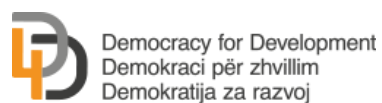




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CREATING SAFE SCHOOLS: SCHOOL SAFETY REPORT ON HIGH SCHOOLS






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INTRODUCTION

About the project

Advocacy Training and Resource Center – ATRC, in cooperation with Internews Kosova – IKS and Democracy for Development (D4D), implements the project: **“Countering Discrimination, Hate Speech and Gender-Based Violence”**, which is supported by the Office of the European Union in Kosovo. The project’s key objective aims to enhance the anti-discrimination legislation and policies, strengthening the capacities of duty-bearers and youngsters in combating anti-discrimination and all forms of violence and raising public awareness on countering hate-speech and gender-based violence and increase transparency and accountability of the government and municipalities. The project strives to strengthen compliance with the Anti-discrimination laws, strengthen capacities of duty bearers and CSO’s, and increase public awareness about human rights and reporting mechanisms, and public trust in institutions responsible for enforcing the law.

The project **“Countering Discrimination, Hate Speech and Gender-Based Violence”** is supported by the European Union (further EU) to strengthen the implementation of the actual legislation regarding human rights at national and local levels. The project will contribute to strengthen the support of Kosovo's alignment with European standards on anti-discrimination, notably practices of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and to address the recommendations of the Council of Europe’s report regarding rights in Kosovo ¹.

Initiative on *Countering Discrimination, Hate Speech, and Gender-Based Violence*, represent a critical and multifaceted global actions’ which aim to address various forms of injustice, prejudice, and violence that impact individuals and communities worldwide. Such definitions which encompass a wide range of understanding the actions of countering discrimination, hate speech, and gender-based violence closely contribute on creating a positive and safe school environment for pupils and students. Moreover, in educational settings, these initiatives are vital for fostering inclusivity, tolerance, and the well-being of pupils and students. According to the report published

¹ Council of Europe, Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/pristina/combating-discrimination-and-hatred>

by European Commission "*Guidelines for healthy environments within European schools*"², more than 64 million students and almost 4.5 million teachers in Europe spend many hours each school day inside pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. Whereas children spend more time in school than in any other place except home. Therefore, to create a positive environment, many countries globally have adopted the "Olweus Program", which is a comprehensive approach that includes schoolwide, classroom, individual, and community components.³ There are various national and international programs focused on long-term change for creating a safe and positive school climate. Therefore, the activity's goal are to reduce and prevent bullying problems among school children and to improve peer relations at school.

Kosovo context on school safety

While Kosovo is generally considered a safe and law-abiding place, like many democracies, differences in viewpoints occasionally lead to conflicts. Recognizing the crucial role of schools and socialization in democratic education, it is imperative for educational institutions to continually reinforce mechanisms for awareness and effective actions against any form of violence.

A 2015 study "Violence and School Safety"⁴ by the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute in nine municipalities, which involved 380 students and 138 teachers from high schools, indicate that 50% of the students surveyed report having been called insulting and derogatory names by their peers on a daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly basis. Twenty-seven percent report being physically pushed and knocked to the ground at least once or twice a year. Reporting physical and verbal harassment cases is a legal requirement, yet Kosovo schools do not often report such cases. According to an additional research study conducted by Kosovo Pedagogical Institute "Overload of curriculum in primary and secondary education"⁵ confirms elements of curricular overload in primary and lower secondary education, with differences between education levels and classes, which come from multiple overload factors. Amongst the present factors included: curriculum expansion, content overload and high expectations for students in relation to the available teaching time, perceived overload of curriculum documents, use of textbooks, homework and student assessment. The results of the study confirm the impact of curricular overload on the well-being of students, teachers and on teaching effectiveness.

