



ARTEMIS

PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING
SEXUAL HARASSMENT & ABUSE IN
PRIMARY SCHOOLS

POLICY BRIEF



Co-funded by
the European Union

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About ARTEMIS Project

ARTEMIS Project (full title: “preventing sexual harassment & abuse among primary school students”) is an Erasmus+ Key Action 2 project, funded by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Commission.

The main objective of the project is to familiarise primary school teachers with the notions of gender diversity, and peer-to-peer sexual harassment and abuse in the classrooms and the school environment in general. This way, teachers will have the opportunity to effectively implement tools and methods that will assist them at preventing, recognising and addressing sexual harassment at school, setting thus the base for the creation of open, respectful and safe school environments for every student.

The ARTEMIS consortium includes 6 partners from France, Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain:





Introduction

Sexual harassment is a worldwide issue that everyone has heard about, however, few people are able to recognise its signs, address it effectively and in time, and offer valuable help and assistance for its eradication. It can take various forms, such as verbal or physical, and can occur in any place, at home, at work, on the bus, on the street. The multi-faceted character of this phenomenon has made its appearance even in universities, schools and online, making it more than evident that it may affect every individual, regardless of their age, profile and background (Hirvonen et al., 2020).

This is the reason why educational institutes should not only be able to adequately familiarise students with this issue but also find ways to address such behaviours that may be occurring right in its environment. In these efforts, the active participation of teachers, professors, school psychologists and administrative staff is necessary. Consequently, educators should have a double role in this:

- Talk to their students about these issues and raise awareness about sexual harassment issues and protection.
- Provide and act as a safe protective space for every student to seek support.



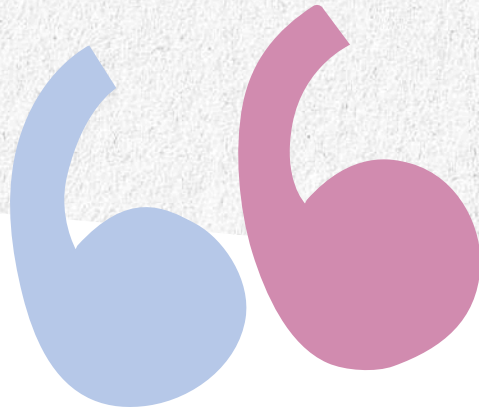
Introduction

The main objective of this policy brief is to raise awareness and educate everyone about the issue of sexual harassment and abuse in primary schools, with the hope that it will incentivise as many people as possible to act and fight for the eradication of this phenomenon. It will provide tools and materials in order to assist primary school teachers, but also school staff and parents in general, to guide through the complexities of this issue and develop strategies and methods that will help them effectively address and fight against it.

The expected results from this policy brief are:

- To raise awareness about the issue of sexual harassment in primary schools.
- To improve the competences of primary school teachers to address peer-to-peer sexually abusive behaviours in the school environment.
- To incentivise teachers, school administrators and parents to learn more about sexual harassment and the impact of gender in this phenomenon.
- To initiate an open dialogue with teachers, school administrators, public local and regional authorities, stakeholders and policymakers.

What is Sexual Harassment?



Any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Source: European Institute for Gender Equality





Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Primary Schools

Over the years, there have been observed several cases in which young children become recipients of sexual harassment and abuse from peers inside the school environment (Eurochild & UNICEF, 2022). This phenomenon is visible worldwide and more prevalent than one may think, with multiplying effects for the psychological and social development of victims. The harassment may take various forms, physical or verbal, and can be expressed through various channels, such as in school, on the street, in the neighbourhood and online (European Parliament, 2024; Karisson Valik, 2024).

The motives behind this type of behaviours may be linked to various psychological and social factors, that are often not taken into consideration from teachers and school psychologists. This makes it hard for them to prevent these aggressive expressions by recognising early the signs, or to even address this issue and offer personalised and appropriate support to the student that received the harassment (Espelage et al., 2016). Teachers and school staff should also be able to recognise and address the developmental and psychological factors of the offender, in order to provide them guidance and create comprehensive and rigid plans for avoiding the repetition of such actions in the future (McMaster et al., 2022).

Facts



In Europe, 1 in 5 children are victims of some form of sexual abuse.

Source: Council of Europe

In Austria, around 28% of 11 to 14-year-olds have encountered abusive sexual behaviours online.

Source: Better Internet for Kids (2025)

In the European Union, 37% of females have reported to have experience some form of peer-to-peer sexual harassment in primary school.

