



**Challenging social and gender norms
to reduce violence against
children in school**

A project co-founded by the European Union



RAPID ASSESSMENT ON SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: REGIONAL REPORT

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE: BULGARIA, CROATIA, GREECE AND ROMANIA

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AoR	Area of Responsibility
CBO	Community-Based organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GBVIMS	Gender-Based Violence Information Management System
HTP	Harmful Traditional Practice
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
IR	Incident Recorder
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISP	Information Sharing Protocol
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, plus
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OVC	Other vulnerable children
RHRC	Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium
SAPI	Institute of Social Activities and Practices
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SRGBV	School-related Gender-Based Violence
SV	Sexual Violence
Tdh	Terre des Hommes
UAM	Unaccompanied Minor
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WHO	World Health Organization



1. INTRODUCTION

Violence in schools is one of the most visible and pervasive forms of violence against children within the EU level. School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is resulted due to gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics. As such, gender plays an influential role in the prevalence of certain types of violence in schools, girls being more prone to sexual and psychological violence, while boys, to physical violence.

The present report contributes to the project [CARING – Challenging social and gender norms to reduce violence against children in school](#), co-funded by the European Union. The project is being implemented by Terre des hommes (Tdh) Romania, Terre des hommes Hungary, Terre des hommes Greece, Brave Phone, SAPI and Association Roditeli between the 1st of May 2023 and the 30th of April 2025 in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece and Romania, coordinated by Tdh Romania.

The aim of the report is to present the findings of the rapid needs assessment exercise conducted in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece and Romania related to SRGBV among children, young people, educational staff, and school management, according to the [CARING Rapid Assessment Methodological Guide](#) (see annexes). The aim of the assessment was to identify the specific social and gender norms which are promoting and maintaining GBV in the 32 selected schools from 4 countries. Its findings and recommendations will be used to better shape the [capacity building programme](#) to increase the capacities of educational staff and school management to adopt tolerant, inclusive, and non-violent communication, behaviour and to promote positive practices related to gender-equity in schools.

The report is based on data collected through online questionnaires and both offline and online focus group discussions (FGDs) with students, educational staff and school management in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece and Romania.

A total of **680 respondents** participated in the study. Online questionnaires were completed by 42 students in Bulgaria, 55 in Croatia, 96 in Romania and 19 from Greece, while 41 school staff from Bulgaria, 50 from Croatia, 171 from Romania and 17 from Greece filled in the surveys. In Bulgaria a total of 6 focus group discussions, 3 with students and 3 with teachers were completed, in Croatia three FGDs were conducted in person with students from three schools, one FGD was conducted online with teachers from different schools, and another online with other members of school staff from different schools. In Romania 5 focus groups, 3 with students and 2 with school staff were conducted. While in Greece, a total of 6 FGDs were conducted; 3 of which with students and 3 with school staff. Students' FGDs and 2 FGDs with adults were held in person, whereas the other FGD was mixed with two of the informants participating online. The data collection tools are available online in the CARING Rapid Assessment Methodological Guide.

The results of the rapid assessment can be grouped into five main categories: perception of gender roles and associated societal expectations; perception of school climate; disciplinary practices of school staff; occurrence of violence in school environment and student's and staff's ability to manage GBV cases.

Analysing the results, it shows that **both students and school staff endorse gender stereotypes to a certain extent.** In Croatia the majority of participants disagree or are neutral with the statement that girls should have long hair and dress ladylike, while in Bulgaria and Romania a significant proportion of



both students and school staff agree. In all countries student participants generally agree that girls need more protection than boys.

In Bulgaria and Greece, it is not necessarily considered a problem if a girl has more boyfriends, she is not considered a “bad girl”, unlike in Romania and Croatia, where almost half of the participants (in both countries) believe that girls who have more boyfriends are considered bad girls. **These results suggest that there are some traditional stereotypes still present towards girls.**

Interestingly, there is a **significant shift from traditional stereotypes towards boys** in all the countries. Boys who cry are not considered weak and it is generally rejected that boys and men should never do housework such as cleaning and cooking. This shows that the typical demands of modernity, having two working and interchangeable parents is leading to a gradual change at least in daily life. Furthermore, neither students, nor school staff accept a boy to hit his girlfriend, it has been overwhelmingly rejected in Romania, Greece and Croatia and fully rejected in Bulgaria. There are similar results among countries with regards to the statement ‘*Boys should always defend themselves even if it means fighting*’, the majority of both students and school staff disagrees, but around one third of the student participants generally agree with this perspective in all the countries.

When it comes to the **acceptance of non-conforming gender behaviour**, in Bulgaria both students and teachers emphatically do not accept such a thing if a girl acts and dresses more like a boy or a boy acts and dresses more like a girl. For both groups, half of the respondents rejected the idea. In Croatia, Greece and Romania both students and school staff believe that it is more acceptable for a girl to dress more like a boy than the other way around, while these results suggest that some **discrimination, based on deviations from traditional appearances, exists in all countries.**

In terms of **perception of school climate** in all countries **students in general feel safe at school**, however, there is significantly more school staff, who believe so than students themselves. In both Bulgaria and Romania students generally agree that teachers or school officials **always take action when students report acts of violence**, while in Croatia only one third of them agree with the above statement, and some students believe that teachers rarely do something. Another interesting finding is when violence occurs at school, it is generally not reported in Croatia and somewhat not reported in Bulgaria. This implies that **it is possible that conflicts, incidents among students happen without the teachers’ knowledge**, which suggests that there might be **communication issues** between students and teachers and other issues related to **power dynamics and fear of consequences’** that might affect the students’ social positions. Students more often prefer to share incidents with their peers or parents than teachers. Another potential reason for students not reporting the violence is the fact that the teachers and school staff (psychologists and pedagogues) have no means other than talking in handling these situations.

In **all participating countries students articulate that violence is a problem.** Especially **verbal violence, marginalisation and bullying** in the forms of threats, insults, calling each other’s names, discriminating each other based on sexual orientation and or ethnicity (especially LGBTQ and Roma students) were mentioned as the most common types of violence.

Cyberbullying is also present at schools in Bulgaria, Greece and Croatia, students mentioned examples such as posting photos or posts mocking a person, creating fake profiles, manipulating a group of students against another group or person, sharing false information about someone via social media. As an example, from the data generated during focus groups in Greece, cyber bullying can be extremely



cruel, escalate fast and get out of control – for example, within half a day one can receive hundreds of haters and/or negative and ridiculing comments visible to everyone, with detrimental effects to the victim. However, in Romania students reported cyberbullying as a somewhat rare type of violence.

Physical violence may also happen in the forms of breaking each other's things or actual fighting, which is more common between boys than girls. Both in Croatia and Romania physical violence became less frequent in the premises of the school, in Romania this may be due to the intervention of school security and video cameras installed. In Bulgaria it is more common and does not surprise neither students nor teachers.

Sexual violence also appears in all countries in the forms of text or video messages, name-calling related to sexual identity, indecent touching, showing, or posting nude photos of others, inappropriate gestures and making fun of someone because of their sexual orientation. Unfortunately, this type of violence often stays unreported as it is sort of a taboo, and a difficult topic and students prefer not to share it with teachers but with their peers.

When it comes to **disciplinary practices** the results are quite similar in all countries. **Praising students publicly** in the school is the most common **reward method** teachers use followed by praising students to their parents. These approaches are recognized as powerful tools for motivating students. Rewarding students with gifts is less common, it appears to be a less frequently employed form of rewarding. If it happens, teachers most often reward students with a good grade, remarks in the diary and rarely offer participation in a camp or field trip.

In terms of **punishment practices**, teachers discussing disciplinary issues directly with students is the most preferred disciplinary action. Involving parents in addressing disciplinary problems is also a common approach, while sending the student to a higher authority, such as the principal or head teacher, is less chosen by the respondents as a form of punishment. To recommend the student for punishment is a rare occurrence.

To measure **students' ability to prevent and respond to violence**, different scenarios were discussed through the FGDs. Although dependent on the scenario, **students would rarely report incidents of violence to third parties** naming their parents, teachers, and the police for example if someone would threaten to beat them up after class. However, in most cases **students prefer to sort issues among themselves in all the countries**. When it comes to relationship violence and online bullying, sharing with friends is the preferred strategy. If they feel that they needed to share it with an adult, they will rather share things with their parents than with teachers. This behaviour confirms once again that **students may fear of getting their school involved, fear of consequences' that might affect the students' social positions, and distrust towards the institution** to be able to solve such incidents.

When measuring **school staff's ability to prevent and respond to violence**, there were some **differences among the countries**. In Romania there is a general procedure in place concerning violence, which has been reinforced through the introduction of audio-video monitoring systems in schools. Schools also provide avenues for reporting acts of violence, including periodic online surveys, informative sessions. However, many of these procedures are not formally documented – teachers often create them based on their own initiative or in addition to existing protocols. In Bulgaria teachers rely on anti-bullying programmes and mechanisms at school that have provided a framework for discussing cases. They also rely on individual and group discussions with children, and discussions and conversations with parents regarding violence. They also initiate their own initiatives, invite speakers



on given topics in group discussion with the children, involve representatives of the student councils in mechanism meetings and in prevention programmes. **In Croatia** teachers cite an official protocol on dealing with violence, which in some schools' students and parents are introduced to in the first-class community lesson. Those teachers who are familiar with the protocol state that it is much easier when they know what to do. Regarding help within the school for students who have experienced violence, both teachers and non-teaching staff mention only psychologists and pedagogues. There are no organized support groups for students who are victims of violence. **In Greece**, school staff identify mostly psychological violence as the most prevalent visible forms of violence. Physical violence is less common or uncontrolled than it used to. Incidents involving physical violence are rare and, when they occur, they are viewed as exceptional, extreme, and shocking. Teachers in the FGDs reported instances of single incidents involving physical violence which have marked their memory due to its exceptional nature and cruelty, noting that this was at individual, and not group level. Yet, other forms of violence, mostly psychological, are a lot more commonly observed nowadays.

Research shows that stereotypes towards gender are still present in schools among both school staff and students and it may lead to numerous forms of violence. Therefore, it is crucial to better understand its manifestations and causes to address and challenge the gender dimension of violence and to develop innovative educational and preventative programmes in schools.

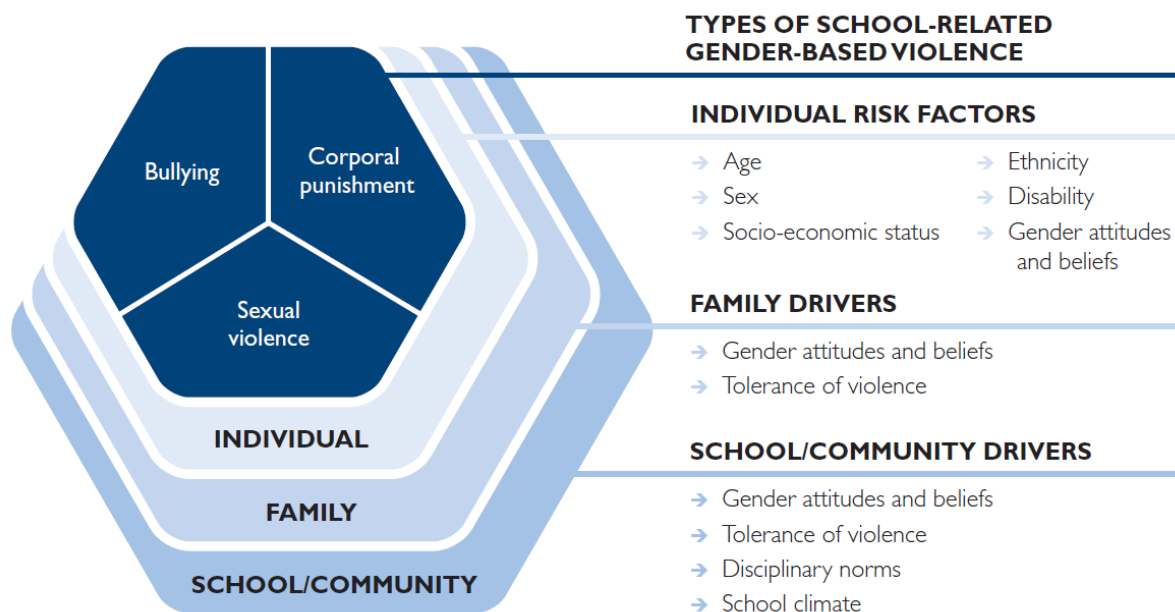


2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

USAID’s Conceptual Framework for Measuring SRGBV¹ has been used and modified for the purpose of the Rapid Assessment in all countries involved in the CARING project. This framework includes the three types of SRGBV, physical, sexual and psychological violence, and, furthermore, it includes a variety of risk factors and drivers at the individual, family and school/community level (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Figure : Conceptual framework for measuring SRGBV



The wording of the USAID conceptual framework is slightly different from what the CARING Rapid Assessment Methodological guide used for this study. In the above framework bullying refers to psychological, corporal punishment refers to physical violence and sexual violence wording remains the same. It was suggested to use the broader terms, physical, psychological and sexual violence as the different types of SRGBV as they include various different acts (see Figure 1.) besides bullying and corporal punishment that the above framework narrows down.

