



How to Prevent and Mitigate Third-Party Violence and Harassment in Schools

Implementation Guide for the Education Sector of the Multi-Sectoral Guidelines to Tackle Third-Party Violence and Harassment Related to Work

1. Introduction

This Implementation guide has been developed within the project *Social Partners in education concerned about Violence in Schools: How to Prevent and Mitigate Third-Party Violence and Harassment in Schools*. It is based on the results of the project activities to which representatives of both, the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) actively contributed.

Appreciating the different cultural and country contexts, the social partners confirm their mutual interest to reach the shared goal where schools, which are the working environment for teachers and other school staff and the learning environment for young people, are safe and secure to ensure the best possible setting for teaching and learning.

Violent incidents in schools interfere with teaching and have a malign influence on the working environment of teachers and the quality of learning of students. 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 pupils. According to the [Fourth and Fifth European Working Conditions Survey](#) (2005 and 2007) by EUROFOUND, the percentage for third-party violence varies significantly between EU countries and only few countries have an official definition of third-party violence. Education is amongst those sectors with the highest risk of third-party violence, yet the number of countries/schools having developed specific policies remains low¹. This is why this topic needs to be high on the agenda of the social partners in education, particularly at a time of economic and financial crisis, when the pressure on society's wellbeing and standards of living cause distress that might be extrapolated negatively to schools.

The social partners in education are concerned about the impact of third-party violence and harassment on teachers and education employees because they not only undermine an individual's health and dignity, but also have a very real economic impact in term of absences from the workplace, morale and staff turnover. Third-party violence and harassment can also create an environment that is unsafe and even frightening to the public and therefore have a wide negative social impact.

With a view to bring about a sustainable change that has a lasting impact on the school environment, actions determining and strengthening the fundamental values in school (e.g. mutual respect, democratic citizenship) should start at an early age and involve all stakeholders in education, social partners, school

¹ [European Risk Observatory Report, Workplace Violence and Harassment: A European Picture](#), European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, pp. 28-42.



leaders, teachers, students and parents alike. For this, continuous public investment in education is needed at all levels to ensure high quality education, including the prevention of third-party violence and harassment, as prerequisite for healthy and safe schools.

The purpose is to support the creation of an atmosphere where children can learn and teachers, education employees and employer representatives can perform their job in a positive, healthy and safe setting. The document reflects the work of the social partners in education on the prevention and reduction of third-party violence and harassment in education on which further joint actions at European, national, regional and local level may be developed.

2. Background

This implementation guide is to be understood as the continuation of the work of the social partners in education in this field.

In 2010, the European Social Partners from the education, local governments, hospital, private security and commerce sectors, represented by ETUCE, EFEE, EPSU, CEMR, UNI-EUROPA, HOSPEEM, COESS and EUROCOMMERCE, agreed and committed to the [Multi-Sectoral Guidelines to Tackle Third-Party Violence and Harassment Related to Work](#).

According to EU² and national law, both employers and workers have obligations in the field of health and safety. Although, the duty to ensure the health and safety of workers in every aspect related to the work lies with the employer, the employee also has a responsibility to take care, as far as possible, of their own health and safety and that of other persons affected by their actions at work, in accordance with their training and the instructions given by their employer. Employers also have an obligation to consult workers and/or their representatives and allow them to take part on all questions relating to health and safety at work. This reflects awareness that, in practice, a joint approach to health and safety is the most successful.

The multi-sectoral guidelines further develop and implement the cross-sectoral [Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work](#) signed by the European Social Partners in April 2007. They aim to support joint actions by employers, workers and their representatives/trade unions to prevent, reduce and mitigate third-party violence and harassment and their consequences. They promote measures to further raise awareness on the topic demonstrating the commitment of social partners to work together and sharing experiences and good practices. Moreover, these guidelines provide employers and workers and their representatives at all levels with guiding principles to identify, prevent, manage and tackle problems of work related harassment and violence instigated by third parties. The ETUCE/EFEE project, *Social Partners in education concerned about Violence in Schools: How to Prevent and Mitigate Third-Party Violence and Harassment in Schools*, targeted exactly these points focusing in particular on the specific challenges of third-party violence and harassment in the education sector.

Promoting joint action of ETUCE and EFEE against third-party violence and harassment in education, this initiative contributed to the EU employment and social policy objectives as stipulated in the [Europe 2020](#)

² EU law includes:

Directive 89/391/EEC on the Introduction of Measures to Encourage Improvement in the Safety and Health of Workers at Work.

Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin

Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation

Directive 2002/73/EC of 23 September 2002 amending Council Directive 73/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment vocational training and promotion and working conditions.



[Strategy](#) with its [flagship initiatives for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth](#) and in the [Renewed Social Agenda](#)³.

The project also aimed to continue supporting national education stakeholders in implementing the social partners' action plans in this area, the European Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work and notably the [Directive 89/391/EEC](#) on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers in the workplace in line with the EU's health and safety strategy.

