responses and 24 online interviews via Google Forms from teenagers aged 16-18 years old in Greek. While it was initially planned to conduct both one-to-one interviews with 10 children and a focus group with 12-15 children, COVID-19 has made it impossible to either conduct the focus group or conduct the interviews face-to-face, despite the research team's efforts to replace the face-to-face focus group with an online group discussion. Therefore, the Cypriot research team took the decision to replace the focus group with additional online interviews with children and adolescents. The findings of the primary research demonstrate that GBV persistently occurs in teen relationships (some forms of violence are more common than others) to an extent that it affects teenagers' wellbeing.

Survey Research Results:

38.6% of the participants were 16 years old, 24.1% were 17 years old, and 37.3% were 18 years old. 67.5% of those, were females, 30.1% were males and 2 preferred not to say. Regarding their gender, 79.5% were heterosexuals, 13.3% were bisexual and the remaining were homosexual. From the participants, 48.2% have faced no obstacles, 22.9% have faced financial difficulties, 21.7% have faced family obstacles, 16.9% have faced health problems, 13.3% have faced cultural barriers, 4.8% have faced 'another' obstacle, 3.6% have faced educational barriers, 1.2% have faced geographical barriers and 1.2% have disability barriers. Moreover, 51.8% (mostly males) have said that they never felt bad or been treated unfairly because of their gender, whereas 48.2% (mostly females) have responded positively that they have been treated unfairly. Of those who answered yes, 61% said that they experience those feelings sometimes, whereas 19.5% selected every week, 12.2% every month, and 7.3% every day. Most of them experienced those feelings from bullying and violence that occurs within the school setting (70.7%), 19.5% within their families, 17.1% within their romantic relationships and 12.2% from friends. Some of the comments received were: *"When I was younger, I was told that since I am a girl I cannot always do what I want", "Women are incapable of engaging in certain professions", "I often hear various 'jokes' or derogatory comments about women and how they should behave in society", "I am being mocked that I am feminine because I am a boy with long hair and I am quiet and I do not like football like the other boys".*

Moreover, 30.1% of the participants have answered positively on the question if they feel ashamed or restricted based on their gender. We received experiences such as the following: *"I have felt fear because I am a woman. I am afraid to walk alone at night, to dress as I want without feeling bad", "I started to feel that because of society and stereotypes", "The social stereotype concerning the sexes is also reflected in the school course, when the teachers during the lessons*

prefer to focus on the boys in the science lessons and respectively on the girls in the theoretical lessons", "I and many of my friends experience sexism because of our sexual experiences while our male friends are not judged when they have many different partners. Masturbation is also taboo for girls", "I had many experiences with catcalling while walking on the street, from young and old. Once a middle-aged man started following me while I was in a well-known public place and tried to seduce me by complimenting me", "Sometimes I feel limited because of the general image of the man that exists in society. For example, I like sunbathing, which can be considered more feminine by some. A friend of mine recently said that he thinks it is more feminine and that he would not do it for this reason, which made me feel a little uncomfortable at first", "I was beaten just because I am a quiet boy. I felt that as a boy you had to know how to defend and defend myself against such threats".

From the 20.5% of those who have experienced GBV from their partners, 36% experienced verbal abuse, 56% psychological/emotional abuse, 16% physical abuse, 12% online violence and 8% something else. A girl commented: *"My ex when we were still together at 16 was jealous of where I was going and with whom because I had male friends. When I wanted to break up with him, he started stalking and threatened me that if I did, he would hurt himself. We were in the same school and during the school breaks he used to look at me intently while I was with my friends. He used to tell me how much he loved me and that I would not find anyone else to love me as much as he does. He also happened to threaten me that he would post photos of me online".*

In question 5.2 on how participants perceive gender-based violence, some of the participants do not know exactly what gender-based violence means and the different forms of violence. Also, while many participants recognise what gender-based violence is, the causes that perpetuate it, and the forms it takes; many do not recognize all of them (limiting GBV to sexual violence only) or do not understand the nature of gender-based violence. Of those adolescents who were informed about issues related to gender-based violence online (63.9%), 48.2% were informed by their school environment either by teachers or by their timetable, 45.8% were informed by their family environment, 43.4% from their friendly environment and 16.9% from their romantic environment. 13.3% of the participants were not informed by any of the above. Moreover, to question 5.3 on whether participants feel protected from gender-based violence (of any kind) at school, 38.6% answered 'sometimes', 38.6% answered that they didn't feel protected and 22.8% answered that they did. Similarly, to question 5.4 on whether participants feel protected from gender-based violence (of any kind) in their family, 68.7% answered positively, 16.9% answered 'sometimes' and 14.5% answered negatively. When asked if they feel protected from gender-based violence in the Cypriot society in general, it is clear that most of the participants (66.3%) do not feel protected, 19.3% said they feel protected 'sometimes' and 14.5% answered in the affirmative. Finally, on whether the participants were ever

informed by their school through their lessons, informative activities, experiential workshops etc. on gender-based violence, 83.1% answered negatively while 16.9% answered positively.

