



Human Rights and Democracy in Action

Pilot Projects on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education

Addressing Violence in Schools through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education

Conceptualisations of School Violence in Greece: focus group analysis

EvieZambeta, Nelly Askouni, Mary Leontsini,
YuliePapadakou, Nikos Psochios, Maria Chalari

**JOINT MA "EDUCATION & HUMAN RIGHTS"-NATIONAL & KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIONS**

ATHENS, FEBRUARY 2016

Funded
by the European Union
and the Council of Europe



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Implemented
by the Council of Europe

1. Introduction.....	3
2.1 Perceptions of violence at school	5
2.1.1 Defining violence.....	5
2.1.2 Bullying	8
2.1.3 Violence at school	11
2.1.3.1 Subjects and forms of violence.....	11
2.1.3.2 Settings / places/ occasions where violence takes place.....	14
2.1.3.3 Violence inherent to the education system.....	15
2.2 Major variables of school violence	22
2.2.1 Gender	22
2.2.2 National origin.....	24
2.2.3 Social class – social inequality	26
2.2.4 Disability.....	26
2.2.5 Main characteristics of perpetrators.....	27
2.2.6 Main characteristics of victims	29
2. 3. Means for combatting violence and recommendations	30

1. Introduction

Two focus group interviews have been conducted in Greece. The first focus group (FG1) was conducted at the premises of a primary school in central Athens and the second (FG2) at the premises of a primary school on an island of the Attica region.

The focus group informants represent different stakeholders in the school community: teachers, school principals, school counselors, parents and civil society groups active in the area of education. On the part of the civil society, the participants came from:

- a. *Generation 2.0* (Activist Group 1), a youth organization consisting of second generation immigrants, which claims the rights of youth with immigrant background.
- b. *Homophobia and Transphobia in Education* (Activist Group 2) an activist group consisting of school professionals (teachers, psychologists), who raise the issues of gender and sexuality in the educational framework.
- c. *KEPAD* (Human Rights Defense Centre) a NGO which conducts teacher training schemes on human rights (NGO).

Both discussions were video and sound recorded, with all the informants' consent.

FG1 took place at an inner-city school of Athens, on (20/1/2016). The school area is inhabited by lower middle and working class strata. Part of the working class population is of immigrant background. The focus group attended eleven informants, two moderators and two assistant researchers. The informants consisted of the regional school counselor, a school principal, three teachers, two parents (one of them was the parents' association representative), one member of *Generation 2.0*, one member of *Homophobia and Transphobia in Education* and two trainers of *KEPAD*. The three teachers and the school principal work in different schools of the area. The member of *Homophobia and Transphobia in Education* is also a teacher, in another region. The moderators were two of the main researchers of the project, specializing in Sociology of Education (educational policy, social inequalities). The assistant researchers remained silent throughout the discussion. The focus group lasted approximately 2.5 hours. While at times the discussion was particularly lively, the overall climate was positive. After the end of the focus group,

some participants expressed their gratification for their involvement and for the context and content of the discussion.

The second focus group (FG2) took place in a suburban area on (23/1/2016). The social composition of the region is middle class and rural population. While it was designed to be composed similarly to the first focus group, it was eventually not possible for all the civil society organizations to be represented. Therefore, the focus group attended nine informants, two moderators and one research assistant. The informants consisted of the regional school counselor, two school principals, one teacher, three parents (one of which was the parents' association representative) and two members of *Homophobia and Transphobia in Education*. *Homophobia and Transphobia in Education* members were a school psychologist and a music teacher in primary schools of other regions. The moderators were two of the main researchers of the project, specializing in Sociology of Education and Sociology of Gender and the Arts, respectively. This focus group lasted 1 hour and 45 minutes, the discussion was conducted in a pleasant atmosphere and the informants were firmly committed to the topic of the interview. At the end, everyone expressed their satisfaction for their participation and confirmed that the discussion was an inspiring experience.

2.1 Perceptions of violence at school

2.1.1 Defining violence

Some participants of the focus group interviews in their attempt to talk about violence at school tried to conceptualize and define violence. Reading their responses, it can be argued that there is not a general consensus on the definition of violence and the forms that it takes at schools, and that violence is very difficult to be defined because as a phenomenon it is socially constructed, very complex and highly ambivalent.

I would feel the need to go a little further back, and discuss a little bit more about what is violence, because I feel that violence (...) is a form of missed communication. We all have needs; if we don't satisfy them, we end up to violence.

(Activist group2/ FG1, p. 2)

Violence is a form of communication and it is a two-way relationship.

(Parent 1/FG1, p. 34)

First of all I think that violence is everything that offends a man's personality (...) I find it very important to define violence.

(School principal/ FG1, p. 6)

However, the definition of violence is subjective. Among parents, teachers and students. Namely, we haven't started [talking about violence], while we have talked about bullying, not we, this story has started from somewhere else, from another country, and we have clarified what bullying is, we haven't clarified what is violence (...) and for me this is even more interesting to discuss, beyond the definition of bullying and the education about bullying, what is violence, where does it begin, what are the characteristics of violence at school?

(Activist group 2/ FG2, p. 27)

According to the participants, violence is a slippery term which covers a huge and frequently changing range of physical, emotional, symbolic behaviours, situations and relationships, and also a term which creates controversies. There are views that violence is a form of missed communication, views that any aggressive behaviour, either at school or outside the school at a football match for example, or anything that produces harm to someone, is violence.