With this initiative, the social partners in education aimed to further raise awareness on the issue of third-party violence and harassment in the education sector at school level and to further promote the multi-sectoral guidelines to tackle third-party violence and harassment related to work amongst the social partners in the education sector at national, regional and local level in Europe. ETUCE and EFEE explored to what extent third-party violence and harassment are addressed in the education sector in Europe, delineated the action of teacher unions and education employers on measures preventing third-party violence and harassment to support the work on this issue. For this purpose, two regional seminars took place on 26 April 2012 in Warsaw and on 7 June 2012 in Brussels, where the outcome of the three case studies to education institutions in Spain, Sweden and Poland were presented⁴.

3. Definition of third-party violence and harassment for the education sector

Third-party violence and harassment are a form of violence and harassment. The European Agency for Occupational Safety and Health (EU-OSHA) defines third-party violence as *“physical violence, verbal aggression, or the threat of physical violence where the aggressor is not a work colleague, e.g. the person, customer, client or patient receiving the goods or services”*⁵. Violence and harassment towards a teacher from e.g. a student or parent would thus be considered to be third-party violence. As such it is an occupational health and safety hazard, covered by EU legislation.

The Multi-Sectoral Guidelines to Tackle Third-Party Violence and Harassment⁶ related to work explain further that third-party violence and harassment can take many forms. They could

- a) Be physical, psychological, verbal and/or sexual
- b) Be one-off incidents or more systematic patterns of behaviour, by an individual or group
- c) Originate from the actions or behaviour of clients, customers, patients, service users, pupils or parents, members of the public, or of the service provider
- d) Range from cases of disrespect to more serious threats and physical assault;
- e) Be caused by mental health problems and/or motivated by emotional reasons, personal dislike, prejudices on grounds of gender, racial/ethnic origin, religion and belief, disability, age, sexual orientation or body image.
- f) Constitute criminal offences aimed at the employee and his/her reputation or the property of the employer or client which may be organised or opportunistic and which require the intervention of public authorities
- g) Deeply affect the personality, dignity and integrity of the victims
- h) Occur at the work place, in the public space or in a private environment and is work related.
- i) Occur as cyber-bullying/cyber-harassment through a wide range of information and communication technologies (ICT).

³ It furthermore supported the European Commission Communications COM(2002)341, COM (2004)557 and SEC(2010)964.

⁴ Reports on these activities are available at: http://teachersosh.homestead.com/3rd-Party_Violence/thirdpartyviolencedescription.html

⁵ EU-OSHA (2011): “Workplace Violence and Harassment: a European Picture”, <http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/violence-harassment-TERO09010ENC>, 2009, p.132.

⁶ (I) 4. of the guidelines; the document can be found in 25 EU languages at: <http://www.eurocommerce.be/content.aspx?PageId=41864>.



Examining cases of third-party violence and harassment, there are two aspects to be considered; firstly, the violence/harassment aspect and secondly, the aspect of a third party. The violence/harassment aspect can be explained as aggression, which can be physical, psychological and/or verbal. The second aspect of a third party is a more complex concept and grounds on a legal concept: A third party is a person outside the relationship between two parties (people) that are legally bound by a contract, e.g. an employment contract, such as an employer and employee⁷. In other words, an employer, e.g. the national or local education authority, would be considered the first party. The second party is thus the employee e.g. a teacher, educator, school leader or member of school staff. Therefore parents, students, their relatives or friends, former students or members of the wider public, etc. would be considered as third party. Third-party violence and harassment do not cover violence and harassment between employees.

In the first regional seminar the participants identified the specificities of third-party violence and harassment in the education sector that distinguish the impact of third-party violence and harassment on teaching staff from its impact on personnel in other sectors. These differences explain why it is necessary to address the issue of third-party violence and harassment in the education sector in particular. Amongst these reasons are:

- ✓ The role of teaching staff – acts of violence and harassment committed against teaching staff due to the simple fact that a person is a teacher, educator or works in the education field and therefore is considered to be in a position of authority
- ✓ Tension for teaching staff as provider of education and at the same time evaluator of student's performance
- ✓ Long-term relationship (students and their respective parents/family)
- ✓ Education as a public good and a legal obligation - students cannot be banned as easily from school as customers/clients might be from shops

This guide aims to help schools in counteracting third-party violence and harassment and in defining concrete measures and establishing common procedures that address the issue and illustrate the necessary changes.

4. Aim

This implementation guide wishes to provide schools, social partners in education and other stakeholders in education with concrete and practical recommendations of good practices on preventing and reducing third-party violence and harassment in schools and to support them in implementing the Multi-Sectoral Guidelines to Tackle Third-Party Violence and Harassment Related to Work. It seeks to assist them in developing and setting up practical steps to increase the awareness on third-party violence and harassment in schools. Most importantly, the guide should be seen as a preventative tool to eliminate and mitigate occurring acts of violence and harassment by third parties as well as to remove the structures that help third-party violence and harassment grow.

It is essential to notice that the implementation guide does not provide an 'off-the-shelf' solution; instead this guide should be understood as a supporting tool on how to deal with the issue and should be assessed and adjusted to the national conditions concerning third-party violence and harassment of teacher and education employees, specifically taking into account the circumstances of each individual working place.

