

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bullying is not an isolated aggressive action between a “bully” and a “victim”. It is rather a dynamic, social relationship problem which is, often, due to hectic human relations involving more participants. As such, it is influenced by peers, families, schools, and communities. Consequently, the phenomenon of bullying should concern the entire school population and all the factors that are responsible for the quality of education. In this context, the overall objective of this project was to develop an evidence-based and theory-driven approach to deal with bullying in schools by integrating research on bullying with a theoretical model which provides a dynamic perspective on the functioning and effects of education. This dynamic approach emphasizes the use of a whole-school approach to face bullying which is concerned with factors that contribute in the improvement of the quality of the school and the classroom environment such as student behaviour outside the classroom, the partnership policy, and collaboration between teachers. Research has shown that these factors have both direct and indirect effects on student achievement in different outcomes of schooling. School policy on opportunity to learn is also taken into account and it is stressed that the policy should refer to aims associated with bullying (e.g., understanding of social values, emotional recognition, developing positive attitudes towards the school). School policy should also include rules for handling and sanctioning bullying when it occurs. In this approach, emphasis is also given to the development of school self-evaluation mechanisms which help schools identify priorities for improvement and develop their strategies and action plans to face and reduce bullying.

During the first phase of the project, a pre-measure with respect to the bullying and the factors included in the proposed framework was conducted in each participating country (i.e., Belgium, Cyprus, England, Greece, and the Netherlands). Analysis of the data collected during this phase revealed the existing anti-bullying techniques in different schools and the functioning of schools in relation to the factors related to the school and classroom learning environment included in the framework. In the second phase, we established a network of schools within each country which were willing to establish strategies and actions to face and reduce bullying by using the proposed dynamic approach. Training and provision of guidelines by considering the different national contexts was provided to the participating schools within each country. A handbook was also produced presenting the theoretical framework and providing suggestions to schools on how to build school self-evaluation mechanisms aiming to prevent bullying and improve the educational practices at school and classroom level. The research team provided feedback to each school on its priorities for improvement that could be considered in establishing their strategies and actions to face bullying. Support was also provided to the schools in order to establish their school self-evaluation mechanisms and develop and implement their strategies and actions to face bullying. This phase lasted for approximately 13 months and researchers provided support to the schools by acting as critical friends. This was achieved by providing school based in-service training to the staff of each school to help them face difficulties in implementing their action plans. Moreover, schools established continuous formative evaluation mechanisms which helped them modify their strategies and plans according to the circumstances and specific needs of different groups of the school population. In addition, in each country, the research team provided feedback to a second group of schools about the results emerged from the pre-measure and these schools developed their own strategies and actions to face bullying without using the proposed dynamic approach (control group). In order to evaluate the impact of the dynamic approach, the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ) and a questionnaire measuring the quality of school life as perceived by students were administered to each group of schools both at the beginning and at the end of the intervention. Since in most countries schools were randomly allocated at the experimental and control groups, at the end of the intervention, we administered a social cognition test to students of each group of schools.

The main results of this project are as follows. First, the first phase of the study revealed that there was a significant variation among schools (within and across countries) on the extent to which students are being bullied or bully others and on the functioning of school factors included in the proposed framework. Second, data emerged from this phase provided support to the validity of the OBVQ and of the questionnaire measuring the functioning of school factors. During the second phase,

we were in a position to demonstrate the validity of: a) the social cognition test and b) the student questionnaire measuring the quality of school life. These instruments can be used for research and for improvement efforts by schools in the participating countries. Third, qualitative data collected during the second phase of the project revealed that schools did not face significant difficulties in developing their own school self evaluation mechanisms and generally supported the proposed dynamic approach to face and reduce bullying. Fourth, using multilevel modelling techniques, it was found out that there were significant differences among schools in their effectiveness status in terms of reducing bullying. The importance of school effect was demonstrated by using either data emerged from the scale A of OBVQ (which refers to the extent to which students are being victimised) or the scale B (which refers to the extent to which students bully others). Fifth, the multilevel analysis revealed that schools which made use of the dynamic approach were able to reduce bullying at a significantly higher level than the schools of the control group. The use of the dynamic approach to face bullying had also a significant effect in the development of positive attitudes towards schooling but this effect was smaller than the effect that the dynamic approach had on reduction of bullying. Sixth, the use of the dynamic approach to reduce bullying had almost no effect on students' social cognition. This finding could be attributed to the fact that most schools developed strategies and actions which were concerned with the improvement of the school learning environment rather than with the provision of further learning opportunities. Finally, in some countries it was possible to collect data on the functioning of school factors both at the beginning and at the end of the intervention. In these countries, it is demonstrated that schools which made use of the dynamic approach managed to improve the functioning of school factors at a higher level than the schools of the control group. Moreover, those schools which managed to improve their school factors were found to be more effective in terms of reducing bullying.

Implications of the positive findings of this project for the development of effective policies and practices in reducing bullying can be drawn. First, the major evidence in this project is that there is scope to be given to school self evaluation in order to develop effective strategies and actions to face and reduce bullying. School self-evaluation promotes the importance of collecting and analyzing data at different stages of a school improvement project and thereby a continuous evaluation model is used. Moreover, schools are expected through reflections to adapt their strategies and actions in order to improve them and thereby the formative purpose of evaluation is achieved. By offering a theoretical framework to schools, it was also possible to help them identify their priorities for improvement (through SSE) and understand why and how by dealing with a school factor reduction of bullying can be achieved. In this way, the use of an evidence-based and theory-driven approach can help schools develop effective strategies and action plans which address important school factors and can contribute in the improvement of the learning environment of schools and classrooms and through that to the reduction of bullying. Support provided by researchers to schools in order to implement their strategies and actions is also critical in reducing bullying since researchers should not only provide schools with the knowledge-base for dealing with the problems that they may face during the implementation but should also help them with their technical expertise to continuously evaluate their strategies and actions to face bullying. In this context, suggestions for further research are drawn in order to investigate the long term effect of the dynamic approach to face bullying and identify contributory and inhibitory factors to the sustainability of this approach.