Schools are not excluded from the potential sites of violence. In the view of the participants, violence is not generated by schools but permeates them as it permeates any other social institution. Violence is a universal phenomenon that exists everywhere in society. Moreover, according to some participants, violence is inherent in social relations; since school is a social institution where social relations are being formed, violence is an integral part of it.

Violence exists, so since it exists, it exists everywhere (...) there is no place that could avoid it.

(Parent 2/ FG1 p.5)

I believe that schools are places where violence is expressed. Not only violence but everything that we, teachers, parents and children, carry with us, it [school] is a very small space, a small community where things are highlighted, (...) and things that come from outside the school are being reproduced here.

(School Principal/ FG1 p.6)

(...)in the places where people are gathered and have relationships with each other, the school is a place like this. Where there are many people gathered together, in the [football] field, in the army, in the church, there are inevitably relations among people and inevitably violence.

(School Counsellor/ FG1 p.12)

The participants use many different terms in their descriptions of violent incidents. Some participants use the general term 'violence', some other the terms 'tension', 'systematic annoyance', 'fights', 'quarrel', 'conflicts', 'tough guy', 'macho', 'bullying' etc. Through these terms they describe violent acts that could be anywhere along a continuum running from an angry and hostile glare, a verbal abuse, a verbal threat, threatening gestures, an attack causing minor injuries, to an attack causing major injuries.

Reasons of violence were quite distinct between two focus groups. The first focus group's argumentation on reasons of violence was child- and society-centered, in contrast to the second one, whose line of reasoning mainly involved family as the most important reason of children's violence in school.

Therefore, according to the participants' views, '*Violence is a modern times' feature*'. In particular, reasons of violence included: competitiveness among students, individualism, difficulties in forming interpersonal relationships, 'Children who do not grow up normally', children overwhelmed by curricular and extra-curricular activities, isolation.

High competitiveness, high expectations, children who want, like, to excel, to be on the top since childhood, high demands, intense individualism. Difficulty in this intense individualism to resolve problems, to build relationships, isolated children, children who do not grow up normally, especially in the urban settings. It's children that experience confinement, to my mind. Namely, they are pent-up in school from morning till noon, pent-up some hours during afternoon, and then there are extra-curricular activities in which children are once again pent-up in a fringed environment, aren't they? This is dance lesson, English lesson etc. They, children, do not have a normal contact with the environment, do not have normal relationships. They're isolated. Many times they are isolated in front of their computer. In front of TV, they're fringed, being in a context of safety and control at the same time. And this actually stems from school.

(Teacher 3/FG1, p. 25-26)

Participants strongly emphasized perpetrator's familial environment as major reason of violence: loose family ties, violence nurtured by family, parents' role as role models of

violence, and violence as a mode of communication within family, are reasons that would possibly lead a child to acting violently.

(...) when family lacks of the coherence it should have, there possibly emerge some incidents of verbal violence, mainly towards the opposite sex, even towards teachers.
(...)

(School counselor/FG2, p. 6)

Lastly, economic crisis was mentioned as a reason of increasing incidents of violence in schools.

Times are moving fast and when someone's working in a company and a family is – we face it daily- in a tranquil environment, there is a triggered off environment next day which, however, will trigger a situation. And this child will con other children. And a group will be made. And these are snowballs.

(SchoolPrincipal/ FG1, p. 40)

And they are excessively born down, of course, by economic crisis. That's another point that I believe has boosted incidents of violence in school.

(School Principal 1/ FG2, p. 8.)

2.1.2 Bullying

The most commonly used term in the description of violent incidents at school is 'bullying'. Although in recent years there has been an especially widespread worry and discourse about 'bullying', and its term has been used as if its definition had been obvious, its content is diffuse. Bullying is understood by the school and the public in varying ways, and it is often used arbitrarily as a blunt instrument referring to any kind of aggression.

Well this thing is not bullying and we have to define what is bullying in schools. In general, what is bullying? Everyone uses it as he wants. We talk about bullying and we all get panic. (...) Yes, I think that in general there is a mess.

(Teacher 1/ FG2, p. 2)

The participants of the interviews do not show clear and comprehensive definitions of bullying. For some of them, bullying is only an entry to the multi-faceted phenomenon of school violence, for some others, it is the term they use to describe a whole spectrum of aggression. Some of them recognize as bullying mostly physical violence and maltreatment and tend to lay emphasis on the physical effects on bullied students describing other kinds of violence (verbal etc) as 'normal' socialization processes, some other the opposite. Nonetheless, the participants generally agree that 'violence' is a broader term than 'bullying', and that 'bullying' involves an imbalance of power between perpetrators and victims, intent to harm or intimidate, and usually a pattern of repeated aggression or aggressive exclusion (physical, verbal, and/or relational) over time.

We have separated the issue of violence in general, which may involve a fight during a football match let's say, as an incident of violence, from bullying, as mentioned before, as being a systematic annoyance with specific targets.

(Activist group 2/ FG2, p. 10)

(...) and it is very useful to understand that bullying obviously has to do with an intent to hurt, there is intention, there is a reason why it occurs, there is inequality of power between the perpetrator and the victim. There is also, how to say it, a pattern, a repeated behaviour.

(School principal 1/ FG2, p. 7)

In general, however, the participants criticize the excessive use of the term 'bullying'. They argue that this term is often used in an improper way, and that this generalised use of it is problematic.

Exactly. They use the term 'bullying' for everything, as if it applies to everything (...) Of course bullying exists, that's why we have gathered here to discuss about it. If it didn't exist, we wouldn't be here.

(Parent 3/ FG2, p. 4)

It seems to me that this term [bullying] has become a little bit of fashion.