With regards to the different factors and drivers, individual, family and school/community, the online survey excluded socio-economic status related questions in the individual level as the project is planned to be implemented in low socio-economic neighbourhoods in the four countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece and Romania). The rest of the risk factors and drivers were included.

Individual-Level Risk Factors: This level examined personal characteristics that increase children’s likelihood of becoming a victim of SRGBV. These risk factors include a child’s sex, having a disability, living in poverty, being an orphan, being married, or belonging to a minority race or ethnicity.

¹ Available online [through this link](#)



Family-Level Drivers: The second level identifies close relationships (such as within a family) that may increase children’s risk of experiencing SRGBV. These drivers include parental attitudes and beliefs regarding their awareness about violence against children and gender inequality in the family.

School-Level Drivers: The third level explores the settings, such as schools, in which social relationships occur, and seeks to identify characteristics of these settings that are associated with becoming victims of violence. These drivers include gender attitudes and beliefs, acceptability of intimate partner violence (IPV)/dating violence, prevalence and extent of disciplinary practices/student punishment, interpersonal relationships, and prevalence and extent of student rewards.

2.2. Description of used methods

The research team presented a mixed methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. This encompassed a school-based survey, a school-based focus group discussion (FGD) tool, and practical guidance on executing these measurement tools. The data collection activities were carried out by the implementing partners of the CARING project in accordance with the agreed-upon methodological framework. *For further details, please consult the CARING Rapid Assessment Methodological Guide available in the annexes.*

2.2.1. Quantitative – Online questionnaire for students

The questionnaire for students consisted of 6 parts that measures the risk factors and drivers at the individual, family and school/community level furthermore the types, physical, psychological and sexual violence target groups may have experienced. Table 1 below depicts the structure of the online questionnaire to measure SRGBV for children and young people.

Table 1: Structure of the online questionnaire to measure SRGBV for children and young people

Structure of the online questionnaire to measure SRGBV – for Children and Young People		
Part	Items	Risk factors, drivers
1. Background	Age, Sex, Ethnicity, Disability	Individual
2. Gender attitudes and perceptions	Gender attitudes and perceptions	Individual, Family
3. School climate	Inclusion and equality, school safety, discipline and fairness, student–student, student-teacher relationships	School/Community
4. Physical violence	Experience with fights, corporal punishment, destroying of belongings	Type
5. Psychological violence	Experience with bullying, verbal abuse, exclusion	Type
6. Sexual violence	Experience with sexual jokes, gender-based discrimination	Type

Source: CARING Rapid Assessment Methodological Guide

2.2.2. Quantitative – Online questionnaire for school staff

The questionnaire for school staff consisted of 4 parts that measure school climate, gender norms and attitudes and staff’s behaviour in terms of disciplinary actions they use at schools. Table 2 below depicts the structure of the online questionnaire to measure SRGBV for school staff.



Table 2: Structure of the online questionnaire to measure SRGBV for school staff.

Structure of the online questionnaire to measure SRGBV – for School Staff		
Part	Items	Risk factors, drivers
1. Background	Age, Sex, Ethnicity, Disability	Individual
2. Gender attitudes and perceptions	Gender attitudes and perceptions	Individual, Family
3. School climate	Inclusion and equality, school safety, discipline and fairness, student–student, student-teacher relationships	School/Community
4. Disciplinary measures	This section is unique to school staff, and asks two open-ended questions on reward and punishment of students	School/Community

Source: CARING Rapid Assessment Methodological Guide

2.2.3. Qualitative – Focus groups discussions and Key Informant Interviews

To understand students and school staff’s behaviour towards and opinion on SRGBV, in person and online focus group discussions have been conducted. Child-friendly exercises have been developed to collect more in-depth data on abilities and behaviours participants show if they experience or witness SRGBV. Separate exercises have been developed for student and school staff participants. Students had to identify the different types of violence that happen to them in school and discuss the possible reasons behind it. Furthermore, their abilities to prevent or manage GBV cases were measured. School staff were asked about the most common types of gender-based violence cases in school, where did they happen and how often, their abilities and preparedness to prevent and manage GBV were also tested.

A comprehensive data collection process was carried out, involving a total of 22 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and 2 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). In Bulgaria, 6 FGDs were conducted, with 3 involving students and 3 with teachers. In Croatia, 5 FGDs took place; 3 were held in person with students from different schools, and 2 were conducted online with teachers from various schools, along with an additional online discussion involving other school staff. Greece organised 6 FGDs in total, split equally between students and school staff, with some conducted in person and others in a mixed format involving online participation. The 2 KIIs were carried out online. In Romania, 5 FGDs were conducted, with 3 involving students and 2 with school staff.



3. DEMOGRAPHIC SAMPLE COMPOSITION

A total of **680 respondents** participated in the study. The KoBo Survey questionnaire was filled in by a total of **491 respondents**, out of which **279 teachers** and/or school staff and **212 students** and, an additional **189 individuals were included in FGDs and KIIs**, out of which 105 were students and 84 were school staff.

Table 3: Overview of Participant Demographics and Engagement in the CARING Project Study

Country	Survey			FGDs/KIIs		
	Sub-Total Survey	Teachers/Staff	Students	Sub Total FGDs/KIIs	Teachers/Staff	Students
Bulgaria	83	41	42	48	25	23
Croatia	105	50	55	34	10	24
Greece	36	17	19	39	21	18
Romania	267	171	96	68	28	40
Total	491	279	212	189	84	105

Among the 279 respondents from the teaching and school staff community, 41 were from Bulgaria, 50 from Croatia, 17 from Greece, and 171 from Romania. Additionally, out of the 212 students surveyed, 42 were from Bulgaria, 55 from Croatia, 19 from Greece, and 96 from Romania, representing 8 different schools in each country.

In Bulgaria, 48 people participated in FGDs (23 students and 25 school staff, in Croatia 34 individuals were consulted (24 students and 10 school staff). 39 individuals were included in FGDs and KIIs in Greece, comprising 18 students and 21 school staff and an additional 68 in Romania, 40 students and 28 school staff.

3.1. Student's demographic comparison among countries

The data collection methods described earlier allowed for a demographic analysis of the respondents, uncovering shared characteristics and some variations within the student samples from different countries. Across all countries, the majority of participants were female. Notably, in Bulgaria and Greece, a substantial 67% and 74%, respectively, of the respondents were female. In Romania and Croatia, the **gender distribution** was more evenly balanced, with 55% and 52.7% female participants, respectively. Additional details regarding the demographic composition at the country level can be found in the annexes (Annex 1).

Table 4: Gender distribution per country

Gender distribution	Bulgaria	Croatia	Greece	Romania	Grand Total
Female	67%	53%	74%	55%	58%
Male	33%	45%	16%	42%	39%
Non-binary	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Prefer not to say	0%	2%	11%	2%	2%

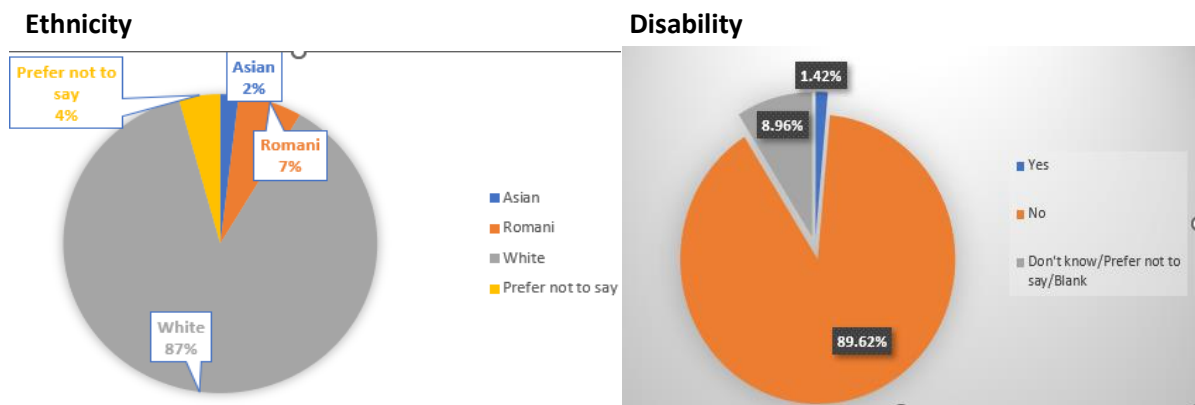
In terms of **age group** in Bulgaria the same number of students belonged to the younger, 13-15 and the older, 16-18 years old groups. Both in Romania and Croatia slightly more students represented the older, 16-18 age group with 64 % in Romania and 60 % in Croatia. While in Greece all student respondent students represented the older, 16-18 age group.

Table 5: Age group distribution per country

Age group	Bulgaria	Croatia	Greece	Romania	Grand Total
13-15	50%	40%	0%	36%	37%
16-18	50%	60%	100%	64%	63%

In terms of **ethnicity**, Romania demonstrated some diversity, with 80% of students identifying as white, 15% as Roma, and 5% choosing not to specify. Similarly, in Greece, 80% of students identified as white, 10% as Asian, and 10% chose not to disclose. Meanwhile, both Bulgaria and Croatia saw a significant majority of students identifying as white, with 93% in Bulgaria and 97% in Croatia. The percentage of students identifying as Roma (0.46%) or belonging to other ethnicities was extremely low, collectively less than 2%. With regards to **disability** in all countries most students declared not having any, both in Bulgaria and Croatia 95% stated not living with disability, while this number was a bit lower in Romania with 88% and in Greece with 74% (other responses were don't know, prefer not to say or blank).

Figure 1: Student respondents' self-reported ethnicity and disability



These figures might suggest a lack of diversity within the schools involved in the study. However, it's worth noting that the selection criteria focused on low-economic regions within the countries.

Although the chosen schools are located in economically disadvantaged and geographically remote areas, some of them even situated over 700 kilometres apart, this doesn't necessarily impact ethnicity of disability status, given that the predominant ethnicity is 'white' and children with disability have problems accessing schools in these regions. Conducting further research would be advisable to better understand the situation for the GBV related situation and the underlying reasons for members of these vulnerable groups.

3.2. School staff's demographic data among countries

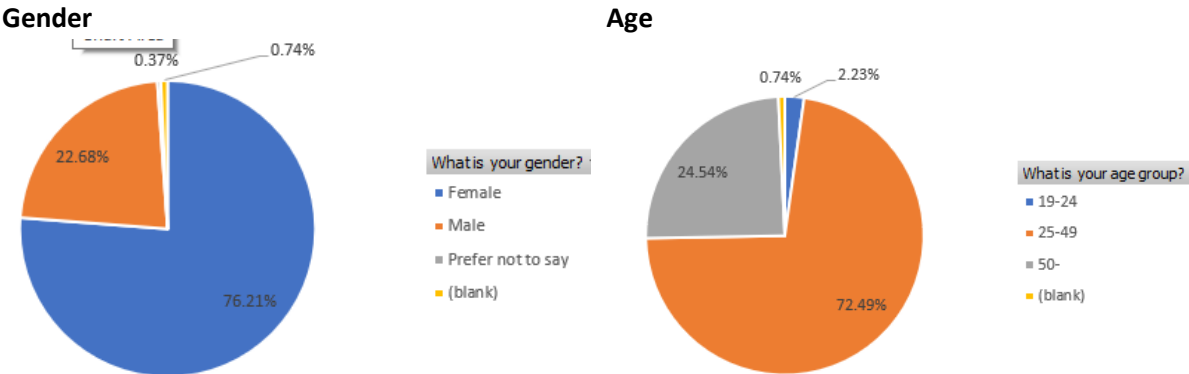
Analysing the data collected through the online questionnaires, within the school staff sample there are more similarities than differences among the countries. In total there were 76% female and 23% male school staff reached through the online questionnaires. In both Romania and Bulgaria, over three quarter of school staff were female with 82% in Romania and 88% in Bulgaria. Croatia and Greece were close to gender balance.

