Updated ETUCE Action Plan on:
Preventing and Tackling Violence in Schools

Adopted by the ETUCE Executive Board in Brussels on 23 November 2010

INTRODUCTION

This action plan was originally developed within the ETUCE project "Preventing and Tackling Violence in Schools" in 2008. Following the implementation of the subsequent project on violence and harassment in schools (2009/2010), the action plan has been updated drawing on the knowledge gained in this follow-up project to include the prevention and tackling of cyber-harassment.

Schools, which are the working environment for teachers and other school staff and the learning environment for young people, must be safe and secure to ensure the best possible setting for teaching and learning.

In general schools are orderly places in which children and young people as well as teachers and other education workers feel safe. Where statistics are collected or where the outcomes of school inspections are made public, schools are often praised for precisely these features. Indeed, it is sometimes highlighted that for children belonging to families in crisis, living in poor housing or with other difficulties arising from family poverty, the school represents a place of safety.

However, when violent incidents occur in schools, they obstruct teaching and have a malign influence on the working environment of teachers and the quality of learning of pupils. Whilst occurrences of most serious violence remain low, any violent incident can be distressing both for those directly involved and for those who witness it, be they staff or students.

It is therefore incumbent upon schools to take action designed to prevent violence in schools and harassment of school staff and to facilitate an atmosphere where children can learn and teachers can perform their job in a positive, healthy and safe setting.

Although statistics are not collected on a comparable basis across Europe and in many cases are not collated at national level, some valuable insight into reported levels of violence, bullying or harassment at work is provided by the Fourth European Working

Conditions Survey carried out in 2005[1] in the EU27, in the two candidate countries Turkey and Croatia, as well as in Switzerland and Norway. The survey shows that overall approximately 10% of workers report having been exposed to violence, bullying or harassment at work in the previous twelve months. The education sector appears to be amongst those where that risk is the greatest. For example, workers in the education sector are six times more likely to have encountered the threat of physical violence than their counterparts in the manufacturing sector and another 7.9% say that they have been personally subjected to physical violence from fellow workers or people outside the workforce (against the EU27 average of 5%) in the previous twelve-month period. Survey data also reveals that around 6.6% of workers in the education sector report having experienced bullying or harassment (against the EU27 average of 5%).

3% of teaching professionals say that they have suffered physical violence at the hands of people from the workplace and another 5% report exposure to physical violence from people outside the workplace (e.g. pupils). Teaching associate professionals report higher levels of exposure to physical violence from colleagues (7.3%) and non-colleagues (7.8%) than teaching professionals. A higher percentage of both teaching professionals (13.5%) and teaching associate professionals (13%) report being subjected to threats of physical violence rather than to actual violent acts.

Harassment can be understood as unwanted or unwelcome behaviour, which may range from unpleasant remarks to physical violence and affect workplaces deeply. Harassment and violence can:

- Be physical, psychological and/or sexual
- Be one off incidents or more systematic patterns of behaviour
- Be amongst colleagues, between superiors and subordinates or by third parties such as clients, customers, patients, pupils etc.
- Range from minor cases of disrespect to more serious acts, including criminal offences, which require the intervention of public authorities.

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[1] Data from the Fourth European Working Conditions Survey (2005), by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

In recent years, cyber-harassment has emerged as a particular form of violence and with technologic enhancement is rapidly increasing. In this context, cyber-harassment is to be understood as the use of information and communication technologies such as email, chat room, discussion group, blogs, websites, social networking sites, virtual learning environments, instant messaging, mobile phones or short message services for repeated, deliberate and hostile behaviour by an individual or a group with the intention to harm others.

It ranges from continuous e-mail-sending to someone who has said he/she does not want any further contact with the sender, to threats, sexual remarks, pejorative labels, ganging up on victims by making them the subject of ridicule in forums, posting false statements, and passing on pictures, sound recordings or films via mobile phones.

The motives range from emotional reasons to personal dislike and conflict of interests at work. Other motives can be prejudices on grounds of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion and belief, disability, age, sexual orientation and body image.

Cyber-harassment against teachers can threaten teachers' current and future employment opportunities, and their professional reputation. It is furthermore to be considered a psychosocial hazard in their working environment, as it can deeply affect the personality, dignity and/or integrity of the victim. This form of violence is not restricted to school as the physical workplace but can affect teachers outside their workplace while being nevertheless related to their workplace

It is clear that violence in schools and harassment of school staff constitutes a constraint for the protection of workers' health and safety conditions as safeguarded by the EU Framework Directive on health and safety at work[2].

Moreover, accepting that when violence occurs it disrupts teaching and learning, it is recognised that teachers need specific knowledge and skills to foresee and prevent incidents of violence of all kinds, and to deal with them when they occur. It is therefore important to enable and encourage teacher unions to exchange best practices and to provide teachers with the knowledge, skills and training to avert and handle these situations in schools and related working environments. The general concern is

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[2] Directive 89/391/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work.

the learning and working environment, for pupils and teachers respectively. Violence in schools is a complex phenomenon that affects not only teachers and their unions, but also other actors in education. Four main relations have to be taken into account in seeking to address and prevent violent incidents in educational institutions. These relations are: pupil-pupil, pupil-teacher, teacher-teacher and parent-teacher (parent could also be substituted by any other third party e.g. siblings, former students, etc. external to the workplace). Violence obstructs the development of individual capacities. For this reason, the fight against violence in schools will have a positive impact in the fight against violence in society as a whole.