Finally, it seems that: *"direct and indirect (underlying) sexism in Cyprus, which is directly and inextricably linked to gender-based violence, is one of the biggest and unsolved problems of Cypriot society. It is neglected and not treated systematically / politically or socially to the necessary extent. There seems to be a strong need among young people for "more education on the subject and awareness not to encourage such behaviours or to become systematically unnoticed or indifferent!"*

Interview Research Results

Regarding the profile of the participants in the online interview, most of the 24 participants were female (17), 6 were male and 1 person preferred not to say. The participation of more girls in the research may demonstrate a perception in which gender-based violence is of particular interest to those most directly concerned with the topic (most likely to be the victims of GBV), hence often overshadowing gender stereotypes that affect men or collecting more data on boys' attitudes toward gender-based violence. In terms of age, 13 of the 24 participants are 16 years old, 9 people are 17 years old and 2 people are 18 years old.

In the first question of the interview on whether the above scenario is familiar to them, and if so in which ways, it seems that in 13 of the 24 participants the scenario was familiar either because they experienced it themselves or because their friends have had relevant experience. Most of those who are familiar with this script were girls. As a young boy has mentioned, *"the above example is familiar to me because unfortunately, there are many mainly males who take the initiative in a relationship and force the girl to isolate and minimize her social contacts, which means that in the relationship there can be no other view rather than that of the man, maximizing his "dominance". This 'dominance' of the man can also lead the girl to believe that what is happening to her is positive or to be pressured to think that it is positive because of her fear for him (it makes Maria feel special)"*.

All participants later agreed that the relationship between Maria and Christos as reflected in the script is not healthy since "it does not have the 2 most important components of a healthy relationship, respect and mutual understanding". All the comments of the participants show that they have a healthier perception of what love is and how it should be reflected in the relationships of young people, which is very positive for the empowerment of young people in terms of gender-based violence.

Greece

In Greece, SYMPLEXIS collected 100 online survey responses from children and teenagers aged 12-18 years old and conducted 22 semi-structured interviews with young people aged 14-17 years old. While it was initially planned to conduct both personal interviews with 10 children and a focus group with 12-15 children, the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to run the focus group despite the research team's efforts to replace the face-to-face focus group with an online group discussion. Therefore, the Greek research team took the decision to replace the focus group with additional interviews with children and adolescents.

The findings of the primary research reveal that gender-based violence is a critical and persistent problem that significantly affects children's life. The online survey was conducted via an online google form questionnaire in Greek. The majority of the responders (73%) were in the age group 12-14 years, while the remaining 27% were in the age category 15-18 years. Most of them (71%) were girls, while less than one third (28%) were boys. Regarding their sexual orientation, 83.2% were identified as heterosexual, while the rest belonged in one of the other categories. Regarding the possible difficulties faced by their family, more than half (56%) did not report any kind of difficulty, while 19.2 % reported financial difficulties and 16.2% said that their parents are divorced.

In the section regarding gender-based discrimination almost half of the participants (56%) replied that they have never been discriminated against due to their gender, while the remaining 44% reported that they have had. From those who reported some kind of discrimination, the majority (77.1%) reported having such feelings very often, 10.4% some of the time, and 15.2% less often. Regarding the context in which they have experienced discrimination on the basis of their gender, the school environment prevailed (68.9%), followed by the home environment (15.6%) and romantic relationships (11.1%). On the same issue, 74% reported having been mocked by their peers, while 82.5% reported feeling ashamed due to their gender. Most of the online survey participants (62.6%) said that they had had a romantic relationship so far in their lives, in contrast with the remaining 37.4% who reported the opposite. When asked about their understanding with regard to the term gender-based violence, a small percentage (10.8%) answered that they do not understand the term or do not know what it means. More than one third (35.6%) said that they understand it as some form of violence, psychological or verbal, exercised by either girls or boys. Regarding the information they may have received on the issue of gender-based violence from their school, 38.6% answered that they haven't received any kind of information, while 24.7% reported having received some kind of relevant information on the subject. In the concluding open-ended question about any personal experience with sexual violence they might have had in an intimate relationship, almost 1 out 10 children (11.8%) reported having experienced emotional or psychological violence, threats, underestimation, offensive comments and verbal violence.

On top of the online survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 boys and 11 girls, students of secondary education in the Attica region (Greater Athens). It is noteworthy

that it proved to be more challenging to engage boys in the research as the majority of the adolescent boys that the Symplexis research team contacted appeared to believe that they have nothing to do with such incidents or that it is not for them to blame school violence on the basis of gender. On the contrary, girls were more willing to participate and contribute in the research with their views, opinion and experiences.