In terms of age group more than half of the participating teachers were in the 25-49 years old in all countries with 72,49% (specifically 72% in Romania, 68% in Bulgaria, 43% in Greece and 83% in



Croatia). Both in Romania and Bulgaria a quarter of school staff belonged to the above 50 years old group.

Figure 2: School staff respondents’ self-reported age and gender



Regarding ethnicity, once again only Romania showed some diversity with 89 % of the school staff declaring themselves white, 6% Roma, 1% Latino and 4% preferred not to say. While in Bulgaria, Greece and Croatia the school staff population, who participated in the research were exclusively white/Caucasian.

With regards to disability in all country most school staff declared not having any, with 91% in Romania, 90% in Bulgaria and 99% in Croatia and Greece.



4. ASSESSMENT RESULTS

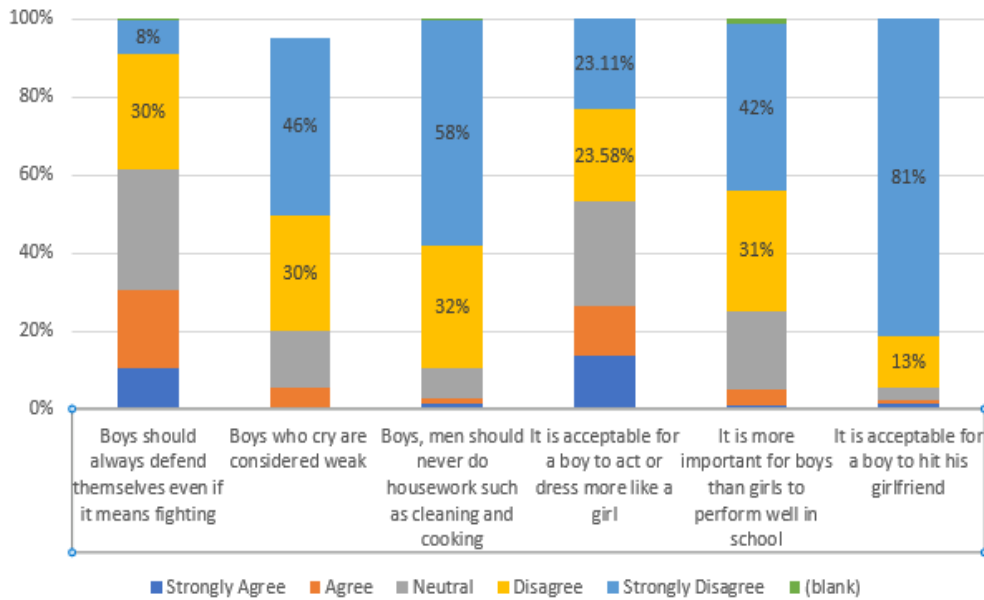
4.1. GENDER ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

To analyse participants’ perceptions and attitude based on gender, the questionnaire measured their level of agreement with a set of stereotypical statements concerning the appearance, behaviour and general needs of boys and girls, as well as certain expectations towards each gender. These concepts were further explored through focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The subsequent analysis will integrate both qualitative and quantitative data.

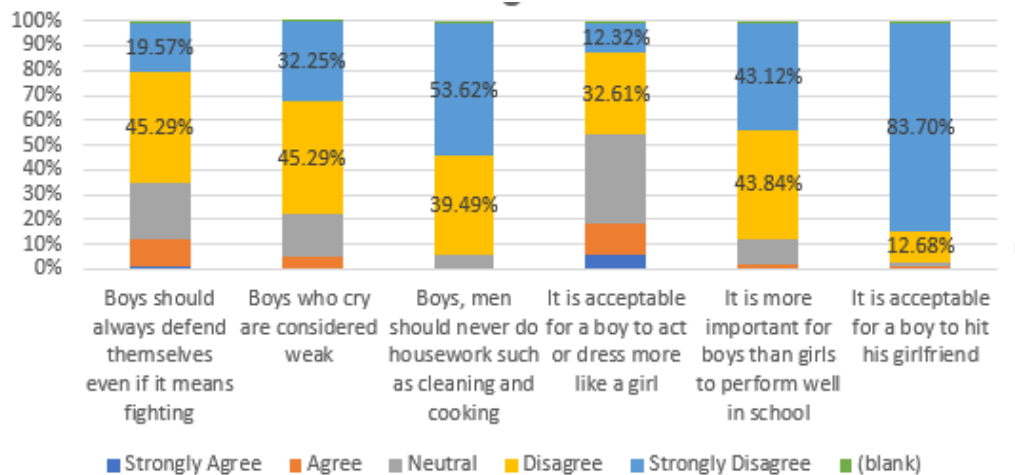
4.1.1. Perceptions on boys

Out of the 10 statements 6 were stating stereotypical things about boys/men.

Figure 3: Perceptions on boys from: **Students**



School staff





Boys should always defend themselves even if it means fighting is a statement that showed a colourful picture as around 31% of the **students** in all countries, Romania – 32%, Bulgaria - 33%, Croatia – 35%, and Greece - 10% agreed including those, who strongly agreed. On the other hand, 38% of students opposed the statement – 30% in Croatia, 36% in Romania, 43 % in Bulgaria, and 63% in Greece, including those who strongly disagreed. Only in Croatia the number of **students**, who opposed the statement (30%) were less than the number of those students who agreed (35%). **School staff** were less acceptable in all countries, with more than 65% of all school staff (65% in Romania, in Bulgaria 63%, in Croatia 60% and 93% in Greece) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. It seems that young people still allow for boys to use their physical strength, however as one of the respondents stated in a focus group, physical fighting happens more in primary school and less in secondary, which suggests that by age and maturity it is less frequent.

Boys who cry are considered weak was rejected by 76% of the students overall. It is a statement that more than half of the Romanian students opposed; 33% disagreed and 38 % strongly disagreed. Similarly in Bulgaria, where $\frac{3}{4}$ of **students** - 75%, including 45% strongly disagreed, and in Croatia, where 29% disagreed and 49% strongly disagreed. In Greece, 90% of students opposed the statement – out of which 79% strongly disagreed. **School staff** had similar views, 78% rejected the above statement in total. In Romania exactly $\frac{3}{4}$ of them opposed the statement, while 66% in Bulgaria and the vast majority in Croatia and Greece (93 % and 92 %, respectively) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. These results clearly reflect that **stereotypes towards boys are changing**.

Boys, men should never do housework such as cleaning or cooking is a stereotypical statement that was strongly rejected. In all the countries the vast majority of both students and school staff disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. In Romania 83%, in Bulgaria 93% and in both Greece and Croatia 95% of the students opposed this statement. In all the countries 95 % of school staff disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. These results clearly show that traditional stereotypes towards boys and men are changing.

The statement, **It is acceptable for a boy to act or dress more like a girl**, was agreed to by 27% of the student respondents. The statement was generally rejected by more than half, 57% of the Romanian students, and only 15 % of them agreed including those, who strongly agreed. In Bulgaria the majority, 57% disagreed and only 12 % of the students generally agreed. In Croatia students were more flexible and acceptable as 40% who agreed and only 33% disagreed to the above statement. Greece showed the most flexibility – with 79% agreeing or strongly agreeing, and only 10% disagreeing. Please note that all Greek students were representing the higher age group, which can account for the difference between Greece and the other countries. Regarding the **school staff**, only 18% agreed to the statement, while 45% rejected it. In Romania and Bulgaria school staff were even more traditional than students, only 11% agreed in Romania and 10 % in Bulgaria. Interestingly Croatian and Greek school staff seems less traditional as 43% agreed in both of the countries, including those who strongly agreed. Results shows that in both Bulgaria and Romania it is less tolerated for boys to be feminine, while in Croatia and Greece people seem to be more acceptable and inclusive.

It is acceptable for a boy to hit his girlfriend generated the strongest disagreement among students in all three countries (94% strongly disagree or disagree). Every student in Bulgaria, 98 % in Croatia, 95% in Greece and 90 % in Romania disagreed with the statement. The results showed a very similar picture with school staff as well, with 96% rejecting the statement.



The statement, ***It is more important for boys than girls to perform well in school***, was generally disagreed in all countries: 89% of the Greek students, 82 % of the Croatian students, 70 % of the Romanian students, and 64 % of the Bulgarian students (73% in total). **School staff** opposed this statement even more with a total 87% of them who generally disagreed with the statement (83 % of the Romanian school staff, 87 % of the Bulgarian, 97% of the Croatian and all the school staff in Greece). These expectations towards **boys** suggest that it is considered as equally important for both genders to perform well in schools, which may lead to further education and later to better economic opportunities in life.

In summary **traditional perceptions towards boys are changing**, both **students and school staff are more acceptive towards boys to show their emotions** and do not consider a boy weak if they are crying. Also, **it is strongly expected from boys, men to help out in the maintenance of the home**, which suggests a change in the demand of modern society, where generally both parents are working especially in urban areas.

It is **absolutely not accepted from boys to hit their girlfriend** neither from the students' nor from school staffs' perspectives. However, in terms of **physical power and aggression between boys**, there were strong **differences between students and school staff**, some students still believed that boys can be more aggressive and use their physical power to defend themselves, while school staff strongly opposed this. School staff identify mostly psychological violence as the most prevalent visible forms of violence. Physical violence is less common or uncontrolled than it used to. Incidents involving physical violence are rare and, when they occur, they are viewed as exceptional, extreme, and shocking. Violence and traditional gender roles seem to be less tolerated in all these countries, reflecting evolving societal norms.

In summary, even though students and school staff generally agree on rejecting stereotypes, emphasizing the importance of equal educational opportunities for both genders. However, findings suggest changing stereotypes toward boys and more gender-inclusive attitudes is different in different countries, especially among students and teachers in Croatia and Greece. Furthermore, qualitative data collected from Greece, exposed that 12 to 14-year-old boys and girls are more likely to make explicit claims on the girls' 'inferiority' and 'innate weaknesses'. As a 13-year-old informant put it '*I know that girls are not so strong, and I can win them any time. I run faster and pulling their hair would be as easy as stealing from a church*²', indicating that it is boys' decision, superiority and pity that lets girls off the hook. Moving on through adolescence, more sophisticated forms of expressing dismissal are adopted, with psychological violence, at times unintentional, organically leading to exclusion. Moreover, malicious sexism against women and the violence it entails, is gradually replaced by benevolent sexism, whereby 'positive traits' of womanhood are to be praised and sought after.

Expectations towards **boys to perform better in school are strongly rejected** by both students and school staff alike, which can suggest that it is equally important for both genders to perform well, which may lead to further education and later to better economic opportunities in life.

Finally, **expectations towards boys look and behavior** generated different views in all the countries. In Bulgaria it is less accepted for a boy to dress or act like a girl, while in Romania students were more neutral but school staff was still traditional. It is only Croatia and Greece, where both students and

² 'Stealing a church' is a Greek idiom to indicate that anyone would be able to steal from the small amounts of cash churches have available, it is easy to access and take.