² Guidelines for healthy environments within European schools, Co-publication by the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Consumers and the Joint Research Centre, the European Commission's in-house scientific service, <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC87071>

³ Olweus Program, Clemson University, <https://olweus.sites.clemson.edu/about.php>

⁴ Violence and School Safety Report, Kosovo Pedagogical Institute, <https://ipkmasht.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Dhuna-dhe-siguria-ne-shkolla.pdf>

⁵ Overload of curriculum in primary and secondary education, Kosovo Pedagogical Institute, <https://ipkmasht.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/4.-Mbingarkesa-kurrikulare-ne-arsimin-fillor-dhe-te-mesem-te-ulet-ne-Kosove.pdf>

References to the regulations, instructions and manuals relating to school safety

The Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (Further Ministry of Education) in Kosovo has developed regulations and administrative instructions aimed at preventing and addressing violence in schools. Supported by didactic manuals and extensive training programs for teachers and students, these measures seek to create a safe and friendly environment while minimizing and managing instances of violence in both school and society at large.

The *Protocol on the Prevention and Referral of School Violence*⁶ adopted by the Kosovo Government in 2013 requires the directors of pre-university education institutions to register reported cases of school violence and share them with the Municipal Department of Education (MED). The MED is in turn obliged to submit a summary report to the Ministry of Education, the institution responsible for analyzing and publishing the data. Based on the guidelines of the "Protocol for the Prevention and Referral of Violence in the Pre-University Education Institutions", the institutions in charge should carry out the requirements from the protocol dealing with the prevention and reaction to violent actions in the pre-university education institutions, as categorized in the Protocol on safety networks:

Internal Safety Network: Pre-school education – (director of the institution, parents' council) and schools (school principal, parents' council, school's council and students' council);

External Protection Network: Ministry of Science, Education and Technology (Regional Education Inspection Sections), Kosovo Parents' Council, Students' Council at national level, Municipal Education Directorate - (Students' Council and Parents' Council at a national level, official on child's rights), Directorate for Education and Social Welfare - (Center for Social Welfare, Family Medicine Centers, Ministry of Justice - (Kosovo Probation Service, Kosovo Correctional Service, Kosovo Police and other auxiliary mechanisms - (media, Institute of the Ombudsman, non-governmental organizations working on children's rights and school violence issues). These two protection networks are obligated to undertake measures and actions to prevent any situation that leads to the violation of children's rights or the harming of student welfare.

In June 2019, Kosovo adopted a *Law on Child Protection*⁷, where *Article 37* specifies that "the Ministry of Education must provide inclusive and equal access for all students in quality and free education on the basis of equal opportunities and non-discrimination". The Ministry of Education has drafted guidelines and regulations aimed at tackling school violence. In addition to the Protocol on Prevention and Referral of Violence in Pre-University Education Institutions, there are

⁶ Protocol on the Prevention and Referral of School Violence, 2013, <https://qzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=10292>

⁷ Law on Child Protection, 2019, <https://qzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=20844>

also documents such as the *Manual on Preventing Negative Phenomena in Higher Secondary Schools*⁸ and the *Internet Child Protection Guidelines Package*⁹.

The efforts aiming to shape the attitudes and behaviors of young people in Kosovo are crucial for preparing students to contribute positively to their communities. Various proactive measures have been implemented to tackle and address human rights issues within the school settings, those include the enactment of *Law No. 05/L-021 on the Protection from Discrimination*. On the other hand, the *Law on Pre-University Education 04 /L-32*¹⁰ in the Republic of Kosovo prescribes the hiring of non-teaching “pedagogues” (education support professionals) and psychologists in schools. According to Article 37 of this law, municipalities can hire non-teaching professional staff, including pedagogical and psychological staff. The *34/2014 Administrative Instruction for the Functioning of Pedagogical-Psychological Services*¹¹ in schools demands the same. According to the instruction, psychologists are obliged to offer assistance to all school students and staff in overcoming difficulties of psychological context. The administrative instruction also defines the tasks that psychologists and pedagogues must accomplish. Psychologists and pedagogues are obliged to offer help in overcoming the psychological difficulties of all school attendants and to contribute to the learning process as well as the cognitive, emotional, social, and personal development of students. Meanwhile, the tasks of the pedagogues are mainly related to planning and programming the educational and teaching process.

Furthermore, Kosovo government and relevant institutions by improving the legal framework are actively engaged in implementing actions to foster a conducive and safe learning environment.