⁷ The examples provided here may vary depending on the different education systems in Europe.



5. Steps to Take in Preventing and Mitigating Third-Party Violence and Harassment in Schools

Step 1 Taking Stock – Start by understanding the situation

- Analyse how third-party violence and harassment affect the school environment (absenteeism, work-related illnesses, general atmosphere and well-being of education staff and students); which measures have already been taken to reduce third-party violence and harassment and which targets these measures have been set to meet and at which aspects they have been focused on. This can be done by local social partners at the school level. This may also be done by social partners at national and regional level.
- Raise awareness on the issue of third-party violence and harassment and their impact on the teaching and learning environment, e.g. by conducting surveys, as the ETUCE/EFFE project has shown, that violence and harassment is an existing difficulty in schools but the awareness of third-party violence and harassment still fairly new to the school community.
- Assess at all levels of education the situation in an open and trustful discussion including the whole school community – teachers, education employees, employers in education, parents and students.

Step 2 Cooperation – Establishing appropriate and well-directed measures

- Make use of common risk assessment tools to decide which measures/procedures are appropriate to promote a non-violent environment with a view to prevent incidents of third-party violence and harassment and to determine which supportive steps to take when such incidents do occur.
- Create a common school identity with common school values and continue to persistently work on them.
- Harmonise school rules, e.g. on acceptable behaviour, forms of punishment, etc. to be equally applied in all classrooms and throughout the school by all education staff
- Involve students, parents, teachers, education employees, school leaders and education employers to ensure that they become aware of third-party violence and work together on defining the appropriate measures/procedures to be taken, based on the analysis of the situation.
Good cooperation amongst the school community will be to the benefit for all. The better and more transparent and open the atmosphere in school is, the more positive the learning and teaching environment will be; leading to less absenteeism, reduced levels of work-related illnesses amongst the education staff and to less absenteeism and more motivation amongst students.
- Contact in accordance with existing procedures the local or regional public authorities, e.g. police, social services, health and safety agencies, etc., in charge of dealing with incidences of third-party violence and harassment in schools to assist in setting up preventative measures and to help establishing an emergency plan, e.g. for situations of serious violence. Good cooperation between the school and the local authorities/services offered to citizens can help to avoid that violent incidents are brought onto the school premises from outside.
- Establish or renew a strong statement by social partners at local level of zero acceptance to acts of third-party violence and harassment, making clear that should such cases occur they will be dealt with seriously.

Step 3 Promoting good practices

- Promote an attitude of respect and fairness amongst the school community, teachers and education employees as role models
- Include the promotion of non-violence and harassment, preventive actions and support to victims as part of a third-party violence and harassment scheme in the everyday school life. It is important to take into account the physical, psychological and emotional aspects as regards the school buildings, its organisation, staff and students' body.
- National or local social partners could launch a campaign on openness and tolerance, promoting a policy of respect rather than shame, e.g. Invite local politicians, together with parents and local education stakeholders for a discussion to inform the school community and education stakeholders about the concerns and actions that must be taken to promote and tackle third-party violence and harassment in education



Step 4 Reporting incidents – knowing how and where to ask for assistance

- Promote clear and simple procedures for teachers and education employers to react and respond to incidents of third-party violence and harassment in and outside the school and where to ask for assistance.
- Explain clearly for the whole school community how incidents of third-party violence and harassment will be dealt with and the consequences for non-acceptable behaviour.
- Find an easy and effective way to report incidents of third-party violence and harassment within the school to school management. This might also be used to report, collect and present the structure of incidents to education authorities, government departments and social partners.
- Consequently report at a very early stage when an act of third-party violence and harassment occurs. This will help to counteract the situation at an early stage with relatively simple measures, avoiding the aggravation of the situation which will probably require more sophisticated and complex procedures
- Ensure that the collected reports reach the stakeholders involved in taking decisions on the further development of the measures addressing third-party violence and harassment
- Offer information to the whole school community regarding the legal actions that could be taken if teacher and education employees are victims of third-party violence and harassment;

Step 5 Initial and Continuous Training

- Provide training to teachers, education employees, school leaders, parents and students on the prevention of third-party violence and harassment to ensure the reduction of violence and harassment rather than its escalation
- Inform the school community about European and/or national, regional and local legislation
- Provide practical training to learn about third-party violence and harassment and its consequences, how to identify third-party violence and harassment, how to react in a smart way and how and to whom to report
- Aim to build a positive atmosphere promoting non-violence in school.
- Advocate for continuous professional training on handling third-party violence and harassment incidents

Step 6 Monitoring and Follow-up

Once the measures and procedures have been put in place in a school, it is important to review them at regular intervals to monitor their impact and analyse whether third-party violence and harassment has actually diminished. Depending on the outcome of this evaluation, the schools might want to adapt the measures and procedures put in place, e.g. where a certain aspect hinders the achievement of the expected result or where the overall performance has been outstanding to enhance the targeted benchmarks.

Annex: Multi-sectoral guidelines