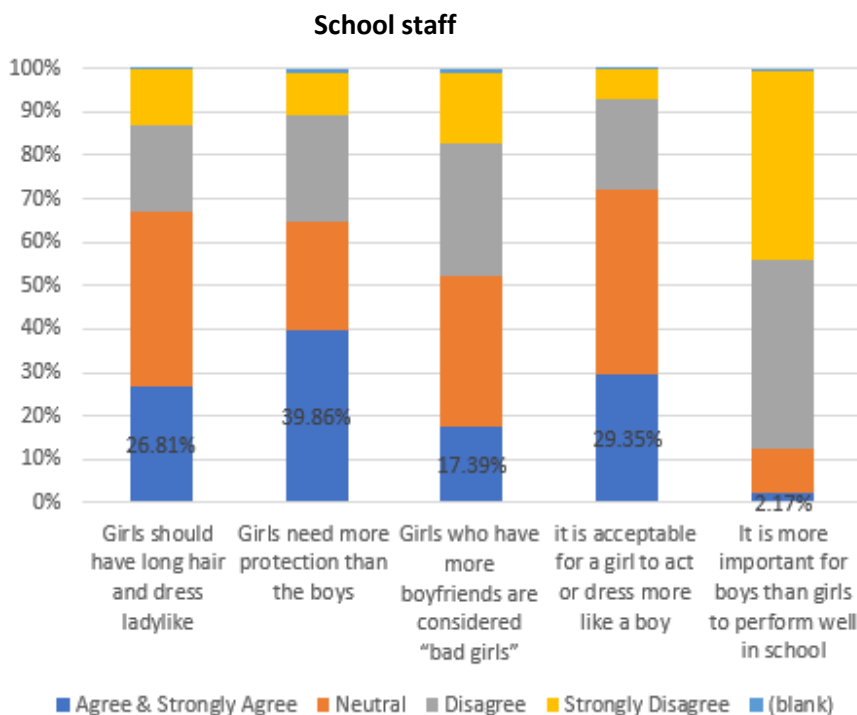
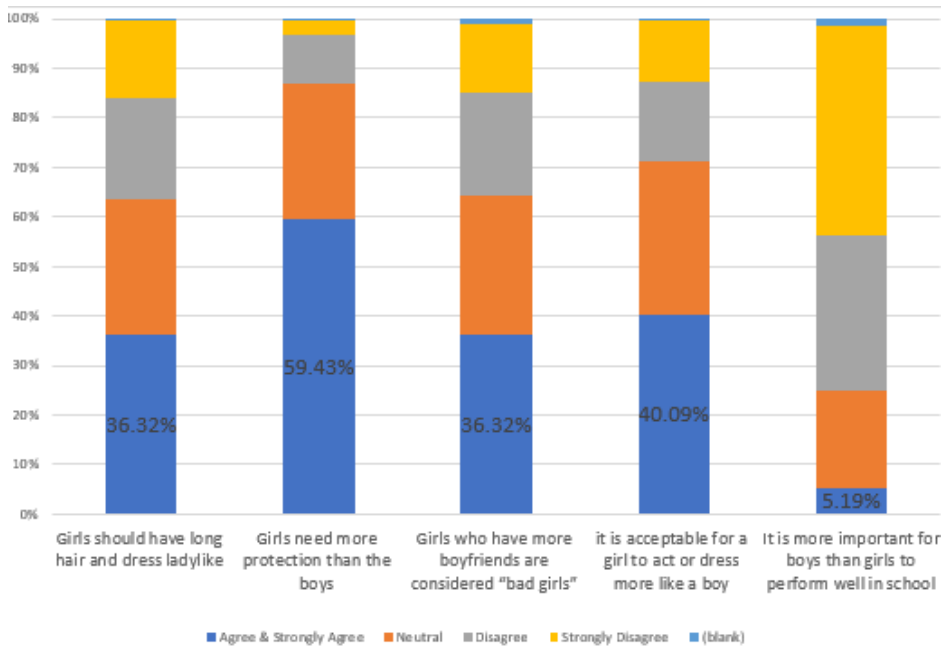


school staff were more supportive and inclusive. However, it is an interesting finding that based on the current results, while the majority of expectations towards boys are changing – gender appropriate acting and clothing seems the most resistant to societal changes.

4.1.2. Perceptions on girls

Out of the 10 statements 4 were stereotypical statements solely considered girls.

Figure 5: Perceptions on girls from Students





Girls should have long hair and dress ladylike is a statement that 36% of the students and 27% of school staff agreed to- including those who strongly agreed. In Romania, only one quarter opposed the statement. Similarly in Bulgaria, 43 % of the students agreed with this statement and 19% opposed it. In Croatia, the majority of students, 53 % disagreed including those who strongly disagreed. While, in Greece, 84% disagreed while 5% agreed. These result shows that many young people still have traditional expectations towards girls. School staff was less traditional in all the countries, in Romania 33 %, in Bulgaria 29%, in Greece 27%, and in Croatia only 8 % agreed. This is an interesting result, considering that school staff was more traditional than students in relation to how boys should act and dress.

Girls need more protection than boys is a statement that more than half of the students in all the countries (Romania - 65%, Bulgaria - 55% and Croatia 62%) generally agreed with apart from Greece, where only 37% agreed or strongly agreed. In total in all 4 countries, only 13% rejected the statement. School staff was again less traditional on the statement, in Romania 45 %, in Greece 40%, in Bulgaria 37% and in Croatia 20 % generally agreed with the statement (40% in total). Once again these are traditional views that young people seem to follow, however these views may change by age.

Girls who have more boyfriends are considered “bad girls” generated different views among students in the countries. Nearly half of the students, 46% generally agreed in Romania, similarly 42% agreed in Croatia, while 40% of students in Bulgaria disagreed and only 21 % generally agreed. In Greece, only 5% agreed while 84% disagreed. School staff was less traditional here as well, with only 17% agreeing to the above statement (17% agreeing in Bulgaria and Greece, 12% in Croatia and 20 % in Romania). This shows that young people’s expectations towards girls are still more traditional, however this may change by age as the responses of the adult participants reflected.

The inverted statement towards girls – **it is acceptable for a girl to act or dress more like a boy** - sparked quite different reactions, with the total of 40% students agreeing and 28% rejecting. In Romania only 25 % of the students opposed, while 35% agreed with the statement, which shows a more acceptive behaviour towards girls than boys in the same question. In Bulgaria, exactly half of the students generally disagreed and only 19% agreed with the statement. In Croatia nearly half of the students 47 % generally agreed, while 27% disagreed. In Greece, similarly to the same statement about boys, 79% agreed and 11% disagreed. Only 30% of school staff agreed, while around the same percentage rejected the statement. School staff was equally traditional in Bulgaria than students, with 51% generally disagreeing and only 12% agreeing with the statement. In Romania the majority of school staff, 47% was neutral and nearly the same amount staff agreed as disagreed. Croatian school staff was somewhat more acceptive, 57% of them generally agreed with the statement. In Greece, 30% agreed and 28% rejected the statement.

In summary traditional stereotypes towards girls are somewhat changing, however less so than towards boys. The **majority of the respondents still prefer a ladylike girl, who should be protected if needed.**

Students are less acceptive towards girls, who have more boyfriends and tend to negatively categorise them, suggesting a more traditional way of thinking, however school staff is more flexible with this regard.

Interestingly, **expectations towards girls look and behaviour** generated different views than towards boys. Students were more acceptive and supportive towards masculine girls than towards feminine

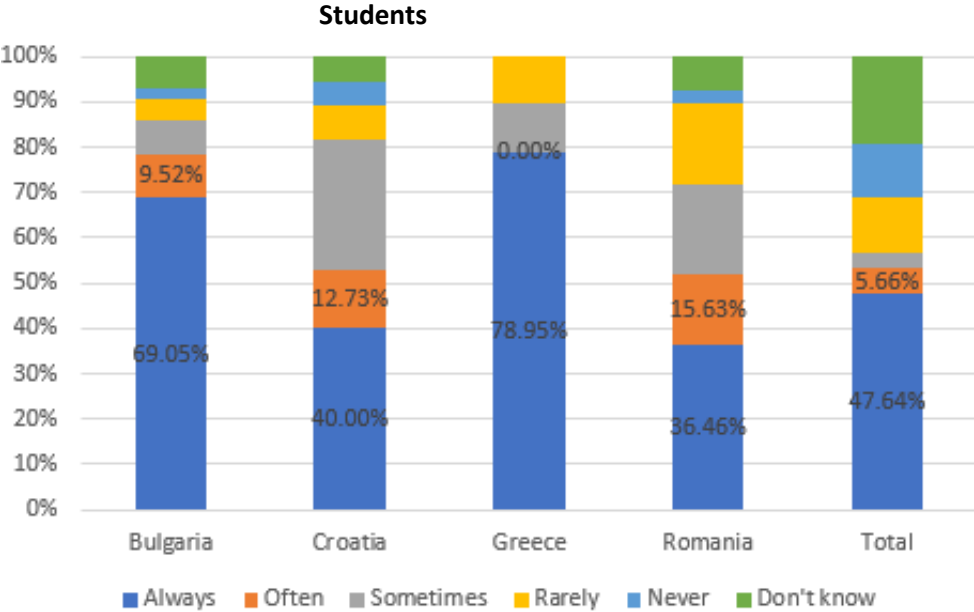


boys. In this regard, in Greece, a shift since the past decades has also been observed: openly mocking and ridiculing peers of non-conforming gender used to be a lot more prevalent, yet has given rise to different forms of violence, most notably that of isolation and exclusion from the power-holding group. In some specific schools, students of non-conforming genders are not subject to open and direct discrimination; rather they are included in the dominant group as they are considered 'cool' and different gender identities can be 'fashionable'. As one of the country researchers suggests - a number of international studies have shown that people behave more negatively towards gay men than towards lesbians. A very situational explanation could be that gay boys and men "betray" this masculine stereotype of strength, stability and lack of emotion, while lesbians, although some of them behave more masculine, still remain in the realm of the feminine, and therefore the masculine "betrayal" is more serious.

4.2. SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

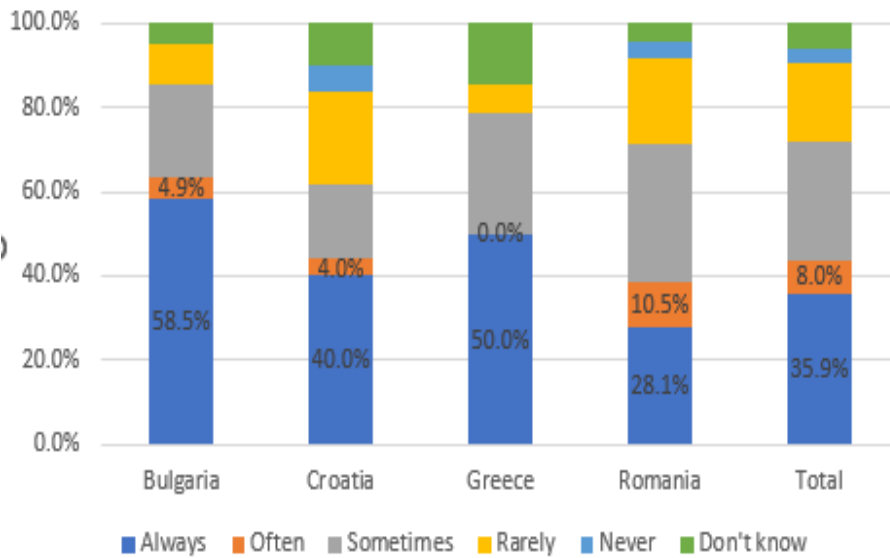
To analyse participants' reaction to the school environment, the questionnaire measured with a set of statements, how often participants experience a given scenario concerning their safety, behaviour and relationships between students with each other and with their teachers.

