



CIDREE Report: Expert Meeting on Bullying

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CIDREE

Report on the CIDREE Expert Meeting on Bullying: Monitoring and Prevention

August 2024, Aarau, Switzerland

1) Introduction

The CIDREE (Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe) expert meeting was held in Aarau, Switzerland, on August 21-22, 2024, organized by the Swiss Coordination Centre for Research in Education (SKBF). The goal of this expert meeting was to bring together international experts to exchange knowledge and experiences related to the systematic monitoring of bullying in schools. The experts from Kosovo, Luxembourg, Norway, Serbia, Slovenia, and Sweden from the participating CIDREE institutions shared their approaches to bullying monitoring and prevention in their educational systems.

2) Objective of the Meeting

The primary objective of this meeting was to facilitate the sharing of insights regarding the monitoring of bullying and prevention strategies across different educational systems. The lack of comprehensive data in some countries, including Switzerland, necessitated this meeting to evaluate current monitoring methods, explore data from other nations, and discuss the potential linkage between monitoring systems and bullying prevention programs.

The key goals were:

- To exchange experiences on monitoring bullying through various types of surveys.
- To examine the connection between monitoring data and prevention strategies.
- To gain insight into national policies and strategies.
- To discuss challenges and opportunities for improving the systematic tracking of bullying incidents in schools.

3) Introduction to the SKBF and the Situation in Switzerland

The SKBF is a joint institution of the federal government and the 26 cantonal ministers of education. Its mission involves documenting research findings from both Swiss and international studies that are relevant to the Swiss education system. The SKBF provides comprehensive information on ongoing educational research projects in Switzerland and facilitates coordination between research, administration, and policy. Additionally, it promotes national and international collaboration in the field of education. The SKBF also conducts analyses of current research on key educational issues, contributing to evidence-based decision-making. The SKBF produce and publish every four years the national Swiss Education Report with the newest research and statistics regarding the Swiss education system and the common educational goals of the federal government and the cantonal ministers of education.

The motivation for organizing this meeting stems from the challenges Switzerland faces in monitoring and preventing bullying. Currently, there is no comprehensive national data collection on bullying, nor a consistent strategy to systematically monitor incidents across different age groups and regions. One primary source of data comes from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which included items on bullying in its 2015, 2018, and 2022 surveys. However, these surveys only cover 15-year-olds, offering a limited view and excluding key information on the behavior of bullies. Some local surveys are conducted by cities and cantons, but these vary in scope and consistency, making it difficult to compare data across regions or to form a comprehensive national picture.

The JAMES study, which looks at media use among 12-to-19-year-olds, also provides insights into cyberbullying. In 2020, about a quarter of young people reported being attacked online, and one-sixth encountered offensive content. However, this study focuses primarily on media use and does not fully address other forms of bullying.

The PISA data from 2015, 2018, and 2022 reveal variations in the number of students who report being bullied, with a particularly high increase in 2018 that remains unexplained. Despite these challenges, the 2022 results showed clear patterns: boys report more physical bullying, while girls experience more socio-emotional bullying. Native Swiss students and lower academic achievers are more likely to report being bullied. Additionally, students from the French-speaking region report more socio-emotional bullying compared to their German-speaking counterparts. However, these surveys face limitations, particularly with non-response rates. It is unclear whether non-respondents were unaffected by bullying or avoided the topic due to personal experiences, making it hard to gauge the true prevalence. Non-respondents tend to be boys, students from German- and Italian-speaking regions, and those with lower academic achievement. Factors such as immigrant background and parental education do not seem to influence whether students respond to these items.

Switzerland also lacks a coordinated national strategy to prevent bullying. While various cantonal and local initiatives exist, these efforts are fragmented and lack coordination. It is currently unclear whether these initiatives are effective or whether they are reaching the areas where they are most needed.

4) National approaches to monitoring bullying and the prevention strategies

Experts from Kosovo, Luxembourg, Norway, Serbia, Slovenia, and Sweden presented their national approaches to monitoring and preventing bullying in schools and provided an overview of the current state. Each presentation followed a standardized template (see Appendix), which outlined key aspects such as data collection methods, responsible authorities, and the frequency of surveys. The template also guided discussions on the linkage between monitoring systems and prevention strategies, highlighting the challenges and opportunities each country faces in addressing bullying in schools.

Kosovo

In Kosovo, the education system addresses bullying through a comprehensive legal framework supported by the Constitution of Kosovo and the Law on Child Protection. Several administrative

instructions guide schools in establishing teams to prevent and respond to bullying incidents. Despite these regulations, there is no regular annual survey focused solely on bullying in Kosovo.