(Teacher 1/ FG2, p. 2)

The widespread fear and concern about bullying has been fueled by sensationalized reporting of violent incidents in mass media, and has led to exaggeration in the way 'bullying' is used by teachers, students and parents.

Today, unfortunately, the media and the parents themselves, and even more the Internet, present a picture to the children which is completely wrong.

(Parent 3/ FG2, p. 3)

The ubiquitous use of the term 'bullying' and the excessive reference to it sometimes create collective attitudes and behaviours that are not based on the actual extent of the phenomenon. These collective attitudes and behaviours concern mainly the parents who are the most vulnerable to this kind of discourse.

As far as bullying is concerned, I will agree with the previous speakers that it is an exaggeration. (...) There is misinformation or perhaps the parents have not been informed properly. We are about to make this term all too common.

(School principal 2/ FG2, p. 5)

I think there is [violence], there was and it might continue to exist. What I want to say is that we face it every day, but we also see that there is an exaggeration in the way we both teachers and parents see violence. I see namely, that the exaggeration sometimes reaches the limits of hysteria and then we drop the ball. We talk about bullying, parents talk about bullying, they come to school, and they create more problems than the ones that really exist (...) There is, I would say, a general immaturity in the attempt to address this issue, a wider social immaturity on this issue.

(Teacher 1/ FG2, p.1)

2.1.3 Violence at school

2.1.3.1 Subjects and forms of violence

The participants referred to school violence or bullying as an individual or collective act which takes place inside and outside schools, and it is expressed among students, among teachers and students, among students and teachers (students' aggressiveness towards teachers), among parents and teachers.

I would mostly locate violence among students, especially lately; I do not know if it has to do with the crisis.

(Teacher 3/ FG1, p. 46)

I would like to disagree here, as a parent. I would like to say that there is violence against teachers by students as well.

(Parent 1/ FG1, p.3)

In some participants' opinion, parents, apart from the fact that they exercise violence to teachers, often use incidents of violence that are related to their kids as an excuse to interfere to the operation of the school, and to control not only the management of phenomena of violence, but also teachers' and school work.

This is what I would like to say, that usually teachers and school principals unfortunately fall victims of violence not by the students but by the parents.

(Parent 3/ FG2, p. 7)

(...) parents who used to accept everything at school, either by the teacher or by other parents, and who used to lower their heads and not to speak etc. they can now very easily, unpredictably, when a very aggressive behaviour occurs, intervene within the school and attack a student who did something to their son or their daughter, and take the matters into their hands defying school laws.

(School principal/ FG1, p. 37)

Well, sometimes there is a chance (...) since the school principal didn't help me, since the parents' association didn't help me, I take matters in my own hands and I do what I think I should do.

(Parent 3/ FG2, p. 28)

The participants' answers demonstrate that violence at school takes on many forms and possesses very different characteristics. Specifically, the participants identified various forms of violence such as verbal violence (insulting and calling names, threatening to cause fear, aggressiveness with words, and consequent intimidation), non-verbal violence and physical violence (aggressiveness with acts), psychological violence (displays of favouritism or scapegoating, taking out anger, hurtfulness), social exclusion and isolation.

(...) when someone depreciates and misjudges a child and its personality (...) through verbal violence (...)

(School principal 1/ FG2, p.11)

In a quarrel a student may hit another student or they may push each other (...)

(Teacher 1/ FG2, p. 2)

What I want to say is that physical violence in many schools, and obviously I do not refer to all the teachers, has become psychological. There are teachers, and I have seen it in my own school and in other schools, who insult their students from morning until evening 'you are idiot', 'you are moron' (...)

(Activist group 1/ FG1, p. 15)

I would add, (...) that there were also forms of violence that had to do with social exclusion and isolation. In the past for example, I believe that children from different nationalities had issues like these.

(School Principal 1/ FG2, p. 15)

Some of the participants argue that the problem of violence in schools is much better today than in the past. They refer mainly to physical violence that takes the form of physical punishment by the teachers which seems to have decreased.

I believe that, although in the past [violence] was commonplace (...) now I would say that there is no violence, there is incredible tension in school (...) but violent incidents rarely occur.

(Teacher 1/ FG1, p. 7)

So there is violence, but it is reasonable, that is not the problem.

(School counselor/ FG1, p. 14)

The improvement on the issue of violence at schools is related, according to the participants, to the institutional frame and the prohibition of corporal punishment of children by law; it is related also to the changes of the teaching orientation of school in the direction of anti-authoritarian education.

The law prohibited corporal punishment. The fear of the law (...) brought these results.

(School principal/ FG1, p. 10)

But regarding teachers' attitudes towards children, they have changed, I think, mostly talking from my experience and from the experience of people I know, most of them can recognize, they know where is the limit, they try. Physical violence does not exist, and verbal violence [they try] not to exercise. I mean that there is an attempt. It has been embedded in people's consciousness and I believe that teachers understand that the child is a human being, with his/her own rights.

(Teacher 1/ FG1, p. 9)

2.1.3.2 Settings / places/ occasions where violence takes place

As reported by the participants, violence takes place inside and outside the school premises. Specifically, violent incidents often occur in the classroom, but also in the public areas of schools such as school playground, corridors, stairs and washrooms. These incidents take place mostly during the break, but very often occur before or after school, at the road to/ from school, at the bus stop, on the bus, at students' neighbourhood, and at the places where they hung out. Moreover, an increasingly prominent arena for bullying takes place in cyberspace through the electronic communications.