Figure 6: Violence is a problem bar chart



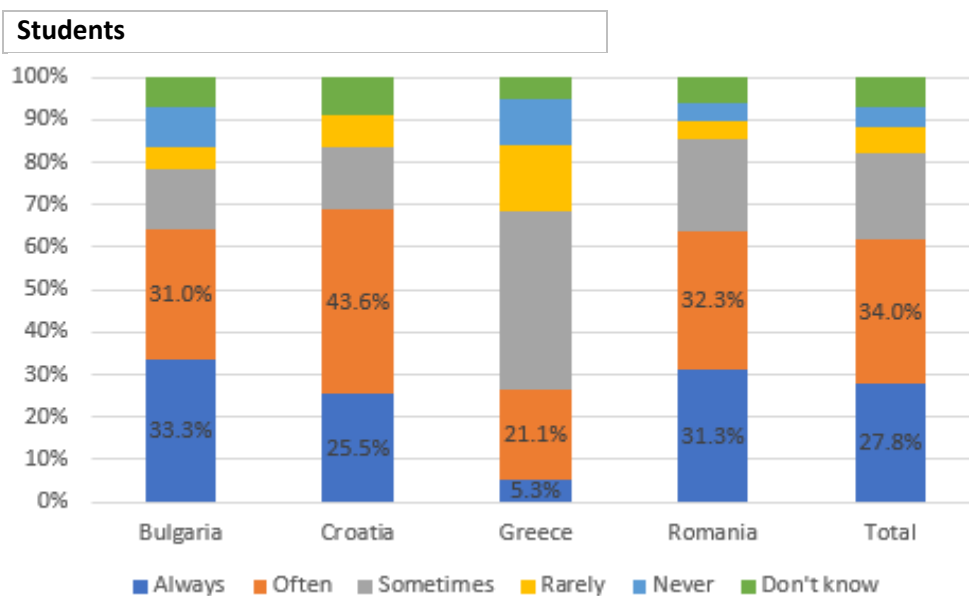


School staff



In terms of *violence and student's behaviour towards violence*, a common trend is observed across all countries. The majority of students believe that *teachers listen to them, when they have problems* and *teachers take actions, when an incident is reported*. However, *students* also acknowledge that violence is a prevailing issue in their schools. In Romania and Croatia, just over half of the students (52%) share this sentiment, while in Bulgaria and Greece, a significantly higher proportion (around 78% in both countries) reported that such incidents occur often or always. On the other hand, *school staff* in all countries express a more optimistic outlook. Around 43% of teachers reported that such incidents occur often or always with the lower percentage registered in Romania (39%) and the higher in Bulgaria (63%). Besides, over 80% of them affirm that they actively listen to students and take prompt action upon receiving reports.

Figure 7: Feel safe at school bar chart





ascent of the extreme far-right group Golden Dawn, which gained substantial popularity, contributed to the normalization of violent expressions. Secondly, teachers expressed concerns about their preparedness and support in addressing cases of gender-based violence in secondary schools. One teacher noted, "*...school staff in secondary schools are neither prepared nor feel supported to deal with GBV cases...*".

Across all countries, when school staff encounter explicit instances of gender-based violence involving boys and girls, they tend to resort to disciplinary measures similar to those used in other cases of violence. Gender-sensitive measures to address GBV are notably absent in comparison to other forms of violence. **Furthermore, school staff across all countries emphasize the predominant role of schools in imparting technical knowledge.** However, they emphasize the urgent need for this role to evolve beyond the mere dissemination of knowledge to nurturing critical thinking skills. This transformation is essential to ensure that students do not passively receive information but develop the capacity to think critically about it.

These findings highlight the importance of maintaining and improving a safe and respectful school environment. Both students and school staff play crucial roles in shaping this environment, and their perceptions and experiences provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers. **Addressing issues related to violence and ensuring consistent reporting mechanisms for violence** incidents remain areas for improvement.



5. IDENTIFYING VIOLENCE AND THE REASONS BEHIND GBV IN THE SCHOOL

5.1. TYPES OF VIOLENCE AT SCHOOLS

The results of the online survey and the FGDs indicated that various forms of violence are present in and around the school in all countries.

5.1.1. Verbal violence

Both student and school staff reported psychological violence as the most common type of violence taking place at schools. Especially **verbal violence** in the forms of **insults, swearing, teasing, embarrassing and humiliating** each other. Over half of the students experienced incidents like someone shouting things at other classmates in public, making them feel embarrassed in all countries. Similarly common is to make **malicious comments about other students' body or clothes** with over half of the children experiencing it in all countries.

In Bulgaria verbal and psychological abuse is seen as one theme by students and teachers. Threats and insults can relate to appearance, clothing, social and economic status of the child or parents, sexual orientation, less commonly to disability, ethnicity, or nationality. According to the children, the places where violence occurs at school are corridors, toilets, schoolyard, and in terms of time, it happens most often in between classes, in Physical education class, in the changing room or after the end of the school day, respectively in the absence of an adult or teacher.

In Croatia students presented many forms of verbal abuse, bullying that happens in the school environment such as: insults, spreading rumours, nicknames that other students don't like, making fun of someone (because of appearance, style of dressing, partner), swearing, threats. One example of bullying is described by a student's statement in FGD: *"My girlfriend was bullied in class because she is in a relationship with me. They called her a "paedophile" because I was in first grade, and she was in third grade. Everything is OK now".*

School staff also recognized bullying as the most common type of violence in school, they told if a student in any way different from the so called "normal" for example has special needs they are often the subject of bullying. One participant cited an example of how the students in the class laughed when a student with autism entered the wrong classroom. They also presented an example of insults related to gender norms: *"Boys in a predominantly male class told two girls who enrolled in the computer science major that the kitchen was for them, not that major"*. In addition to bullying, they state that students with special needs are often excluded from groups.

In Romania as well both boys and girls are the victims of verbal abuse, bullying but the reasons behind it are different. In the case of **girls, verbal violence takes the form of gossip, teasing and insults**. FGD participants listed appearance, style, the quality or the brand of the clothes, but also their love history or their degree of femininity as main reasons behind bullying. In the case of **boys, verbal violence** is oriented towards three main directions according to the respondents: **their physical appearance, their sensitivity and their femininity**. The insults cover however a much wider general spectrum, including the family (especially the mother), their intellectual capacity, the colour of their clothes or the sexual orientation. From the respondents' answers, it appears that **boys tend to be harsher than girls in bullying other boys who have a more feminine behaviour or display a more sensitive personality**.



The interviewed students point out that the reasons for excluding boys from social circles are, as in the case of girls, based a lot on physical standards (boys must be tall, muscular and slim, while girls must have long hair, be feminine and wear short skirts).

In Greece as well verbal abuse and bullying are present in schools especially in the forms of benevolent sexism, whereby 'positive' traits of masculinity and femininity are to be praised by both girls and boys. However, there are differences in what is socially expected: male-dominated 'positive' traits are expected to (continue to) be performed by boys, whereas girls are expected to (continue to) to perform their womanly-prescribed roles, get rid of their 'weakness' and, at the same time, adopt stereotypical manly 'positive' attributes.

5.1.2. Discrimination and exclusion

Discrimination and exclusion were also mentioned as a **common form of psychological violence** in every country. It was predominantly commented on in the form of discrimination based on children's **sexual orientation**, social and economic status, **ethnicity** and nationality: „*Discrimination - I think it's very relative. I think it's equal for girls and boys and for races and for looks, generally for different*“ (Girl, 15, Bulgaria).

Discrimination on the basis of **sexual orientation other than heterosexual** and of **Roma origin** are most often mentioned and supported by examples from children and also from teachers. These two groups of children **are at a significantly higher risk of being physically and mentally abused**.

Teachers consider discrimination on sexual orientation a sensitive topic what they rather skilfully avoid as many of them feel that they do not have the tools and knowledge to intervene.

An example from Bulgaria demonstrates teachers' inability to handle such cases:

"...He polished his nails, let his hair down and dyed it different colours and suffered because he was a boy. Many specialist groups intervened, there were advocates, there were aggressive students. We did meetings with these groups of students. While he was younger, we ran away from the subject, but when he decided to demonstrate, things did not go well for him. This led him to anorexia; he went into independent learning. The parents didn't want to see each other. Children accept difference if it is not demonstrated, if it is demonstrated it leads to visible aggression." (Case study from school, Bulgaria).

Another example from Greece shows how badly things can go when teachers try to intervene. A case was mentioned, when a student (in primary school) asked her teacher whether two men can get married. The teacher responded that this is possible, but that they cannot have children of their own. It was further explained to the child that families can have various forms, such as a family of two fathers, one grandma, one mother etc. and that what defines a family is the common element of love. This resulted in angry reactions by parents who came to school screaming and threatening to take legal action if such messages are communicated to their children. The teacher who had responded to the child's question, and who was newly appointed, was personally attacked. Parents claimed that it is only them who can ever tell their children what the right thing is and ended with a father's telling phrase: „*I told my son – it was me who brought him to life and me who will take it back if he becomes such thing*“ . (FGD, School staff, Greece).

As the quantitative data above shows **neither students nor school staff is tolerant towards boys, who act or behave feminine nor towards girls, who act or behave in a more masculine way**. FGDs also



confirmed that students take as a provocation which not only triggers discrimination and bullying but may trigger aggression and physical violence towards these students. The only country was **Croatia, where both students and school staff showed more tolerance and acceptance** towards this kind of behaviour.

Students whose gender identity is not 'clear enough' and does not conform with stereotypical notions of man- and womanhood are more likely to be picked upon, ignored, isolated, and excluded by their peers. Again, early adolescents are more likely to be vocal in their mockery than older ones. Furthermore, deviations from the so called „normal“ behaviour often lead the victim blaming.

„I think the blame can also lie with the victim. For example, when a boy doesn't dress normally in men's clothes, but wears short t-shirts, some tight clothes, hairstyle - to straighten his hair, to put on make-up - for me it's a provocation and an aggressor who has decided to abuse him in this case, he has no reason to do it, but he will do it, probably because he was in such an environment.“ (FGD, Students, Bulgaria).

Concerning ethnicity, **Roma children's exclusion** was mentioned in both Bulgaria and Romania as well. Teachers in Romania pointed out that there were also Roma children who marginalized themselves out of frustration, without the other children intervening in this regard and excluding them.

In Bulgaria a young girl brought the following strong example: *"There are a few children in school who are Roma. I ignore them, I haven't interacted or talked to them."* (FGD, Girl, 16, Bulgaria).

What they have in common is that the insults are again based on difference, i.e. on discrimination on a particular ground, indicating that behind them is the insulters' desire for conformity, a common 'we' from which some are different, and we should stigmatize them. Of course, this is a dynamic process, but it is fundamentally about conformity, perceptions of normality and being a community through our uniform characteristics.

5.1.3. Physical violence

Physical violence is also present in schools in all countries, **more than half of the students heard or witnessed** manifestations of physical violence as someone hitting another peer with a hand or any type of object. Although it was mentioned that it became less frequent, which may have different reasons behind it. For example, students in Romania said that it may be due to the intervention of school security services and cameras, while in Croatia interestingly aging and maturity was highlighted, students said that it was more common in primary school and not in secondary school. Additionally, participants in Greece appeared to believe that everyone can be a victim or perpetrator without differentiating the occurrence of such behaviour based on sex. Although some of the responders reported that girls are more likely to be victims due to their gender, the majority mentioned that boys may be equally victimized, but also claimed that they consider them safer from psychological violence.

Some of the examples of fights refer to fights between two or more people, but there are also frequent examples of one or more students beating up one student, who is usually weaker than them in some way. For example, *"there was a boy with special needs and then the boys used to hit him"* (FGD, Student, Croatia). In Romania the most frequent forms of physical violence were slapping, hair pulling and beating - said by the students at the FGDs. Physical violence can happen in the school, however it became less since there are security guards and video cameras installed, as students suggests physical



violence can happen outside the school in its close proximity after school hours for example and it is more common among boys than girls.

In Bulgaria, half of the students believe that physical violence is still common. *"Fighting - any kind, for example with fists, with kicking, with throwing something - a ball, with bottles has happened in our class"* (FGD, Boy 15, Bulgaria). According to teachers, physical violence can lead to other, more hidden forms of violence, such as bullying or discrimination.

5.1.4. Cyberbullying

Both students and teachers agree that **cyberbullying is a growing phenomenon**, and it is a very worrying trend that can have serious consequences. Although only 1/3 of the students reported in the online questionnaire that they have witnessed their peers receiving SMSs or video messages with sexual jokes or love proposals that they didn't like, the FGDs revealed that cyberbullying is common, and it happens in many different forms. It can happen in the forms of negative comments, creating fake profiles, sharing false information, threats, insults and compromising pictures and videos uploaded to social networks or groups to ridicule, humiliate, blackmail a person, among others.