⁸ Manual on Preventing Negative Phenomena in Higher Secondary Schools <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2016/06/doracaku-me-dizajn-ne-shqip-1-1.pdf>

⁹ Manual on the summary of best practices for peaceful conflict resolution between peers at schools, Kosovo Education Center, 2019, https://www.childrights-ks.org/site/assets/files/1452/02_-_manual_on_the_summary_of_best_practices_-_eng_-_web.pdf

¹⁰ Law on Pre-University Education <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2770>

¹¹ 34/2014 Administrative Instruction for the Functioning of Pedagogical-Psychological Services <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=10421>



SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Schools are meant to be safe for growth and learning. As school leaders and communities begin to embrace a more collaborative and comprehensive approach to school safety – including all stakeholders in the process — a clearer picture of successes and challenges emerge. Since safety is essential to student well-being and success there are a variety of definitions of what constitutes a safe school. For example, Hernandez, Floden, and Bosworth (2010)¹² suggested that a safe school is a place free from violence, and represented by an environment where there is no perceived fear with respect to the school or its disciplinary procedures. Learners and staff must feel safe before they can focus their energy on teaching and learning.

As schools' mission is to improve academic performance, there is need to create a physically and emotionally safe environment for everyone in school. Based on this principle, our "School Safety Report on High Schools" is a publication designed to explore the particular pressing concerns focusing on the safety within educational institutions in Kosovo, specifically in four high public schools. In pursuit of a comprehensive grasp of school safety from the viewpoints of students, teachers, and parents, the ATRC, under the "Countering Discrimination, Hate Speech, and Gender-Based Violence" project, **organized four focus groups across public high schools.**

These institutions include the "Gjon Buzuku" Gymnasium in Prizren/Prizren, the "Xhevdet Doda" Gymnasium in Prishtina/Priština, "Xhavit Ahmeti" Gymnasium in Gjilan/Gnjilane and "Ahmet Gashi" Gymnasium in Prishtina/Priština.

Utilizing a structured focus group methodology, our aim was to gather insights from targeted groups regarding the safety environment and existing safety measures within the respective schools. The primary goal of this report is to assess perceptions, identify issues, and highlight gaps in the understanding of safety within public schools. Recognizing the significant impact of individuals' perceptions on behavior and beliefs about their surroundings, the report captures perspectives from students, teachers, and parents concerning safety, educational dynamics, and parental roles. Furthermore, the report explores their commitment to improving both the quality and safety of education. This compilation of insights endeavors to offer a nuanced understanding of the diverse dimensions of safety within the educational context.

The Ministry of Education in Kosovo holds a foundational responsibility to ensure the health, safety, and overall well-being of students and staff. Beyond formulating plans and setting stringent standards for the pre-university education system, the Ministry collaborates with relevant institutions and municipalities to address challenges and foster a secure learning

¹² How safe is the school study, Journal of School Violence, 2010, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ900754>

environment. Through this proactive cooperation, the report endeavors to provide valuable insights, recommendations, and strategies aimed at enhancing safety measures within schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Collection dates

September and October 2023

Methodology: Structured Focus Groups

A comprehensive research initiative was undertaken through the organization of four focus groups aimed at soliciting valuable insights from various stakeholders within the educational community. The diverse composition of these focus groups ensured a general perspective, with participants representing students from 10th to 12th grade, teachers, school management, representatives from parents and student councils, and municipal officials. In total, around 70 participants actively engaged in these focus groups, contributing their perspectives and experiences. The distribution of participants across the different high schools and institutions were as follows:

- **Gjon Buzuku Gymnasium (22 participants):**



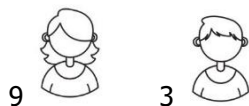
- **Ahmet Gashi Gymnasium (12 participants):**



- **Xhevdet Doda Gymnasium (24 participants):**



- **Xhavit Ahmeti Gymnasium (12 participants):**



. There was notable inclusivity with the presence of a Bosnian representative from "Gjon Buzuku" Gymnasium, contributing to a diverse range of perspectives. These insightful focus groups were conducted within the premises of the respective schools, creating a comfortable and familiar environment for the participants to express their opinions freely. The collaborative nature of this research initiative aimed to foster meaningful dialogue and generate a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the educational ecosystem. As part of our methodology, ATRC organized a comprehensive training program involving representatives from various institutions in Kosovo, such as the police, customs, academy, and correctional service, to ensure a well-rounded and informed approach to our research on school safety and discrimination.