Based on the common research protocol of WP2, the interview questions primarily concerned children's understanding of gender-based violence in the school environment, the frequency of the phenomenon, the forms that it takes, its root causes and the consequences for the victims, the stimuli (social and cultural) that may affect the occurrence of violence and possible suggestions for preventing and/ or addressing the phenomenon. Regarding children's understanding of gender-based violence, almost all interviewees answered that it mainly concerns psychological, emotional and verbal violence. They also appeared to believe that it is a very common and frequent phenomenon in the school environment, but often hidden and underreported. Regarding the context in which violence takes place, the majority of the children reported that in most cases it occurs in close relationships and especially between married couples. Concerning the causes of violence, most of the interviewees referred to the influence of the family environment focusing on the prevailing standards and stereotypes within the family, while some of the responders placed attention on the influence of peers.

The findings of the qualitative research in Greece are in accordance with existing literature on the phenomenon as it is widely acknowledged that family difficulties, as well as the prevailing gender-related standards and beliefs in the family context, affect the healthy social and psycho-emotional development of children. According to Tsiantis (2008), the main causes of school bullying-victimization are: a) family conditions; and b) adolescence as a stage of development and formation of the individual's identity, which is characterized by certain triggering reactions such as emotionality, reactivity, opposition to any form of power, lack of self-confidence or (on the contrary) a feeling of omnipotence. This result confirms the research findings that gender-based violence does exist in the school environment and accordingly in the family and in children's romantic relationships.

Another important finding is that most of the interviewed children reported that they have never received any kind of information or support from their school regarding school/ gender-based violence, which appears to be one of the most important shortcomings as the lack of information and awareness about the phenomenon and the management of such crises among teachers and parents may encourage the expression of violent behaviour.

The majority of the research participants reported that both boys and girls may be victims or perpetrators of gender-based violence in the school setting, yet they also appeared to believe that the forms of violence differ based on the gender. Boys, as perpetrators, reportedly engage in direct forms of physical or verbal violence while, in contrast, girls use indirect forms of intimidation, such as spreading rumours or being excluded from friendship groups mostly

against children of the same sex (i.e. girls). The research in Greece revealed that the most frequent form of violence is emotional and psychological violence and that children are aware of the issue of gender-based violence and its importance. However, it is important to consider the age group in which the interviewed children belong (14-17 years old), which may partly explain their high level of awareness and understanding on the issue in question.

Finally, on the subject of prevention, the interviewed children highlighted the importance of widespread information sharing and training for all interested parties (students, parents and teachers), including specialised school lessons on gender equality and human rights, which nowadays are lacking in the Greek education system.

Italy

In Italy, CESIE collected 142 online survey responses from children 12-18 years old. In order to ensure the adoption of a bottom-up approach, as embedded in the project methodology, the research was entirely conducted by the Italian Youth Advisory Board (YAB), made up of a group of 16 adolescents aged 15-17 years old, attending the High School “Ernesto Basile” in Palermo. Fully trained on GBV and social research methodologies, the Italian YAB has also conducted and analysed 10 interviews. A group of adolescents was also involved in a focus group conducted by CESIE, aimed at identifying their opinions on the phenomenon of dating violence.

From the 10 interviews conducted, it has been possible to test children and adolescents' understanding of GBV in schools and in general in their relationships, how frequent the phenomenon appears, which the main causes and consequences are, and how it could be prevented. Almost all of interviewees agree in evaluating and understanding episodes of jealousy, aggressiveness and need to control over the partner's life as an example of GBV, or at least as a situation that could, in the future, degenerate into GBV. The remaining part believes that sometimes “unhappy jokes” or jealousy can occur in a relationship, and that they should not be seen as GBV. The majority refers not to have experienced GBV, however they believe that it can occur very often and in different contexts, especially among people with a closed mindset and addiction to feelings of anger and hate. Among the one who experienced GBV, several situations of boys imposing onto their girlfriends rules on how to dress or with whom to go out. When asked about the actions that should take place to prevent GBV, the majority agrees on the primary role of information for preventing GBV, particularly for youth: their “fresh minds” (as reported by some of them) could be more responsive to changes compared to adults. Many respondents report that a major role is occupied by the family circle, followed by school, which should not only educate on gender equality, but also help those who experience GBV.

Similar findings emerge from the results of the online questionnaires. Among the 142 answers, 85.2% are adolescents aged 15-18 years with the remaining respondents aged 12-14 years old.