Students in Bulgaria mentioned typical examples of online bullying in the form of insults and blackmailing. The most basic way of cyberbullying that is very common is commenting negatively on someone. *'I have most often seen, for example in TikTok- some girls upload a little bit provocative video, and she is showered in the comments with all kinds of epithets - what was she like, what was she like...'* (FGD, Student, 15, Bulgaria).

'Someone has a picture of a girl and threatens her - if you don't do this, I will send your picture to so-and-so, I will send it to people from the school to different friendly companies around the city' (FGD Student, 16, Bulgaria). These cases are very common when it comes to a former intimate couple, and the boy circulates such pictures of the girl to get revenge.

Cyberbullying has opened a new platform of violence, where individuals can be abused, blackmailed even if they have not done anything and have not even been in contact with the aggressor. *"It has happened many times that they cut your face, sort of photoshop you and threaten you again. Even if you don't have a photo like that, they can do it and still threaten you or take advantage of you"* (FGD, Girl, 14, Bulgaria).

Moreover, a statement from a boy in Greece underscores a troubling double standard prevalent in our society, particularly in the context of sharing intimate photos and the emergence of cyberbullying as a form of violence. It is evident that this phenomenon affects boys and girls in distinct ways, rooted in traditional societal roles and power dynamics. *"In case a boy shares intimate photos of his girlfriend with his friends, the girl is stigmatized forever. The other way around, the boy not only isn't stigmatized, but he could also be praised and admired by his mates."* (FGD, Boy student, Greece).

School staff believes that cyberbullying happens more than they are aware of, students may not think that it is serious enough to report or they are getting used to it. Besides it can also happen that the aggressor remains hidden, and no one knows who he/she was. An example was mentioned in Romania is the creation of some fake accounts on social media with the aim of denigrating a student. The school was unable to determine who was behind the accounts, nor did the police. The respective posts were deleted, but they continued to circulate through the school.



School staff reported that they often feel helpless as they only see the surface and find out things, when it is too late, and the damage has been done. *"We can't find out about it if kids don't share with us. It's harder for us and we find out about events very late."... "Sometimes pictures are posted that are not ok, but with us we just see exchanges of remarks and insults, and there is a process that is not happening here, but rather out there in the online space."* (FGD, Pedagogical advisor, Bulgaria).

5.1.5. Sexual violence

Over 40 % of students stated that children at their age are exposed to sexual abusive behaviours, at least 1/3rd of them witnessed peers receiving SMSs or video messages with sexual jokes or love proposals that they didn't want. They list numerous forms of sexual violence: inappropriate sexual language, showing or posting nude photos of others, inappropriate touching, inappropriate gestures, making fun of someone because of their sexual orientation, which may happen to them or their peers in the school.

In Romania regarding the harmful sexual behaviour, the vast majority of adolescent respondents stated that in high school it does not stand out as much as it did in secondary school. According to them, such behaviours are frequently encountered at kids aged 11 - 14, especially because they encourage each other to do certain things with sexual connotation by challenging each other's with sentences like „you don't have the guts to...”.

Students in Bulgaria stated during the FGDs that topics on sex are still taboo in the schools. Teachers and schools in general are rather conservative in relation to this topic. However, gender and sexuality come up very easily and often among students as a topic and they have their sources from where they can educate themselves. One student said that a sexual education specialist came to the school to talk about protection and mutual consent, but it was not new to students. They believe that this sort of education should start early on from age 13-14 when students start to be interested about the theme.

Students stated that sexual violence can happen to both boys and girls, however it is more commonly happening to girls. Boys are more often talking badly, teasing girls with sexual connotations, however they also mention cases of harassment by girls "taking advantage" of drunken boys at parties, etc.

Sexual harassment is also present online: *„Sexual harassment is also present online, when you are asked for a nude photo and you refuse, and you receive threats of rape and beatings. Asking for nude pictures and sending them, including pictures of genitals, is so normalised that I don't even pay attention to it"* (FGD, Girl, 17, Bulgaria).

According to teachers, cases in school or in the media that reach children on the topic of sexual harassment can bring to light attitudes in students, and possibly in teachers, to attribute responsibility and blame to the victim for the violence: *"Sexual harassment is not seen as a form of violence, she dresses up like that so that we can talk to her like that, it dilutes that feeling of violence, she wants me to talk to her like that, the students may not realize that it is doing harm. Thinking that she has earned it"* (FGD Directors, Bulgaria).



5.2. CAUSES BEHIND VIOLENT BEHAVIORS OF STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS

Various factors were identified as triggers for violent behaviour among students in schools through the FGDs. Individual, social, family related, school related and social context related causes were mentioned among other.

Among the individual, psychological causes teachers mentioned lack of tolerance, frustration and disappointment, which can all lead to aggression and impulsive behaviour especially among students, who have self-control and other emotional self-regulation issues. The lack of empathy was also identified as a trigger that can lead to a lack of consideration for others' feelings.

Difficulties in adapting to school discipline: students who have trouble adapting to the rules and structure of the school environment may exhibit aggressive behaviour. Also, students with a **negative self-image may act out aggressively** as a way to cope with their feelings of inadequacy. On the other hand, students whose gender identity is not 'clear enough' and does not conform with stereotypical notions of man- and womanhood are more likely to be picked upon, ignored, isolated, and excluded by their peers. Again, early adolescents are more likely to be vocal in their mockery than older ones.

Looking at the **social, family environment of students**, it has been revealed that unhealthy relationships between parents and violent attitudes of parents toward their children can create an environment **lacking emotional security**. **Economic factors** were as well mentioned as triggers of aggressive behaviour, with children from **disadvantaged backgrounds** more prone to such type of conduct.

The **family structure** also plays an important role. The results showed that single-parent families or those marked by disorganization, violence, or parental absence (due to work abroad) can contribute to aggressive behaviour.

The school-related causes include but are not limited to the **gap between family and school** environment. The school staff interviewed draws the attention that the lack of connection between the family and school environments can contribute to problematic behaviours. In the view of the respondents, the academic pressure with excessive focus on exam preparation and neglect of holistic child development may also lead to frustration and aggression.

The survey results pointed out that the **social context**, like **mass media and influential figures** can also contribute to certain behaviours and attitudes. For example, it was mentioned by students in Romania that a millionaire TikTok star, who is very popular in Romania and now under investigation for human trafficking and violence against women, was quoted by a boy towards a girl during a violent discussion. The boys said that the girls' place is in the kitchen.

Exclusion and discrimination are other important triggers, being pointed out by the respondents that Roma children are often singled out as victims of exclusion and discrimination. This can lead to self-marginalization among some Roma children. According to the school staff and students participating in the survey, exclusion and discrimination may also be based on social status, financial power, physical appearance, disability, or religious differences.

On the other hand, teachers feel disempowered and not fully prepared to react. They admit that predominantly rely on the psychologist, and on outside help (technical specialists) in all countries. *'We are not taught, and we are not prepared, we rely on the psychologists at school'* (FGD, Headmaster,



Bulgaria), Moreover, it was also mentioned in Greece that it is not common to have external support, schools who get regular support from external specialists' (e.g., psychologists and sociologists) consider this to be beneficial. *"In our school environment we try to foster acceptance to everyone, but what is missing is clear guidance and a referral pathway on how to address such concerns when happening"* (FGD, School staff, Greece). All these suggests that they acknowledge the importance of the topic as they reach out to provide some solution.

The overall conclusion of the research is that the factors contributing to violent behaviour in schools are multifaceted and can stem from a combination of individual, family, school, and societal influences. Addressing these factors requires a holistic approach that involves not only schools but also families, communities, and broader societal contexts to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for students.



6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings presented in the report, several recommendations can be made to address school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) and create a safer and more inclusive educational environment:

- Promote Gender Sensitivity and Education:
 - Develop and implement gender sensitivity training programs for both students and educational staff. These programs should focus on challenging and changing traditional gender stereotypes and norms.
 - Incorporate gender education into the school curriculum to raise awareness about the harmful effects of gender-based violence and promote gender equality.
 - Implement a peer-to-peer support program for the educational staff adapted to the specific context and needs of each country, taking into consideration various gender power dynamics.
- Address Cyberbullying:
 - Develop and implement strategies to address cyberbullying in schools, including educating students about responsible online behavior and the consequences of online harassment.
 - Encourage students to report cyberbullying incidents to both school authorities and parents.
 - Collaborate with external organizations, such as psychologists and pedagogues, to provide additional support to victims of violence.
 - Establish support groups within schools to provide assistance to students who have experienced violence. These groups can offer counselling and guidance.
- Raise Awareness and Encourage Reporting:
 - Implement awareness campaigns in schools to encourage students and staff to report any incidents of violence, including SRGBV.
 - Create safe and confidential reporting mechanisms that allow students and staff to report violence without fear of retaliation.
- Strengthen Disciplinary Practices:
 - Review and enhance school disciplinary practices to ensure they are effective in addressing incidents of violence.
 - Consider involving parents in disciplinary discussions to provide a supportive and collaborative approach to resolving issues.
- Foster Student-Teacher Relationships:
 - Promote positive relationships between students and teachers to build trust and ensure that students feel comfortable reporting incidents of violence.
 - Encourage open communication and provide avenues for students to share their concerns with teachers.
- Promote Inclusivity:
 - Create a more inclusive school environment where diversity is celebrated, and discrimination is actively discouraged.
 - Develop strategies to address and prevent violence against LGBTQ+ and Roma students.
- Engage Parents and Communities:
 - Involve parents and local communities in anti-violence initiatives and awareness campaigns.



- Encourage parents to participate in discussions about violence prevention and gender equality.
- Monitor and Evaluate Progress:
 - Establish a system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of anti-violence and gender equality programs in schools.
 - Regularly review and update policies and practices based on feedback and outcomes.
- Research and Data Collection:
 - Continue to conduct research and collect data to gain a deeper understanding of the prevalence and causes of SRGBV.
 - Use data to inform evidence-based policies and programs.

These recommendations aim to address the challenges associated with school-related gender-based violence and promote a safer and more inclusive learning environment for all students and staff. It is essential to work collaboratively with educational institutions, local communities, and relevant stakeholders to implement these recommendations effectively.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: DEMOGRAPHICS

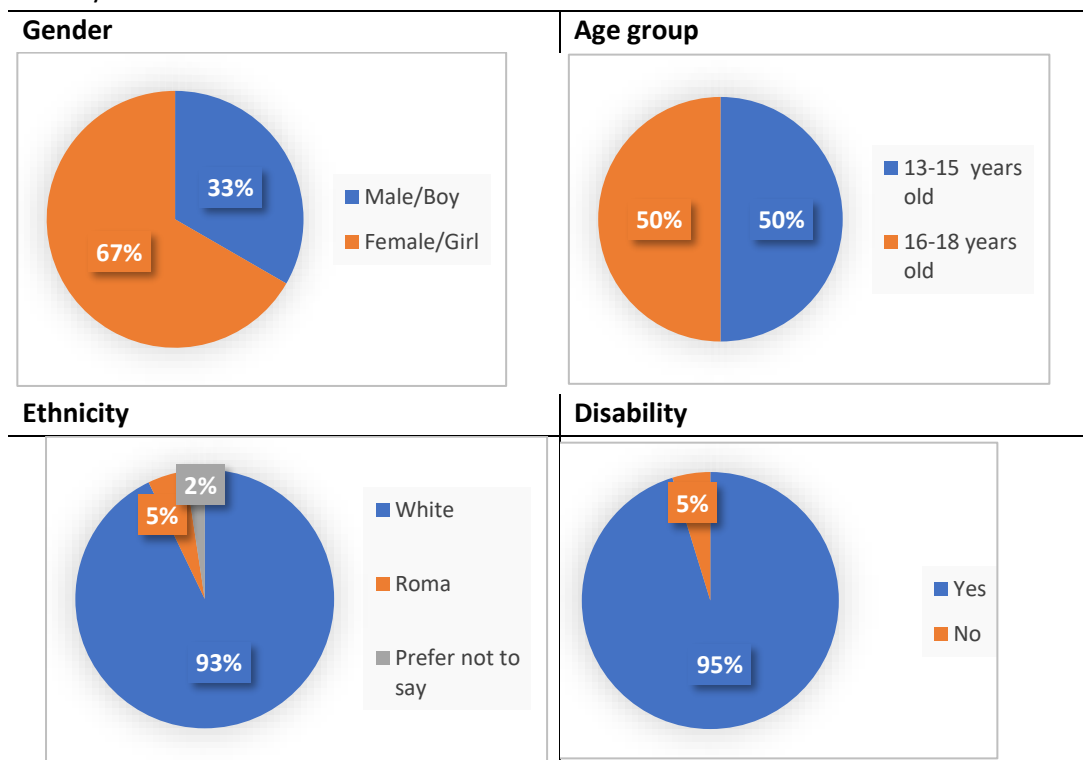
BULGARIA

Students' demographic data

In total 42 students filled in the online questionnaire in Bulgaria in the 8 targeted schools. The figure below (Figure 8) shows the gender, age group, ethnicity and disability distribution of the students who participated in the survey. 67% of the participating students are female/ girls and 33% are males/ boys, there were no students who did not want to declare their gender. Half of them represent the 13-15 age group, and the other half are between 16 and 18 years old.