Sampling

A subset of the total participants comprised 12 teachers, 3 parents, and additional students from grades 10 to 12 who actively took part in the focus groups held during the months of September and October 2023. These targeted discussions were organized within the premises of two schools in Prishtina/Priština, namely "Xhevdet Doda" Gymnasium and "Ahmet Gashi" Gymnasium, one school in Prizren/Prizren - "Gjon Buzuku" Gymnasium, and another in Gjilan/Gnjilane - "Xhavit Ahmeti" Gymnasium.

The participating teachers specialized in various subjects, including psychology, sociology, quality coordination, and other educators with a keen interest in the overarching theme. This diverse representation ensured a comprehensive exploration of perspectives within the educational community. The inclusion of parents and students from different grade levels further enriched the discussions, offering a well-rounded view of the challenges and opportunities present in the educational landscape.

Set of Questions asked in each focus group

- *What are the main safety concerns within our school community?*
- *How can we effectively address discrimination, hate speech and gender-based violence?*
- *What role can teachers, students, parents and municipalities play in improving school safety?*
- *Are there successful practices or models from other schools or communities that we can learn from?*
- *What educational programs or seminars can be developed to promote tolerance and prevent discrimination?*

- *How can we improve reporting mechanisms for incidents of hate speech or gender-based violence?*
- *Are there specific policies or guidelines that need to be revised or developed to increase school safety?*
- *How can schools and municipalities cooperate to create safer school environments?*

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH REPORT


Through our research in "Gjon Buzuku" Gymnasium in Prizren/Prizren, "Xhevdet Doda" Gymnasium in Prishtina/Priština, "Xhavit Ahmeti" Gymnasium in Gjilan/Gnjilane and "Ahmet Gashi" Gymnasium in Prishtina/Priština, students, teachers, and parents rated their schools as safe environment but had diverse opinions and suggestions about how to improve school safety. Participants engaged in discussions aimed at identifying the primary safety concerns prevalent in their respective school environments. Concurrently, the focus groups delved into strategies for effectively addressing issues of discrimination, hate speech, and gender-based violence, recognizing the need for a collective effort involving teachers, students, parents, and municipalities. Insights were gathered on the potential roles each stakeholder group could play in enhancing school safety, fostering an inclusive environment, and mitigating instances of discrimination and violence. Attention was directed toward enhancing reporting mechanisms for incidents of hate speech or gender-based violence, underlining the importance of creating transparent and accessible channels for reporting such incidents. Additionally, considerations were given to the necessity of revising or developing specific policies and guidelines to bolster school safety.

Students' Perspective about School Safety

Overall, student responses highlighted the need for more mental health services and cultural and physical activities. Moreover, the responses indicated that students' feedback should be considered when developing school safety policies. Based on this information, further research on safety initiatives and measures should be conducted to understand their effectiveness. But, based on the findings of the research of the Municipality of Pristina, the Kosovo Police and the OSCE *Safety in the schools of the Municipality of Pristina*¹³, about 23.5% of students in grades 6-12 declare that they do not feel so safe in schools. According to this report, the aspects that seem to affect the safety of schools the most are estimated to be uncontrolled visitors in the school premises, physical fights, vandalism, harassment on the way to school/home, as well as to a certain extent it is also estimated to be the possibility for theft of students' property.

¹³ Action Plan for School Safety, Municipality of Pristina, 2023:

https://prishtinaonline.com/uploads/plani_i_veprimit_per_siguri_ne_shkolla_2023-26_dokumenti_narrativ_final.pdf



During the discussions in the four focus groups, bullying emerged as a prominent theme, primarily voiced by the students themselves. According to their accounts, those engaging in bullying frequently blurred the lines between humor and harassment, treating bullying as a form of jest without distinguishing it from innocent jokes. Furthermore, in three of the four schools under examination, **concerns were raised about the safety of the school's outdoor surroundings**. In contrast to the perceived security within the school premises, the exterior environments were perceived as less secure, largely due to the open accessibility of schoolyards to individuals outside the school community.