The great majority are female (72.5%) and heterosexual (81%). All the respondents are Italian. Half of the interviewees attest to having been discriminated against because of their gender, especially at school and mainly for the way they dress, for some physical characteristics, for their haircut, for their supposed sexual orientation, for the music they listen to, for the games they play, for school grades, or because they cry too much. 23% report feeling ashamed or limited by their gender, mainly for being "not feminine enough", for not being free to wear what they want or to go out without taking risks, or because of body shaming. As for gender stereotypes, most of them disagree with the most common gender stereotypes. However, many believe that gossiping is for girls (21%), that boys are stronger (19%) and more aggressive (24%) and girls are more vulnerable (18%), and that boys should be the ones asking girls out and not vice versa (20%). The majority say that behaviours such as being verbally violent, hitting, forcing intimate touching or having sex, being jealous, obsessive or unfaithful, making the partner feel ashamed or threatened or setting limits to personal freedom, should never happen for either boys or girls. Jealousy and stalking the partner are the most "acceptable" behaviours identified, which can be sometimes tolerated by 8% and 6% of respondents respectively. Concerning GBV in general, all participants express negative feelings when asked how they understand and evaluate it: *unjust, senseless, unacceptable, inhuman, disrespectful, sick, repulsive* are the most recurrent expressions that define it. However, only half of them affirm to have been informed about GBV through school, media or personal researches, and the great majority agree that they are unaware of any support mechanisms available in their environment in case of GBV. Among those who are informed, school psychologists, help desks and the presence of associations inside and outside the school are mentioned. Finally, 10.6% attest to having suffered some forms of GBV within an intimate relationship. Among the stories collected, episodes of psychological violence, body shaming, non-consensual intimate touching and revenge porn emerge. One participant reported being touched and recorded while he/she was unconscious.

Finally, the focus group results show that young people are able to define GBV as any emotional, psychological, physical or sexual act committed against someone. 70% identify GBV in examples of relationships based on disrespect and need to control, while among the remaining voices, some report that jealousy and possessiveness are ok, "when not exaggerated". Most of the participants have never experienced GBV, but they know people who did, mainly at school, at home or in free time. According to them, the causes of GBV are always linked to the character or personality of the violent party (fear of losing the partner, closed mentality, excessive jealousy, low self-esteem, need to control others), no one has identified causes in the victim's behaviour. Among the consequences of GBV, they mention several physical and psychological problems, especially depending on the sensitivity of the victim, and they underline the importance of asking for help to get out of a similar situation. With regard to the prevention of GBV, many actions have been identified, including the need to speak with family, friends or in general, with someone who could help in case of violence; and, more generally, the need to speak more about the phenomenon, also in the school and family environment, in order to

eliminate stereotypes and gender norms still too common. In particular, some participants propose to start sensitising children from birth, while others identify 12 years as a useful age, when you start to have more awareness and experience in this regard.

Lithuania

In Lithuania, DDG conducted quantitative and qualitative research with the involvement of students aged 12-18 from various municipalities. The research consisted of 3 parts: 1) an online survey of 100 students, 2) semi-structured interviews with 10 students, 3) two focus groups with 12 students in total. The findings of the primary research revealed the prevalence of GBV among students and shed light on their attitudes towards GBV in and outside school, within their families and romantic relationships.

Online survey

An online survey was conducted using Google forms with the participation of 100 students: 65% girls, 35% boys. 80% of the respondents were 15 to 18 years old, and 20% were 12 to 14 years old. 83% identified themselves as heterosexual, 13% as bisexual, 2% as pansexual, 1% as homosexual and 1% as asexual. Regarding possible difficulties faced by their families, more than half (60%) did not report any kind of difficulty, 23% reported their parents were divorced, 13% faced economic difficulties, 5% claimed that their families faced health problems or geographical issues due to living in rural areas, 3% claimed they face difficulties related to disability, and 3% were faced with dropping out of school early. In the section on gender-based discrimination, more than half of the respondents (60%) replied that they have never been discriminated against due to their gender. From those who claimed the opposite, 45.6% claimed they experience gender discrimination in school: "All the boys received worse grades than the girls as the teacher said boys are worse singers. She did not evaluate our individual abilities". 10.5% faced discrimination in romantic relationships, and 8.8% at home: "When I told my parents I wanted to start practising weightlifting, they said they would not allow it because it is not feminine". 45% of respondents agreed with the statement that boys are stronger than girls, in comparison with only 6% that agreed that girls are stronger than boys. Also, 58% of respondents thought that girls are more vulnerable than boys, in comparison with 3% who claimed the opposite. These gender stereotypes contribute to the belief that girls are weaker than boys, which affects power dynamics among them in school and in romantic relationships.

58% of respondents answered that they have been in romantic relationships, of whom 86% stated they felt safe in those relationships. Regarding information on GBV, more than 79% claimed that it is never OK to be violent towards your significant other. Most students agreed that physical violence is unacceptable, while some had different opinions on forms of control in relationships such as jealousy: 33% of respondents claimed that rare occurrences of jealousy is

OK, while 14% claimed that frequent jealousy of your significant other is acceptable. This data showed that some students think that jealousy is a sign of care and affection; others claimed it can cause GBV. Respondents showed a slightly higher percentage of tolerance of violence perpetrated by girls towards boys than vice versa. Regarding what information they may have received on the issue of GBV from their schools, 65% claimed they haven't received any kind of information, while 35% had some kind of information on the subject. This is worrying as students also claim that if they face GBV or other problems, they either try to solve it themselves or seek support from their friends. A lack of information on this phenomenon leads to flawed, sometimes victim-blaming approaches. Students answered that when they need information, they look for it online and try to identify GBV by themselves. The internet remains one of the most popular sources of information: "You can look up the popular Netflix series 13 Reasons Why"¹⁴. Some students get information from their friends, which shows the importance of peer-to-peer education programmes on gender equality and GBV in formal and non-formal education. Most students answered that they have experienced psychological violence: "When they bully you and make jokes only because you are a girl, or when boys are bullied because something they did is not 'manly', like paint their nails". Some respondents said they are aware of sexual violence ("I know about sexual harassment, touching of intimate places") and economic violence. Regarding support for victims of GBV, 64% of students said they are not aware of any organisations providing victim support.

Interviews with students

10 interviews with students (1 boy and 9 girls) aged 12-16 were conducted in Lithuania. As usual when conducting research on gender equality, it was more difficult to attract boys to participate in interviews than girls, and they tend to dissociate themselves from the problem of gender-based violence more. It is easier to involve boys with the support of experts working in schools, which was the case while organising focus groups in Lithuania. Regarding children's understanding of GBV, almost all interviewees identified physical and psychological violence as the main forms of GBV. They also stated that they and their friends experience this issue at school and in their relationships, but they do not report it to adults and try to solve it by themselves or with the support of their friends. When asked about the main causes of GBV, respondents referred to jealousy, gender stereotypes ("Girls are seen to be weaker than boys") and early experience of domestic violence in their families: "If a person is violent, maybe it's because his/her parents are going through a divorce; they have family issues and feel lonely and start to attack other people", "My neighbour is a 12-year-old girl, and her parents have issues with alcohol, so she sometimes comes to spend time at my house. Recently she told me that she got slapped by her mother just because she could not join her online school class".

¹⁴ A TV show on Netflix banned in several states in the US due to glorification of suicide.

Students claimed that their friends are usually more willing to share problems they face in their own relationships than those existing in their families. This confirms national statistics on domestic violence that indicate that the majority of domestic violence cases remain underreported. The Women's Issues Information Centre research on the prevalence of domestic violence and support for victims (2019) stated that 60% of victims of domestic violence do not report it. Students also stated that they have heard of cases of gender-based cyber violence. According to them, most teen relationships start online rather than in school, and after a break-up, some cases of violence manifest in the form of, for example, intimate pictures or texts being posted online: "I believe everyone feels cooler and like they can get away with things from the other side of a computer screen". Regarding gender stereotypes in schools, students shared that they and their friends experience it from their peers and from teachers as well: "Sometimes I can feel it in relation to grades; let's say all the girls get additional points on a test and boys do not." Most worryingly, some students believed that teachers apply certain gender stereotypes based on their long-term experience in working with children, e.g. "girls are not as good at physics as boys". This kind of attitude creates a dangerous environment where gender stereotypes are normalised and further reinforced because they come from teachers, who are viewed by most students as a reliable source of information.

Focus groups with students

In addition to the online survey and interviews with students, two focus groups with students were organised in Lithuania. One focus group consisted of 5 students (3 boys, 2 girls) aged 12 from Vilnius¹⁵ and 7 students (2 boys, 5 girls) aged 16 from the small municipality of Taurage¹⁶ (an industrial city close to the border between Lithuania and Kaliningrad). It took a long time to organise these focus groups due to the global pandemic and students' intense lesson plans, but participants of both focus groups engaged very well and shared stories on the prevalence of GBV in schools and teen relationships. The views of respondents in both target groups differed in some respects due to differences in age and geographical location. In the first focus group, with participants aged 12, girls were more active in sharing their experiences than boys, and in the second focus group, with participants aged 16, older boys and girls were more or less equally involved in sharing their views.

The majority of the participants in both focus groups, similar to participants in the online survey and interviews, agreed that they and their peers face GBV at school and in teen relationships. Students claimed that girls face GBV more often, but they are also aware of cases where girls were the perpetrators: "I know one girl that was threatening to bully her boyfriend

¹⁵ Capital city of Lithuania with a population of 580,000 inhabitants as of 2020.

¹⁶ Industrial city in Lithuania close to the border with Kaliningrad with a population of 21,516 inhabitants as of 2020

online if he left her and pretended to be pregnant. We only figured out that it was a lie when she couldn't explain how she tested for that". Students described some cases of revenge after a break-up, which usually involved cyber violence: "I know one guy who published intimate photos of his ex-girlfriend for the whole school to see after she broke up with him". Regarding gender stereotypes in teen relationships, students answered that they are definitely present: "I heard that boys are usually referred to as wallets and girls as janitors". Focus group members indicated that sometimes LGBTQ+ students face even more discrimination in relationships when their significant other threatens to reveal their orientation or break up with them after learning about their orientation: "I have two friends who are bisexual and are bullied by their parents. Also, also each time they reveal this information to boyfriends, their boyfriends leave them and suddenly show no interest in them".