Source: Forced Migration Review (2020)



Fight Against Sexual Harassment:

Identified Gaps

- **Lack of Awareness by Teachers and Staff:** Sexual harassment and abuse is an issue that is often overlooked by teachers and school staff in primary education settings. It is wrongly believed that this issue does not appear in the relationships between peers at this age.
- **Lack of Inclusive Support and Protection Systems:** Students who are being harassed by peers at school or outside often lack the means of support they need in order to open up, discuss their issues and receive appropriate assistance. Schools and teachers are rarely seen as safe protective spaces for addressing such topics.
- **Minimum Sexual and Social Education:** Modern school curricula, especially in primary education contexts, fail to effectively integrate sexual education and social-oriented courses. This widens the gap of knowledge for young students, who ought to be informed and educated in these issues in an appropriate way.



Fight Against Sexual Harassment: Identified Gaps

- **Lack of Mechanisms of Prevention:** Teachers and school curricula fail to implement effective prevention strategies and methods to proactively recognise the signs of harassment and abuse. This leads to the apparition of such incidents at schools.
- **Limited Access to School Resources:** Students usually do not have access to freely provided school resources (e.g. psychologist, assistance, sessions with teachers) either due to the lack of the school to provide adequate number of resources to accommodate the needs of all students, or due to lack of information about their existence.
- **Failure to Present Gender-Based Realities:** Gender studies and gender-sensitive curricula are not integrated in modern educational environments. Both teachers and students fail to recognise the gender-based hidden factors that are connected to cases of this phenomenon.



ARTEMIS

Policy
Recommendations



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For Teachers

Inclusion of Social and Gender-Based Approaches in Teaching

Familiarisation with and inclusion of more socially and gender-sensitive approaches, methodologies and theories in teaching efforts. Through this, students will have the opportunity to learn from an early age about gender issues, violence and harassment in an appropriate and safe way for them.

Communication with Students

Dedication of some time and space by teachers to host students who want to reach out and talk to them about any issue that is troubling them. The teacher should make it clear that it is a safe space of expression, so that they gain the trust of the students.



For School Administrators and Staff

● Planning and Reporting

Development of clear guidelines, plans and strategies for the recognition, prevention and addressing of sexual harassment cases at school. School administrators, working closely with teachers and other school staff, should guide the creation of specific rules and processes that should be followed when there is a suspected or realised harassment attempt.

● Externalisation of Work, Collaboration and Sharing of Best Practices

School administrators should be responsible for the creation of partnerships and networks with other schools at local, regional, national and international level, to assist the sharing of best practices on policies, activities and initiatives regarding the eradication of sexual harassment and abuse incidents at schools.



For Policymakers

● Provision with More Specialised School Staff

Local and national authorities should make sure that every school is adequately equipped to address and support the needs of every individual student. This means, provision of enough psychologists, teachers and school staff to which students can express their issues and open up.

● Conduction of Research on Different Levels

Authorities and stakeholders should guide a nationwide research initiative to recognise and identify the percentages of sexual harassment incidents in primary schools and how these affect children in various aspects of their life (social, psychological, educational, physical, etc.). This activity will enable the facilitation of awareness campaigns and the drafting of more effective and inclusive prevention strategies.



Conclusion

The eradication of sexual harassment incidents in schools can only have a positive effect, not only to the students, but to the whole society.

Sexual violence and intimidation do not belong in societies that should be promoting inclusion, accessibility, safety and equality. Young students should be given the opportunity to get educated on these issues in order to get familiar with the detrimental effects such actions can have to individuals.

Schools, teachers, authorities and families should have an active role in this fight against violence and abuse, and can make a change for future generations.

Only in this way sexual harassment incidents can be really prevented and effectively addressed in the long term.



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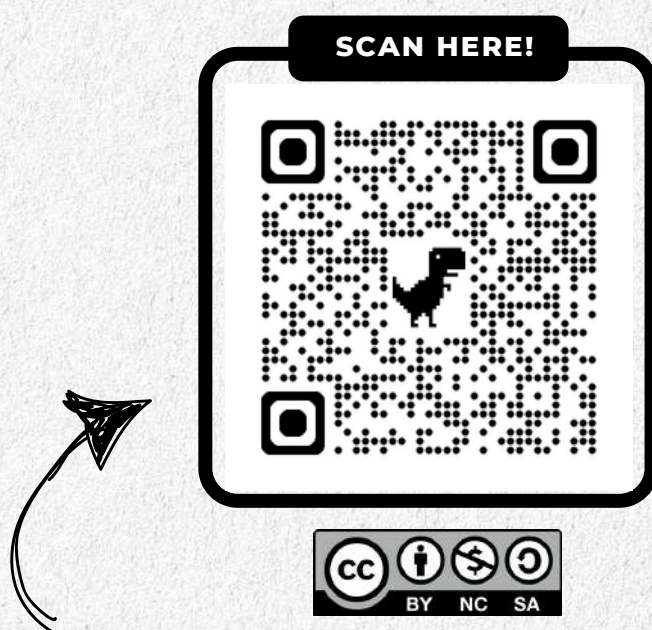
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