



Strasbourg/Oslo, June 2011

**High-Level Expert Meeting
"Tackling violence in schools"
Oslo, 27-28 June 2011
CONCEPT PAPER**

Background

Intimidation, bullying, cyber-bullying, repression, threats, discrimination, homophobia and all forms of violence, including corporal punishment and sexual violence, reflect the downsides to life in contemporary society. Manifestations of these phenomena can therefore also be found in schools and learning institutions. Every child nevertheless has a right to be protected from all forms of violence and to develop and realise his/her full potential in a safe learning environment.

The 2006 **UN Study on Violence against Children** represents the most comprehensive assessment of the diverse forms of violence against children. The Study examines various settings where violence against children arises and proposes recommendations for individual countries, regions and the global community. The UN Study calls on states, to encourage schools to adopt and implement codes of conduct applicable to all staff and students, apply classroom management and disciplinary measures respectful of the rights of the child, and develop specific programmes to tackle violence in the whole school environment.

The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children emphasised in her report to the **Human Rights Council** that initiatives are increasing and momentum is growing in many countries to prevent and address violence against children in schools. Campaigns on learning without fear, addressing specific forms of violence, including gender violence. There are school audits and debates to inform; the development of ethical standards and encourage child sensitive counselling, reporting, mediation and victim assistance. Data collecting and research are being carried out to discover root causes of violence and support children at risk, and law reform underway to prohibit all forms of violence in education. Some key components of this significant process of change include developing.

In this respect, **the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** provide a global normative framework for the reduction of all forms of violence against children, encompassing the types of violence children might encounter in the school environment. For ensuring effective implementation of this global framework, the jurisprudence of the Committee on the Rights of the Child will provide further protection for children against violence, in particular in General Comments 1 and 13 on the aims of education and on the child's

right to protection from all forms of violence respectively. In addition, the Special Rapporteur on the right to education whose mandate was established in 1998 takes an active role in violence prevention and in protecting children from violence in the education system. More information on the mandate can be found at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/education/rapporteur/index.htm>

Since its inception, the Council of Europe has been at the forefront in Europe of combating violence against children, including violence in the school and other educational settings. Its key legal instruments, the **European Convention on Human Rights** and the **European Social Charter**, prohibit in absolute terms violent, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment of children at all times and in all settings. From this perspective, the Council of Europe legal standards are fully concurrent with the relevant provisions of the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

The protection of children from all forms of violence became a strategic priority for the Council of Europe in 2006 with the launching of a **transversal programme "Building a Europe for and with children"**. For the 2009-2011 Strategy on the Rights of the Child it was decided that the Council of Europe should take on the role of regional initiator and coordinator of national and regional initiatives to combat violence against children and to act as the European forum for following-up the recommendations proposed in the 2006 UN Study on violence against children.

In the last few years, the Council of Europe has developed an important set of **legal and policy standards** with a dual goal: to promote a holistic approach to eradicating violence against children and to tackle specific types of violence or settings where violence against children takes place. The following Council of Europe standards are relevant to the protection of children from violence in the educational setting:

- the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS. 201);
- the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers CM/Rec(2009)10 **on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence** which promotes the development and implementation of a holistic national framework for safeguarding the rights of the child and protecting children from all forms of violence;
- the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers CM/Rec(2010)7 **on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education**, which promotes a culture of democracy and human rights through education, thereby contributing to the prevention of violence.

A full set of Committee of Ministers, Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Regional and Local Authorities recommendations and opinions related to violence in schools can be found at:

http://www.coe.int/t/transversalprojects/children/violence/ViolenceSchool_en.asp.