Most students, when asked about forms of GBV, named physical and psychological violence, but some also shared cases of sexual violence (e.g. touching of intimate parts, gang rape). Focus group members claimed that the majority of them, if faced with GBV, definitely would not go to adults but try to solve the problem themselves or with their friends: "I am not sure if I would go to an adult because they usually say that it is your own fault". This situation shows the importance of peer-to-peer education, as well as education for teachers and parents in order for them to be aware of the prevalence of GBV and to be able to recognise the signs and provide support in a non-judgemental way. Some students stated that they and their peers usually would not go to a school psychologist due to the stigma around using these services. However, students also admitted that individuals who contact these specialists feel better and continue with consultations. Therefore, it is important to destigmatise support services among youth, make them more accessible and attractive, create more spaces for psychologists to interact with students more often and on various subjects in smaller groups. Regarding prevention of GBV, members of the target group stated that they feel that sporadic lessons on GBV are not that effective if they do not bring behavioural change. Therefore, they would need periodic lessons on the subject, organised in smaller groups with their classmates – first girls' and boys' groups separately and then all together – where they could ask questions, analyse real-life scenarios and be exposed to creative visual materials on the subject of gender equality and GBV.

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, there has been a growing amount of research and enquiry into the prevalence of Gender Based Violence in school. As recent as 2016, the Women's and Equalities Parliamentary Committee (WEPC) launched an enquiry into sexual harassment in schools.¹⁷

¹⁷ WEPC (2016) *Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools*. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/inquiry1/>

The enquiry identified the prevalence of the different forms of violence such as unwanted sexual touching, sexual name calling and violence in teenage partner relationships.

Thus, to understand the lived experiences of young people in relation to teen dating violence and overall gender-based violence field-research consisted of a combination of qualitative and quantitative research in the form of surveys, interviews and focus groups. Participants for the research consisted of young people between the ages of 12-18 across different communities in and around London (England) and Cardiff (Wales). Access to these groups were provided through the services of local youth workers, the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) and social media dissemination. The findings of these research amplified the importance of this research regarding challenging the norms and attitudes young people have on GBV and the prevalence of GBV in their homes and schools.

Surveys

The surveys were constructed on Google Forms and were disseminated to youth groups on various social media platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. 81 surveys were completed with 83% of the participants being aged 16-18 and the rest being 12-15 years old. Among these results, 61% of the participants identified themselves as Heterosexual, 11% as Bisexual and the rest of the 12% identifying as Homosexual, Asexual, Pansexual and Queer. Following on from that most of the participants came from diverse backgrounds with 32% identifying as White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British, 21% Black or Black British African, 11% Arab and 4% Asian or Asian British Pakistani. The diversity represented in this survey meant that many of the young people faced unique additional obstacles which have reformed or distorted their views of society. Although 54% of the participants marked that they did not face any obstacles, 18% came from low income families, 8% coming from single parents' households, 5/3% had cultural disadvantages, 2% have health problems and others have disadvantages in relation to geography and education. This was interesting as when it came to their general understanding of whether they have been personally affected by GBV there were mixed results with 41.5% saying yes, 51% saying no and 7.5% who were unsure. This was no surprise as their collective experiences were mixed, with 67% stating that they had encountered GBV every now and then in comparison to 16.3% saying every day and 6.1% saying never. Despite these differences, there were three environments in which the young people felt GBV was prominent: 50% said schools, 11.9% said work, and 23.8% mentioned that they have experienced GBV at home. Examples covered a wide range of themes including gender norms, stereotypes and discrimination, Examples of these comments included *"I am pigeonholed into the housewife role"*, *"I get called a female when I am not"*, and *"I get called a sket¹⁸ because of how many boys I talk to"*. Many agreed that it is never okay for any gender to harm others. When asked to specify their understanding on GBV it was clear that they had limited understanding

¹⁸ London Slang to describe a woman who is in a relationship with multiple partners.

on what the phenomenon entails. A prominent view was that “*gender violence is when you hurt another person*”, some gave examples of GBV from past sex education lesson by highlighting actions such as “*domestic violence*”. What was clear from this question was the differences in responses between boys and girls, in which some of the girls understood what relationship violence entails from their own experiences of being catcalled and judged, whereas the boys acknowledged it from a discriminatory in relation to feminism and equality. One of participants commented that “*Gender Violence is a counter effect; people talk about equality but if I hit someone can they hit me back. For example, if you “slap me, I can slap you back”. It’s a psychological or defence mechanism*”. This misunderstanding and detachment was once again not surprising as 72.5% of participants said they did not feel protected by society with 32.5% saying do not feel protected by their families. This lack of access and support young people feel they have was telling, with 67% saying that they are not sure who to contact and where to get support.