(...) washrooms, corridors and the school playground are the places where violence takes place (...) on the school bus (...) and there [on the bus], our intervention is not very easy because you don't have any jurisdiction. It is the driver, the co-driver [responsible] (...) There are complaints from the neighbourhood and from the places where children hung out, sometimes people come from the nearby supermarket and say to me that students did this or that or quarrelled among themselves while shopping (...) Many, however, incidents occur during the break (...) because during the break students from different classes, different ages coexist (...)

(School principal 1/ FG2, p. 24)

Bullying has to do also with other kind of problems that parents often do not understand. When the child is all the time on the Internet and communicates

[electronically], you don't know what is in there, and how much the child is being stressed psychologically or verbally. I think, I don't know if it is right, that we need to identify other dimensions as well. We should not only focus on school or on students. Things are often quite different from what we see. We see the detail and lose some other things.

(School principal 2/ FG2, p. 8-9)

Sometimes teachers are present. In the occasions where teachers are not present, some 'observers', students who do not take part in the violent incidents, recite the events to the teachers.

They [violent incidents] occur in front of us. But mostly we find out about them from the students, not from the ones that took part, but from the observers (...)

(Teacher 1/ FG2, p. 25)

2.1.3.3 Violence inherent to the education system

Violence, in the view of many participants, is related to the structural characteristics of the education system. The structure, the curriculum, the priorities, and the grading system of the school, as well as its environment and infrastructure generate violence. Furthermore, the fast and intensive pace of school, the high concentration of students' population, and the fact that the school is not open to the community and the parents create tension and violence in school.

Institutional and pedagogical violence

Interestingly, the notion of institutional and pedagogical violence is identified as one significant manifestation of school violence. According to several of our informants the school is responsible for the development of violence, either through teaching practices or through the curriculum, thus the structural characteristics of the education system. This

was a quite interesting finding, taking into account that a usual response in educational research is that the school blames ‘the others’ and especially the family for educational and social problems arising in the school. The school is perceived as an institutional concentration of power characterised by asymmetric relationships representing social hierarchies. Official school knowledge, traditional pedagogies aiming at discipline and punishment constitute discursive strategies which embody and involve violence. This type of violence is usually symbolic, but it can be materialized in physical terms as well.

I feel that the school nowadays, the way I experience it, is an application of violence, almost constant. In many forms (...) In so many forms, that is, almost the system itself.

(Activist group 2/ FG1., p. 2)

Us teachers don’t reflect [on our practices] enough, even school’s good side seems violent to me, because it is not attributed meaning.

(Activist group 2/ FG1, p.2)

The responsibility of the school was diffused in most of the participants’ inputs, more so in the first focus group interview. In the participants’ opinion, the responsibility of the school lies in some teachers’ violent behaviour; teachers’ ineffectiveness in managing challenging situations at school; and in the ways in which school life is organized. Although some of the informants tended to lay emphasis on the individual teachers’ responsibility and less on the structure of the education system (education policies, curriculum), there is no clear distinction between the aforementioned axes, because they all converge around pedagogical violence.

The participants testified that teachers may be violent towards students in the forms of sending them away from class for punishment, of being ironic or even of gripping and shaking students when someone’s safety is at stake. These practices are reported as being sustainable despite the literal prohibition of corporal punishment by law.

(...) to me, as a psychologist, sending a child away from class for punishment is violent.

(Activist group 2/ FG2, p. 44-45)

I just said that, indeed, a teacher may exercise violence which may not be the hand [corporal], it may be other things.

(School principal/ FG1, p. 14)

There is tension, a lot. We will grip children, we will shake them. The law stopped spanking. The fear of the law (...)

(School principal/ FG1, p.10)

(...) the grading system is a form of psychological violence.

(Parent 1/ FG1, p. 35)

According to some participants, the most common form of violence that students suffer in school is the disciplinary violence used by teachers as punishment. Punishment refers to reprimands, expulsions, and to any act that validates fear, pain, intimidation to students.

Any public reprimand on any matter affects the other. There should be no penalties, we have and they show our weakness (...) this is violence.

(School counselor/ FG1, p. 13)

For some other participants, however, discipline does not necessarily mean violence. According to their view, the school has to teach children to respect the rules under which the team operates.

I think that there is no violence against students exercised by teachers. It is a different thing, another kind of pressure, the pressure to complete your lesson, the discipline.

(Parent 1/ FG1, p. 9)

The intensity of school time – tension

The lack of control over school time on the part of the teachers, the density of the curriculum and the timetable are perceived as factors that develop tension and violence. The words used by the informants to describe the overall climate when violent incidents take place, were ‘tension’ (ένταση) and ‘haste’ (βιασύνη). Tension interferes with teachers’ effort to preserve discipline and ensure security inside and outside the classroom and it is connected to the rapid rhythms of school life.

There is a certain haste at school. I am not sure if I would call it ‘violence’ or not, I would call it ‘non-thinking’. (...) There is a routine, in a way, in the schools where violence is manifested.

(Teacher 1/ FG1, p. 8)

(...) you are pressed to preserve safety, discipline, to protect a child from being injured. From then on, it is easy for someone- me, let me talk about me- to exceed certain limits that he knows aren’t right. There is tension, in general. And this tension exists in the schoolyard, it is everywhere.

(Teacher 1/ FG1, p. 8)

We don’t cooperate with each other, because we don’t have the time.

