



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Co-funded by the
Rights, Equality &
Citizenship Programme
of the European Union

*CONVEY – Counteracting sexual violence and harassment: Engaging Youth in schools
in digital education on gender stereotyping”*

Ref. *JUST/2015/RDAP/AG/SEXV/8572*

This document has been produced with the financial support of the Rights, Equality & Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the CONVEY project partners and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

INTRODUCTION

The following paper presents policy recommendations for educational and policy stakeholders on increasing the quality of the initiatives in preventing and combating sexual violence and harassment in the framework of the *CONVEY – Counteracting sexual violence and harassment: Engaging Youth in schools in digital education on gender stereotyping*.

The aim of the CONVEY Project is to counteract sexual violence and harassment using online creative and interactive educational tools targeting young people aged 14-18 about gender stereotyping and the sexualization of women in media. The focus of this education is to show how gender inequality ultimately leads to gender-based violence. The CONVEY project has the following objectives:

- To develop peer-to-peer approaches to education and awareness-raising on sexual violence and harassment against women by training young people on the effects of gender stereotyping and sexualization in digital media.
- To educate and contribute to behavioural change of young people in the field of sexual violence, harassment and gender stereotyping by developing an educational simulation game and a pilot creative programme of gender equality and sexual education and critical digital media literacy.
- To foster the respect of women's rights and dignity in schools through a train-the-trainer programme for teachers on the prevention of gender stereotyping and sexualization in the digital society.

The 3-year project was developed with the contribution of 6 partners including Gender Alternatives Foundation (Bulgaria), "Hope For Children" CRC Policy Center (Cyprus), The Smile of the Child (Greece), Sexual Violence Centre Cork (Ireland), Westminster City Council (UK). The results include:

- The creation of an online simulation game (and linked training materials) as educational tool to awareness raising and prevention against sexual violence and harassment
- The involvement of 14-18-year-olds as peer consultants to provide inputs and feedback to the development of the CONVEY online simulation game.
- The establishment of an adult expert consulting group integrating professional external knowledge and experiences in the delivering of project's activities.
- The organization of workshops for teachers and educators by empowering with knowledge and tools to become trainers with innovative approaches on project's sensitive issues.
- The development a social media campaign against sexual violence & sexual harassment.

The online game and training programme were created in conjunction with feedback from young people and experts from each of the six EU countries.

This paper will be divided as follows. The first section will present the policy brief, including definitions of sexual violence and harassment; the relevance of counteracting sexual violence and harassment in young people; and per country policy recommendations. The latter will comprise encountered issues, authority to which the recommendation is addressed to, policy recommendations and the rationale behind them for partners from Ireland, Cyprus, Italy, Bulgaria, UK and Greece. A case of good practice will follow. The paper will end with a brief conclusion.

Definitions

What is sexual violence?

Sexual violence is any unwanted sexual act or activity. There are many different kinds of sexual violence, including but not restricted to: rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, rape within marriage / relationships, forced marriage, so-called honour-based violence, female genital mutilation, sex trafficking, sexual exploitation, and ritual abuse. (Rape Crisis England & Wales, 2017)

What is harassment?

Harassment is a form of gender-based violence encompassing acts of unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature, which have a purpose or effect of violating the victims dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. (Eige, Gender Equality Glossary and Thesaurus, 2018)

Relevance

Why is it important to counteract sexual violence and harassment in young people?

An EU-wide survey conducted in 2014 by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2014) found that in relation to sexual violence: 1 in 3 women had experienced some form of physical and/or sexual assault since the age of 15 (FRA, 2014, p. 9); 1 in 10 women had experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 15; 1 in 20 women had been raped since the age of 15; young women in particular were a cohort that was especially vulnerable to victimization; 1 in 4 women who had experienced a sexual assault did not contact the police or any other help organizations after the most serious incident of assault due to feelings of shame and/or embarrassment. (FRA, 2014, p. 9)

The scenario for sexual harassment is not very different. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (ibid) has found that between 74-75% of women in professional settings or top level management jobs have experienced sexual harassment within their lifetime; 1 in 4 had experienced sexual harassment while in the workplace in the last 12 months; 1 in 5 woman reported experiencing unwanted sexual advances in the form of touching, kissing or hugging since the age of 15; of the women who reported experiencing this type of sexual harassment, 32% cited a colleague, boss and/or customer were the main perpetrators; and 1 on 10 have experienced sexual harassment via online technologies such as sexually explicit emails, texts or unwanted sexual advances made through social media (ibid).