With regards to ethnicity, the overwhelming majority is white / Caucasian - 93%. 5% of the students declared that they are Roma and 2% choose to refrain from disclosing their ethnicity. In terms of disability, 95% of the student participants report not having of any, and 5% admit living with some sort of disability.

Figure 8: Distribution of students' participating in the online survey by gender, age group, ethnicity and disability



Source: CARING Online survey among students, Bulgaria

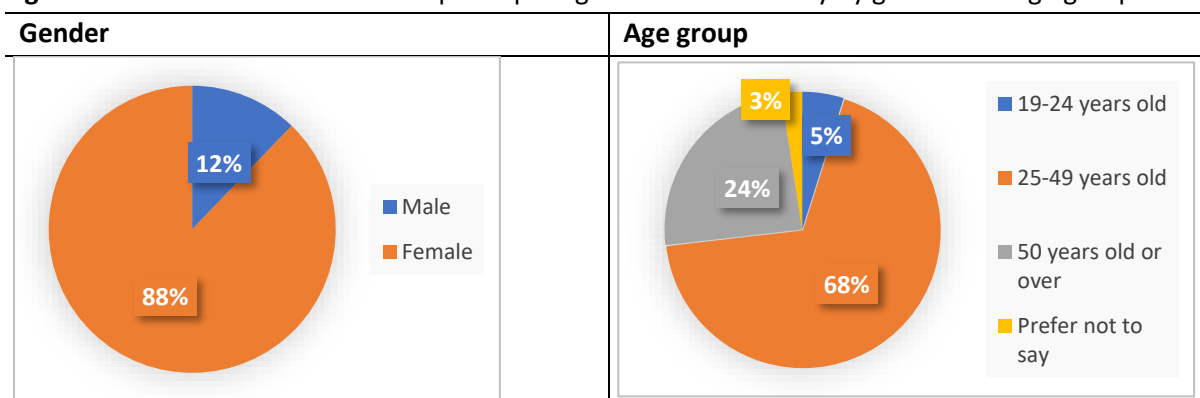


School staff's demographic data

In total 41 school staff filled in the online questionnaire. The school staff that participated in the survey is overwhelmingly female, with 88% female and 12% male. The majority of the participants, 68%, represent the 25-49 age segment. 10 staff, 24% of them are 50 years old or over, while 5% are aged between 19 and 24 years old. With regards to school staff's ethnicity 100 % of the teachers and educational staff belong to the white / Caucasian people. In terms of disability 90 % of them reported that they do not live with any disability, while 7% declared having some sort of disability and 2 % responded do not know if they any.

These demographic insights are important for understanding the diversity among school staff participants and how their characteristics might intersect with their experiences and perceptions related to SRGBV. This information can help tailor interventions and support efforts to address SRGBV effectively within the school community (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Distribution of school staff participating in the online survey by gender and age group³



Source: CARING Online survey among school staff, Bulgaria

CROATIA

Students' demographic data

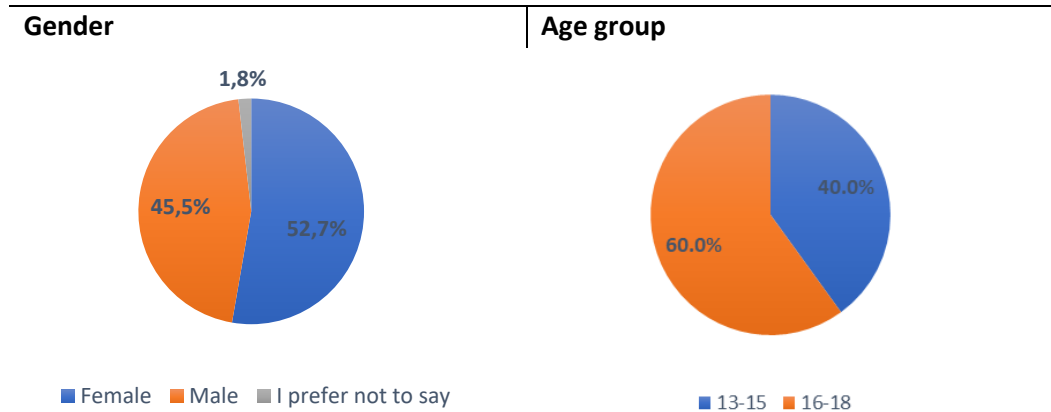
The sample for the online questionnaire for students included 55 students in Croatia from the 8 targeted schools. The figure below (Figure 10) shows the gender, age group, ethnicity and disability distribution of the students who participated in the survey. Out of the total number of students who participated in the research, more than half (52.7 %) were female, and one person did not want to express their gender. A bit more than half, 60 % of the students belong to the 16 -18 years old groups, while 40 % to the younger, 13-15 years old group.

With regards to **ethnicity**, all students declared to be white / Caucasian, except 1, who preferred not to say. In terms of disability, 95% of the student participants report not having of any, and the rest, 1 student reported that he/she does not know, another student preferred not to say.

³ Since quantitative data for both ethnicity and disability show over 90% uniformity, graphs for ethnicity and disability are not presented.



Figure 10: Distribution of students' participating in the online survey by gender and age group⁴



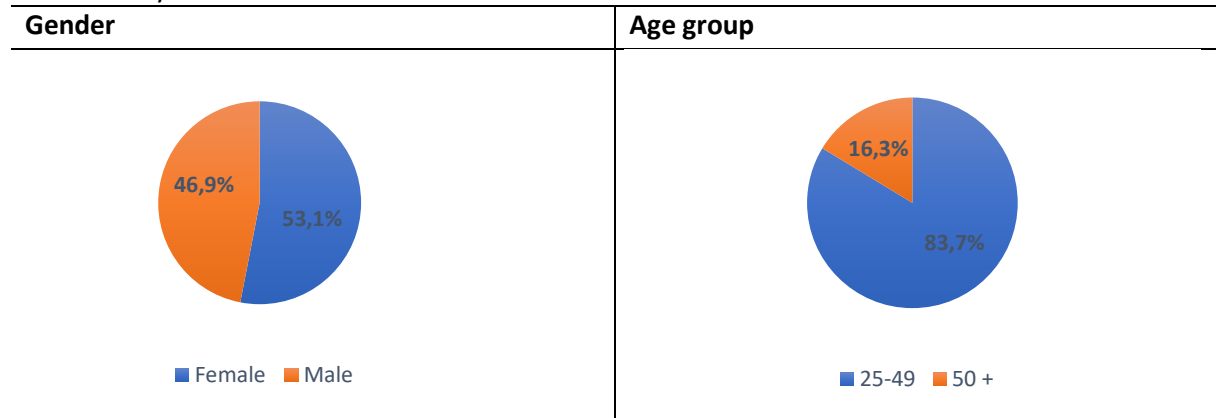
Source: CARING Online survey among students, Croatia

School staff's demographic data

In total 50 school staff filled in the online questionnaire, one participant was removed from the analyses because he did not answer any of the questions, except for the demographic questions.

Out of the total number of school staff members who participated in the research, 53.1 % were female, and 46.9 % were male. Also, most members of school staff (83.7 %) were between 25 and 49 years old, and 16.3 % are more than 50 years old. All members of school staff declared themselves as white, and none of them says they are disabled, except for one participant who prefers not to say.

Figure 11: Distribution of school staff participating in the online survey by gender, age group, ethnicity, and disability



Source: CARING Online survey among school staff, Croatia

GREECE

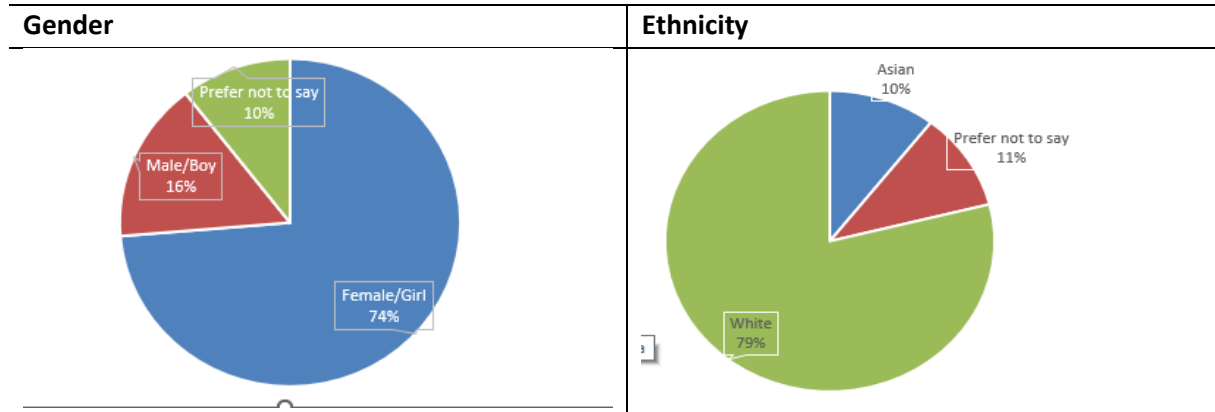
Students' demographic data

⁴ Again, since quantitative data for both ethnicity and disability show over 90% uniformity, graphs for ethnicity and disability are not presented.



In Greece the survey collected 19 answers from students in the 8 targeted schools. The figure below (Figure 12) shows the gender and ethnicity distribution of the students who participated in the survey. 74% of the participating students are female/ girls and only 16% are males/ boys, while 10% of them prefer not to disclose their gender. Since quantitative data for both age group and disability show over 95% uniformity, graphs for ethnicity and disability are not presented.

Figure 12: Distribution of students’ participating in the online survey by gender and ethnicity, Greece



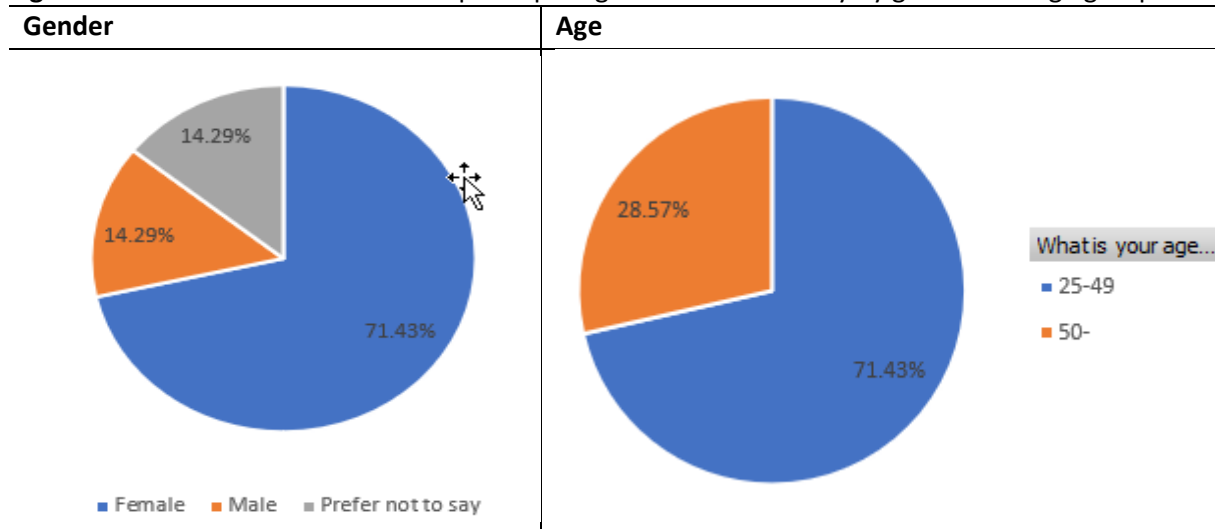
Source: CARING Online survey among students, Greece

School staff’s demographic data

In total 17 school staff filled in the online questionnaire in Greece, no participant was removed from the analyses.

