

Education against violence at school

Resolution 1803 (2011)¹

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is deeply concerned by the fact that too many schools in Europe continue to be confronted with very serious acts of violence. Incidents include attacks by pupils, with or without weapons, bullying and harassment among pupils, sexual violence, acts of hostility and even aggression against teachers by pupils, as well as the use of violence by teachers against pupils.
2. Although such events may remain infrequent, the Assembly considers that they deserve the greatest attention as they always produce very significant – if not dramatic – effects on the persons involved and their immediate environment, provoking frustration, fear and feelings of insecurity. They are a worrying sign that, despite many efforts, the phenomena of violence at school and of violence in society in general have not been properly addressed.
3. Humanism, non-violent behaviour, tolerance and mutual respect are common fundamental values upheld by the Council of Europe since its foundation six decades ago and the Organisation has made longstanding efforts to combat all kinds of violence, in particular against children.
4. Fundamental safeguards are provided by Articles 3 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and by the revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163). The latter states in its Article 17 that children and young persons shall be protected against negligence, violence or exploitation, with a view to ensuring the effective exercise of their right to grow up in an environment which encourages the full development of their personality and of their physical and mental capacities.
5. The Assembly has dealt with these issues in many texts, including: [Recommendation 561](#) (1969) on the protection of minors against ill-treatment; [Recommendation 1666](#) (2004) on a Europe-wide ban on corporal punishment of children; [Recommendation 1778](#) (2007) on child victims: stamping out all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse; [Recommendation 1905](#) (2010) and [Resolution 1714](#) (2010) on children who witness domestic violence; [Recommendation 1934](#) (2010) on child abuse in institutions: ensure full protection of the victims.
6. Standards for the protection of children against violence are also included in Committee of Ministers' Recommendation No. R (79) 17 on the protection of children against ill-treatment, Recommendation No. R (85) 4 on violence in the family and Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10 on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence. The Assembly also recalls General Policy Recommendation No. 10 of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education.
7. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the harmonious and safe development of each child and its Article 19 explicitly relates to protecting children against violence. The Assembly welcomes, in this context, the work of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General on Violence against Children.
8. The Assembly recalls that according to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and ethnic or religious groups".
9. Notwithstanding worldwide condemnation, violence unfortunately appears to be an aspect of human relations which is very difficult to eradicate. It occurs everywhere, between individuals and groups as well as within families, social groups and society. It can manifest itself in direct physical aggression or take less evident, but equally pernicious, psychological forms. Violence at school and violence in society are interrelated; it is therefore not surprising that various forms of violence also

exist within the school environment.

10. However, the Assembly will continue to combat with the greatest determination all forms of violence, in particular that directed against children and young people. In this respect, it is of utmost importance to address violence as early as possible in the school life of children and to introduce and/or further develop education against violence at school.

11. The radical transformations which have occurred in education policies show that it is possible to achieve results and change mentalities: the authoritarian teaching methods have gradually given way to a non-authoritarian style, often promoting a critical approach to authoritarianism. Similar developments exist within parent-child relations and within society as a whole.

12. Research into violence at school has been pursued in many countries and several governments have established national programmes to combat such violence. The Assembly also welcomes the work in this field by the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children. Results are encouraging, but further efforts are required to reduce violence at school.

13. If this problem is not treated adequately, the resulting social and financial costs will clearly exceed the costs of setting up more comprehensive programmes to deal with violence effectively, not to mention the unacceptable human suffering of those children who are and were exposed to violence.

14. It is, of course, crucial that violence be prohibited and acts of violence which fall under penal or disciplinary provisions be referred to law enforcement or disciplinary authorities and corresponding sanctions pronounced and implemented. However, sanctions are the ultimate recourse and not a remedy. Preventive action and support to victims are needed even more. Consideration must be given to the fact that violent children are most likely to be themselves victims. In addition, the greatest transparency must be guaranteed, while respecting the dignity and privacy of the victims.

15. Given the complexity of our society and the plurality of factors that may generate violent behaviour, it is necessary to take action at different levels and involve all key players, in particular families, teachers and pupils, in order to combat effectively violence at school.

16. The media has been exhibiting violent content in different forms for decades and the debate about the impact of such content has been going on for just as long. With the development of new forms of interactive online media, potentially greater psychological impact has been identified and should be studied further. On the other hand, since children spend more and more time using media, informal education through the media may produce positive effects and should be considered and investigated more seriously.