The Council of Europe has furthermore developed a number of educational tools aimed at assist the professionals and children in building a safe learning environment:

- The **Violence Reduction in Schools Training Pack** was published in 2009 to support existing violence prevention schemes in member states and it offers a whole school approach to violence reduction and prevention. The training pack builds on the previous Council of Europe analyses and data in existing publications and reports, such as *Violence in schools, a challenge for the local community* (2004), and *Bullying schools* (1999);
- **Compass, a manual on human rights education** has been developed by a multi-disciplinary and intercultural team of writers and educators providing youth leaders, teachers and other educators, whether professionals or volunteers, with concrete ideas and practical activities to engage, involve and motivate young people to form a positive awareness of human rights in their own way and in their own communities;
- A set of guidelines on various aspects of citizenship and human rights education has been developed as part of the Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education project, based on examples of good practice in the member states and is now known as the **“EDC/HRE Pack”**. It addresses topics from teacher training and democratic governance of schools to quality assurance and policy development and implementation. A series of manuals: *“Living democracy”*, has been developed for work in classrooms. All these materials contribute to the prevention of and protection from violence through the promotion of a culture of human rights and democracy at school. This includes mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution, participatory decision-making that promotes mutual respect and dialogue, and interactive teaching methodologies, which encourage critical thinking and co-operation.

To promote its standards and tools amongst member states’ education professionals, the Council of Europe has set up the **Pestalozzi Programme** and is maintaining a network of education professionals who act as multipliers at national level. In 2011-2012, the programme will offer a trainer training course on **“Education for the prevention of violence in schools”**.

The Norwegian policy to eradicate violence in schools

Norway emphasises developing a school system which provides all pupils and students with a safe and inclusive school and learning environment. The Norwegian school system is based on pupils’ involvement and participation in conflict mediation, anti-bullying efforts, teacher training modules, and it works in cooperation with parents and the community outside school

Read more at: <http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/kd.html?id=586>

Meeting objectives

The High-Level Expert Meeting is jointly organised by the Norwegian Royal Ministry of Education and Research, The Norwegian Royal Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, the Norwegian Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Council of Europe and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. The European Wergeland Centre is a co-partner. The meeting will pursue the following objectives:

- to share recent global and European data and research in combating violence against children in schools;
- to consolidate the various national and international methodologies, strategies, initiatives and good practices, including human rights and democratic citizenship education, to make schools free from violence;
- to identify instruments, methods and recommendations for the follow-up work of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, to prevent and address violence against children in schools, and
- to define the role that the Council of Europe could further play in addressing violence in schools via its future Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2012-2015).

The conclusions and recommendations from the High-Level Expert Meeting will inform the follow-up process to the UN Study on Violence against Children promoted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, and feed into the Council of Europe Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2012-2015) to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers in early 2012.

Participants

The High-Level Expert Meeting will bring together around 40 to 50 participants including representatives from regional organisations, international experts, individual countries as well as children and youth with experience in or commitment to the development of integrated national strategies, policies and programmes to combat violence against children in schools.

Working methods:

The High-Level Expert Meeting will take place over two days. After an official opening there will be expert presentations and discussions in four sessions as well as in two working groups (to reflect session II). The meeting will end with a short concluding session. The working languages of the conference will be English and French.

Thematic approach:

The overarching agenda of the high-level expert meeting will cover the following themes:

Session I: Violence in schools –setting the scene. Experts will aim to set out an overview of the concept of violence in schools, including e.g. dimensions of gender, age, ethnicity, race and disability.

Session II: Violence reduction in schools: approaches, methodologies and good practices. Experts will present good practices to prevent all forms of violence in schools such as bullying prevention programs, mediation, conflict resolution, democratic governance, the learning environment, teaching and learning tools, the involvement of children and young people and parents in schools, involvement of different bodies within the school system, professional development for educators and indicators for evaluation.

Session III: Violence in schools: building partnerships with parents, children and the local community. Experts will analyse the impact that violence within the family and within the community has on the school setting. Different patterns of collaborative approaches between the schools and parents and representatives of local communities, including local authorities will be analysed.

Session IV: Taking the next steps – recommendations for further actions. Experts from international organisations will propose recommendations for future actions. To address and prevent violence against children in schools the experts will draw on their experiences and good examples to recommend further actions to be taken at global, regional and national level. Reference will also be made to examples of good practice in some 30 European states which have implemented violence prevention programmes in schools.

Preliminary programme (see separate programme)