Widespread rape and harassment-related myths and lack of comprehensive sexuality education in schools cement the status-quo, despite clear political will at European and national levels. The consequences have long-term negative effects on the life of victims. Victims might experience shame, confusion, and guilt. A disturbing trend in many cases of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and rape against women is the tendency to blame the victim of the crime, rather than the perpetrator. About one in four victims of sexual assault (either by a partner or a non-partner) does not contact the police or any other organization after the most serious incident because of feelings of shame and embarrassment. This proliferates the belief that women are at fault when they are attacked, and leads to a lack of accountability for men. Within this culture of victim blaming, women are told to change their own behavior in order to avoid being assaulted or raped. They are told repeatedly to dress less provocatively, drink less alcohol, and not put themselves in risky situations. Victim-blaming attitudes marginalize the survivor and make it harder to come forward and report the abuse. Victims from sexual violence may also suffer from depression, PTSD, anxiety, self-harm and suicidal thoughts; it can impact their sexuality and relationship intimacy as well as have an impact on one's own identity, self-concept and motivation in daily life. (McGee, et al., 2002)

Young people are particularly vulnerable due to technological changes and the greater presence of media in their lives. Young people are one of the most at-risk groups and this includes the influence of these topics in their everyday lives. For instance, they are more vulnerable to suffering from online violence; and it is practically impossible to scroll through social media or watch the news without seeing some report of sexual assault, but the focus of these stories always seems to be on what we should be doing better to help victims in the aftermath of their suffering. But when the subject of prevention comes up, the emphasis is often placed on what girls should do to protect themselves. There is little mention of what should be done to encourage our boys from growing into men who have the awareness and knowledge to establish healthy relationships. Nor there is any attention put to the importance of consent in intimate relations. Unfortunately, there is a tangible lack of information and proper education that results in twisted power relationships disguised by silence, shame and fear; and an assignment of women as weak and emotion, unable to make decisions on their own, by popular culture.

These are the main reasons why there is an urgent need to counteract sexual violence and harassment in young people as one of the most vulnerable groups at risk.

Policy recommendations

How can policy makers counteract sexual violence and harassment in young people?

After almost 3 years of work, partners of the CONVEY project have identified some of the main issues and shortcomings affecting young people in relation to the topic of sexual violence and harassment. Thanks to the input of partners, a number of useful recommendations have been drawn. The following subsection

will present per country recommendation for educational and policy stakeholders on increasing the quality of the initiatives in preventing and combating sexual violence and harassment in young people aged 14-18.

➤ IRELAND

Ireland has encountered the problem that *young people do not get adequate information about a myriad of topics comprising gender, gender equality, gender-based violence and consent*. Addressing the **National Education Authority**, Sexual Violence Centre Cork suggests that:

- School curricula should incorporate education on these topics, both at second level and primary level. It should be taken into account that given the sensitivity of the topic, content should be adapted in an age-appropriate manner;
- Considering the lack of a systematic approach to the issue, teachers should receive training in order to adequately address it with students. Updates should be done regularly, therefore, teachers should receive training both in their initial studies and as in-service training.

The rationale behind it is that an increased awareness of gender, gender-based violence and consent would greatly assist young people in recognizing and identifying sexual violence. Education can encourage attitudinal shifts, in both students and teachers, and eventually impact culture in a transformative way.

➤ CYPRUS

In Cyprus, the following issues were identified, for which “Hope For Children” CRC Policy Center proposes the respective recommendations:

A consistent gender inequality in salary attribution as well as a series of difficulties in terms of work conditions different for women and men. Addressing the **National- Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance**, it is suggested that:

- A thorough investigation be initiated in order to shed light on the root causes of inequality between men and women;
- Programmes at national level be duly planned and enforced in order to change the legislation aiming at equal pay regardless of gender;
- Programmes at national level be promoted by the Ministry in order to promote work-family life balance;

- An adjustment in the political agenda be done in relation to the prioritization of the promotion of better conditions for women in the labour market.

Investigating on the causes of inequality will make easier to create programmes focused on gender equality in labour market and it will contribute women's condition at work as far as payments, social benefits, pensions, among others, is concerned. Moreover, programmes to promote work-family life balance will improve the role of women in the unbalanced sharing of responsibilities related to children care. For instance, leave entitlements after childbirth balanced between women and men will make easier for women returning to work.