Monitoring of bullying is primarily carried out through the Educational Management Information System (EMIS), which collects data from schools at three levels: school, municipal, and national. Schools are required to report data twice a year through EMIS, with the class teacher responsible for collecting and submitting the information. EMIS also includes a confidential reporting option, allowing students, teachers, and parents to submit concerns anonymously. The Protocol for the Prevention and Referral of Violence in Pre-University Education outlines clear procedures for identifying, reporting, and managing cases of bullying. Schools are required to establish prevention teams that coordinate responses to incidents, ensuring that cases are properly documented and referred to relevant authorities, including health centers, social services, and police, if necessary.

Kosovo's prevention strategies are implemented at the school level, with Teams for Prevention and Response Against Abandonment and Non-Enrollment (TPRAAN) playing a crucial role. Additionally, Kosovo has introduced guidelines for teachers and staff on how to identify and respond to different levels of violence, categorized by intensity—from verbal and psychological abuse to physical violence. The government has also launched campaigns and educational initiatives to raise awareness about the risks of bullying and to promote safer school environments.

Luxembourg

In Luxembourg, bullying monitoring is partly conducted through the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Survey, which is carried out every four years. This survey, involving students aged 11 to 18, provides national-level data on bullying and cyberbullying. According to the 2022 HBSC report, approximately 7% of students were victims of bullying, while 13% experienced cyberbullying. However, outside of the HBSC, Luxembourg lacks comprehensive data on bullying, making this survey the primary source of national insights.

The Centre psycho-social et d'accompagnement scolaires (CePAS), a key institution under the Ministry of Education plays an important role in promoting student well-being and reducing bullying through non-violent communication. CePAS is currently implementing the GEPS digital system, which allows schools to track and manage cases of bullying and other student issues in real time. The system, initially launched as a pilot in a few schools, will eventually be used across all secondary schools. GEPS is not specifically a bullying survey, but it enables the tracking of incidents through case management, providing valuable data for prevention efforts.

Prevention strategies in Luxembourg involve a coordinated approach at both national and school levels. CePAS leads the national anti-bullying plan in secondary schools, while the SePAS (School Counseling Services) and SSE (Social Pedagogic Services) work directly with students to resolve bullying cases. These services focus on building non-violent communication skills and promoting mental health. While the national anti-bullying plan offers a framework for action, schools retain the responsibility for implementing specific preventive measures and ensuring a safe environment for students.

Norway

Norway monitors bullying primarily through the *Student Survey*, which is conducted twice each year. The autumn edition is mandatory for schools and engages around 450,000 students, while the spring edition is voluntary and involves approximately 15,000 students. Participation is required for students in grade 7 and 10, and in the first year of upper secondary, while other grades participate voluntarily. The survey, which includes questions about both physical and cyberbullying, aims to provide a clear picture of students' experiences with bullying by peers and adults.

In 2023, approximately 77% of students from 5th grade to the last year of upper secondary school took part, offering valuable insights into bullying trends across age groups. The survey data indicates that bullying incidents decrease as students move through the education system, though cyberbullying remains a significant concern. Over the last seven years, there has been a noticeable increase in the share of students experiencing bullying, particularly since 2021. This rise is especially significant among 7th-grade students. The reasons for this are complex. Further analysis is needed to better understand this trend.

In 2017, a new chapter was added to the Education Act designed to promote both students' learning and well-being, along with a more structured system for quality development in schools. Although the implementation of a new school environment survey is still under discussion, the new law sets clear expectations for schools to strengthen their preventive efforts and to act swiftly and effectively in individual cases. The Act introduces twofold requirements: First, schools must ensure the right to a safe and positive environment for all students. This includes zero tolerance and prevention. Second, there are obligations related to handling individual cases, providing a detailed guideline for how schools should act if they suspect or become aware of a student that does not have safe and positive school environment. The County Governor plays a critical role as an enforcer of this chapter of the Education Act. If the County Governor finds that a school has failed to implement necessary measures, they have the authority to order the municipality or county municipality to rectify the situation.

Norway's prevention efforts are supported by various initiatives, including online resources and digital learning packages. Programs like the Learning Environment Project and the Grant Scheme for local competence development provide schools with the tools and funding necessary for anti-bullying initiatives.

Serbia

Serbia has taken significant steps to address bullying and violence in schools through its national platform, "I Protect You", which integrates data collection and prevention efforts. This platform gathers information on school violence from educational institutions, health centers, social services, and the police, creating a comprehensive overview of bullying incidents nationwide. All schools are required to enter data into a centralized system, ensuring that cases are tracked and monitored effectively at both local and national levels. The platform has reported over 3,000 cases of violence, with nearly 20% related to digital violence and the majority involving physical or psychological bullying. The legal framework supporting these efforts includes several protocols designed to protect children from abuse and neglect, such as the General Protocol for the Protection of Children and the Special Protocol for Educational Institutions. These protocols ensure that schools have clear guidelines on how to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying incidents.