(Teacher 1/ FG2, p. 20)

Tension and haste are used to describe the pressure exerted on them by the curriculum, since the informants reported that all teachers are aware that such behaviours are inappropriate. There was a general consensus in that teachers nowadays are sensitized

as far as student's rights are concerned and refrain from abuse of their power or discriminatory behaviours, but mainly so in primary education. Teachers in secondary education were presented as more susceptible to manifest discriminatory behaviours.

Lack of inclusive structures

Lack of or insufficient compensatory structures for students with disabilities in general schools was also presented as a factor that may generate conflicts between other students' parents and the school and may result to the exclusion of the students with disabilities.

(...) and exclusion of children that we can include to the broader spectrum of learning disabilities (...) I believe that there is; a great inequality is manifested in the classrooms. That is, a child with autism attends the regular class, let's say, with echolalia, you can't do your lesson. This annoys children, it also annoys the teacher when he himself can't work, it reaches parents; parents come outraged at school.

(School principal 1/ FG2, p. 16)

The school was described as inefficient in taking into account the different starting points of students and thus contributing to the reproduction of social hierarchies, a fact that is perceived as encouraging violent practices.

How do you step on the child's experience- I mean in the first grade- to teach it to read. (...) All these things are not worked in our education system. They are not included in our curricula, therefore all this hierarchy reveals itself at school (...) That is, all these things are so hard to be worked. Identities are hierarchised, whether we like it or not.

(School principal 1/ FG2, p. 30-31)

Managing difference (origin, cultural diversity, gender)

The responsibility of teachers was also evident in the responses which emphasized the ineffectiveness of teachers in 'managing' some classes, such as classes with Roma children and black children, where cultural differences among students may lead to violence, such as exclusion or fights. The informants acknowledged teachers' responsibility and stressed that teachers have the potential to bring positive change to diversity related issues.

Well, Roma children come with this physical contact very cultivated, we don't manage as we should (...) but we end up having consolidated an attitude towards them, having isolated these children and not being able to manage all this; we don't work it all the time.

(Activist group 2/ FG1, p. 45)

(...) they mocked the child because it is black. At some point, for instance, at school and when the parent came to see what had happened, because many times the fight went physical, anyway, the teacher would realize that 'oh, I haven't talked to the children about this issue, as it seems'.

(Activist group 1/ FG1, p. 32)

Consequently, inequalities among students deepen and their identities are rendered hierarchised. Moreover, the participants reported that inequalities, which may trigger violence among students, may arise also by the curriculum content, for example when teaching the traditional ethnocentric history in multiethnic classrooms.

Namely, when you have a classroom and you are in a region where there are children of Albanian origin, children of Turkish origin, children which are Muslims, you have to be careful about how you will teach history. Because, if you say some things some other way, you run the risk these children to be beaten up during the break. Or to be isolated.

(Activist group 1/ FG1, p. 28-29)

Lack of communication - isolation

According to the informants, teachers are also held liable when they are not conducting pedagogical meetings during the school year and for keeping parents at a distance, even trying to exclude them from school. Excluding parents from schools, instead of trying to establish cooperation with parents' associations, was perceived as violence against parents.

Closed doors to parents. At school. It is a settled practice, policy of many schools in order to survive. This is violence.

(Activist group 2/ FG1, p. 19)

(...) I see school's responsibility towards parents. Namely, the picture, which for me is crystal clear, is that parents and parents' associations are left outside the school, the school feels threatened by students' parents.

(School counselor/ FG1, p. 58)

School size and management

The size of the school came up as a factor that enables violence, since managing a school with a large number of students makes it very hard to keep control over violence.

(...) at the school in which I used to be, with 180 children, I used to know each parent's name (...) I knew the company of each child. (...) It can't be all so impersonal. It can't be 'Hello' and you at 'Hello' not knowing whom you are facing. (...) These schools, that is, the enormous, you can't say that you will manage violence.

(School principal/ FG1, p. 65)

2.2 Major variables of school violence

2.2.1 Gender

Participants stressed the gender variable and described violence related to it as '*invisible*', but at the same time '*self-evident*'.

To that extent that we think it's self-evident, it might happen during each break, under our eyes, continuously and we simply don't see it. It's invisible to us.

(Activist Group 2/FG1, p. 43)

Violence was mainly related to gender in terms of dominant demands regarding gender-appropriate behaviour. Such incidents of violence were reported to have been performed among students, but also from teachers to students. Furthermore, students who are victimized because of non-compliance with expected gender performance usually silence such incidents both from parents and school.

Namely, when a little boy for some reason –because in a patriarchal system it is offensive being called a 'girl'- if, like, something like this happens in a repeated manner or in some other ways, with more... heavy words, then this child will have a rather hard time telling his parents. He will not rely on his parents as allies. Because, they may even say something to him, yell at him, or 'advise' him -as a piece of advice is somewhat suspicious- to be something that he is not. To abnegate what he is.

(Activist Group 2/FG2. p. 18)

In addition to gender performance, performing sexualities within school was related to violence. Gay teachers' coming out to parents was considered as a form of violence, with the former provoking parents' fear when disclosing their sexuality.

I want to, because I am still casting about defining violence. When you say, like, you declare to a parent that you're gay, don't you exercise violence upon him/her, meaning that you strike fear into his heart? Just bringing it up.

(Parent 2/ FG1, p. 24)

However, even if silenced, when teachers realize that homophobic incidents take place, e.g. calling names, they believe that raising the issue within school classroom is worthwhile and they do so:

In classroom, for instance, a child may come and ask 'next classroom's Yannakis is being called gay' and will pose the issue and we will have to bring the matter into discussion (...)