Low representation of women in politics and in decision-making roles. Addressing the **National-Political Parties- Union of Municipalities**, it is recommended that:

- There should be an introduction or strengthening when needed, of gender quota system in political settings;
- There should be a better promotion of a parity system;
- There should be an update of policies and the legal framework in relation to the inclusion of gender equality principles.

This should be incorporated on the grounds that the inclusion of gender equality principles in all relevant policies and legal framework will concretely put the basis for democracy and social justice.

Violence against women (mainly domestic violence and trafficking in women). Speaking to the **National-Ministry of Justice- Social Welfare Services- Police- Ministry of Interior**, it is suggested that:

- Awareness raising campaigns should be initiated;
- Training for professionals in the justice system on gender equality should be provided;
- Researches and a systematic data collection on violence against women including domestic violence and woman trafficking should be conducted.

The present policy recommendations related to violence against women aim to prevent episodes of violence and protect women ensuring a national strategy to raise awareness and address the issue properly coordinating and cooperating with the various governmental services and implementing national and European laws.

Gender stereotypes and traditional attitudes in the whole of society. Calling the **National-Department of Education**, it is recommended that:

- Campaigns to promote gender equality at local, regional and national level be implemented to contrast gender stereotypes traditionally enclaved in society;

- An incorporation of activities on gender equality both based on formal and non-formal methods in the educational reform system is done.

Campaigns and activities in schools to address this issue will contribute to prevent and fight discrimination based on gender as well as violence providing a gender sensitive approach and a good quality education system. For instance, Cyprus is already currently involved in a similar initiative through the HOMBAT project. The project focuses on preventing and raising awareness on homophobic and transphobic bullying in school through the active cooperation and collaboration of teachers and school advisors

Lack of Prevention and Health Promotion in private schools. Addressing the **National- Ministry of Health – Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health**, it is suggested that:

- Policies and Action Plans about sexual education at school and sexual and reproductive health are implemented.

This is on the grounds that more space for treating sexual education in schools will increase children’s consciousness about the topic and all its relevant aspects and implications (contraception, abortion, sexual health).

➤ ITALY

Gender-based violence is a pervasive phenomenon all over Europe, Italy included. Figures for Italy evidence that 1/3 women have suffered some kind of gender-based violence. But, according to a national study carried out by the Italian institute for statistics (ISTAT, 2015), only 1/3 of the women who experienced violence consider it a crime. A significant percentage of perpetrators of violence against women are former partners or partners. Linking this with the data from the behaviour change study carried out within the framework of the project, we can see how students aged 14-18 in Italy (78 students involved in the workshops for young people on education for gender equality, digital media literacy and against gender stereotypes) who were surveyed before the start of the workshops were clearly split into two groups: one against and one in favour, when asked to state their view about the statement “*a woman cannot be raped by someone she is in a sexual relationship with*” (Behavioural Change Study 2019). Knowledge and awareness about what sexual violence (or violence in general) against women is still lacking. We have however showed, through our study and intervention in the framework of CONVEY project, that knowledge and awareness about sexual violence in the sample/group of students has greatly increased.

Education for gender equality is foreseen in the Italian education system, starting from pre-primary school (“*La Buona Scuola*”, Italian Law n. 107/2015). The specific sub-article in the law is specified through guidelines for the school professionals to be implemented when creating the content of the curriculum.

However, the guidelines remain an orientation for the curriculum developer, who has the discretion to decide how and to what extent to include curriculum content related to gender equality. This results in the lack of a common framework of learning that all students are exposed to, and more often than not into the absence of topics such as gender equality, gender stereotypes, gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive rights from the educational offer of the school system in Italy.

Therefore, even though the legislative and formal framework in Italy is up to date and potentially encompasses all actions needed *to support gender equality and to prevent and fight gender-based violence*, there is still *a lack of implementation of what remains at the level of laws and guidelines*. For this reason, CESIE addresses the **Ministry for Public Education** suggesting that:

- School curricula should include education on gender equality and for the prevention and contrast of gender stereotypes and gender-based violence at all levels.
- Mandatory professional development of teachers should be introduced around these topics in order to allow the implementation of activities and the tackling of content with which, thus far, teachers are not particularly at ease.
- Such curricular integrations and capacity building of teachers (and future teachers, i.e. university students) should be complemented with a comprehensive programme on sexual and reproductive rights and on sexual education, in order to fully support the establishment of healthy intimate relationships even within young couples, and to support the understanding and awareness of the concepts of respect of the other and of consent in sexual encounters.