Out of the total number of school staff members who participated in the research, 71.43% are female, and 14.29 % are male. Also, most members of school staff (71.43 %) are between 25 and 49 years old, 28.57 % are more than 50 years old. All members of school staff declare themselves as white, and none of them says they are disabled, except for one participant who prefers not to say.

Figure 13: Distribution of school staff participating in the online survey by gender and age group.



Source: CARING Online survey among school staff, Greece

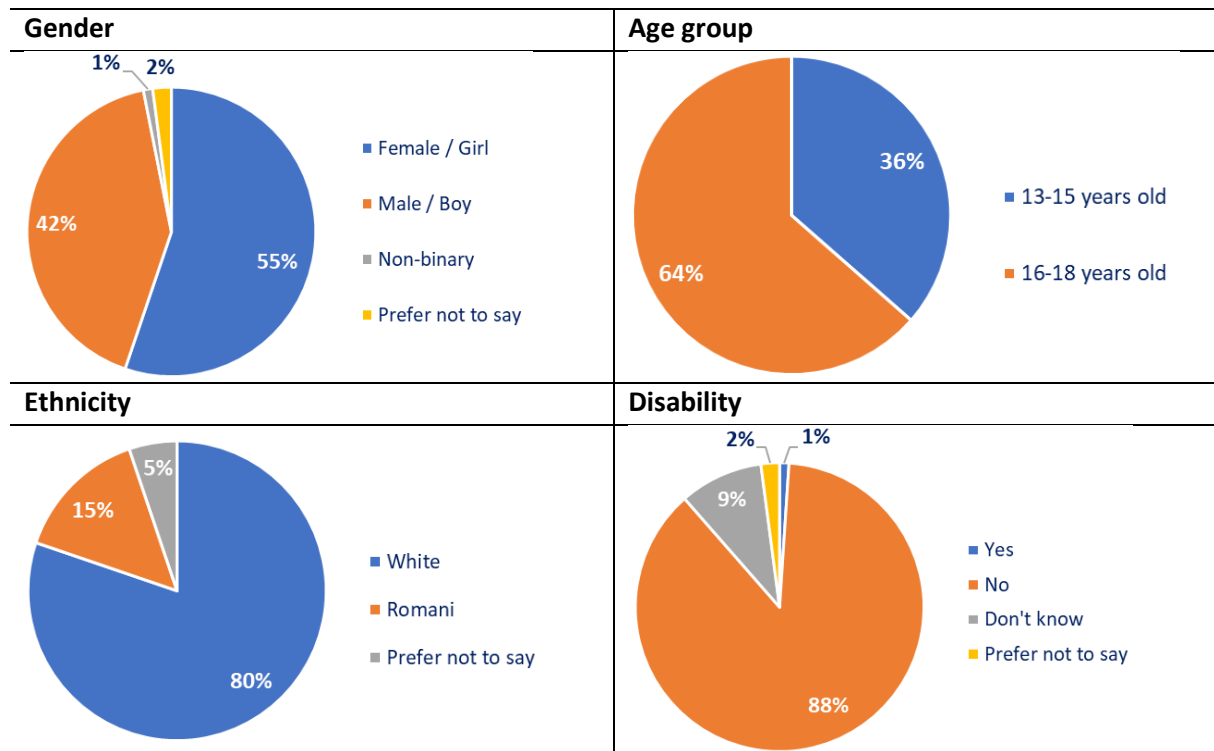
ROMANIA

Students' demographic data

The survey collected 96 answers from Romanian students in the 8 targeted schools. The figure below (Figure 14) shows the gender, age group, ethnicity and disability distribution of the students who participated in the survey. 55% of the participating students are female/ girls and 42% are males/ boys, while 2% of them prefer not to disclose their gender and 1% declare it non-binary. 36% of them represent the 13-15 age group, and 64% are between 16 and 18 years old.

As for their ethnicity, the vast majority is white / Caucasian - 80%. 15% of the students questioned report that they are Romani and 5% choose to refrain from disclosing their ethnicity. In terms of disability, 88% of the student participants report not to suffer of any, 9% are unsure on how to answer, 2% prefer not to say and 1% admit being suffering of a disability.

Figure 14: Distribution of students' participating in the online survey by gender, age group, ethnicity and disability, Romania



Source: CARING Online survey among students, Romania

School staff's demographic data

Regarding school staff, the survey collected 171 answers from Romanian participants. The school staff that participated in the survey is predominantly female, the ratio being 82% female and 18% male. This study brought together respondents of a wide age range, who were able to bring their specific input at various levels of professional and life experience. The minimum age of this category of

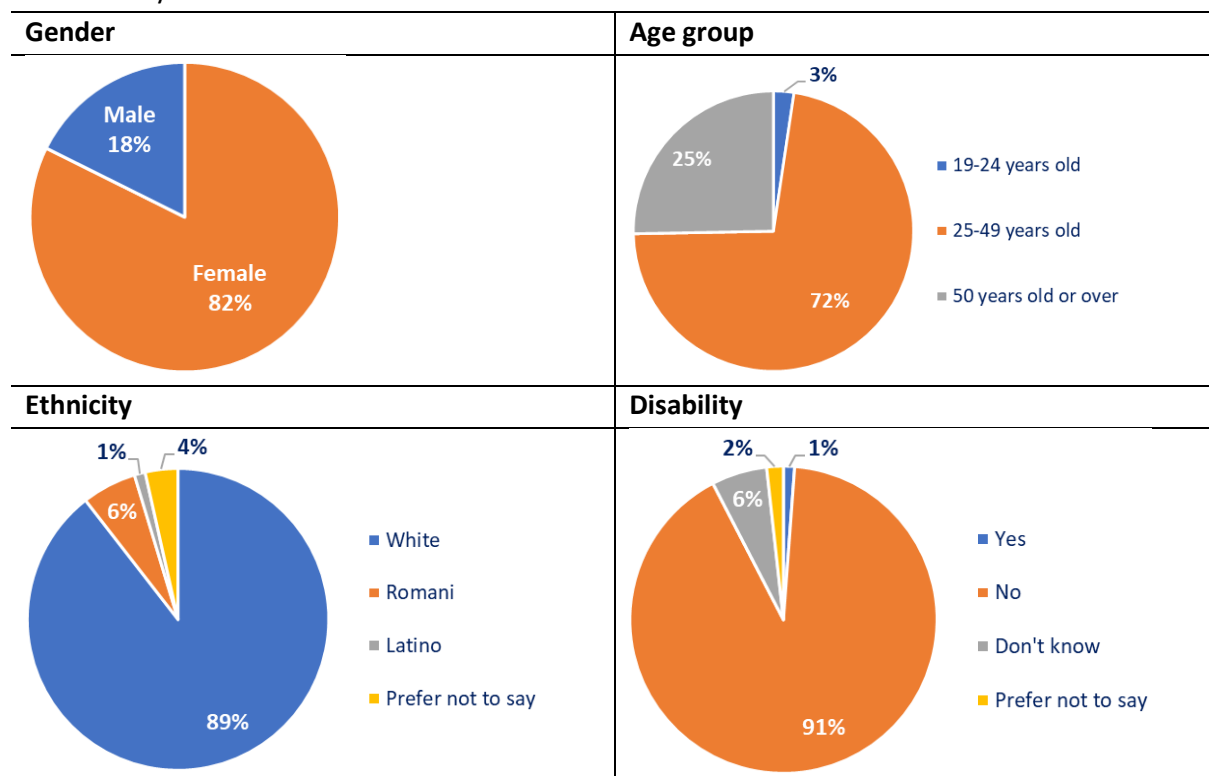


respondents is 19 years and extends up to over 50 years of age. Most of the survey participants, 72%, represent the 25-49 age segment. 25% of them are 50 years old or over, while 3% are aged between 19 and 24 years old. Regarding the ethnicity of the teaching staff participating in the study, the white / Caucasian people represent 89% of the respondents. 6% of the respondents in this category are of Romani ethnicity, 1% are Latino, and 4% prefer not to disclose their ethnicity.

Looking at this group of respondents from the perspective of disability, it is noted that a percentage of school staff who report being suffering of a form of disability is equal to that of students in the same situation, being 1% in both cases. 91% of the responding teaching staff report that they do not have any kind of disability, 6% do not know if they have any, and 2% prefer not to answer.

These demographic insights are important for understanding the diversity among school staff participants and how their characteristics might intersect with their experiences and perceptions related to SRGBV. This information can help tailor interventions and support efforts to address SRGBV effectively within the school community (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Distribution of school staff participating in the online survey by gender, age group, ethnicity and disability



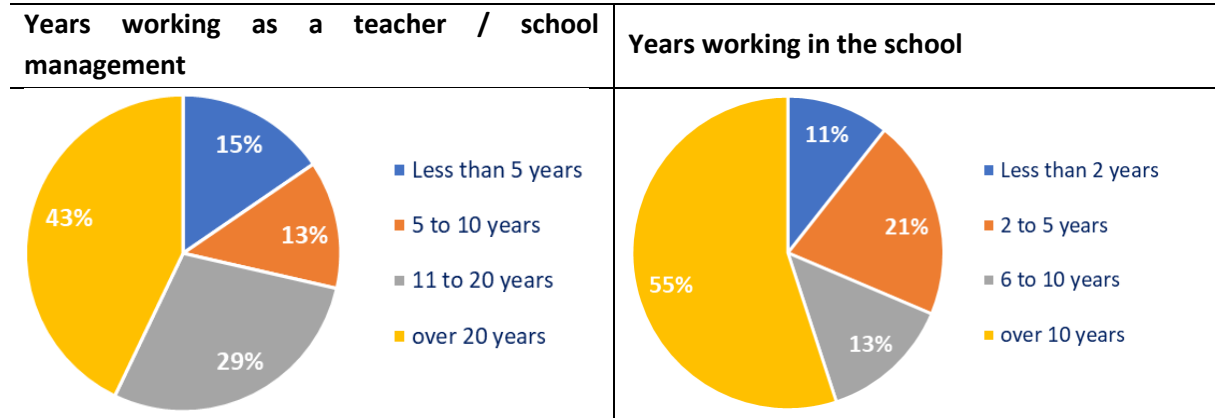
Source: CARING Online survey among school staff, Romania

As illustrated in Figure 16 below, 43% of the staff responding to the survey come with a professional experience of over 2 decades, 29% have between 11 and 20 years of experience, 13% have between 5 and 10 years of experience, and 15% work in the field for less than 5 years. It is worth noting that 68% of the staff interviewed have been working for over 6 years in the respective school, and of these, 55% have over 10 years of experience in this workplace and 13% have been here for a period between 6



and 10 years. 21% of the respondents in this category have been working in the same school for a period of 2 up to 5 years and 11% have been in the same school for less than 2 years.

Figure 16: Distribution of school staff participating in the online survey by years of experience as teacher / school management and working in the same school



Source: CARING Online survey among school staff, Romania

Annex 2: Rapid Assessment Methodological Guide

The CARING Rapid Assessment Methodological Guide is available [through this link](#). The Methodological Guide also contains the utilized online questionnaires and the FGDs/KIIs facilitation guides.



FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS PROJECT:

CARING - Challenging social and gender norms to reduce violence against children in school | ChildHub - Child Protection Hub

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