Interviews

The interview conducted provided the opportunity to elaborate on some of the points that were raised in the survey. 11 semi structured interviews were conducted in which young people were asked to freely describe their views and attitudes relating to GBV. Among the 11 participants, 6 of them were between the ages 16-18 with the rest (5) belonging to 12-15 age groups. 7 of the participants were boys and 4 were girls. Within the themes derived from the interviews there were clear differences in understanding between the two ages groups particularly within their awareness and models of intervention. In regard to their understanding on GBV, in general most of the participants aged 16-18 described GBV as something which is done by “men to women”. Many of young people concluded that men are unlikely to be believed and were not sure whether boys and men can be victims of sexual assault. This was also evident among the young people between the ages 12-15 who, due to their lack of romantic history, conceptualised it as only just domestic violence or just simply harming someone. It is worth noting that the interview participants came from a local youth club where many of them have encountered obstacles such as poverty, homelessness and social exclusion which can have a significant contribution toward their own understanding and distorted view of violence as being an appropriate form of action. The role of culture is an important driving force for this. One of the participants described their experience of being hit as a child and how it contributed to their understanding of what GBV entailed, and what forms of violence are deemed more acceptable than others. This was evident when participants from both groups normalised offences such as controlling behaviour and manipulation in comparison to physical forms of violence. An example of this is when the interviewer asked the participants “Would you be comfortable with your partner spending time with members of the opposite sex?” Most of the male participants indicated a degree of discomfort with this issue and expected the same treatment from their partner in comparison to the responses from

females who stated that such demands were extremely bad signs in a relationship. This theme further filtered into understanding of gender norms as, once again, participants from both ages groups reinforced gender stereotypes and norms, for example the fact that “boys are stronger than girls as they have greater muscle mass” or that it was expected of boys to ask the girl out as it is “gentlemanly”. Despite this when it came to conceptualising what the rules of dating entails, several of the male participants cited social rules such as “never put your hands on a woman” without completely understanding the origins and reason for it. From the interviews, it was clear that the young people were drawing on what they have seen or heard but not what they have been taught. When asked about whether a healthy relationship was something taught or discussed in school, they all answered negatively. Similarly, when asked about whether they knew any support service they only mentioned one organisation Childline.¹⁹

2.3 Focus Groups

Similar to the themes derived from the interview and surveys, focus groups were conducted online with young people between the ages 16 to 18 who identify themselves as being from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME). When asked about what they think GBV or gender discrimination entails, once again there was an array of answers which confirmed some of the points already raised. Responses to that particular question includes answers such as “it is violence that is specifically done to a particular gender”, “you normally associate with the male being dominant and female being inferior. Among these responses the group understood these were stereotypes and were not universal definitions for what it entails. Within the discussion the group highlighted the evolution of domestic violence as not only something perpetrated by men but also women too, examples included issues such as mental manipulation and the struggles couples have in coming forward with their story. One of the young people in the group stated how coming forward is not an easy thing due to feelings of “embarrassment” and “mistrust”. When the focus group members were asked if they have ever encountered GBV they have all unanimously said no, but did agree they had encountered instances of “toxic” relationships. The term “toxic” were mentioned multiple times especially within the scenario they were provided in which all members were able to identify unhealthy traits of the relationship. Although they were informed of what it entailed, in one of the main discussions surrounding support for survivors many of them mentioned how they would not approach their parents due to cultural reasons, or approach their teachers and police because of the lack of trust. Apart from Childline they were not aware of where to seek support.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, the desk-based and field-based research has revealed that in all partner countries, gender-based violence is a phenomenon which occurs often amongst children’s and teenagers’

¹⁹ ChildLine, UK based children protection organisations. Available at: <https://www.childline.org.uk/about/about-childline/>

everyday relationships. Specifically, high numbers of GBV amongst children and teenagers are recorded in all partner countries and it has been observed that GBV affects disproportionately girls or adolescents coming from ethnic/religious minorities or young people who have sexual orientations that are not aligned with the patriarchal norms. Based on each national context's economic, political, legislative, and social reality, the extent of GBV among children and teenagers differs.

Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania record amongst the lowest performances in gender equality between the project's partner countries. Significant gaps were noted in existing literature regarding the phenomenon of GBV amongst children and teenagers (with special focus on GBV which occurs within the school environment) at a national level. In those contexts, further research on the prevalence of GBV, the attitudes of minors towards different forms of GBV, the environments in which GBV occurs and the impact it has on their wellbeing is under-studied, therefore creating a knowledge gap on the wider cultural and social processes that underpin experiences of exploitation of violence. In those countries, there is also a legislative gap and lack of progress in incorporating GBV into school policies and initiatives and creating legislation or national policy which would be specifically focused on the issue of GBV amongst children and teenagers. Nonetheless, it is important to note that significant steps are taking place from both a governmental and civil society level. The latter particularly has an important role to play in raising awareness on the matter through various initiatives.

Although Italy shares many similarities with the rest of the partners in terms of gender equality; civil society has begun to deal with the school-related gender-based violence since 2015 with the "Good School" reform. Still, in terms of research, dating violence amongst children and teenagers remains poorly addressed, studied, and treated by laws, policies and practices. On the contrary, despite the existing challenges on GBV, UK has recorded the higher in number actions and policies on the issue at stake on a governmental and civil society level, although this does not mean that gaps do not exist or that the numbers of GBV cases amongst children and teenagers are not worrying. UK records better legislation and policies on school-related gender-based violence on a governmental level and also initiates more actions to tackle GBV which occurs towards boys, a dimension often less addressed in other partner countries. Nonetheless, all stressed the importance of encouraging cooperation between institutions working on GBV issues and educational institutions to ensure early prevention of GBV in schools and teen relationships and strengthen the support services already existing in schools.

One common theme which emerged from the desk-based research was that gender-based violence is encouraged through patriarchal norms and narratives which fuel gender stereotypes and violence. The findings have shown that the phenomenon of dating violence is present among young people, especially at school with girls often being the victims in all partner countries. In particular it emerges that:

- A large number of children and adolescents have already experienced discrimination, limitations, physical, online or sexual violence because of their gender, even before the age of 18. The most frequent cases are those of emotional and psychological abuse, which mainly affect women and the LGBTQI + community.
- These episodes are always connected to the permanence of gender roles and stereotypes. More generally, it appears that gender stereotypes are still deeply rooted in all partner countries and have various effects on young people's perceptions, relationships and wellbeing.
- Young people are able to define and recognize gender-based violence because they are often exposed to it directly or indirectly or through their perception of society, but they claim not to be sufficiently informed on the phenomenon and trained on how to react or report it, especially within their school environment and by their teachers.

Hence, from the real-life scenarios collected, the need to focus on gender within the school environments is evident from the participants' responses. The attention should simultaneously be on understanding the gaps of our educational systems and on establishing an evidence-based and multidisciplinary approach, which focuses on young people and involves all stakeholders (family, school, institutions) in preventing gender-based violence. There is a clear need to introduce changes in the educational approach of the schools and entrust it with new methodologies; including civic and citizenship education, respect for diversity, and gender/sex education in a more widespread and systematic way; using experiential learning and non-formal education methods within the school curricula and lessons. The focus should be on gender-based violence amongst children and teenagers and how prevalent this is within their relationships with a particular focus on dating violence which occurs from a young age.

Generally, more discussions and emphasis should be given to other forms of gender-based violence that young people often experience (online, sexual, emotional, psychological) – except domestic violence which is often the focus of governments – and start discussing gender-based violence in regards to how it is experienced differently by both girls and boys. Moreover, the need to ensure the active participation of girls and boys into the discussion for the creation of youth-led initiatives which will be addressed to young people's needs and realities; and the promotion of awareness actions aimed at students, teachers and parents coupled with the requirement to train teachers and educators has been stressed by all partners involved. Finally, these findings suggest that to prevent this phenomenon in all partner countries, the school community along with parents and relevant institutions should work collaboratively to challenge the perceptions of all actors involved with children and children themselves by promoting healthy relationships. It is important to understand that gender stereotypes and violence are being formed in an early stage in children's lives under the status of male-dominated/female-dominated objective conditions-structures which shape their attitudes, understandings, and relationships.

In conclusion, more similarities than differences have been stressed from each partner's findings. This emphasises the current and common needs that many European societies are facing in regard to gender stereotypes, gender equality and gender-based violence. Those common gaps and needs highlighted from the consortium's findings stress the importance of



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policy making and collaborative action on a governmental and civil society level in all partner countries and also at the EU.

Children First Policy Recommendations

- 1 **Awareness raising** on the prevalence of gender-based violence through an intersectional lens which takes into consideration the cultural, social, economic and all aspects of gender-based violence in order to shed a light on the phenomenon of such violence and act on preventing it.
- 2 **Inclusion of sex education, gender equality and human rights education** in national programmes, school curriculums and textbooks in all levels (primary, secondary and tertiary education).
- 3 **Promotion of curricular and extracurricular activities** that will involve both children/teenagers and parents to eliminate gender stereotypes and gender-based violence and promote gender equality through experiential learning and non-formal education methods.
- 4 **Training of teachers and educators** and support them in developing/offering educational tools, training materials, and cultivating holistic curriculums that represent the diversity of classroom and education of GBV to equip them with skills so as to identify the forms of GBV and its consequences to young people's wellbeing.
- 5 **Enhance national and European research** on gender-based violence among children and teenagers.
- 6 **Encourage cooperation** between NGOs working on GBV issues and educational institutions to ensure early prevention of GBV in schools and teen relationships.
- 7 **Draft and implement a national legislative plan** against violence against children and adolescents, establishing concrete measures to prevent SRGBV.
- 8 **Youth-focused policies and programmes** at each national setting with the aim of increasing initiatives related to the prevention and education of GBV within the school environment.
- 9 **Development of sound cooperation mechanisms between parents-students-local community** for the provision of support for victims of GBV (students, parents and staff working in schools).
- 10 **To ensure the active participation of girls and boys** in devising strategies for the prevention of GBV in order to let them deal with a phenomenon that affects them directly and could compromise their development.

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