These insights emphasize the need for a holistic approach to address safety concerns within the educational system. Furthermore, the input provided by students in this study reinforces the importance of including their voices in the formulation of school safety policies. Consequently, there is a compelling call for educators and policymakers to engage in further research to evaluate the effectiveness of safety initiatives and measures. Such research can shed light on the specific interventions needed to create safer and more nurturing school environments that cater to the well-being and development of all stakeholders in the educational community.

Parents' Perspective on School Safety:

Parents participating in the research expressed heightened concern regarding the safety of school outdoor surroundings. Their collective perspective underscored a need for more stringent control measures from security personnel, coupled with a demand for increased surveillance through the installation of cameras. Parents emphasized the importance of creating secure external environments to mitigate potential risks and enhance the overall safety of their children within the school community. These insights illuminate the multifaceted nature of safety concerns and highlight the integral role parents play in advocating for measures that address both internal and external aspects of school safety.

Teachers' Perspective on School Safety:

Teachers, as crucial figures in the educational system, expressed specific concerns during the focus group discussions. Notably, their primary emphasis was on establishing effective reporting mechanisms for students to report incidents of bullying, discrimination, and other phenomena within school premises. Recognizing the significance of fostering an open dialogue, teachers advocated for increased collaboration with students. This collaboration aimed at encouraging students to express their concerns openly, facilitating a more proactive approach to addressing issues. Additionally, teachers underscored the importance of implementing annual activities that empower students to actively participate in the fight against bullying and discrimination, promoting a sense of collective responsibility within the school community. These teacher-driven

initiatives seek to create a supportive and inclusive environment that aligns with the broader goal of enhancing overall school safety.

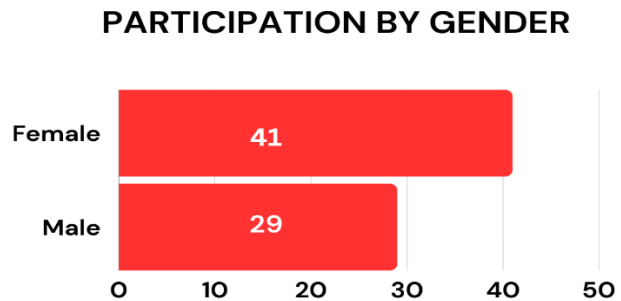


Figure 1: Participation by gender from 70 high school students

Increasing the capacities of security officials in relation to the fight against discrimination, hate speech and gender-based violence

In addition to gathering input from students, teachers, and parents, ATRC also organized a comprehensive training program that included representatives from various institutions in Kosovo, including the police, customs, academy, and correctional service. The training revealed that there is a considerable gap in general knowledge, particularly in understanding international mechanisms and standards relevant to the domestic legal system. Participants exhibited a certain level of biases and stereotypes, and they lacked the necessary knowledge to differentiate between misconceptions, prejudices, and the legal obligations associated with offering support to victims of bullying, discrimination, and related issues. This underscores the need for further education and awareness-building among key stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of efforts to promote school safety and address discrimination in Kosovo.

Discussion about School Safety at "Gjon Buzuku" Gymnasium, Prizren: Focus Group Insights

The discussion with "Gjon Buzuku" Gymnasium in Prizren shed light on the school's commitment to fostering a safe and inclusive learning environment for its students. 22 participants (Female: 8 and Male: 14) actively engaged in the focus group, providing valuable insights into the comprehensive measures implemented by the school to address various aspects of school safety.

Internal Initiatives for School Safety:

The school has strategically invested in measures to control entrances and exits, creating a secure campus for its students. Notably, a strong dedication to psychological well-being was evident through activities and courses addressing discrimination, bullying, and mental health concerns, particularly for students in the 12th grade. These initiatives aim to instill an understanding among students that such issues impact not only individuals but the entire school community.

Support Structures:

To ensure the holistic development of students, the school provides access to a dedicated school psychologist. Additionally, students have the opportunity for conversations and free hours with class supervisors, crucial figures in nurturing social and emotional development. Participants emphasized the significance of fostering self-initiative and welcomed the school psychologist into classrooms to raise awareness about pertinent issues.

External Collaborations:

In addition to internal efforts and regulations, "Gjon Buzuku" actively engages with external partners, collaborating with other schools and organizations to promote inclusiveness and well-being. The school's involvement with the Student Council demonstrates a commitment to raising awareness about discrimination and bullying, evidenced through peaceful protests and awareness posters displayed in classrooms.

Advocacy for Children's Rights:

The school collaborates with the Municipal Assembly of Children to advocate for children's rights, particularly concerning bullying and safe access to social networks. Actively involving students in these advocacy efforts fosters a sense of responsibility and community engagement.

Conclusion:

These approaches undertaken by "Gjon Buzuku" Gymnasium, which combines psychological support, teacher involvement, student-led awareness campaigns, and external partnerships, positions it as a model for proactive school safety and student well-being in Prizren. The insights gathered from the focus group underscore the school's dedication to creating a safe and nurturing environment for its students.



Figure 2: Focus group organized in Gjon Buzuku Gymnasium, Prizren – September 2023

Discussion about School Safety at "Xhavit Ahmeti" Gymnasium, Gjilan/Gnjilane: Focus Group Insights

Introduction:

"Xhavit Ahmeti" Gymnasium in Gjilan actively engages in addressing the concerns and well-being of its students, with a particular focus on combating bullying and related issues. A total of 14 participants (Female:9, Male:3) played an active role in the focus group discussion, providing valuable perspectives on the school's initiatives.

Addressing Bullying and Harassment:

The school places a strong emphasis on understanding the feelings of bullied students to create a safer and more nurturing environment. Recognizing the diverse educational backgrounds of

students, especially those from villages, the school acknowledges the complexity of fostering a sense of community. While incidents like "jokes" or forms of harassment are not uncommon, the school is proactively working to mitigate these challenges.

Mobile Phone Usage and Sexist Comments:

Acknowledging the impact of mobile phone use on the school atmosphere, the institution seeks to raise awareness about responsible phone use. Additionally, addressing issues such as sexist comments, even when perpetuated by teachers, remains a priority as they violate the fundamental rights of students. Strategies, including teacher training sessions and closer relationships between students and teachers, are being implemented to effectively tackle these concerns.

Open Communication and Mediation:

"Xhavit Ahmeti" Gymnasium adopts an approach focused on open communication and mediation. Joint meetings between the school psychologist and students, as well as between teachers and students, are crucial for addressing emerging issues in the school environment. The school recognizes the prevalence of violence in Kosovar society and remains committed to providing a safer environment through initiatives like joint mediations.

Campus Safety Concerns:

Both students and teachers at the school express concerns about the safety of the external environment, as the school shares a campus with other educational institutions of the city. This external safety aspect adds complexity to the school's efforts to ensure a secure and nurturing atmosphere for its students.

Conclusion:

"Xhavit Ahmeti" Gymnasium's multifaceted approach, encompassing psychological support, collaborative meetings, and campaigns like the *'Think about Health'* initiative, underscores its dedication to addressing the safety and mental health needs of its students. The complexity of interpreting teacher strictness as either positive or negative highlights the nuanced nature of addressing various aspects of school safety within the institution.



Figure 3: Focus group organized in Xhavit Ahmeti Gymnasium, Gjilan – October 2023

Discussion about School Safety at "Xhevdet Doda" Gymnasium, Prishtina/ Priština: Focus Group Insights

Introduction:

24 (Female:15. Male:9) participants actively engaged in a focus group discussion, providing valuable insights into the safety measures and initiatives implemented by "Xhevdet Doda" Gymnasium in Pristina.