Monitoring in Serbia is carried out at several different levels including the state (via the "I Protect You" platform), the local level (involving health centers, social services, and the police), and the school level (with schools contributing data to a unified national database and receiving support from school teams). However, a significant challenge remains in ensuring the effective exchange and coordination of information between these levels.

In addition to participating in international studies like PISA and TIMSS, Serbia conducts national research to assess the prevalence and dynamics of school violence and bullying. Recent research shows that peer violence is the most common safety risk among young people aged 15-30, with 23% reporting frequent peer violence. Despite this, 87% of respondents stated they feel mostly or completely safe in Serbia. Additionally, a 2023 report found that nearly every fourth student has experienced violence at school, while 10% admitted to being violent towards their peers.

Prevention strategies in Serbia focus on both school and national levels. Schools have designated teams responsible for protecting students from discrimination, violence, and abuse. These teams work closely with external authorities when necessary. Serbia also implements educational campaigns and online training programs for students, parents, and school staff to raise awareness about bullying and how to handle it effectively. The "School without Violence" program and peer prevention is a successful example.

Slovenia

In Slovenia, there is currently no systematic, national-level monitoring of bullying. Instead, data on bullying is gathered primarily through international studies such as PIRLS, TIMSS, PISA, and ICCS, which offer limited insights into bullying trends among certain age groups. A meta-analysis conducted in 2019 on research related to bullying in Slovenia found that around 33% of children and adolescents had experienced peer violence, with 9% reporting repeated incidents. Despite this data, Slovenia lacks a comprehensive, longitudinal study specifically focused on bullying, which has made it difficult to form a complete picture of the issue across the country.

The prevention strategy in Slovenia operates at both the school and national levels. At the school level the efforts are led by school counseling services, which play a central role in promoting the well-being and safety of students. Schools are also encouraged to adopt preventive programs, often in partnership with non-governmental organizations. At the national level, the Ministry of Education has introduced several initiatives, including the prevention of direct and current violence, continuous professional development for educators, and curriculum renewal. Cross-sector cooperation is also key, along with initiatives such as cyberbullying campaigns and efforts to increase the number of school counselors.

Regarding prevention, recent research conducted in Slovenia highlights several protective factors against bullying, including a strong sense of belonging to school, teacher support, and home resources for learning. Students who report feeling supported by their teachers and peers are less likely to experience bullying. However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring that all schools implement effective prevention strategies. Ongoing research aims to develop a more systematic approach to addressing bullying in Slovenian schools.

Sweden

Sweden monitors bullying through a combination of national surveys, most notably the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study and *Skolenkäten* (the *School Survey*), both of which provide essential data on student well-being and bullying. The HBSC survey, conducted every four years, collects data from 11-, 13-, and 15-year-olds, focusing on their experiences with bullying, including cyberbullying. Meanwhile, the *School Survey*, managed by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, is conducted annually in half of the country's schools. It covers key areas such as safety, students' feelings of inclusion, and overall school climate. The survey, which involves students in grades 4 and 9 and year 2 of upper secondary school, as well as teachers and other school professionals, providing nationally comparable data across all participating schools. In addition to these surveys, the *Attitudes towards School Survey*, conducted regularly since the 1990s. This survey targets students and teachers in compulsory school grades 4 through 9 and upper secondary school, offering insights into well-being, stress, and bullying.

Swedish schools are legally required to ensure a safe environment, with schools conducting annual evaluations of student well-being and establishing action plans to address bullying and other forms of abusive behavior. Each school must develop a plan against discrimination and bullying, which includes promoting positive relationships and responding to reported incidents.

There is a market for prevention programs in Sweden, that schools are free to engage in their work however these are not operated by Swedish authorities. Rather than recommending certain preventing programs, the National Agency for Education emphasizes the importance of working from a whole-school approach, through systematic work, in order to provide a safe school environment.

Overall, Sweden's combination of national monitoring, legal obligations, and flexible prevention programs fosters a comprehensive approach.