In several European countries, measures developed to prevent violence in schools have proven successful and underline the potential benefit of the exchange of best practices and an analysis of their transferability.

In February 1999, an ETUCE policy document was finalised at the ETUCE Round Table and adopted by the ETUCE General Assembly in May 1999. Relevant conclusions, such as the need for initial teacher training and continuing professional development to cover this issue; the importance of the support of other professionals including psychologists, therapists and counsellors in dealing with bullying and the victims of bullying; as well as the importance of leadership, constructive conflict management and school action plans, featured in this document. As a result of the work carried out since 1999, the Pan-European Committee approved the ETUCE Action Plan on Violence in Schools in November 2008. The updated document presented here revisits issues already addressed by ETUCE in 1999 and 2008 as they remain an ongoing concern for teachers and students. The present Action Plan goes beyond incidents of violence and harassment in schools in general by including cyber-harassment, as this is a growing concern for teachers in Europe.

In this context, the Autonomous Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work, signed by the European social partners UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC (and the liaison committee EUROCADRES/CEC) in March 2007, gives the trade union movement an additional tool for tackling all forms of violence and harassment in the workplace. In order for teacher unions to ensure an optimal benefit of the

Framework Agreement, ETUCE is working more in-depth on this concern. In the project on cyber-harassment, ETUCE facilitated the exchange of experiences among trade unions to identify best practices on strategies and actions to tackle cyber-harassment of school staff and to analyse the transferability of such best practices to different countries within EU/EFTA and candidate countries. Continuing the work achieved in the project "Preventing and Tackling Violence in Schools", ETUCE was able to offer teachers and school staff different approaches for dealing with student bad behaviour and violent attitudes, this time with a special focus on cyber-harassment.

Moreover, ETUCE continues to promote its implementation guide for teacher unions on the Autonomous Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work produced in 2008 to provide teacher unions with information from a teacher perspective, as the guide is a useful tool for teacher trade unions when implementing the Framework Agreement at national, regional and local level.

ETUCE believes that further effort is needed to continue preserving schools as safe places for teaching and learning.

This Action Plan intends to lay the foundation for ETUCE's work on violence and harassment, including cyber-harassment in the following years. Four main levels for specific action have been identified:

1.   European level
2.   National/regional level
3.   Local level
4.   School level

At European level, ETUCE commits itself to:

- Continue supporting the implementation of the European Social Partners' Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work at national and trade union level;

- Support the exchange of national good practices and data collection on actions and strategies on the implementation of the Framework Agreement in the education sector and disseminate these amongst its member organisations to be taken into account according to the national context;

- Report to ETUC on how the national implementation of the Framework Agreement is carried out, according to the information sent by ETUCE member organisations and cooperate with ETUC on future implementation measures;

- Monitor and influence the EU decision-making processes, particularly the European Commission's Strategy on Health and Safety at Work (5-year strategic guidelines) and related policies and legislative measures, so as to give greater prominence to harassment and violence at work, including cyber-harassment, in the European agenda;

- Continue lobbying the EU Commission's DG EAC and the Education Council to deal with teachers' Health and Safety issues within the "Education and Training 2020" Process;

- Monitor and influence the EU decision-making processes in those issues that concern the educational policies, bringing violence in education to the attention of the Directorate General "Education and Culture" of the European Commission;

- Support all activities aiming at the inclusion of harassment and violence (prevention) in the risk assessment required by the Directive on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in workers' safety and health at work (89/391/EEC), in particular within the framework of the Healthy Workplaces Campaign on Risk Assessment and on Safe Maintenance conducted by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work;

- Monitor and influence the EU decision-making processes as regards media and information policies, raising awareness about the effect in particular cyber-harassment has got on teachers with the Directorate General "Information Society and Media" of the European Commission.

- Encourage and support the dialogue of European and national actors in education with global and national service providers of media and information policies to seek ways to set up sustainable technical measures to prevent and avoid in particular cyber-harassment;

- Raise awareness on the fact that efficient work organisation in schools is essential in preventing and tackling violence in schools;
- Raise awareness on the fact that the education sector is one of the most exposed sectors to violence and cyber-harassment in particular, and that this issue has to be collectively addressed by the profession through its trade union representatives;
- Promote and facilitate the exchange of measures to tackle violence at work and cyber-harassment against teachers and school staff via the ETUCE Health and Safety website, www.edu-osh.org.
- Develop a basic set of guidelines for teacher unions on strategies for tackling and preventing cyber-harassment against teachers and school staff which can be adapted to the situation in each country and be used for the cooperation with other parties in the education sector.
- Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Updated ETUCE Action Planon Preventing and Tackling Violence in Schools.
- Disseminate relevant information concerning European legislation on the protection of personal data to raise awareness on this topic and on the existence of European organisations that protect and assist individuals in this matter.
- Consider the issue of harassment and violence at work for teachers as part of teacher education;
- Negotiate specific and joint guidelines on how to implement the European Social Partners' Framework Agreement with the employers in education (EFEE) in the European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in Education;