(Activist Group 2/FG1, p. 24)

Although, there is a possibility to engage with gender-related violence within school classroom, interviewers also stressed that intervention programs on school violence do not always address gender issues openly, and sometimes deliberately silence them.

[they mention a big research program] – the vocabulary, the offensive one that is used, is 70% -and this comes up from its conclusions- related to homophobic issues, like, 'you're a sissy, you're a wuss, you're a faggot, gay etc.' was completely silenced, it was not even included in the questionnaire. This was deliberately done, as I have talked with psychologists working in the program's design.

(Activist Group 2/FG1, p. 40)

Gender appropriate behaviour was also related to masculinities, stressing that violence is stereotypically connected to masculinity, and during childhood, violent incidents among young boys could also be part of 'becoming' a man.

That is, what violence means and is, I think it's in a fog because someone can say, it's alright, if a child's not beaten and does not fight, does not hurt one another, how is it supposed to be a normal little man?

(Activist Group 2/ FG2, p. 27)

Lastly, participants that family could be a factor encouraging sexist behaviour. Specifically, they mentioned incidents of sexism from parents towards teachers.

His [female] teacher had floundered and called his parents in school and in front of the child the father said, 'you won't listen to women, don't listen to that (offensive word)'. To the teacher. In front of the child. What can you do in such situation? That is, to obey only the male teacher. You cannot do much. I don't know, just posing the question.

(Activist Group 2/FG2p. 19)

2.2.2 National origin

When referring to violence because of national origin, participants discussed such incidents in terms of forms of violence and its various patterns.

There was a dominant discourse, like, by Greeks towards Albanian children. I notice this because we had children here that were mainly Albanians and fewer from other [national] groups. I saw this too.

(School Principal 1/ FG2, p. 15)

Special reference was made to the social isolation of Roma children:

(...) Roma children. Excessively. Since I'm in an all-day school and entering different classrooms, and filling working hours in, it's really amazing how in an innovative

school, an ANT.AR.SY.A. [left political party in Greece] school and even more leftist, Roma children are isolated.

(Activist Group 2/FG1, p. 44)

In particular, they pointed out incidents of symbolic violence, such as changing names of migrant children, discouraging them from carrying the national flag on ethnic parades, and exclusion. Exclusion was also pointed as a form of violence enacted to Roma students by teachers. In terms of patterns, violence due to non-Greek national origin was defined as both happening among students and from teachers towards students.

However, in terms of teacher-to-student exercise of violence, they stressed an important differentiation among different levels of education: primary education was mentioned as a place where such incidents take place less frequently than secondary. As stated,

To mention this, I have been working for ten years. From all incidents, that are half in primary schools and half in secondary schools, I have only encountered racist incident from teacher to student in secondary education. Calling him 'Albanian' in classroom and the like. In secondary school, this is a personal experience.

(Activist Group 2/FG2, p. 49)

On the other hand, teachers were also described as unprepared to react to xenophobic incidents, and at the same time preventing them.

What's happening, and that is mainly narrated by parents that have kids at school and did not know how to cope with it themselves, is that, e.g. a boy was mocked for being black.

(Activist Group 1/ FG1, p. 32)

2.2.3 Social class – social inequality

Social class emerged during the focus group interviews in terms of social hierarchies and forms of violence that are differentiated among and between socio-economic strata within school settings.

Specifically, violence related to social class and social inequalities was mentioned as part of social hierarchies within school. As such, participants described school as socially divided; hence, violence occurring among different socio-economic strata, was described as symbolic.

There is great isolation, there is substantial hierarchy, identities are ranked and the issue of social division, even though no one talks about it, is present.

(School Principal 1/ FG2, p. 30)

Physical violence was connected to lower socio-economic strata and non-physical (exclusion, threats) with upper ones. However, in terms of frequency, students from upper socio-economic strata are more often presented as perpetrators, in comparison with students from lower ones.

Physical violence in lower ones [socio-economic strata] and isolation and, 'I don't invite you', 'I won't talk to you', 'I'm ignoring you', 'I'm meddling with your stuff', and so on, in upper ones.

(Activist Group 2/ FG1, p. 49)

2.2.4 Disability

Disability emerged as a conceptual category in both focus group interviews. Students with disabilities do face violence.

I may have an autistic child in class, which brings other kinds of violence up, but still I am able to deal with constantly emerging issues that are resolved in class in collaboration with the group.

(Activist Group 2/ FG1, p. 42)

When referring to disability, there is a distinction among different forms of disability, e.g. learning disabilities, autism, behaviour problems, intellectual disabilities. Noticeably, there seems to be a differentiation regarding the intensity of violence, as well as its patterns (who exercises violence on whom) when it comes to different forms of disability. When participants refer to learning disabilities, violence is described as happening among students and bears less tension, e.g. calling names such as '*fool*'.

And something rather important in what (Teacher 1's name) said, is that we noticed a lot of incidents of violence by the majority of the class towards children with learning difficulties, he was the fool, the moron etc.

(School Principal/ FG1, p. 51)

The aforementioned reactions, however, are not restricted among students, but involve parents in practices of exclusion, as well.

2.2.5 Main characteristics of perpetrators

In general, participants profiled perpetrators attributing psychological characteristics. According to participants' views, perpetrators could be students, parents¹ and teachers.

That is, parents who once accepted anything by school or teacher or other parents, and either cringed or remained silent etc, can rather easily, unexpectedly, in a rather aggressive manner, step in the school and attack to any student that harmed their

¹Perpetrators may also be parents to students with disabilities, see *Disability*.

son, or their daughter and to resolve, by overlooking laws, in front of the teacher, namely roughly entering school yard, to resolve issues.