Comparative Overview

	International Survey	National Survey	Case Documentation
Kosovo	PISA		EMIS case data at school, municipal, and national levels
Luxembourg	HBSC PISA		GEPS system records interventions in schools, currently being piloted for national implementation.
Norway	PIRLS PISA TIMSS	Student Survey twice every year; mandatory for grades 7, 10, and year 1 of upper secondary; voluntary from grade 5	Schools document bullying cases, overseen by the County Governor; cases reported via national platforms.
Serbia	HBSC PISA TIMSS		I Protect You platform allows reporting and tracks bullying cases across schools.
Slovenia	ICCS PIRLS PISA TIMSS		
Sweden	HBSC PIRLS PISA TIMSS	Skolenkäten annually grades 5, 8, year 2 upper secondary; Attitudes towards School survey compulsory education grades 4– 9 and upper secondary	Schools must document bullying cases and report them to the Swedish Schools Inspectorate.
Switzerland	HBSC PISA		

HBSC (Health Behavior in School-aged Children Study): 11 to 15 years old, every 4 years

ICCS (International Civic and Citizenship Education Study): grade 8

PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study): grade 4, every 5 years

PISA (Program for International Student Assessment): 15-year-olds, every 3 years

TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study): grade 4 and 8, every 4 years

5) Challenges and Development

Monitoring and prevention of bullying face several significant challenges across the participating CIDREE member institutions, alongside notable gaps in data collection and opportunities for further development. This section highlights key challenges faced by educational systems, identifies existing gaps in the current monitoring frameworks, and explores potential areas for future development.

Challenges

- Survey fatigue: Particularly in countries with frequent surveys
- Non-response: Either due to fear of retaliation or discomfort with the subject matter.
- Monitoring younger students: Most data collection efforts focus on secondary school students, leaving a significant gap in understanding bullying among younger students.
- Cyberbullying: Monitoring and addressing cyberbullying remain a challenge
- Integration of data: While large amounts of data are collected, they are often not integrated into a comprehensive national overview, making it difficult to form an accurate picture of the bullying landscape.
- Privacy requirements: Stricter privacy regulations have affected the scope and design of student surveys
- Update of survey content: content of existing student surveys often needs updating to reflect the evolving nature of bullying
- Zero-tolerance policies within the context of socio-emotional development: Developing a school culture that promotes socio-emotional growth while maintaining a clear, firm stance against bullying

Gaps

- Lack of data for younger students
- Limited data on minorities and marginalized groups
- Lack of data for higher education and vocational education
- Disconnect between national data and school improvement: Schools often struggle to use national-level data to improve their own bullying prevention efforts, as the results may not be sufficiently localized or actionable.

Development Potential

- Data-driven prevention: Using existing data more effectively to identify the root causes of bullying could lead to more targeted and effective prevention strategies.
- Student participation: Encouraging students to take an active role in monitoring and prevention initiatives, through involvement in survey design or school-based prevention efforts
- National plans for prevention: Establishing comprehensive national plans that link data collection with actionable prevention strategies

6) Conclusion

The CIDREE Expert Meeting on Bullying Monitoring and Prevention brought together a diverse range of experiences and strategies from the different CIDREE member institutions, highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses in current approaches to bullying prevention. While countries like Norway and Sweden have developed well-established systems for monitoring and addressing bullying, others have comprehensive case documentation platforms but lack a systematic national approach.

One of the key takeaways from the meeting was that systematic data collection is essential. It became clear that time-series data are crucial for tracking trends, understanding long-term developments in bullying and for refining prevention strategies. Key insights included the need to monitor not only those being bullied but also the bullies themselves, as this is critical for identifying patterns, risk profiles, and high-risk schools. Such data can help allocate resources more effectively and guide targeted interventions that address the root causes of bullying. Moreover, the dynamics within classrooms, such as class composition and peer interactions, were recognized as important factors that influence bullying behavior. Understanding these dynamics can provide educators with important information.

Despite progress, significant challenges remain. Issues such as non-response and survey fatigue continue to impact the accuracy and representativeness of data. Additionally, gaps persist in monitoring younger students, minority groups, and higher education institutions. Integrating the large amounts of data that are collected into a coherent and comprehensive national overview remains another challenge, as it is essential for forming an accurate picture of the bullying landscape and informing effective prevention strategies. There was also a discussion about the zero-tolerance policies, particularly in the context of students' socio-emotional development. Bullying, particularly in its more subtle socio-emotional forms, often overlaps with issues of emotional regulation and peer interaction, which can make it difficult to distinguish between harmful bullying behaviors and normal peer dynamics under a strict zero-tolerance framework. To address this, a context-sensitive school culture is needed—ones that account for students' developmental stages while maintaining a firm stance against bullying. Additionally, clearer and more comprehensive definitions of bullying are necessary, ones that cover the full spectrum of behaviors while allowing for nuanced interventions.

However, there is considerable potential for further development. Strengthening collaboration between different stakeholders, schools and students could be a way forward, particularly to ensure that data-driven prevention strategies are implemented effectively. Encouraging student participation in both monitoring and preventing bullying, and allowing students to see how survey results lead to change, could increase engagement and improve outcomes.