The rationale behind the aforementioned recommendations is that young women are amongst the most vulnerable group to victimization (FRA, 2014), and this is especially so when considering the risks related to access and use of digital media that is not aware of and does not challenge the foundation of gender-based violence, as stated before.

Challenging stereotypes, supporting digital media literacy connected with critical thinking, and supporting the equality between women and men are actions at the basis of the prevention of gender-based violence. Tackling the issue with young people, from the earliest age possible, becomes essential in this effort.

Children aged 14-18 who have been involved in the activities of CONVEY project, from the co-development of the videogame “CONVEY Not A Game” to fight GBV and gender-stereotypes, to the workshops held in three different schools on the same topics, had in some cases never been exposed to these topics addressed in a coherent and structured manner through the CONVEY Pilot Programme.

The Educational Authority of Sicily (Italy) is putting efforts on the matter. It is now developing a more comprehensive programme to address gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence in schools. However, so far, and since the issuing of the Italian law explicitly calling for education on gender

equality, there is no mandatory programme that is implemented through regular curriculum in the schools of the Italian region of Sicily.

➤ BULGARIA

Mirroring the setbacks against human rights in Europe and globally, women's human rights in Bulgaria are at stake, with nationalistic and traditional political parties and organizations gaining power by means of instilling fear and disinformation among the general public. Long achieved human rights like access to abortion, promotion of minority rights, and protection against gender-based violence are being questioned, with the human rights movement being silenced and presented as "an enemy to the traditional family". In parallel, the Bulgarian institutions do not take adequate measures to calm down societal concerns on the "gender hysteria" and do not defend their own achievements in the field of gender equality, leaving civil society alone in the battle against populist rhetoric and hate speech.

Therefore, calling on the present governing parties, and the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and Ministry of Finance, among others to:

- Introduce and implement concrete and effective policies against homophobic, sexist and racist actions and speech coming through populist rhetoric or through stimulating fear from eradication of gender stereotypes;
- Introduce definition of "gender-based violence" in the Bulgarian legislation, recognizing the historical gender inequalities between women and men, and the systemic violence against women;
- Amend the Law on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men with the aim of defining a gender equality body to monitor the implementation of the law; draw a clear division of the responsibilities of state and municipal services and institutions, together with responsibility for their failure.
- Provide funding for NGOs to implement human rights trainings, with focus on prevention against gender-based violence and discrimination among young people in schools and work with vulnerable groups;
- Promote sustainable forms of State-civil cooperation in the promotion of human rights. For example, through state-funded programs for exchange of know-how, capacity-building, work with young people;
- Introduction of compulsory comprehensive sexual education in the Bulgarian schools that will promote sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- Adoption of the long-awaited Law on Volunteering and encouragement of citizens to participate in volunteering activities through tax relief and other benefits;

- Put the problems of ethnic women and girls with special focus on Roma in the political agenda;
- Encourage participation of women in decision-making and politics through introduction of quotas.

➤ UNITED KINGDOM

In the United Kingdom, the main issue that was encountered corresponded with *schools not allocating sufficient time on the curriculum to deliver preventative education*. Calling on the **National Department for Education**, Westminster City Council proposes:

- To make relationship and sexual education a statutory requirement.

The recommendation lies on the ground that statutory preventive education will create additional leverage to get schools on board with delivering programmes of this nature as part of the curriculum.

➤ GREECE

Greece found that even though the CONVEY Pilot Programme for students evidenced the great interest and motivation of the young people who participated in gaining knowledge about the topic, still, there is *little time in Greek schools to treat topics related to gender-stereotypes and violence*. Addressing the **Greek Ministry of Education, Science and Religion**, The Smile of the Child thus recommends that:

- There should be a designing and implementing a National Strategy against Sexual Abuse or Assault in terms of prevention in schools from kindergarten to secondary Education.
- Programs like Convey must be designed and implemented in all levels of the educational system according to the results from the CONVEY Behavioural Change analysis.

Such recommendations lie on the fact that there is a wealth of literature pertaining to the high percentages of incidents of sexual abuse that neither the victims never report nor the system can detect them. It is crucial for children to be informed and trained on this aspect and also to get prepared to protect themselves as so to decrease the sexual abuse incidents, and their results not only to the victims but also to the society.

Good practice

What good practice can be taken into consideration for counteracting sexual violence and harassment in young people? ...?