17. The Assembly therefore adopts the following guiding principles for education against violence at school and calls on member and observer parliaments to endorse them at national level and to ensure that the competent government authorities support schools administratively, logistically and financially, and monitor the implementation of these principles:

17.1. legal framework and administrative practices:

17.1.1. penal and/or disciplinary standards should clearly prohibit all acts committed at school which can be qualified as “violent”, including physical or degrading punishment of pupils, violence against pupils by school staff, violence by third persons against pupils on school premises as well as violent behaviour by pupils against other pupils, school staff or school property;

17.1.2. penal and/or disciplinary sanctions should be foreseen that are commensurate with the seriousness of these acts; however, with regard to young perpetrators of violence, account should be taken of the guidelines enshrined in the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)11 on the European rules for juvenile offenders subject to sanctions or measures, and in the Issue Paper of 2009 on children and juvenile justice by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights;

17.1.3. all acts of violence should be investigated and recorded and, where an act is of a sufficiently serious nature, it should be reported to the competent law enforcement or disciplinary authorities; in this context, appropriate complaints mechanisms should be set up for pupils in education settings;

17.1.4. administrative procedures in relation to acts of violence at school should guarantee the right of parents to be informed promptly and properly as well as the right to protection of privacy of the victims;

17.1.5. school headmasters should be held professionally responsible for the effective implementation of the above obligations;

17.2. awareness-raising and training:

17.2.1. a culture of democracy and human rights should be promoted at school, in accordance with the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, adopted in the framework of the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7;

17.2.2. awareness raising about violence reduction, non-violent conflict resolution and children's rights, in particular at school, should form part of general education curricula; violence should be addressed from different angles in classes on, for example, history, literature, media, the arts, music, sports, sociology, psychology, philosophy and religion or ethics;

17.2.3. school teachers and staff should have mandatory training to understand better the different forms of violence (physical, psychological, verbal and behavioural violence) and learn how to combat such violence and respect the right of children to a non-violent school;

17.2.4. training curricula for school personnel should take account of the specific needs related to their responsibilities, but also of pupils' needs, especially those who are more vulnerable;

17.3. preventive and supportive measures:

17.3.1. strict security measures should be taken to enforce the prohibition of introducing weapons and drugs into schools and to prevent criminal acts at school;

17.3.2. teaching methods should help address the causes of violence and seek to avoid individual pupils finding themselves in a situation of isolation or exclusion; to this end schools should provide specific support for pupils with learning, physical, social or other difficulties, reduce competitive trends in classes, foster team work, co-operation and tolerance as well as provide opportunities for pupils to control their physical or psychological tensions in a non-violent manner through sports activities, music or artistic work;

17.3.3. school staff should include specialised confidential counsellors, trained to help pupils who have experienced violence and those who have committed violent acts inside or outside the school; in addition, mediators and psychologists should be available for pupils, their parents and teachers;

17.3.4. at the level of school circumscriptions, specialised teams with relevant knowledge and expertise should be established to provide advice to schools facing particular difficulties;

17.4. getting pupils and their families more involved:

17.4.1. schools should develop practical projects and extracurricular activities (such as forums, round tables, open days) on the problem of violence at school, bringing together teachers, pupils and parents; special attention should be given to a non-sensational approach

of the media (print media, music, television, film, Internet, mobile phones, etc.) to violence at school and social violence in everyday life (such as family violence, group violence, criminal violence);

17.4.2. schools should organise voluntary programmes with parents aimed at helping them to assume their parental responsibilities, as well as to ensure full recognition and respect of children's rights;

17.4.3. in implementing targeted projects and activities, schools should envisage collaboration with NGOs having specific knowledge and experience in relation to education against violence;

17.5. monitoring and assessment:

17.5.1. national authorities should establish a system to centralise statistical data concerning violence at school and the results achieved by different measures implemented to combat this phenomenon;

17.5.2. national surveys should be conducted in order to identify good practices; co-operation between schools at national and European levels should be encouraged.

18. The Assembly invites the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to ensure that work on children and violence will remain a priority for the Council of Europe in future programmes of activity.

19. The Assembly invites the Joint Council on Youth as well as the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations of the Council of Europe to join the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers in their efforts to combat violence against children and violence at school through activities in their respective sectors.

¹ *Assembly debate* on 13 April 2011 (15th Sitting) (see [Doc. 12513](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr Flego). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 13 April 2011 (15th Sitting).