Physical Safety Measures:

The gymnasium places a strong commitment to ensuring the physical safety of students within the school premises while simultaneously addressing the need to protect school property. For this, according to the discussion, students of this school pay extra to have civil security outside and inside the school, whose task is to maintain order and security, both inside and outside.

Complex Nature of Bullying:

Participants acknowledged the complex nature of bullying, with diverse perspectives associating it with gluttony, disputes, and even predatory behavior. Recognizing the importance of addressing the trauma experienced by both bullied students and aggressors, the school has adopted a multi-pronged approach to tackle discrimination, hate speech, and gender-based violence.

Multi-Faceted Approach:

The school employs civil police for external security, funded by students, reinforcing its commitment to physical safety. Initiatives also focus on self-awareness, empowerment, and

mental health awareness, with dedicated weeks dedicated to these topics. This multi-faceted approach highlights the commitment to fostering a safer and more inclusive school environment.

Roles of Stakeholders:

“Xhevdet Doda” Gymnasium recognizes the crucial roles of teachers, students, parents, and the municipality in improving school safety. While acknowledging that bullying is primarily student-driven, the school encourages positive relations and self-awareness among students. The presence of a psychologist within the school is seen as a positive step, and collaboration with student clubs enhances these efforts.

Awareness Campaigns:

The school actively promotes awareness campaigns through various channels, including films, social networks, and individual meetings initiated by teachers or parents. Teachers actively contribute by empowering students through lectures on bullying, awareness, and discrimination. Collaboration with external organizations and sharing successful experiences, particularly in career orientation, is integral to their approach.

Comprehensive Commitment to Safety:

“Xhevdet Doda” Gymnasium's readiness to cooperate with external partners, coupled with practical measures such as complaint boxes, physical and cultural activities, and efforts to eliminate harmful habits, underscores its comprehensive commitment to school safety and student well-being. The insights from the focus group reflect a holistic approach to creating a secure and nurturing environment within the school.



Figure 4: Focus group organized in Xhevdet Doda Gymnasium, Pristina – October 2023

Discussion about School Safety at "Ahmet Gashi" Gymnasium, Prishtina/ Priština: Focus Group Insights

Introduction:

A focus group discussion involving 12 participants (Female: 9, Male:3) at "Ahmet Gashi" Gymnasium in Pristina provided valuable insights into the prevalent safety concerns within the school community.

Primary Safety Concerns:

The school community at "Ahmet Gashi" Gymnasium is predominantly concerned about the widespread issue of bullying, recognizing its global prevalence and the need for specific attention within their context. While the classroom environment is generally positive, instances of hate speech in the yard, often rooted in judgments based on appearance, pose challenges. Additionally, concerns regarding the improper treatment of female professors, particularly by male teachers, further contribute to the complex dynamics within the school.

Complications and Recognition:

Injustice among students, prejudices, and the fine line between bullying and harmless teasing complicate the issue, emphasizing the importance of addressing these concerns due to their potential impact on students' self-confidence and well-being.

Roles of Stakeholders:

To enhance school safety, "Ahmet Gashi" Gymnasium emphasizes the crucial roles that teachers, students, parents, and municipalities can play. Complaint boxes are provided to encourage students to voice their concerns, with a commitment from the school administration to address these complaints in writing. The newly formed students' youth council offers a promising avenue for student involvement, while an accessible public email allows students to submit complaints and requests anonymously, fostering open communication.

Student Involvement and Communication:

Recognizing the need for students to have a platform to voice concerns, the school actively involves students in periodic meetings with caretakers. Emphasizing the importance of learning from successful practices, the school draws inspiration from other schools and communities. This includes implementing a dress code for security personnel and holding regular meetings with the school psychologist.

Transition and Empowerment:

“Ahmet Gashi” Gymnasium considers the transition from primary to secondary school as a pivotal juncture, highlighting students' rights to complain directly to the director. This ensures that their concerns are taken seriously and addressed effectively, empowering students to actively contribute to the improvement of the school environment.



