# Violence against children with disabilities in schools



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## **Overview of the project**

- What? Violence against children with disabilities
  - legal and policy framework
  - triggers, forms and settings
  - challenges and promising practices

In school: "You were told all the time that you were worthless, you're bad, stupid and all that. So I never had any friends at all." (Sweden, male, 45)

Why? Under-researched area falling between the gaps



## Research design

#### • Where?

- 28 Member States, and
- 132 interviews in Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, the United Kingdom

#### Who?

- CRPD Article 33 bodies
- Public authorities
- Representative organisations (DPOs, NGOs ...)
- Human rights protection bodies



# International and European legal and policy framework

Prohibition of discrimination

Participation and accessible services

UN, CoE and EU standards and policies

Protection from violence

Access to justice/right to be heard



## National legal and policy frameworks

Law: risk of falling through the gap

"Many legal documents were ratified without a clear plan or vision for their implementation. If you try to take a child with Down syndrome to a grammar school, you will hear: 'You must be kidding. We have no training to work with these kids.'"(Lithuania, National Human Rights Body)

- Policies: weak coverage and few practical tools
  - National policies on child rights or disability
  - Violence in particular settings
- Implementation a challenge



# Characteristics of violence against children with disabilities

- More likely to be victims of violence than children without disabilities
- Children with 'invisible disabilities' and children with multiple and severe disabilities at higher risk
- Triggers of violence: exclusion, prejudice, 'vulnerability' and 'easy targets', overburdening of parents and overextended and untrained personnel
- Intersection with other characteristics and multiple layers of risk



#### Forms of violence in schools

"[in school] a child with disability is not accepted by the principal, not by the professor and not by peers themselves – that setting is a fertile ground for the occurrence of violence, which will go unsanctioned, because it only reflects the attitude of the majority." (Croatia, NHRB)

- Predominant forms: bullying psychological abuse and verbal insults
- Children with intellectual disabilities and children with psychosocial disabilities at bigher risk

"Not selecting them at gymnastics [...], secretly bullying them when the teacher isn't looking, taking their belongings, not wanting to play with them, [...] not wanting to hang out with them, not wanting to sit next to them in class." (Netherlands, representative of funding organisation)





# Societal attitudes

**Exclusion** 

Lack of knowledge about disability

Prejudice and fear of otherness

# Structural weaknesses

Lack of inclusiveness

Lack of prevention mechanisms

Lack of support measures

Lack of targeted training

# Staff issues

Lack of competence, awareness and willingness

Inadequate communication techniques

'Bad examples' to children



"You have to work with the [children] themselves, the staff working with them and the organisation itself to make sure it is a well-rounded and understood issue" (UK, Representative of NGO)

"In this field there is still a lot to do. It is a pathway that needs education for everybody." (Portugal, Public Authority)

# Measures to prevent violence against children with disabilities

"I see no reason to create special programmes, special courses and training. Hostility is hostility, intolerance is intolerance, degrading other people is degrading regardless of their physical or mental state, or emotional condition." (Poland, Organisation for children's education, rehabilitation and upbringing)



- Awareness raising and educational campaigns
- Combating isolation of adults and children with disabilities

All stakeholders

- Awareness raising on rights
- •Self-empowerment trainings

Children with disabilities

Families and communities

- Respite programmes
- Training on rights and on recognising abuse
- Early intervention programmes

**Professionals** 

- •Guidelines, protocols and standards of care
- •Training programmes
- Holistic approach



## Measures targeting all stakeholders

- Teaching for diversity increasing awareness and fostering respect (Czech Republic)
- Tackling stereotypes and prejudice against people with disabilities in schools (Slovenia)

"When they teach about human rights, it is one of the best measures against bullying, because it illustrates that you have rights yourself. And when you have rights yourself, you don't have to step on others."

(Denmark, representative of a disability umbrella organisation)



#### Measures targeted at children with disabilities

- Awareness raising initiatives focus on developing skills to recognise risk situations
  - 'Stay safe' personal safety skills programme (Ireland)

"Children with disabilities don't speak out because they get so used to being treated poorly that they actually tolerate far too much abuse without reporting. We have got to get them to understand it is their right to raise issues." (United Kingdom, National charitable organisation)



"Strengthening children's self-image and self-confidence and self-esteem so that children can react when something is not right."

(Sweden, NGO representative)

"We should avoid a situation where only fully able persons have a say in what's good for a person with disability." (Poland, NGO representative)

- Empowerment measures
  - Involved children and youth strengthen children's selfesteem and self-image (Sweden)
  - Rock and Water and children with autism (the Netherlands)
- Participation of children with disabilities
  - Hear our voices training children with intellectual disabilities to participate in various matters which affect them directly (6 MS)



"[Children with disabilities] often do not have anyone else except a teacher or a doctor outside the family to turn to. And if these [professionals] do not know what they are authorised for and what their duties are and who to call immediately, then this is just another unnecessary burden." (Slovenia, Public Authority)

# Measures targeting professionals

- Guidelines, protocols and toolkits
  - Index for inclusion practical tool to support schools in improving teaching based on inclusive values (United Kingdom)
- Training
  - Anti-bullying alliance: compilation of guidance for professionals on bullying

"In addition to their teacher-training courses, [...] teachers should be given extra training in communicative techniques, in how to manage different areas of conflict. (Portugal, Representative of NGO)

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