At national/regional[3] teacher trade union level

> ### ETUCE commits itself to:

- Build on the acquired knowledge and experiences from its projects on Preventing and Tackling Violence in Schools and on cyber-harassment by continuing to complete national good practices and by disseminating the implementation guide

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[3] The action should be taken at the appropriate level, depending of the division of competences in education in every country.

to the European Social Partners' Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work;

- Support its member organisations in their efforts to improve national policies and national legislation on occupational health and safety, particularly on harassment and violence at work including cyber-harassment;

- Strengthen its member organisations in their efforts to provide schools with the necessary framework to tackle and prevent violence, including cyber-harassment in the educational environment and to give visibility to the actions taken;

- Encourage its member organisations in developing national trade union strategies that ensure a good working environment and the well-being at school for teachers and pupils alike;

- Help its member organisations in promoting the development of guidelines on school action plans and policies concerning the prevention of violence in general and cyber-harassment in particular;

- Support its member organisations in considering conflict resolution as an important matter to be dealt with in teacher education and promote the development of national trade union strategies on the prevention of violence and harassment;

> **ETUCE advises national trade unions to:**

- Continue informing and raising awareness on violence, including cyber-harassment. To particularly consider the implications of the failure to act, and to lobby national governments, regional authorities and other employers in education on the need for action to tackle violence in schools;

- Negotiate specific and joint guidelines on how to implement the European Social Partners' Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at work, including anti-cyber-harassment measures with employers in education at national level;

- Work on the development and adoption of specific collective agreements in countries where the national collective bargaining model allows;

- Promote training for health and safety union representatives, shop stewards and other representatives on mainstreaming the issues of violence and cyber-harassment in collective agreement negotiations;

- Provide advice and guidance on efficient measures and tools - for school management and school staff - on how to tackle and prevent harassment and violence, including cyber-harassment in schools, by giving priority to examples of measures taken as part of the risk assessment process;

- Disseminate these guidelines to their regional, local and if possible school (trade union) structures;

- Promote training measures for teachers and head teachers how to prevent and tackle violence in schools, in particular incidents of cyber-harassment against school staff and develop concrete action policies;

- Work on the inclusion of violence and harassment at work and the use and risks of emerging technologies in the context of teachers' initial education and continuous professional development with a particular focus on cyber-harassment;

- Promote the adoption of guidelines on how to develop school action plans and policies (including training, risk assessment, mediation and victim support);

- Promote the teaching of subjects within the national curriculum which contribute to pupils positive behaviour in schools (i.e.: civic education, learning to behave);

- Cooperate with the national/regional education authorities on the development of teaching material on the prevention of violence and harassment, including cyber-harassment.

- Promote the establishment of procedures for reacting and responding to violence in schools (i.e. emergency plans) including harassment against school staff linked to the working environment, but occurring outside the workplace;

- Encourage better regulated service and that service providers remove offensive web-content more rapidly.

At local level, ETUCE advises national trade unions to:

- Advocate for the allocation of adequate funding in order to prevent and tackle violence and cyber-harassment in schools;

- Promote an increased cooperation among schools and local social and health services including service providers and external experts on violence and harassment and cyber-harassment;

- Promote the involvement of parents' associations in the implementation of local/regional policies on tackling violence and harassment;

- Advocate for the organisation of continuing professional development training courses for teachers and head teachers on preventing and tackling violence, including cyber-harassment;

- Advocate for the development of training courses for head teachers on how to implement risk assessment in their schools, taking into consideration the risks and misuse of new media, internet and communication technologies;

- Inform their affiliates on their rights (European case law and national law) in cases of violence at their work place and/or against them, as well as on the available support from the trade union for teachers and school staff being victims of violence;

At school level, ETUCE advises national trade unions to:

- Concentrate efforts on incentive measures, e.g. such as training measures directed at school staff, to promote the implementation of risk assessment in schools, including taking into consideration the risks and misuse of new media, internet and communication technologies;

- Lay emphasis on the importance of involving school management in the process of tackling violence and harassment in schools for teachers and school staff, always in consultation with school governors and the educative community;

- Promote a school concept based on democratic values that encourages violence and harassment prevention and includes mediation plans;

- Monitor the implementation of school action plans and policies on tackling violence and harassment, including cyber-harassment;

- Promote parents' involvement in the implementation of school policies on tackling violence and harassment;

- Develop a school that is based on the principal of subsidiarity, i.e. the principal that every school is best placed to find the best ways to promote good relationships at school, including the establishment of agreements among the whole educative community (parents, students, teachers, other workers, etc.).

<u>Glossary</u>

CEEP: European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public services

ETUC: European Trade Union Confederation

EUROCADRES: The Council of European Professional and Managerial Staff

CEC: European Confederation of Executives and Managerial Staff

UEAPME: European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

UNICE: Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe