UKCCIS
UK COUNCIL FOR **CHILD INTERNET SAFETY**

European Parliament

Cyberbullying Among Young People:
Directorate-General for Internal Policies, European Parliament

Aims

This study provides an overview of the extent, scope and forms of cyberbullying in the EU taking into account the age and gender of victims and perpetrators, as well as the medium used. It illustrates the legal and policy measures on cyberbullying adopted at the European and international levels, and delineates the EU role in this area. It also analyses legislation and policies aimed at preventing and fighting this phenomenon, and outlines the variety of definitions of cyberbullying across EU Member States. The study also examines the similarities and differences between cyberbullying, traditional bullying and cyber aggression. Last, it presents successful practices on how to prevent and combat cyberbullying in nine selected EU Member States, and puts forward recommendations for improving the response at EU and Member State levels.

Key Findings

- The increased availability of new technologies has resulted in a rise in cyberbullying cases in recent years. Cyberbullying is a particularly dangerous phenomenon as it can take place everywhere and at any time, giving victims limited possibilities to escape.
- While there is no single internationally agreed upon definition of cyberbullying, according to the literature the following elements characterise cyberbullying: the use of electronic or digital means; the intention to cause harm; an imbalance of power between the victims and the perpetrators; a sense of anonymity and lack of accountability of abusers as well as the publicity of actions. Only fourteen EU Member States provide an official definition of bullying online.
- There is evidence that bullying and cyberbullying often continue in adulthood, but limited findings available do not make it possible to draw a clear picture of its extent.
- Whereas most studies reveal that no gender is particularly targeted, some studies suggest that girls are just as likely, if not more likely, than boys to experience cyberbullying as victims or perpetrators.
- The link between cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration has been highlighted in some Member States based on evidence that victims of cyberbullying are also more likely to be perpetrators than non-victims.
- Bullying online and offline seem also to be linked. Cyberbullying perpetrators are often involved as victims or perpetrators in traditional bullying.
- Social networks are identified by more than half of the respondents as a channel for cyberbullying, whereas few respondents recognised the internet as a channel for cyberbullying.
- According to respondents in Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Romania the average age when cyberbullying is experienced is 13-15 years.

Policy Context

- The European Commission should adopt an official definition of cyberbullying in order to ensure a common understanding of the phenomenon and provide guidance to Member States which have diverse definitions. This could be achieved by mainstreaming the existing Commission's definition through EU programmes/grants. While taking into account its links with traditional bullying, cyberbullying should then be considered and tackled per se. In this respect, the Commission should promote initiatives in collaboration with Member States to raise awareness of cyberbullying and its unique characteristics, including training of relevant professionals.
- The Commission should consider criminalising cyberbullying perpetrated by adults given the seriousness of cyberbullying behaviours and their cross-border nature on the basis of Article 83 of the TFEU. Although the EU has only a 'supplementary' role in this area, EU action on cyberbullying cannot be completely excluded.

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- The awareness of bullying online and the sharing of good practices in this area across the EU should also be strengthened. Since data and information are essential for developing and implementing effective measures to prevent and combat cyberbullying, harmonised data collection should be guaranteed across Europe. The Commission should foster cooperation with the private sector including social media providers.

- The Commission should introduce soft-law instruments such as guidelines addressed to internet providers on how to effectively detect, monitor and report cyberbullying incidents. Preventive measures should also be adopted and reinforced through the direct financial contribution to projects/programmes on cyberbullying by the Commission.

- The European Parliament should ensure that cyberbullying among young people is at the top of the EU agenda in the field of child protection. The European Parliament should scrutinize the Commissions' proposals, opinions and activities in this area and work with the Commission to ensure that cyberbullying is not side lined in the legislative process. In this respect, a role could be played by the Intergroup on children's rights in charge of promoting children's rights in all EU internal and external action.

- At national level, Member States should measure cyberbullying regularly and systematically. A preventive approach to cyberbullying should be preferred to a punitive one. Strategies promoting a safer education environment within and outside schools, as well as programmes increasing internet skills for children, parents and teachers should be promoted. Member States should also consider introducing specific responsibilities on schools to prevent and combat bullying offline and online. Support and educational programmes for all those involved and not involved in bullying incidents should be created. Reporting mechanisms such as helplines and the installation of reporting tools in children's computers to signal incidents should also be put into place. Member States should establish ad hoc structures and programmes for the treatment of victims and their families in serious cases of cyberbullying.

Methodology

The study is based on research conducted between February 2016 and May 2016. Although the research covered all 28 EU Member States, a closer analysis of the situation in nine Member States was performed: Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The methods included an extensive literature review, consultation with experts, and a survey among young people aged 12-21 years in all EU Member States.

Background

The European Commission defines cyberbullying as repeated verbal or psychological harassment carried out by an individual or a group against others through online services and mobile phones. Cyberbullying is generally understood as bullying taking place on the internet, but there is no single definition agreed upon internationally. However, attempts to define this phenomenon have been made by international organizations, EU institutions and academia. According to the 2014 EU Net Children Go Mobile Report, 12% of the 3,500 children aged 9-16 years old were cyberbullied. Similarly, the 2011 EU Kids Online report found that 6% of the 25,142 children between 9 and 16 years of age had been bullied online across Europe and 3% had carried out cyberbullying. Cyberbullying increased among children aged 11-16 from 7% in 2010 to 12% in 2014. At the national level, none of the 28 EU Member States have criminal legal provisions targeting cyberbullying and there are no standards specifically targeting cyberbullying at international level.

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