(School Principal/FG1, p. 37-38)

Parents were profiled by participants using violence in defense of their children, both to students and to teachers or school principals, as detailed below:

Yes, outside school. We are giving a struggle not to come, namely 'come, tell us what is wrong and we will fix this, we will closely examine it'. I, during the first years there were real fights among parents or a parent with an unaccepted behaviour could admonish, or scold or threaten another child due to the fact that he hit his/her child and since, he thinks, 'school cannot give a solution, I'm stepping in'.

(School Principal 1/ FG2, p. 26-27)

Student perpetrators were described as '*scapegoats*' and it was vividly stressed the need of their support, as well the need of the proper way to deal with perpetrators.

And many times, I agree with (Teacher 1's name), this perpetrator has, this child has a greater need of support, since sometimes you see in familial environment things that you don't like?

(School Principal 1/FG2, p. 12)

Participants described overachieving students as using 'invisible', non-physical ways of exercising violence.

(...) and is a good student and in a cunning way, they are manipulative, he talks to you and you don't easily grasp what's happening and he takes satisfaction.

(School Counselor/ FG1, p. 56)

2.2.6 Main characteristics of victims

Participants described victims in terms of physical characteristics, e.g. obesity,

Possibly in appearance, like, a child may be chubby (...)

(Teacher 1/ FG1, p. 36)

as well as attributed certain psychological characteristics to victims, therefore described as '*passive*', having a low-key profile, not confident, and having low self-esteem:

I believe that [victims] are mostly those kind of people that do not easily react, which are less, have a more low-key profile (...). Among children those who are mainly victimized are lower, with lower self-esteem (...)

(Teacher 2/FG1, p. 33)

(...) children with low self-esteem, (...)

(School Principal/ FG1, p. 37)

Furthermore, being a victim was posed in terms of peer interaction. In this manner, victims' characteristics included unpopularity among peers, and exclusion from peer groups:

They are not the popular ones.

(Activist Group 1/FG1, p. 33)

(...) to the strong ones.

(Teacher 2/ FG1, p. 33)

An additional variable that emerged through focus group interviews was victims' school achievement. Specifically, victimswerereportedtobeunderachievingstudents.

(...) [victims] may be children that are underachieving students, in remarks, who fail.

(Teacher 2/FG1, p. 36)

But overachieving students can be victims as well; victimized overachieving students do not seem to be victimized only in terms of achievement (that is, for being “nerd”), but having additional characteristics prone to rendering them victims, such as not participating to group activities, e.g. football, or other homosocial activities.

it’s not just being a good student, he has to be labeled as a nerd, for being a good student but, like, he doesn’t play football, some characteristics that intersect, he has to make a profile.

(Teacher 1/FG1, p. 47)

2. 3. Means for combatting violence and recommendations

All the informants emphasized the importance of prevention measures and activities with reference to the broader issue of violence in schools. The responses reveal a need for an opening of the school community to the local community and for the (institutional) encouragement of cooperation and partnerships with other bodies.

Community approach and Networking

More specifically, the informants extensively discussed how ‘networks’ and ‘networking’ may be a highly effective solution to the phenomenon of violence at schools. Cooperation with parents’ associations, with other schools and with NGOs conducting programs for schools were some of the examples that were brought.

Networks. What you said is the most important thing. Networks. Right now, it is the only way we work. Networks.

(School principal/ FG1, p. 62)

I think that perhaps it [violence prevention] should be included in the educational process. I don’t know how it will be done, how the universities, the NGOs, look, *Human Rights*

Defence Centre, the *UN Refugee Agency* has outstanding programs which are running in schools, with much effort.

(School principal/ FG1, p. 66)

I strongly believe in inter-school cooperation.

(Teacher 3/ FG1, p. 63)

I will insist on the 'network' and, as a matter of fact, I will pass it as 'networking'. Or, I don't know if there is anything like that among you teachers, but do you exchange good practices? Do you learn what happens nationwide? If a school does something innovative?

(NGO/ FG1, p. 67)

Opening of the school to the local community and cooperation with the local authorities (municipality) and municipal social services is perceived as an enabling strategy when dealing with violent incidents. Well-organised municipalities were presented as potential allies and supporters for schools.

(...) we really ask and we would like to establish cooperation with people more specialized than us (...) we would like a cooperation with the local authorities. Because municipalities which are very well organised, have their municipal social services, their social worker, their psychologist; it would be of great help.

(School counselor/ FG2, p. 12-13)

Local activist groups, volunteers, university departments and local museums were highlighted as other possible allies in combatting violence at schools, through the implementation of various educational activities in cooperation with the school community.

It [the network] can include universities; it can include programs and political movements. Whichever network is active in a region, I mean there may be a network in [inner-city area] which is related to the citizens who have been mobilised for that park. They, too,

havestartedto coil; theyconductededucationalactivitiesandthey add in the middle local museums.

(Activist group 2/ FG1, p. 63)

Encouraging initiatives for teachers and parents' associations by the Ministry of Education was another proposition, in order to accomplish the opening of the school to the community. Flexibility in organizing school life and the curriculum by taking full advantage of innovative ideas of the members of the school community, was considered by some participants as a most helpful response to the problems faced by schools.