Between December 2018 and April 2019, the 'CONVEY Pilot Programme: Workshops for Young People' was delivered in high schools in the six partner countries of the project as part of the CONVEY project. A series of educational workshops were delivered for young people aged 14-18, and it aimed at:

- educating and familiarizing young people on the issues of sexual violence, harassment and gender stereotyping;
- teaching children and young people how to protect themselves;
- promoting behavioural change (away from the behavior that is tolerant to violence and gender stereotypical behaviour) by training young people about media influences, gender equality, healthy relationships, risky behaviour and attitudes related to media and sexuality.
- sharing an online simulation game by allowing young people to face sensitive topics in an attractive way for them as the target audience but also appropriate for their age and development.

The programme included educational activities using non-formal education as a method to trigger awareness and reflection, such as debates, campaign creation, role-play activities, non-verbal communication tasks, open discussions and analysis of written and audiovisual material, and art-based activities; and the situational stories of the project's interactive videogame: CONVEY Not a Game on violence, harassment and gender stereotyping issues. It also provided a training for teachers and educators who were trained by the CONVEY project partners which, in turn, became trainers for their own students.

The behavioural change study that was conducted during and after the piloting programme to evaluate the impact and the effectiveness of the Pilot Programme intervention, show promising results for the adoption of such a programme in the curriculum of high schools. It has shown that a short educational programme, supported by non-formal learning and the use of new technologies can support behavioural change in young people aged 14-18 when included as a more structured approach in the curriculum.

The application of an interact tool such CONVEY NOT A GAME for engagement of young people in countering hate speech, gender-based violence and equality are very useful for the achievement critical thinking, safety and awareness in the era of digital communication and technologies. Results also show evident attitude and behavioural change in topics such as gender stereotypes, sexualization of women, intimate relations, harassment, stalking, sexual violence and consent in young people with well-established ideas and myths on women's behavior. (Behavioural Change Study 2019)

The inclusion of modern educational tools that addresses present-day society's problems in an interactive way and that promotes action on the user for topics usually neglected, has proven successful also in engaging, motivating and triggering reflection and discussion in young people. It was also a unique opportunity for them to observe these situations from a different angle and help to develop their critical thinking.

CONCLUSIONS

The present paper has presented the policy recommendations proposed by the six partners countries of the CONVEY project in relation to the counteracting of sexual violence and harassment in young people aged 14-18. After three years of work, a series of issues have come up related to deficiencies in varied spheres of society, comprising the justice, economic, societal and political and educational systems.

At a justice level, violence against women, mainly domestic violence and trafficking in women is present. At an economic level, there is a marked gender inequality in salary attribution together with difficulties in terms of work conditions, translated into differences for women and men. At political level, there is low representation of women in politics and in decision-making roles. As far as society as a whole is concerned, there is a strong entrenchment of gender stereotypes and traditional attitudes in relation to women and men's roles. Last but not least, at the educational level, there is a lack of adequate information provision for young people in relation to gender issues, equality, violence and consent; a lack of prevention and health promotion in private schools and a deficit in the implementation of statutory programmes and guidelines in schools in support of gender equality and gender-based violence prevention at the level of laws and guidelines. Where these topics are treated, schools still do not allocate sufficient time on the curriculum to deliver preventative education.

Policy recommendations presented in the brief aim at giving more importance to research and data collection on matters of violence, together with an update of current legislations and the implementation of programmes of national reach that consider gender equality and gender-based violence prevention as a priority. The statutory incorporation of these topics on secondary and primary schools in an age-appropriate manner for students should be done but also for teachers considering the lack of a systematic approach to the issue. Such approach to these sensitive topics should be addressed in a comprehensive manner through formal and non-formal methods which include violence prevention, gender equality and action plans referring to sexual education and sexual and reproductive health.

This report has also presented a good practice that has already been implemented with positive results. The inclusion of a programme such as the CONVEY Pilot Programme for students, as a modern, technological and educational tool has proven successful in promoting action in the young people who participated in the project. It has helped to engage, motivate and trigger critical thinking and reflection in an interactive way.

All in all, the promotion and protection of equality between women and men and the contrast of gender-based violence in all its forms requires a change of mind-sets, solidarity and the political will to create institutional and legal frameworks that specifically address gender inequalities. Considering that young people are among the most vulnerable groups in society, it is imperative that we put all of our efforts to protect them at all levels.

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