Figure 5: Focus group organized in Ahmet Gashi Gymnasium, Pristina – October 2023

RECOMANDATIONS

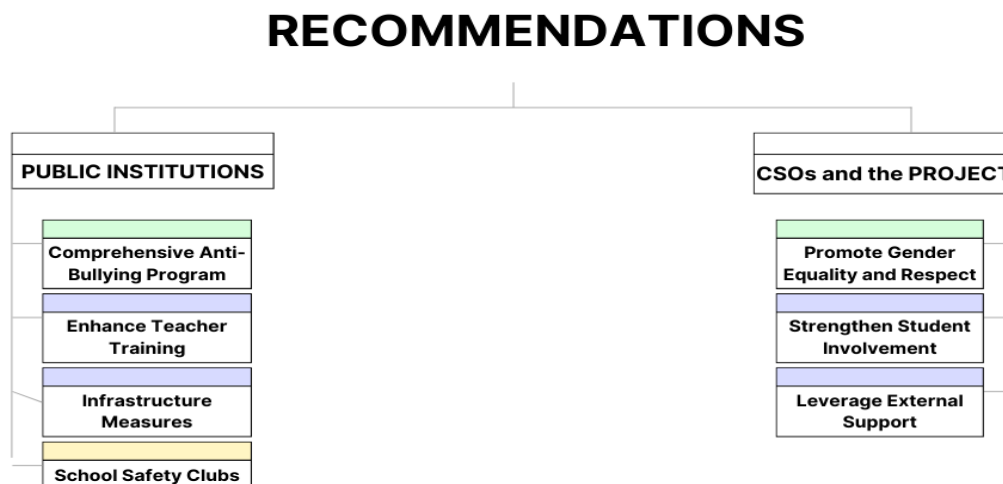


Figure 6: Recommendations for Public Institutions and CSOs

FOR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS:

- **Comprehensive Anti-Bullying Program:** Implement a comprehensive anti-bullying program that focuses on prevention, intervention, and support for students. This program should include awareness campaigns, training for students and staff, and clear reporting mechanisms to address instances of bullying effectively. The Ministry of Education should consider training and licensing for the “Olweus Program”.
- **Enhance Teacher Training:** Provide ongoing training and professional development for teachers to effectively address issues of discrimination, hate speech, and bullying. Teachers should be equipped with the knowledge and tools to create a safe and inclusive classroom environment.
- **Infrastructure Measures:** To enhance the overall safety of students, the Municipality Education Directors should put criteria for student transportation, implementing protective measures on roads adjacent to schools, inspecting premises near schools, and maintaining

proper street lighting in front of schools. Key activities within this objective encompass marking roads near schools, inspecting nearby premises, conducting patrols by police units around schools, maintaining street lighting in school vicinity, and installing cameras and fences where necessary.

- **School Safety Clubs:** Provide support for schools regarding the creation and functioning of Safety Groups, which would monitor and take care of the development of activities that raise awareness of the phenomenon of bullying, discrimination, and other phenomena.

FOR CSOs and the PROJECT:

- **Promote Gender Equality and Respect:** Develop initiatives and campaigns to promote gender equality and respect within the school community. This includes educating students and staff about the importance of respectful behavior and providing resources and support for those affected by gender-based violence.
- **Strengthen Student Involvement:** Encourage active participation of students in shaping the school's safety initiatives. This can be achieved through student clubs, youth councils, and regular open dialogues where students can express their concerns and ideas for improving the school environment. Another measure could be support to schools for extra-curricular activities that develop soft skills in students, which prepare teenagers for life and work in the 21st century.
- **Leverage External Support:** Collaborate with external organizations, mental health professionals, and community resources to further bolster school safety efforts. Seek guidance from successful practices and models in other schools and communities, adapting strategies that have proven effective in similar contexts.

These recommendations aim to create a safer and more inclusive school environment, address existing safety concerns, and empower all members of the school community to actively contribute to a positive and nurturing learning environment.

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Contributors

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Schools:

- "Gjon Buzuku" Gymnasium in Prizren
- "Xhavit Ahmeti" Gymnasium in Gjilan/Gnjilane

- "Xhevdet Doda" Gymnasium in Prishtina/ Priština
- "Ahmet Gashi" Gymnasium in Prishtina/ Priština

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