(...)[I would like]totakeon, ata school (...) aniceidea with several colleagues, andoperateitonthebasisofsomeprinciplesandstandardswhichwewillhavedetermined; andthisopportunitytobeofferedtousbythestate. (...)

initiativeswillemergeandnicethingscouldbedone, thenagainanenergeticparents' associationmay exist and do things (...) Therefore, itwouldbepositiveandcleveriftheMinistrywastomovethatwayinstitutionallyetc; strengthenthese people with nice ideas, so that they have the space to implement them. Anddon't let themfeelfrustrated.

(Activist group 2/ FG1, p. 60-61)

Along the same lines, some participants claimed that the school should also develop permanent cooperation with school psychologists, who will help enhance school's communication with parents and contribute to any conflicts' resolution attempts.

A psychologist in the school is extremely necessary. You have an incident, you don't even know the questions you have to ask the mother; the teacher or me as the principal.

(School principal 1/ FG2, p. 11)

A clear school policy of prevention: the inclusive school

Other suggestions for combatting violence were the clear school rules, communicated to all members of the school community (teachers, students, parents) at the beginning of each school year. Preparing an action plan beforehand was presented as vital for the effectiveness of addressing violence issues.

I, let's say, add the concept of the inclusive school, of clear policy, of 'we do things from the beginning, before they [violent incidents] happen'.

(Activist group 2/ FG2, p.)

So, I want to say this, from experience. The schools which discuss the issue of school violence at the first meeting, at the beginning of the school year- and discuss it, but not ritualistically, because it [the Ministry's directive] says they should- but more in detail, and make an action plan for addressing school violence, I believe, or want to believe, that problems aren't so intense.

(School counselor/ FG2, p. 22)

Moreover, art and culture projects as a prevention strategy and compensatory structures for students with disabilities were other measures mentioned by the informants for efficiently addressing violence.

At this point, we should add the introduction of culture and the arts in schools, as a prevention strategy every school should have.

(School counselor/ FG2, p. 32)

And I think that inclusion is better when there are compensatory structures, namely when there is an inclusion class, or parallel support.

(School principal 1/ FG2, p. 16)

Evaluation matters

Some participants raised the issue of the evaluation of education officials, in order to be suitably supportive of school units. It was supported that when education

officials are 'worthy of their name', they can motivate and back school principals and teachers in their efforts to combat violence.

(...) the lack of [education] officials worthy of their name, capable of supporting (...)

(School counselor/ FG1, p. 13)

The teacher can't on his own (...) [that teacher] was trying to speak of homophobia and the school counselor was about to take the teacher's head off. It's not possible to talk, to work in a school and ask what needs to be done, when the school counselor will tie a noose around your neck (...) the school principal will press the teacher downwards (...)

What does that mean?

Evaluation. Evaluation and right choice of people possessing these positions.

(School principal/ FG1, p. 64)

The need for reflection on the teachers' work experience

Another issue that was raised during the interviews was the need for reflection on the work experience. The teachers referred to 'pedagogical sessions' as a practice of paramount importance for addressing violence, as well as to the fact that they are wrongly often overlooked during actual school life. Discussing with colleagues and sharing ideas and concerns was mentioned as a practice which can invigorate teachers and in turn have a positive impact on the everyday teaching practices.

(...) it [the Ministry's directive] cites 'pedagogical sessions', but you are a hundred percent right that pedagogical sessions are not worthy of their name, to speak openly, to share. They are usually formalities; they don't guarantee anything.

(School counselor/ FG1, p. 56)

I want us to conduct a pedagogical session in order to listen some suggestions myself, why should I implement mine [ideas] all the time, the ones I have thought. We never do.

(Activist group 2/ FG1, p. 24)

Initial teachers' education (university)

The initial education of teachers was mentioned as another parameter related to the teachers' readiness to deal with violence at schools. It was supported that the relevant university departments should encompass humanities modules, something that is not always the case for the departments attended by future secondary education teachers.

(...)it is something that will bring results in the long run, changes will occur in the long run, starting, in our opinion, with humanities courses in university, for the teachers. And humanities courses at schools.

(NGO/ FG1, p. 28)

Skepticism towards existing policies and programs on school violence

Some teachers expressed their skepticism regarding certain anti-bullying projects. They noted the absence of gender identity and sexuality parameters in otherwise successful anti-bullying programs and they criticized the Ministry's of Education currently running program. As far as the Observatory for the Prevention of School Violence is concerned, teachers stated that they perceive it as an 'impersonal institution' unable to substitute the communication among school principals, school counselors and teachers. Teachers added that they are worried about the intensification of scrutiny institutions, since they are required to report incidents in detail and, subsequently, about the protection of personal data of students and teachers. Furthermore, the participants shared their concern that the Observatory is using the issue of school violence as an instrument to further control teachers' work and school life.

(...)

we all are discussing now, talking about an opening that the school must make in order to acco

mplish inclusion (...) and all this system [Observatory] –stemming from the Ministry-
comes to (...) entrench and close the issue.

(School principal 1/ FG2, p. 38-39)

Awareness, professional autonomy, responsibility and commitment

Despite acknowledging and enumerating all the adverse conditions, several informants highlighted that those who have the means to change things for the better, are teachers themselves. The participants argued that teachers' professionalism and personal commitment to their work are indispensable in any attempt to address violence, therefore, teachers' autonomy should be enhanced and their initiatives supported.

(...)we are the point where change must start from, I mean us, teachers. (...) indeed, a whole system puts pressure on us, but we also have the upper hand. (...) We have incredible freedoms which we do not use.

(Activist group 2/ FG1, p. 20)

(...)it doesn't do us any good to complain about the system or the books or whatever; what pushes us forward is 'what can I do?' and I can do a whole lot of things.

(School counselor/ FG1, p. 54)